Social Movement to Address Climate Change

LOCAL STEPS FOR GLOBAL ACTION

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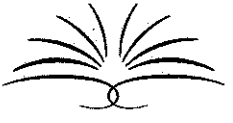

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Chapter 2

Calling All Artists

Moving Climate Change From My Space to My Place

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Each year, the Gallup Poll reports that more Americans claim to understand global climate change better than they did the previous year (Carroll 2007; Saad 2007). Climate-change-communication researchers Susanne Moser and Lisa Dilling (2004) have argued that while people understand climate change, they do not yet feel sufficient urgency to take meaningful action. They and others have suggested the enormous time lags in biophysical and social systems, the fact that developed countries and the power elites within them are relatively insulated from the effects of climate change, and the overshadowing of climate change

by political and economic crises (Moser and Dilling 2004; Moser 2006; Begley 2007) have combined to minimize attention to this phenomenon. Bill McKibben also observed that global warming is a background issue in the United States, where "it hasn't registered in our gut; it isn't part of our culture." McKibben emphasized his point with a set of rhetorical questions: "Where are the books? The poems? The plays? The goddamn operas?...Where are the artists in this movement?" (2005, 1). Organizers for Step It Up (SIU) sought to fill this void, placing climate change on America's center stage by incorporating art.

Guided by the assumption that "images would count most," the national SIU organizers explicitly called for a visible national movement, inviting potential hosts to "gather your friends and take a picture" (McKibben et al. 2007, 101). Over 1,400 group photographs captured local SIU events on April 14, 2007. Local organizers uploaded these photographs to the SIU home page, and national organizers assembled a running slideshow (see figure 9 in chapter 8). In addition to being seen, organizers also implicitly called for a community-based movement by encouraging local organizers to interpret the SIU policy message of cutting national emissions of CO_2 "80 percent by 2050" in whatever manner they deemed most appropriate (Barringer 2007). In this chapter, we examine artistic performances that went beyond taking a picture in Austin, Texas; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Seattle, Washington. These performances illustrate how climate-change activists can use community art to reconfigure perceptions of climate change from a distant and ambiguous spatial phenomenon to a personalized and specific danger to individual places. These community-level artistic performances suggest ways to enable tangible experience with climate change as well as other issues that present the challenge of scale mismatch. After explaining what we mean by the term *green art*, we describe each of the performances listed above, pointing out how they interact with both the local and national scene to make climate change more visible and visceral. We conclude with suggestions for how environmental organizers and other activists may use green art to achieve their goals.

WHAT MAKES ART GREEN?

John Delicath (2004) argued that cultural activism and other informal contexts for citizen protest open public-participation opportunities to those who are not comfortable in more formally constituted settings. We use the term *green art* to specify cultural activism that is not only environmentally themed, but also political, activist-oriented, and community-based. These are not mutually exclusive categories, but labels whose colors bleed into each other (Scher 2007). Our concept of political art expands on David Orr's claim that "poetry and politics are both matters of verbal persuasion" (2008, 409). In one sense, poetry, painting, sculpture, dance, and other art forms are performances, and performance implies an audience. The attempt to persuade an audience, however, is not sufficient to designate an artistic performance as political. Orr describes "political poetry" as being

> concerned with a specific political situation; rooted in an identifiable political philosophy; addressing a particular political actor; written in language that can be understood and appreciated by its intended audience; and finally, offered in a public forum where it can have maximum persuasive effect. (2008, 415)

Although art may be political without necessarily exhibiting all of these characteristics, art that does exhibit these characteristics is unquestionably political.

Green art also is oriented toward activism. Douglas described activist art as "critical intervention that is uncontained by fixed categories and insists on foregrounding power and dominance relations...[It expresses] a critical attitude toward institutions and structures" (2006, 19). For example, although Arnold Friberg's popular painting of George Washington titled *Prayer at Valley Forge* is clearly political, it is not activist art because it does not challenge the status quo. Rather than celebrating the current political regime, activist art sends a message that subverts the regime and its ideology. Activist art with an ecological theme can attempt to directly influence environmental actions and policy, or it can take an

indirect route to change. When McKibben and other national organizers invited artists to participate in SIU, they guided artistic endeavors toward indirect rather than direct action. The event "cookbook" (see chapter 8) urged organizers to "provide art supplies and invite your participants to create art—maybe something that speaks of the importance of your iconic place" (Step It Up 2007).

