



Anthropocene Gallery

Fall 2016

An exhibit brought to you by
first-year students in
ENVI 194: Welcome to the Anthropocene

Welcome to the Anthropocene

The Nobel Prize laureate and atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen coined the term “Anthropocene” to argue that we have entered a new geological epoch, following the Holocene, when humans have become geological agents who have reshaped the surface of the planet in irreversible ways. Beyond the field of geology, theorizing the Anthropocene has catalyzed major shifts in a variety of disciplines including history, anthropology, political science, engineering, biology, and the arts.

This past semester the 16 students in my first year seminar “Welcome to the Anthropocene” used an interdisciplinary framework to consider what this new epoch means for our shared ecologies, political economies, and cultures. A timely look at this emerging concept provided us with special challenges and opportunities for self-reflection, debate and expression.

This temporary exhibit is inspired by the work of museums around the world to imagine the Anthropocene. This effort has been spearheaded by the American Museum of Natural History, whose workshops have been a springboard for developing new narratives, tools

for public participation, and modes for designing exhibits. Similar efforts include the work of the Deutsches Museum and Rachel Carson Center in Munich, New York City’s in development Climate Museum, and the UW Madison’s 2014 event The Anthropocene Slam: A Cabinet of Curiosities. Our modest Macalester exhibit represents our contribution to these tremendous efforts at visualizing and understanding our Future Earth.

Students were invited to enter an artifact that represented the Anthropocene. Some chose to create their own artistic pieces, while others found inspiration in household objects or works created by other artists.

We would like to acknowledge several Macalester colleagues who have supported this project: Ann Esson, Dave Collins, Ron Joslin, and Ellen Holt-Werle. Many thanks also to Steve Dietz and Sarah Peters at Northern Lights for their Anthropocene Awareness Association project.

Roopali Phadke
Professor, Environmental Studies



Dirty White Trash by Tim Noble and Sue Webster

Adjusting the Lens: Dirty White Trash

Jack Fong Gougoutas

Adjusting the Lens: Dirty White Trash focuses on a silhouette made out of trash by London artists Tim Noble and Sue Webster. Their work centers around the idea of transformation; how humans perceive an abstract image and define it with meaning. Their piece, *Dirty White Trash*, rejects the common “out of sight, out of mind” approach to waste management. The art piece literally sheds light on the issues of trash pollution and exposes the everyday people behind the mess in each piece. In fact, the everyday people happen to be themselves, as they collected six months worth of trash to create this art. Macalester College has set the goal to be a “zero-waste” campus by the year 2020. Reduction of unnecessary items, considerate management of resources, and creative reuse of materials is the closest way students (and the rest of the U.S.) can get to immediately tackling climate change. Noble and Webster confront careless behavior towards waste management, however seemingly insignificant, by presenting the trash directly in one’s face.



Biodegradable Government?

Miriam Eide

One of the challenges when observing the Anthropocene is understanding its implications for our human systems. What will survive? What will perish? Scientists, politicians, academics, artists, and others are all trying to understand what is happening around us. *Biodegradable Government?* is an artistic exploration of my perspective on the Earth in the Anthropocene. The exhibit is a conceptual assemblage containing a plastic blow-up political globe deflated and partially buried in earth. Arguably, there are multiple interpretations which could be made of this piece which range from doomsday to questioning the feasibility of present governmental structures.



Deforestation by Jill Pelto

Deforestation

Mason Cohn

My entry to the Anthropocene museum catalog is *Deforestation*, a painting by artist Jill Pelto. My paper discusses the painting's history, symbolism, and significance to my individual understanding of the Anthropocene. The painting was created in order to raise awareness regarding habitat degradation, specifically through deforestation. Specific features of the piece are meant to invoke reactions by the public. The piece was created using data referencing the growing rate of habitat degradation, its impact on animals (in particular, tigers), and the negative impact human interaction has created on the environment. I conclude by articulating how this piece demonstrates my definition of the Anthropocene.

