



Tufts University Art Galleries Collection Guide

Climate Change & the Environment

Introduction

Humanity's relationship with the environment is continuously evolving, particularly as the need to understand and prevent climate change becomes more urgent. Many artists have made the changing environment their subject, documenting human intervention in the natural world and calling attention to our role within it. The sampling of artworks presented in this collection guide offer a variety of perspectives on climate change and the complex connections between people and nature.

Using Art Across Disciplines

This collection guide draws from selections from Tufts University Art Galleries' Permanent Collection. The content presented here is meant to suggest curricular connections, prompt further discussion, and promote interdisciplinary learning. Click on each image to open its record in TUAG's collection database.

Art and visual images can supplement any curriculum across academic disciplines. Engaging with art can help to fine-tune cross-disciplinary skills that complement a variety of research practices and critical-thinking methods. The images and questions offered in this collection guide can prompt educators and learners to:

- ➔ Consider how artists visually represent data, tell a more complete story about presented data, or connect emotionally with an audience by presenting data pictorially.
- ➔ Consider the aesthetics of color, shape, line, texture, etc. by looking formally at art. Apply those sensibilities to images in your own work or field:
 - What do I notice first?
 - Where does my eye travel? In what directions?
 - Am I looking at individual parts of an image or at the whole?
 - What do particular colors connote?
 - What has been omitted?
 - What story or message is most prominent?

Valley Curtain, Rifle, Colorado, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, 1970-1972, offset color photolithograph on paper, 24.75 × 39 in. Tufts University Permanent Collection, gift of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. ↑

- Examine an artwork or group of works as primary source material. How does it relate to or challenge other texts, objects, or archival sources you are reading?
- Practice perspective or compare ideas cross-culturally. Use an image or work of art to consider others' values and ways of looking.
- Use art to practice asking and honing questions. Consider all of the questions you might have about a given work of art. Think about which types of questions yield more substantive discussions or additional lines of thinking.
- Look at art as a way to get out of a rut or think creatively about your own work. Consider:
 - How would an artist have presented content related to your field?
 - What information was known about a topic in your discipline at the time this artist was working? How has it evolved?
 - What could be different in this work of art? This situation?
 - Sketch or draw as a way of coming to understand or know the material differently.

Spring Tangle, from the *Gowanus Wild* series, Miska Draskoczy, 2013, archival pigment print. Tufts University Permanent Collection, gift of Miska Draskoczy, A98, courtesy of Tepper Takayama Fine Arts.

Key Questions

How have artists documented climate change and environmental degradation?

How do artists represent scientific data visually in order to effect change?

How can images prompt us to reflect on humanity's relationship with our changing environment?

How do artists work with the land as an artistic medium?

Örxfajökull glacier tongue, Iceland 07/1999 (top); Örxfajökull glacier tongue, Iceland 07/2011 (bottom), Olaf Otto Becker, 1999-2011, archival pigment print, 24.25 × 60.5 in. Tufts University Permanent Collection, gift of Olaf Otto Becker.



Documenting Climate Change

Artists can play an essential role in recording changes in the natural landscape. These four photographs document phenomena inflicted upon the land by human beings, capturing in their sweeping scale the major impact humans have on their environment.

Olaf Otto Becker's *Örxfajökull glacier tongue 07/1999 and 07/2011* show two views of the same landscape twelve years apart. In these two photographs, part of the series *"Under the Northern Light": A Journey through Time Island 1999-2011*, Becker sought to make clear the changes humanity has levelled onto their environment in a relatively short period.



On the Crevasse, Diane Burko, 2013, archival pigment print, 20x20 in. Tufts University Permanent Collection, gift of Diane Burko.

Diane Burko's *On the Crevasse* (2013) is one of many photographs she has taken on *Polar Investigation* trips around the world as part of her research regarding glacial melt. This photograph was captured in Svalbard, Norway, an archipelago located within the Arctic Circle.