Perhaps one reason for the indirect approach was a desire to present SIU as a safe venue in multiple communities. Because direct action often involves confrontation, it alienates many who do not see themselves as extreme (see, for example, chapter 10). Artistic performances for SIU in Austin, Salt Lake City, and Seattle all exemplified indirect action. Time's Up, a New York City-based group, on the other hand, illustrated direct action when members participated in the Bike Lane Liberation Ride. Dressed in brightly colored clown costumes, they rode through Manhattan bike lanes "searching out motor vehicles illegally parked in their lanes" (Time's Up 2007) and issued them parking tickets. Although community-based art may include both direct and indirect action, most SIU events appealed to people who indicated greater comfort with indirect action. The important point is not whether the political action is direct or indirect but that community-based art must begin where the community is; it must grow out of community needs and desires (Siskin 2006).

Community-arts practice is more about the creative process than it is about producing an object. Although both the technical expertise and aesthetic sensibilities of professional artists are important dimensions, they do not form the core of this artistic genre. Community-based art projects are "collective processes...with artists acting more as facilitators of community members' creativity" (Scher 2007, 5). Although they may be initiated by any individual or group, community-based projects must be participatory and inclusive. For example, a group of interested community members jointly created the ceremony for the Salt Lake City water ritual and then offered participants the opportunity to further develop the ceremony. The critical reflection generated by encounters with community-based art offers the potential for expanding the original

community of concerned citizens and galvanizing previously unconcerned participants.

Community-based art performances and installations provide shared spaces where people can gather. Those material spaces provide focal points that enable community members to imagine themselves as part of (rather than apart from) the group that engages with the art, including those whose engagement with that space occurs at different times (Forsbert et al. 2006). By producing and displaying community-based art, professional and amateur artists can focus attention on the most important issues we face, especially those, such as climate change, that are ordinarily invisible or difficult to visualize. We now examine three examples of SIU green art that enabled attendees to become cocreators of simulated encounters with climate change.

SEATTLE: ENVISIONING RISING SEA LEVELS AT A LOCAL BEACH

Waves of blue ribbon fluttered gently in the ocean breeze. Far above the ribbon, strips of yellow caution tape flapped wildly. On a Seattle-area beach, forty individuals marked a new shoreline with bamboo poles, ribbon, and caution tape, creating a disconcerting line well above the heads of morning beachgoers. Members of Sustainable Ballard met on April 14 to make a picture, an evocative image of change, of danger, of foreboding arrest (see chapter 9). They used their bodies to provide an opportunity for every beachgoer to experience a personal encounter with the seemingly far-off specter of climate change. One of the local organizers explained,

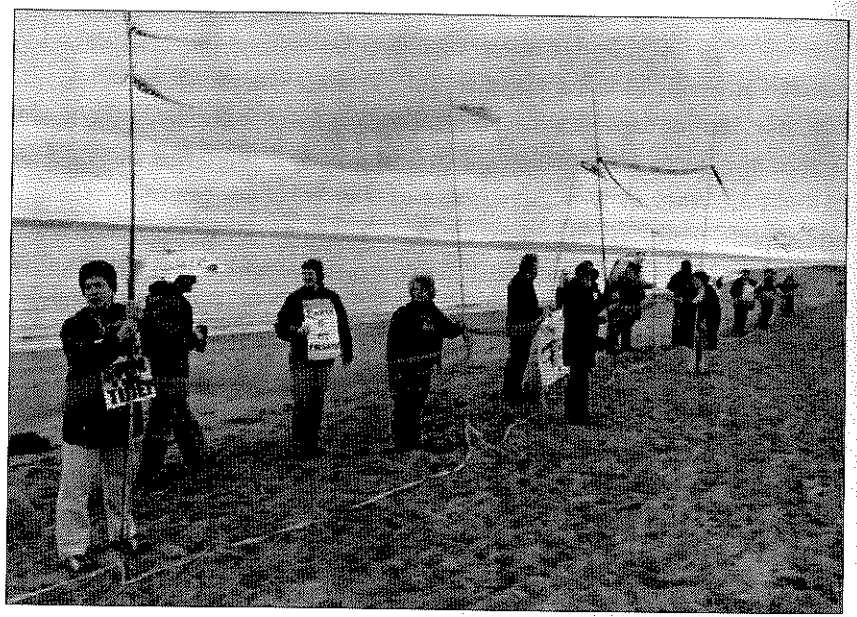
> People need to know that global warming isn't a theoretical construct; it is actually happening now. The blue tape is one meter. A meter is what the scientists are predicting we'll get everywhere if present trends continue everywhere. It won't happen tomorrow. It's real gradual. That's one of the problems with climate change. You don't see it...We have a couple bamboo poles that are really high that have caution tape on them. That's halfway to catastrophe. That's what Al Gore was talking about if everything melted, the Greenland Ice Shelf, the Antarctic Ice Cap. So that's

> only the halfway mark…we're talking about twenty-three feet. So we absolutely can't let that happen.