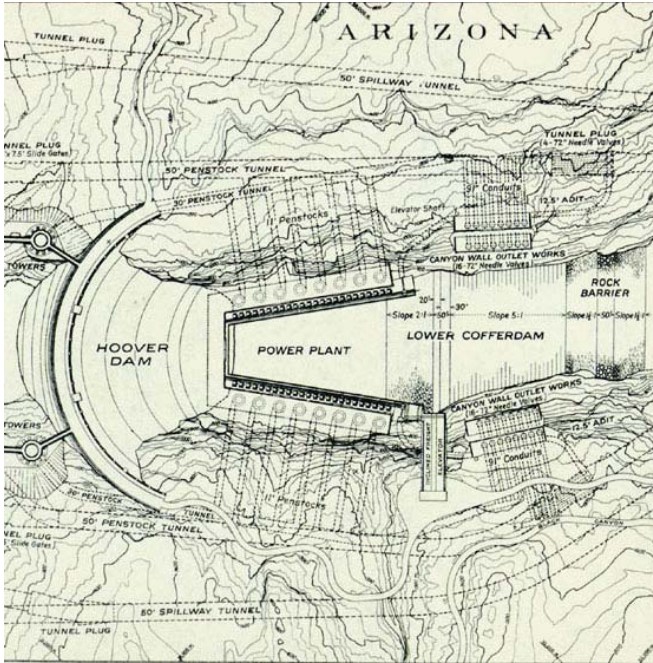


Evergreen by Deborah Butterfield

Evergreen by Deborah Butterfield

Laurel Kriesel-Bigler

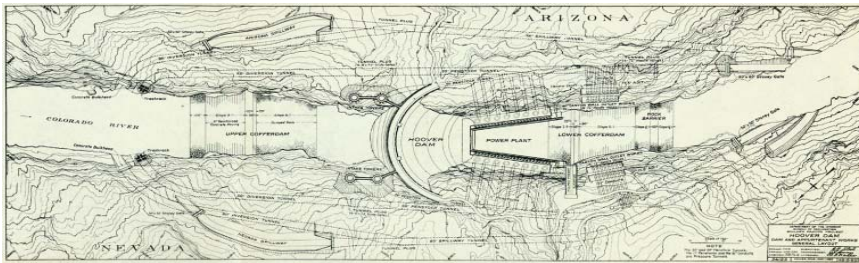
Evergreen is a piece by the renowned artist and sculptor, Deborah Butterfield. Butterfield became inspired to create sculptures of horses which capture the real nature and essence of the animal she knew and loved. Her horse sculptures have since brought her national acclaim and her work can be found in numerous art museums across the country including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Dallas Art Museum, and the Whitney Museum. The hallmark of the Anthropocene is the prevalence of human activity on Earth and how the convergence of natural and manmade worlds have made humanity a force of nature. *Evergreen* draws attention to this convergence and shows the collision of nature and humanity in the form of a horse made out of scrap metals. Their strength, grace, and vulnerability are all subtly nuanced into the sculpture that seems to have a movement all of its own, despite being stationary and made out of totally man-made materials. The paradox of the sculpture is representative of the paradoxes inherent to the Anthropocene. The representation of this idea within the sculpture is both beautiful and thought provoking. The piece embodies the historical aspects of the Anthropocene, through the importance of horses to the Columbian Exchange and as humans grapple with issues of sustainability and finding new purpose in discarded objects. *Evergreen* is a perfect example of the power of art to inspire and illustrate how environmental change is made.



Hoover Dam Architectural Plan

Phuong Nguyen

My proposal for the Anthropocene exhibition is the Hoover Dam Architectural Plan. The drawing, published in 1931 by the United States Bureau of Reclamation as part of the bidding documents for construction, depicts the general layout for the dam and supporting structures. This highly technical and detailed drawing not only demonstrates an astonishing level of western engineering development in the early 20th century but also alludes to mankind's dependence on engineering itself. With the construction of megastructures like the Hoover Dam, mankind forever changed its relationship with the Earth from a resident species that merely inhabited the planet to a geological force with aggravated capability to exploit natural resources and power for its own exhaustive use.



