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Globalization & Me

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“Throughout the history of art there has been a tendency for artists to explore the natural environment in their work, and examine humanity’s relationship with nature” (Williamson, 2013). The threat imposed on the environment by climate change, no longer called global warming (McKillop, 2014), causes one to take on a different perspective about humanity’s relationship with the environment. Contemporary environmental art steadily addresses issues about global environmentalism.

The global environment has been reduced to a political and economical commodity to be bought, sold, or traded with no sustainable benefits for collective environmental concerns, only the appearance of the slight reduction of irreversible damage (McKillop, 2014). Artists and activists have noticed such catastrophic potential to our planet and its inhabitants and are using contemporary environmental art to raise public awareness, impact governmental policy, and propose sustainable solutions on such issues (Inwood, 2010; Williamson, 2013).

Introduction

Environmentalism is defined in the online *Oxford Dictionaries* (2015) as “concern about and action aimed at protecting the environment” and *environmental* is defined as “relating to the natural world and the impact of human activity on its condition.”

Environmentalism is now a global concept (Boundary Conditions, 2012) and environmental art is aimed at educating the public about issues related to the environment and humans’ treatment of it (Williamson, 2013).

One key reason environmentalism is coined “the most global issue” is because humanity is locked in to this planet and cannot escape it if the global environment does not survive the negative effects of humanity’s actions or, worse yet, inactions (Stiglitz, 2007). Now that the global culture is more aware of environmental issues, it is known that actions have to be taken to reverse the results of human forces on the natural world. There are several reports that claim there is relatively little time left to do so before the effects become irreversible if they have not already done so (Stiglitz, 2007; Williamson, 2013).

Key Concepts

The effects of environmental degradation have no boundaries even though the actual acts of harm do (Boundary Conditions, 2012; Stiglitz, 2007). What one nation does to its own environment affects the environment of other nations as well. For one nation to ask another to change its environmental bad habits is not likely to generate positive results. The change may best be approached in a more peaceful global way (Earth, 2014). The concept of “living well” as apposed to “living better” is becoming more universally communicated and advocated (Earth, 2014; Price, 2011; Stiglitz, 2007). Bolivia will soon be passing into law “The Law of Mother Earth” (Earth, 2014; Price, 2011). Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, even shared with the World People’s Conference on Climate Change his commitment to this concept of giving legal rights to Mother Earth in hopes of raising awareness of poor industrial regulations and unity in understanding the Earth as the source for sustaining all life (Earth, 2014; Price, 2011).

Environmental art plays a strong role in environmentalism also. It has the capacity to “provoke greater social awareness and responsibility” (Chin, 2015). It

informs and engages the public on issues of climate change and inspires effective or creative action in facilitating or at least advocating for reparative or preventative climate changing actions (Williamson, 2013). Artists like Mel Chin go even further to include the element of sustainability in environmental art. In the case of Chin's *Revival Field* this is achieved through the collaborative efforts of science, art, ecology, and agronomy. Chin's *Revival Field* has proven that such sustainable environmentally friendly measures are possible, with nature having the ability to repair itself and then once again give back to humanity (Chin, 2015).

Contemporary Response

The "Rights of Nature" movement, envisioned by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1959, is beginning to show itself. Through courageous political, economical, and national efforts, countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, Sweden, Australia, and even Japan are putting general neighborly concerns before many other concerns (Boundary, 2012; Price, 2011). They are promoting the concept of "living well" above that of "living better." President Morales boldly explains "living well" as apposed to "living better" is living harmoniously with the natural world while still having all personal needs met instead of striving for material or political gain at the expense of everything else: humanity and the environment (Price, 2011).

Environmental art is helping to bring about such change in a few ways. First, it makes the public aware of what is not clearly known about the environment. Artists like Chris Jordan use their art and personal voice to bring global environmental issues to the forefront of people's conscience. Jordan photographs sights that show the harmful physical effects of global environmental issues such as pollution, careless

overconsumption, or overproduction of harmful products (Jordan, 2015). Second, it can influence necessary changes in policies and other advocacy actions. Wyland's whale walls are a powerful example of the global influence art can have on promoting environmental advocacy actions (Swartz, 1992). His work is of life-sized oceanic scenes colorfully portrayed on large walls for the sake of advocating protection of the oceans and sea life. Finally, environmental art can suggest creative, sustainable solutions to specific issues like the work of Chin and Sabraw does. These artists use art and nature to remove and reclaim the hazards imposed by mankind and then create an art form that gives back to the people and the local environment in some way. Chin deals with an ecology theme in works such as *Revival Field* (Chin, 2015). Sabraw harvests toxic heavy metals from local Ohio streams to create vibrant paint colors for his personal artwork. He is working on harvesting even more of the toxic heavy metals to create paint pigments for commercial sales, which in turn will help clean up some of the local streams and the sales of which will sustain his environmental work (Sabraw, 2015).

My Personal Response

My concern is that if some cultures so notably struggle to live cohesively, they likely will not be able to agree on how to deal with other cultures on global environmental issues. Greed of some sort seems to be a constant cause of environmental abuse: the drive for personal gain at the expense of all else. Fear could also be a factor: fear of others gaining a bit more than they "deserve" or more than I gain myself. Since the potential positive results for all of humanity are neither certain nor immediate, a unified mission of improving the global environment seems largely

impeded by things like fear and greed. However, if “Eco-art education offers the means to stimulate learners’ senses, open their minds, and touch their hearts,” like Inwood (2010) claims, it will “becom[e] a powerful ally in fostering environmental literacy.” Environmental art can help break the barriers self-imposed by human fear of uncertainty and greed for only what is already known. It can confront dangerous environmental problems, motivate advocacy for a better environment, and even suggest possible sustainable solutions to hazardous environmental situations.

Perhaps the problems are not rooted in the concept *that* there is concern for a global environmental health plan but rather in *how* we can agree to implement that plan. Each culture has its own unique connections with and concerns about the environment, and creating a sense of unity that still acknowledges unique differences is necessary in order to maintain a central concept that all can agree upon. Like it is proposed in Kenya, some level of sameness (hybridization) that bonds all together has to be achieved while still positively celebrating the benefits of unique differences (Nyaberi, 2011). Art has the ability to do this, to speak in a unified way across cultural differences. Environmental art could be one of the keys to developing a unified global mission of cleaning up the global environment for the sustainability of human existence.

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