Sustainable Ballard acted on the assumption that when people can imagine how something may endanger us and our special places, we will work to fix it. Rather than presenting a reasoned argument about climate change, they invited fellow Seattleites to imagine what they risk losing if they do not act.

Participants in Sustainable Ballard's SIU action used a participatory, embodied, community-art performance to call attention to the ramifications of global warming for sea-level rise in general and particularly for the Golden Gardens Beach. The line that participants formed ran roughly parallel with the waterline at high tide. Because the yellow caution tape

FIGURE 1. Sustainable Ballard's community art.



attached to the group's bamboo poles flapped high above everyone's heads, passersby were obliged to crane their necks sharply to identify the elusive sight. While the blue ribbon connecting the entire line of poles sat at a comfortable waist level, the garish caution tape bedecking individual poles was much higher. One participant holding a bamboo pole explained the performance as an attempt to concretize our ephemeral experience with climate change:

> How do you get people concerned about this completely seemingly nonexistent problem? A problem people can't see or witness. It's almost like people need to see it to make something happen. Like, you have kids getting killed with guns, you get gun legislation. You have to get people thinking about it.

The visual image of the altered high tide provided a simultaneously dramatic and nonthreatening (at least in the immediate sense) opportunity for local residents, tourists, congressmembers, and other decision makers to imagine the effects of climate change on their everyday lives. It played on personal self-interest or productive narcissism, suggesting that climate change matters in each of our lives (to our families, the things we do, the places we love, etc.). Everyone (activist or not) who went to the beach that morning encountered this representation.

For another participant, the performance was an opportunity to offer an alternative to the dominant political discourse surrounding climate change. After arriving on his bike, flying an earth flag, he explained his frustrations:

> It's "climate crisis," not "global warming" or "climate change." It's "climate crisis." This term is meaningful because it invokes what it really is. "Global warming" is inaccurate, as some places will freeze over—and some people think "warming" is nice. And "climate change" is ambiguous…It doesn't help communicate the issue at hand. "Climate crisis" does…We're using the language brought to us by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Cato Institute, as well as the oil-company-funded industries and organizations. Those groups have dictated the language used to the corporate media, who have—without thinking—just parroted the language.

For this participant, simulating the loss of his beach was one way to overcome the strategic ambiguity that results from political vocabularies designed to protect elite interests. The message was clear: climate change will destroy this beach.

SALT LAKE CITY: GATHERING THE WATERS IN A DESERT

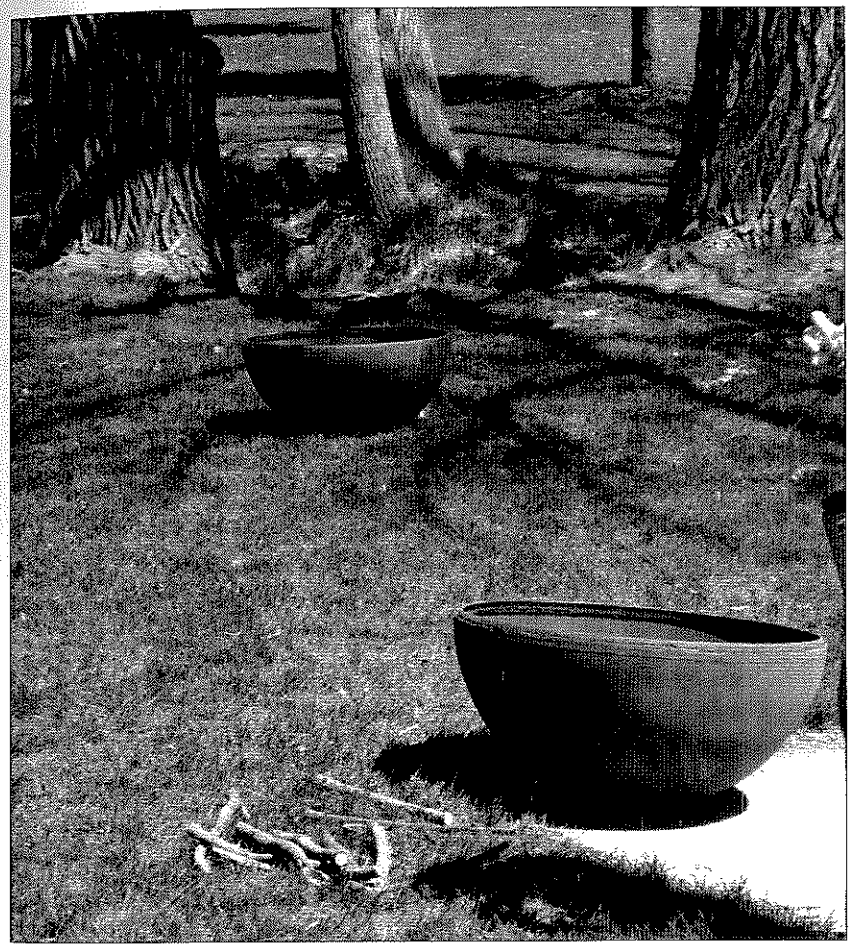
The fourteenth of April, 2007, was a "bluebird" spring day in Salt Lake City. A light breeze rustled the giant banner that spread across picnic tables, and feeding birds rippled the surface of the human-made pond at Sugarhouse Park. Twelve students of nature writer Terry Tempest Williams created an SIU ritual to celebrate the LifePlace of Salt Lake City, the Great Basin, the Great Salt Lake, the Oquirrh Mountains, the shores of Pleistocene-era Lake Bonneville, and the snow-capped peaks of the Wasatch mountain range (Thayer 2003).