Published by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation



Study-Skins of Huia (*Heteralocha acutirostris*)
Auckland War Memorial Museum

Hope's Echo

Maya DeGasperi

Hope's Echo is a piece by ecologist and creative writer Julianne Warren, currently on display in the "Welcome to the Anthropocene" exhibit in the Deutsches Museum in Munich. The piece centers around the extinction of the Huia bird, a species native to New Zealand, which went extinct due to anthropogenic causes in the late 20th century. Because the Huia went extinct before the introduction of field recording technology, the exhibit features a 'sound fossil,' a 1954 recording of a Maori man named Henare Hamana, the mimic, whistling the Huia's call. The pressures introduced by imperialism had an impact on Huia numbers, as European naturalists justified their decline with their view that the Maori and their native species were less fit and thus needed to be replaced by the colonists and the species they introduced. The 'sound fossil' haunts us in its presentation of this unequal global dynamic that is eerily similar to today's environmental inequalities. The Anthropocene is defined by its indelible mark on the geologic record. Similarly to how this record will one day reveal loss of species, *Hope's Echo* presents a record of the loss of the Huia preserved in sound waves. The complete reordering of earth in the Anthropocene includes the loss of bird species and how it will change the basic soundscape of our ecosystems. *Hope's Echo* is hopeful in that its presence may incite us to action and prevent us from perpetuating the structures that led to the Huia's demise.



I am NOT a Plastic Bag: Keeping it Environmentally Fashionable

Inonge Naluchima Mubita

As governments and markets try to move out of the 'Plastic Age' by initiating green eco-friendly stickered products, a new trend of green consumerism has made way. In this new trend came the tote bag, a replacement of the plastic bag, widely recognized as an eco-friendly alternative. However, in my report I question how effective the tote bag is in sending an environmental message if it is only at the basis of consumption. In addition, I will examine the effect of individually based environmental responsibility as a means of living in a "good anthropocene". I examine how we have transitioned from a plastic reliant system to the over branding of green products, specifically looking at how the tote bag has become so popularized. Though the tote bag sends an environmental message across the market, it still acts on the basis of consumption, a driving force of the Anthropocene. I will explore global consumption as well as the importance of ensuring global environmental governance as the tote bag presents only a small aspect of environmental action. I wish to emphasize the importance of incorporating individual responsibility, community based action and institutional change in order to make a "good anthropocene" possible and distinguish between what can be considered "environmentally friendly" and what are actions of "environmental justice".



Lifeless Swarm: Bees and the Anthropocene

Izzy Hart

My display tackles the interconnected issues of bee population decline and monocultural crops and neonicotinoid pesticides. Through exploration of Sarah Hatton's "Bee Works" collection, I decided to use my display to examine similar issues as ones she looked at in her work. These issues are of ethical, historical, environmental, societal, mathematical, and technological concern. Through a common denominator of a bee, specifically, one placed in the center of a Fibonacci spiral, a mathematical pattern that appears in nature and crops, my display aims to spark discussion concerning the intersections between humans, nature, and math.



Meander by Futures North

Meander

Marie Crane

My entry to the Anthropocene exhibit is *Meander*, a permanent public artwork commissioned for CHS Field in St. Paul. *Meander* was made by Futures North, a Twin Cities-based public art collaborative consisting of Daniel Dean, John Kim, Adam Marcus, and Molly Reichert. Meander is what the group calls “data spatialization”; data visualization in three dimensions. Various aspects of the artwork, including its height, width, and colors, are visualizations of over 200 years of data about the Upper Mississippi River. *Meander* is an excellent example of the importance of art in the Anthropocene, as a way to communicate complex data sets. *Meander* is representative of my personal understanding of the Anthropocene - that humans are the driving force of climatic and environmental changes, the impacts of which will last for millennia to come - because it illustrates the effects humans have on the environment.



The Milking Parlor via capefarewell.com

Milk and Water in the Anthropocene

Gabbi Rutherford

My entry into the Anthropocene art exhibit is inspired by Nessie Reid's performance piece/ documentary *The Milking Parlor*. Nessie's project examines the moral implication of our agricultural industry (focusing on dairy) as in her words "milk is cheaper than bottled water". I want to explore the negative affects that mainstream agriculture/dairy industries have on our environment and determine their sustainability as we digress further into the Anthropocene.