Though depicting in a less-extreme environment, Frank Gohlke's *Aerial View; Woods, Fields, Houses, Blue Earth County, Minnesota* (1983) raises similar concerns through his bird's-eye-view, which reveals the unnatural forms imposed upon the landscape in the rural Midwest.

Richard Misrach's *Cloudburst, Nuclear Test Site, Nevada* (1987) casts a critical eye on human intervention in southwestern American deserts. Evoking a mood similar to landscape painting and photography of the 19th century, Misrach inspires a sense for awe of the land punctuated by a sense of impending environmental disaster.



Aerial View; Woods, Fields, Houses, Blue Earth County, Minnesota, Frank Gohlke, 1983, gelatin silver print, 16x20 in. Tufts University Permanent Collection, gift of Nathan Gantcher, A62, H04 and Alice Gantcher.



Cloudburst, Nuclear Test Site, Nevada, Richard Misrach, 1987, chromogenic print, 40x50 in. Tufts University Permanent Collection, gift of Richard Misrach.

Humanity's Relationship with Nature

These four artworks explore the inextricable ties between humans and the natural world from a variety of perspectives. The artists vary in approach, intent, and positionality, representing just a few of the myriad ways in which people across time and place engage with their environments. Uniting these disparate works is the imperative to challenge viewers to reflect on connections between humanity and the natural world and, in turn, to reconsider their own role within this relationship.



Lewis Baltz's *San Quentin Point #10A* (1985) is part of his *San Quentin Point Portfolio*, a series of photographs documenting a swath of undeveloped land in Marin County, San Francisco. Though San Quentin Point was technically vacant at the time Baltz photographed it, traces of human presence are unmistakable in this image. Not far from San Quentin Point is San Quentin State Prison, California's first prison and the site of the state's only death row. In the decades since Baltz took this photograph, Marin County's property values have risen exponentially; it now boasts one of the highest property values in the United States. Questions of land use and development persist in the area, since the land San Quentin State Prison resides on is estimated to be worth over a billion dollars. This presents a stark contrast to the general desolation and disregard exhibited in Baltz's *San Quentin Point Portfolio*.

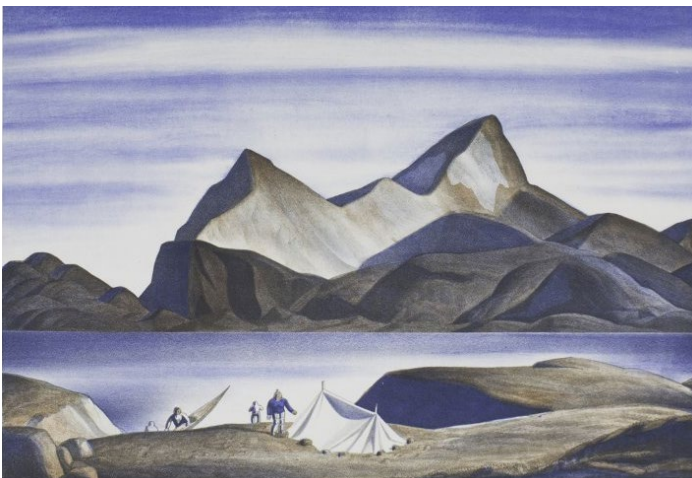


Miska Draskoczy's *Spring Tangle* and *Fluorescent Tree* (both 2013) expresses a similarly fraught relationship between human and nature. In his series *Gowanus Wild*, Draskoczy takes as his subject Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal, a polluted industrial site, and makes clear nature's tenacity in the face of immense adversity.

Ka'e (corn dancer *katsina*, 20th century) by Deloria Adams is just one example of a robust indigenous Hopi carving and ritual tradition. *Katsina* figures are meant to represent *Katsinam*, spiritual messengers who can intervene and assist with everyday life. Typically carved from cottonwood root and given to Hopi children, the figures are teaching tools for Hopi community roles. This corn dancer katsina reflects the Hopi's deep ties with their ancestral lands, as a central tenet of their cosmology is the cultivation of corn for continued sustenance.