Seven watersheds, familiarly referred to as canyons, flow into the Salt Lake Valley. The streams that carved these canyons rely on annual snowpack, which is also a mainstay of the economy and culture for a state whose license plates proclaim, "Utah: the greatest snow on earth." Organizers and performers focused on the hydrologic cycle and how residents value the water. Collectively, they created four touchstones for their SIU event: (1) gather the waters of the world representatively, (2) engage a group of local residents who would promise to protect Earth's waters, (3) provide information to the attendees on actions they can take, and (4) gather signatures and public presence to influence Congress and Utah's governor to seek policy solutions for global climate change. Each artist collected water from a different watershed so that all would be represented. All attendees were invited to bring water from their communities. Cups were provided so that those who did not bring water with them could carry water from the stream running through the ceremonial site.

On the day of the performance, informational posters adorned the adobe firepits and the wooden struts of the public gazebo. As people arrived, they were greeted by an artist, invited to sign the banner asking the governor and Congress to cut carbon 80 percent by 2050, and directed to

the posters and large kettles where the ceremony would be performed. Printed programs with a photograph of water and a short refrain on the cover were dispersed among attendees. A local environmental activist and graduate student then announced that the ceremony was about to begin. He called on everyone to form a circle and join in gathering

FIGURE 2. Ceremony kettles.



the waters. The resulting circle of participants was about twenty feet in diameter and encompassed one of the kettles, leaving the other on the outside.

The speaker stood on the circumference of the ragged circle, slightly apart from others, to deliver a prepared statement written by two of the organizing artists. It opened,

> Climate change is an increasingly serious and omnipresent issue, as it has the capacity to affect all life on earth. One of the major ways is that it will change patterns and quantities of precipitation. While no one is certain how the Wasatch Range will be affected, as floods or droughts are equally as likely and equally as much a part of the water cycle over time, we believe that whatever human impact could lead to such change should be recognized, studied, and decided upon, based on a multiplicity of factors (economic, ethical, ecological). We are emotional beings. We are moral beings. We are part of this place.

The audience of approximately forty white, middle-class participants was attentive as he delivered a lyrical description of the water cycle: "the winds, the disparate heating and cooling of the earth's atmosphere, push and pull, sometimes dragging up and out these great collections of water." He used familiar objects and relationships to relate water to climate change and provide something people could identify with, noting that "only the slightest change in temperature determines the shape of a cloud. Only the slightest change in temperature determines where it will go." The text of his presentation was designed to encourage his audience to recognize the connection between water and global climate change.

A group leader set the tone by clearly stating what was meant to happen during the ceremony: "Let us take this time to revere the water source we have treated unkindly. Let us take this time to celebrate what a gathering of the waters can mean, for us and for our future." After a moment for reflection, the first of eight ceremonial cycles began. Each time, the speaker stated the name of the watershed or canyon, read a four- to eight-line poem about the canyon and the neighborhoods through

FIGURE 3. Circle gathered by the kettles.

which it flowed, and then invited people to join in the ceremony. Those who had brought water from that watershed were invited to pour it into the communal vessel in the center, in response to the phrase, "Let us gather the waters of _____ Canyon." As they poured from plastic water bottles or crouched down with their pottery cups, other attendees recited text printed on the program: "These waters remind us of what is possible and what is important. As waters change, so can we; bodies of water, we flow." Then the leader would announce the next canyon. The ritual continued in this fashion until all seven watersheds of Salt Lake City had been gathered. Gradually, a rhythm settled into the group. Some participants were visibly moved to tears, and everyone contributed water to the central kettle.