Kuntze, S. (2010, January 29). Greenpeace: Climate Change [Digital image]. Retrieved December 6, 2016, from www.behance.net/gallery/406484/WWF-I-Global-Warming

Public Relations in the Anthropocene

Spencer McAllister

This entry to the Anthropocene Art Exhibit features a mobile with pictures of various evocative propaganda posters about climate change and other environmental issues. These images were all found on the internet and are readily available online for use by anyone. This level of accessibility makes these pieces of Anthropocene art more effective than gallery pieces at conveying to the general public the importance of environmental activism in the Anthropocene. These images can be shared on social media as ways to start a dialogue between people about environmental issues. Only by talking about these issues can we compel people to action. Especially in a time when the United States government can no longer be relied upon to enforce environmentally responsible regulations on corporations, it is up to the general populace to take a stand against environmental injustices. For this reason, the Anthropocene has taken on the form of a PR campaign: an attempt by the scientific community and its political allies to inspire civic engagement. This campaign will not be spread through gallery art pieces and park sculptures that cater to a limited audience. Rather, the environmental issues threatening the globe will be promulgated through digital, easily accessible, mass-distributed, and compelling propaganda pieces like those shown in this display, aptly titled Public Relations in the Anthropocene.



Revival Field by Mel Chin

Reconstruction: Reviving Ecosystems with Metal

Jude Macannuco

In his work *Revival Field*, artist Mel Chin seeks to “sculpt” an area’s “ecology” with hyperaccumulating plants, which leech cadmium and other heavy metals out of the soil from which they grow. This eco-installation piece, which utilized the minds of both Chin and scientist Dr. Rufus Chaney to chemically remediate a landscape, demonstrates the intersection of scientific and artistic practice in the new, eco-focused age of the Anthropocene. The work also illustrates the futility of restoring pre-human environments, for newly “sculpted” ecologies are inherently human constructions; in doing so, the artwork, intentionally or not, alludes to widespread attempts at environmental “restoration,” which are often fueled by environmental nativism. One also should note that the plants involved, a variety of *Thlaspi*, contain elevated levels of metals. The new, “revived” ecosystem is thus nonetheless composed of anthropogenic waste. This responsive display emulates this inherent irony, showing plant being sustained by the metals of the soil. *Revival Field* in and of itself is ultimately symbolic of the salience of art, especially installation art, in interpreting this new epoch, as well as the simultaneous ability of humanity to remedy certain environmental ailments while never succeeding in completely eliminating them.



Rio Fish Sculptures by unknown artist

Rio Fish Sculptures

Brooke Carey

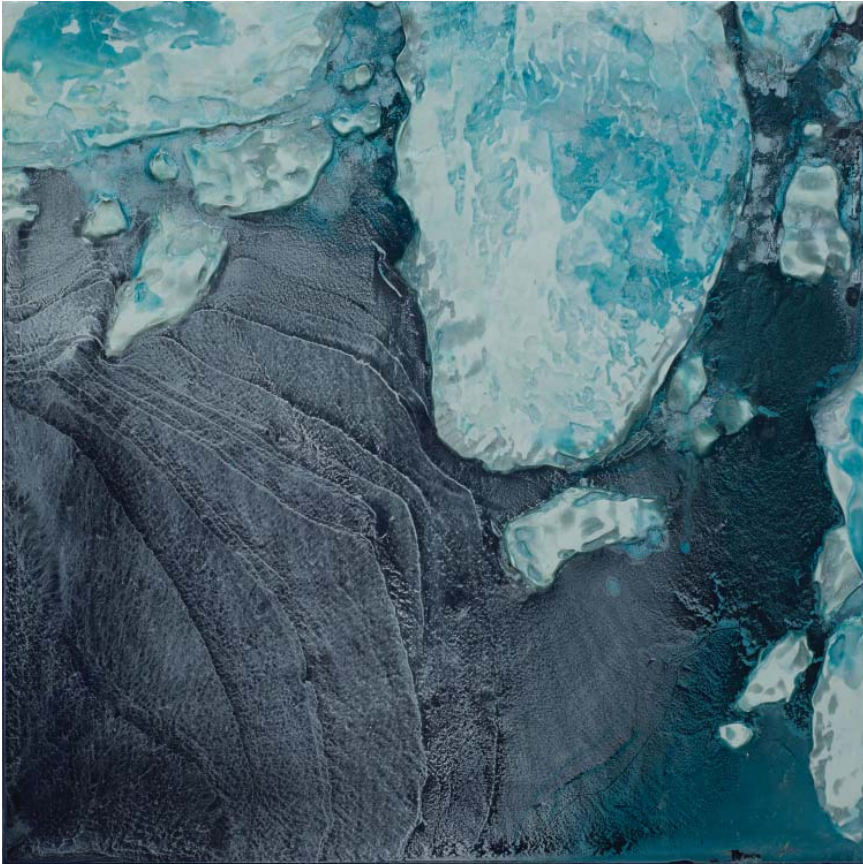
This installation of Rio Fish Sculptures was presented at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2012. The slogan accompanying this piece was “Recycle Your Attitude”. These Rio Fish Sculptures are made completely from discarded plastic bottles to raise awareness about the major ocean pollution caused by plastic. Shown through humanity’s throwaway culture and disregard for the well being of Earth, the plastic bottle acts as a symbol of the Anthropocene. Plastic pollutes nearly every edge of the Earth and majorly affects the health of marine ecosystems. Plastic bottles exemplify consumerism and the laziness of Western culture, both of which are main contributors to the Anthropocene. This piece was used to bring people’s attention to plastic as a pollutant and enact a call to action. Hopefully, it can do the same to you.