Ka'e (corn katsina),
Deloria Adams, 20th
century, polychrome
wood, 13×5.5×5 in. Tufts
University Permanent
Collection, gift of Dr.
Karl Gilmont in Memory
of Bernard Goldberg,
M.D. A1918.



Sermilik Fjord, Rockwell Kent, 1931, color lithograph on paper, 18 × 23.375 in.
Tufts University Permanent Collection.

Artist and author Rockwell Kent's lithograph of the Sermilik Fjord in Greenland (1931) prompts consideration of the impulse to explore and exercise dominion over the far reaches of the landscape. Kent explored remote locations all over the world, like other artist-explorers who recorded and popularized imagery of various frontiers. Kent's images and his travels raise questions about the desire to explore and record one's presence on the land—and how this impulse might relate to environmental destruction.

At first glance, Evelyn Rydz's *Floating Artifact, #5* and *Floating Artifact, #8* (both 2014) appear to be a photographs of a precious gem or mineral sample. However, the artist's *Floating Artifacts* project takes as its subject matter detritus found in the ocean. In this ongoing project, Rydz conducts coastal field studies, gleaning tiny samples of debris that have washed ashore. The resulting body of work encourages active contemplation both about humanity's pollution of the ocean and about the ways in which the natural world can shape and change objects' materiality. Rydz's project also includes an interactive workstation with microscopes and a small filing cabinet where viewers can examine samples and record their findings on notecards for future participants to read. This component borrows the mechanisms and appearance of a scientific experiment, lending *Floating Artifacts* a sense of academic credibility.

Further Discussion

What different types of relationships between human and environment do each of these artists present to the viewer?

How do each of these artists convey the complex relationship between humans and their environments?

As a viewer, what is your role? Do you feel implicated in the narratives presented here?

Do these images evoke any feelings or sensations within you about your own relationship to your natural environment? What is it about these images that causes these feelings?



Floating Artifact, #5, Evelyn Rydz, 2014, archival pigmented ink print mounted on aluminum panel, 48 × 36 in. Tufts University Permanent Collection.



Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, 1980-1983, offset color photolithograph on paper, 25 × 39 inches. Tufts University Permanent Collection, gift of Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

The Land as Medium

In the practice known as Land Art, artists frequently use natural materials as their media, create massive installations fitting the scale of their chosen environment, or employ a combination of these two methods.

Surrounded Islands (1980–83) and *Valley Curtain* (1973) document two large-scale installations by land artist duo Christo and Jeanne-Claude. In *Surrounded Islands*, located in Biscayne Bay near Miami, Florida, Christo and Jeanne-Claude (with the help of 430 workers) wrapped 11 small islands in 6.5 million square feet of woven pink fabric. *Valley Curtain*, located in Rifle, Colorado, consisted of 200,200 square feet of nylon fabric suspended across a 1,250-foot-wide rift over a highway. Due to strong winds, the curtain needed to be disassembled only a day after its installation.