Eventually, the group had gathered all of the streams that would have at some point flowed into the Great Salt Lake (or Pleistocene Lake Bonneville), where the water would have resided in brine or evaporated, bonding with sandy particulates and coalescing into clouds that would

rise and catch the mountains' edges again. One participant contributed the following sample of local knowledge and place-based description:

> A swirl, spirals of salts and larvae waves.
> Brine shrimp below a sky flat surface.
> Breeding birds, flocking black, rising out of small white caps, to arc and glint in the sun.
> Seagulls bowing, pull their necks in and run, sprint at the flies, snapping devouring.
> Reeds and marshes by Bear River trace a saline edge green. A highway edges the lake and carries the migratory people back to their suburban islands.
> Islands: Antelope, Stansbury, Gunnison.
> Quiet, still, a resting place. Rooting shallow in the desert, deep with salt, Remembering past shores: Lahontan, Bonneville, Great Salt.
> Let us gather the waters of the body that gathers our local waters, Great Salt Lake.
>
> —Catherine Ashton and Leigh Bernacchi

Finally, to invoke a relationship with the global system, participants were invited to contribute water from beyond the Salt Lake Valley. One participant added metaphorical water from a recent trip to Rwanda, while others dripped precious water from tiny streams in southern Utah's desert into the kettle. Participants then repeated one last time, "Let us gather the earth's waters."

Then the leader guided participants into the second segment of the ceremony. One member of the organizing team had started a fire in the kettle that sat outside the circle. As participants turned toward the fire, the speaker described fire's ability to forge something new and strong, and water's ability to quench a fire. He then likened the fire to global climate change. He encouraged participants to consider ways to use the water they had gathered, suggesting, "Let us take this water and make a promise to this place, this planet. We will be bound by this combination of fire and of water: clouds. A pledge to the cycle." At the conclusion

of this presentation, participants responded to an invitation to read a pledge from their programs: "We promise to respect this water's source. We promise to respect this water's path." For the final segment of the pledge, participants were encouraged to fill in their own individual action: "I promise to..." Each person silently rehearsed his or her promised action as he or she walked to the water kettle in the center of the circle, filled a vessel or cupped hands, and then carried water to the fire kettle. As the attendees poured water on the fire and observed the sizzling embers, the leader read a closing paragraph, and the ritual was complete.

The event's solemnity was somewhat marred when the gradually dispersing group was hurriedly called back to perform a requirement of SIU: gather your friends and take a photo. The group took pictures with everyone holding the banner, then some with just the organizers. The signed banner was never delivered to any political office, but photos of the event were posted to the SIU Web site later that day.

Despite the failure to deliver the banner, both those who created the ritual and those who participated were attempting to send a political message to their governor and to Congress. Perhaps more importantly, they experienced the immediate presence of climate change as they listened to the ritual's narrative, trickled water into a communal kettle, and reflected upon potential actions they might commit to. All of them brought to the ritual an awareness that, especially in the desert, water is life. Participation in the ritual enabled them to sharpen that awareness and link global climate change directly to their local water supply.

Austin: Taking Out the Trash

In Austin, Texas, an art installation shared the stage with several SIU speakers. From afar, the strange-looking metal sculpture resembled a giant blue-green pineapple. Closer observation revealed four metal bars affixed to a metal circular base weighed down by sandbags and rising to a pinnacle eight feet tall. Upon this point rested a swirling, propeller-like top made of four six-foot-long curved metal blades. Zip-tied and knotted to all points of the frame were teal-colored plastic grocery bags that