Time in the Anthropocene

Melissa Blum

The history of humanity's relationship with time is one of increasingly precise technology, and a society linked to constructs based on this technology. The watch is a symbol of this progression and human reliance on our ability to divide time into units we have created. Humans have used time keeping technology as a symbol of our growing separation from nature and our superiority to other species, but the Anthropocene challenges this division between Man and nature by changing our understanding of time. The Anthropocene represents a dissolving boundary between human and natural history, and forces the discipline of geology, traditionally rooted in deep time, to step into the present and predict the future. The Anthropocene also prompts us to ask questions about how we perceive the passage of time, and the implications this may have with regard to our ability to respond to climate change. Ultimately, by challenging our assumptions and restructuring our perception of time, the Anthropocene emphasizes the complex entanglement between humanity and the natural world.



"Cadence I" by John Sabraw

Water and Coal

Anya Ptacek

Water and Coal is based on John Sabraw's collection of paintings, *Resonance*. The title *Resonance* refers to the study of systems in physics, specifically, the likelihood of a system to fluctuate with greater magnitude at certain frequencies. Through his work, Sabraw explores the irregularity of systems, and how they are formed under the influence of natural law. Through a systems approach, Sabraw is able to demonstrate the drastic changes that can occur when coal mining is introduced into an ecosystem. Sabraw creates his work by turning toxic sludge from improperly sealed underground coal mines into different pigments of paint. This exhibit is focused on the toxicity of coal mines to water, and the ripple effect of water pollution. The guidelines for dealing with toxic pollutants produced by coal plants have not been updated in approximately 30 years and fail to address the worst pollutants that coal plants dump into our water. Though Sabraw utilizes toxic sludge from the abandoned coal mines in southern Ohio, his work reflects on the broader issue of abandoned coal mines across the world. Sabraw's work reveals an intersection between the ugliness of industry and the beauty that is still possible.



Yuxi Yuve by Nixiwaka Yawanawá



Yuxi Yuve by John Dyer

Yuxi Yuve

Ingrid Kilde

These two paintings are both representations of Yuxi Yuve, the water spirit of the Amazon Rainforest. The top painting was created by Amazonian indian artist Nixiwaka Yawanawá, a member of the Yawanawá tribe of the Amazon who is now working for Survival International, an organization from the United Kingdom seeking to protect the rights of indigenous populations worldwide. John Dyer, who depicted Yuxi Yuve in the bottom painting, is an English artist who draws inspiration from tribal art worldwide. The Eden Project, a UK charity focusing on environmental education, brought these two artists together to create work that would be displayed and sold. The creation of these works of art prompts dialogue about the representation of indigenous people on a global stage, the purpose of art in education, and the actions that are prompted by increased awareness. These paintings have significance as a reflection of our current cultural views. The Eden Project sold these paintings to fundraise for their charity, and while this is valuable, it perpetuates the idea that consumption is a valid response to the call to action given by the environmental movement. These paintings represent the false understanding that green consumption, or the purchasing of items that support an environmental cause or philosophy, has the potential to mitigate problems that formed as a result of consumption. The Anthropocene calls for a change in how we think about material wealth and living standards, not just an alteration in our buying habits.



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