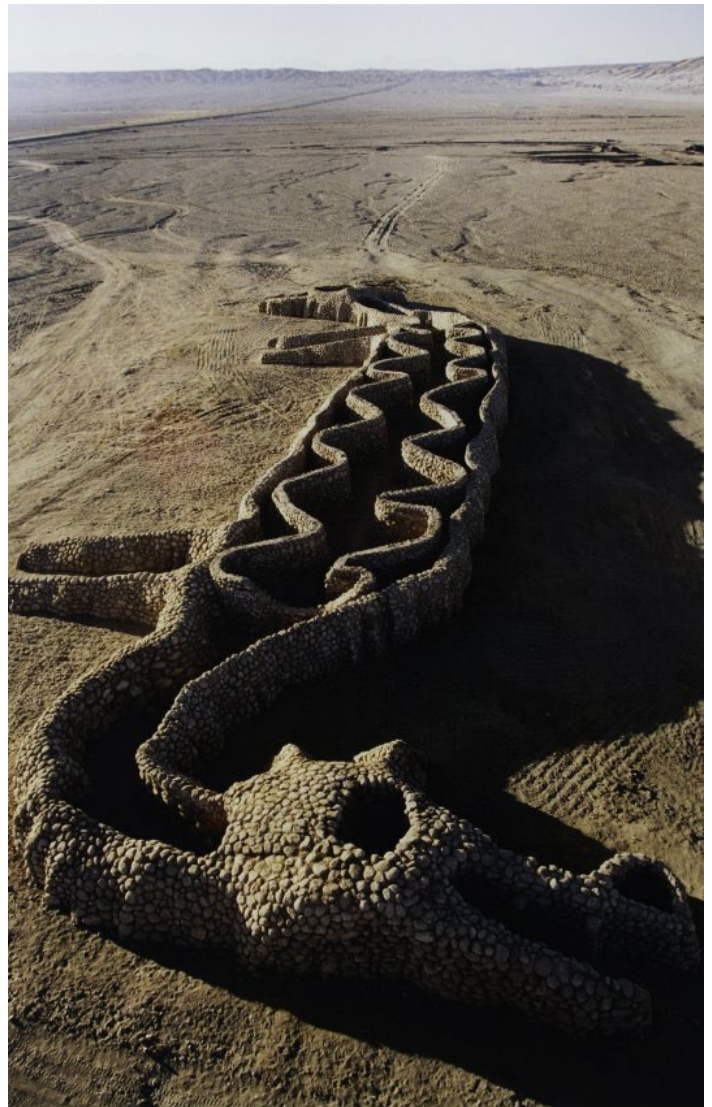


Valley Curtain, Rifle, Colorado, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, 1970-1972, offset color photolithograph on paper, 24.75 × 39 in. Tufts University Permanent Collection, gift of Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

Land artist Andrew Rogers sculpts in a similarly grand scale, but uses natural materials such as earth and stone in his work. Pictured here are two works from his *Rhythms of Life* series, which consists of over 50 monumental sculptures found on every continent. *Ancient Language* (2004), located in Chile's Atacama Desert, represents an ancient glyph found in the region. *Sacred* (2008) is located at the base of the medieval Spišský Castle in a mountainous region of Slovakia.

Ancient Language (Chile), Andrew Rogers, 2004, chromogenic print, 30 × 20 in. Tufts University Permanent Collection, gift of Andrew Rogers. ➔

Sacred (Spišský Hrad, Slovakia), Andrew Rogers, 2008, chromogenic print, 20 × 30 in. Tufts University Permanent Collection, gift of Andrew Rogers. ↓





Statue of Liberty, Jimmy Lee Sudduth, 20th century, acrylic paint with dirt on plywood, 32 × 24 in. Tufts University Permanent Collection, gift of Andrew Safran A76, F77 and Linda Safran.

Working at a much smaller scale, American artist Jimmy Lee Sudduth literally paints using the Earth. His *Statue of Liberty* (20th century) is rendered using mud, which became his trademark medium after drawing an image in mud on a tree as a toddler. Sudduth eschewed store-bought materials for dirt of different textures, thicknesses, and colors achieved with the help of natural pigments. In *Statue of Liberty*, Sudduth uses a single shade of mud to form the silhouetted image of the American monument. The lack of illusionistic depth is countered by the sculptural quality of the surface, with the mud mixture thickly encrusted on the statue's face. The Statue of Liberty appears solidly built and nearly animate in its curving form, an unusually humanizing depiction of the iconic figure.

Further Discussion

What relationships do these artists appear to have with the landscapes that they work with and from?

Why might an artist want to use the land itself as their artistic medium? What are your views on this practice?

What complexities might arise when an artist choose to engage with large groups or communities, as is necessary to create a work like *Surrounded Islands* or *Ancient Language*?

Additional Relevant Collection Works

- [Photographs by Caleb Cain Marcus](#)
- [Photographs by Marilyn Bridges](#)
- [Richard Hunt, *Planar Mountain*](#)

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