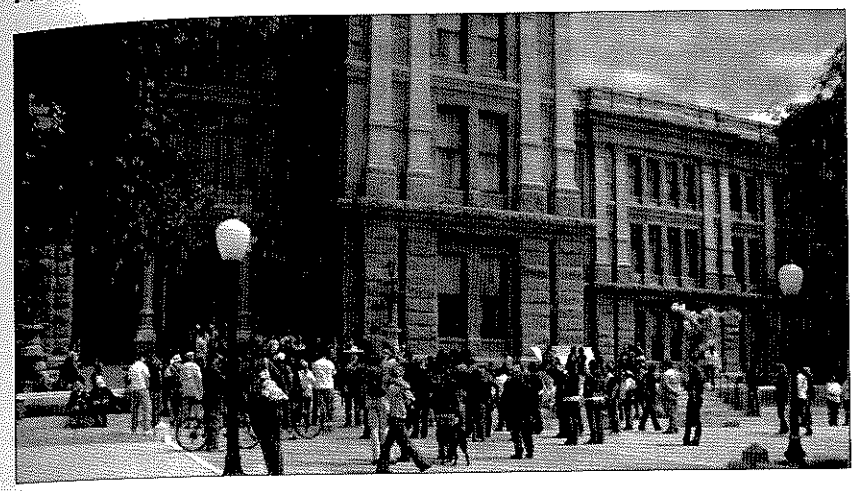
sounded like flags flapping in the stiff Texas wind. The sculpture was a twelve-foot-high mass of moving blue-green plastic.

During a speech, the director of Austin Green Art explained the installation to the Austin SIU audience. He told the crowd of his attendance at a modern-art show in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where McKibben had asked, "Where are the artists in this movement?" He responded to McKibben's question via e-mail and received immediate instructions about how to get involved with SIU. He collaborated with Austin artist Virginia Fleck to tell the story of a situation that is directly related to anthropogenic causes of climate change: the North Pacific Gyre (NPG). The phenomenon was first documented by Don Walsh, who wrote, "Since the oceans are 'downhill' from virtually all mankind's activities, the sea is the final resting place for tens of millions of tons of lost and dumped plastics" (2005, 82). The NPG is a direct result of a global economy that runs on fossil fuels, which, in turn, contribute directly to increased rates of climate change. The ocean currents pull plastic trash (a petroleum product) from around the Pacific Rim into a space that is one thousand miles in diameter and ten feet deep with plastic trash. Some of the inert and long-lived plastics are broken down into tiny plastic fibers and granules that become suspended in the upper one hundred feet (Thompson et al. 2004). A Greenpeace study of the Texas-sized site reported that more than 267 species of marine animals—including turtles, seals, sea lions, whales, fish, and 110 species of seabirds—have been entangled in or have ingested debris from the NPG (Allsopp et al. 2006; Kay 2006).

After reading about this repository of plastic consumer waste, the director of Austin Green Art said Fleck "started immediately making art out of plastic bags." In a personal interview, he described experiencing her art:

> At first, when you see it from a distance, you don't know what the material is. You just see this beautiful swirling thing, and then you get up close, and it is like "Whoah?! It's shopping bags!" And she'll have a little thing beside it that says, "Don't use shopping bags!" She feels like this a problem that has a solution.

FIGURE 4. View from afar of the Austin SIU art installation.



Austin Green Art used this installation to encourage audience members to move from curiosity to interest, repulsion, and finally, to action.

Fleck described the installation as a metaphor for the kind of thinking and visualizing necessary to respond to impossibly large global problems such as climate change. Like climate change, the accumulation of plastic in the NPG results from apparently invisible and gradual accumulation of waste from the fossil-fuel-based global economy. Like Earth's atmosphere, the ability of subtropical gyres to absorb and recycle this waste has been taken for granted and seen as limitless (Moore 2003). Consumed plastics are so common that people rarely think about their impacts. The sculpture deconstructed this *unseen* environmental phenomenon and reassembled it as overlaid upon the audience's everyday *seen* experiences with plastic grocery bags, the porters of consumerism.

Speaking from behind the podium, Austin Green Art's director told of countries that have adopted policy solutions, such as Bangladesh, where plastic bags are outlawed, and Ireland, which instituted a tax on bags and cut its bag use by 90 percent in one year. He concluded by encouraging

attendees to take a teal plastic bag from the barrel and tie it onto the frame of the sculpture, remember the NPG, and commit to using alternatives to plastic shopping bags. He bluntly demanded that his audience "quit using shopping bags!"

FIGURE 5. Austin SIU participants tying on bags.

After all the speakers had finished, people lined up to tie bags onto the sculpture. Participants had to reach into a small barrel, pull out a bag, and tie it onto the sculpture. It was impossible to pull the bags out of the barrel without getting your hands sticky with wet paint. When asked about this, the artistic director explained that "the experience of pulling the bags from the barrel is meant to be nasty." By accepting his invitation to add to the sculpture, SIU attendees became artists, allies, collaborators, and advocates. As audience members solemnly tied bags to the frame, they relived the request to make a personal commitment to be conscious of this swirling blue-green place of plastic trash in the Pacific Ocean. By providing a tangible encounter with the vast and interrelated issues of global climate change and plastic waste, the sculpture enabled participants to close mental gaps between individual actions and their potential impacts upon Earth's biophysical systems.

All three of these performances demonstrated how green art may affect participants and communicate climate change in a unique way. All three presented climate change as a complex biophysical phenomenon that was also a discrete political issue. In the Seattle case, the artists took their performance to the larger community, presenting all beachgoers with a startling yet nonconfrontational image. Community artists in Salt Lake City and Austin performed for a more narrowly defined audience of SIU attendees. They took advantage of their venue by providing opportunities for audience members to become part of the artistic performance, whether by pouring water onto hot coals or by sticking their hands into masses of gooey plastic bags.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

In the SIU organizers' postevent handbook, *Fight Global Warming Now*, McKibben et al. spoke of creative visual expressions of climate change as a "low-cost high impact solution" that nourishes citizen understanding "in a deep and visceral way" (2007, 92). Based on the three artistic performances we analyzed, we offer the following suggestions for national and local organizers who want to use green art to encourage climate-change activism.

1. *Green art should be community-based; it should appear simple, sincere, collaborative, fun, and nonthreatening.* Community-based art differs from mass-produced national nonprofit activist messages, professionally designed high-gloss advertisements, and high-art exhibits. The construction of community-based art is made with everyday materials like ribbon, plastic bags, bottles, and cups of water. The homemade character and apparent low cost help potential participants envision themselves as cocreators.

This does not mean that professional artists should not participate. Organizers should encourage collaboration among diverse and creative groups of people. Organizers can suggest ways that professional artists might incorporate local images, events, or issues that demonstrate the connections between seemingly abstract and ephemeral biophysical processes. They also can challenge all participants to find new uses for everyday or readily available materials in image design. For example, Austin Green Art collaborated with community volunteers to create "Cup City," a sixty-five-by-eighty-five-by-fifteen-foot installation of over 30,000 recycled coffee cups, aluminum cans, and plastic bottles (Sayer 2005). The creation process as well as the display of the artistic image should be sincere and fun, for the collaborative process of producing community-based art is at least as important as the end product. Although Cup City resulted in a product (and was commissioned by Starbucks), the more important aspects of this effort were community interactivity, collaboration, and fun.

2. *Artistic endeavors should create a face for the problem, giving audience members a recognizable focal point.* This imaginary meeting acts as a starting point for conversations that are less easily dismissed than political slogans. Only if artistic performances or installations can give the problem scenario a face can the audience have a face-to-face encounter with the problem. Through these encounters, participants locate themselves in relation to the issue presented. Identification with the need to address the problem transcends the discourse of culpability and political problem solving, and the beholders face the immediacy of ecological change as it confronts their places, their homes, their families, their neighbors, and their daily lives. In other words, art should foster meetings between the distant global and the immediate local.

Organizers can help give a face to the problem by encouraging the production of dramatic and ridiculous-looking artistic images that excite curiosity and wonder, such as the Austin installation. Organizers can prompt these artistic endeavors to emerge locally by asking challenging questions of local participants. For example, what does global climate change look and feel like where you live? How do you see climate change at home, in your town, or in your favorite place? What is the highest hurdle people must get over to see, smell, hear, touch, and taste global climate change? Organizers could call for visual, visible, tactile, audible, and other sensual experiences of the problem (or solution), with care taken to allow for artistic freedom and local nuance.

3. *Organizers should encourage designers to subject their creations to some kind of art criticism.* By art criticism, we mean criticism that focuses on aesthetics rather than politics. This encourages a thoughtful and appreciative response and enables community activists to differentiate artistic performances and installations from explicitly didactic arguments. Cup City, for example, was submitted to the Texas Society of Architects and received a state-level architecture award in 2006. As a result, the ideas it embodied became part of the conversation in multiple forums, extending beyond those traditionally focused on environmental topics. Artistic expression may be less easily dismissed than campaign slogans, declarative signage, and political platforms because it does not prescribe a structure for action but names a reality that connects to the human condition.

Because sloganeering alienates some audience members, organizers may even consider challenging designers to limit usage of overtly politicized terms, letting the agnosticism of the expressive artistic form lead. This new relationship to an issue constitutes a relatively safe space where individuals may begin to view themselves as part of a shared Earth. Artists and other educators may respond more openly to options for reclaiming the ocean around the Pacific Gyre, for example, if they read about it in the context of an award-winning art installation, the *Laguna Gyra* (Rockett 2006).

4. *Community-based art should fit the local setting and audiences.* Organizers should remind designers to consider both external (publics) and internal (planners, designers, and performers) audiences. While the Seattle shoreline display may have led to few public interactions, the forty participants who formed this shoreline experienced their own power as they stood ten feet apart on the beach, braved the cold, clutched their poles, and gazed out into the ocean for that chilly morning hour. The Salt Lake City students who created a ritual for collecting the waters from their valley experienced a new level of connection with their special place. Both of these performances may have been more significant for the performers than for an external audience. By cocreating a frightening new shoreline or measuring out water in the desert, these participants experienced the material presence of climate change.

Timing, location, and normative activities of the setting are also important considerations. For example, walking, running, or strolling along the beach is an intimate and contemplative practice, one that fits seamlessly with the opportunity to view the new sea level represented by the blue ribbon rippling between bamboo poles. Sustainable Ballard was unlikely to have offended or disrupted beachcombers. At the same time, the chilly April weather and early morning hour yielded few beachgoers to see this representation. Austinites, who are accustomed to viewing themselves as an avant-garde outpost in conservative Texas, accepted the plastic-bag sculpture as consistent with their city's sensibilities. All three performances focused attention on climate change in ways that were relatively comfortable for local attendees.

Of course, community-based art sometimes takes a more confrontational tone. Since all three of these examples were part of the SIU campaign, organizers designed performances that presented climate activism as a reasonable, safe, and relatively mainstream activity. While organizers should remind designers to honor the local community, the discourse of community should not be limited to dominant political discourse.

5. *Organizers should use artistic performances and installations to suggest possibilities for rearranging status quo understandings of political and scientific complexities.* Although the goal is change, change usually is

incremental, and it always begins in the present. Audiences seek a familiar point of connection, a way to reorganize familiar patterns into new ways of thinking or feeling. Artistic performances that begin from a point of familiarity can disrupt habitual attitudes towards projected climate-change impacts. Showing projected sea-level rise and the related changes to the look and feel of a familiar place challenges the claim that climate change is unimportant to residents of the United States. Gathering the waters of a desert valley leads to questions about just how close to the edge our human settlements are. Participants are led to imagine how the slightest increase in temperature may make their homes uninhabitable. Learning about a Texas-sized plastic-trash vortex in the Pacific Ocean interrupts the comfortable assurance that Wal-Mart is always available to recycle the plastic bags.

Imagining the local relevance of global ecological impacts empowers individuals and communities to creatively envision alternative futures and relations with the natural world that differ from dominantly held sensibilities. Organizers should invite interpretations that disrupt long-held and habitual beliefs. They can encourage designers to re-vision dominant forms of thought that prevent publics from envisioning, understanding, and experiencing the impacts of global climate change.

6. *Organizers should remember that artistic performances are multiple and open-ended. Art invites multiple interpretations and defies standardization.* These interpretations depend on contextual elements, the event itself, and the manner in which a performance is staged or exhibited. Organizers should embrace the impossibility of controlling possible interpretations, because such control would severely limit the creative power of art. At the same time, they should exert due diligence in encouraging interpretations consistent with their advocacy goals. To do this, they should surround displays, installations, and performances with appropriate supporting persons and other resources.

At the same time, they should be leery about trying to create a master narrative for the sake of a uniform artistic sensibility. Although the standardized campaign formula often has proven successful, its application to artistic performance is less well documented. SIU offers new ways

of *doing* social-movement organizing (see chapter 5 and chapter 11). Rather than following the corporate model used by most nonprofit organizations (complete with magazines, mailers, meetings, and organizational charts), it formed a network of active citizens and friends. Rather than maintaining itself in a static organizational format, the network musters when called or otherwise moved. Each node has local concerns, local problems, local groups, and local goals.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

One strength of the SIU network is its diversity of voices, faces, and talents. Although the specific art performances and installations that emerged from the many SIU events were not predictable, their diversity was. As an introduction to climate change, green art can constitute a starting point for thinking about how individuals see themselves as a part of the problem, the solution, and ultimately, as part of a shared Earth. These artistic performances were more than slogans that ended the conversation with a command to do or say something; they began conversations that continue to spin out in multiple directions, and where every new message has the potential to be an equally creative response rooted in relationships to Earth and other beings. What remains of critical importance is that the artistic performances enable an embodied encounter with something beyond the self.

The genius of the green-art pieces at SIU was their ability to personally engage audiences and participants with complex multiscaled human-environmental phenomena like climate change. They did this by providing a *local face* for the problem. W. J. T. Mitchell argued that images "present, not just surface, but a *face* that faces the beholder" (1996, 72). Any sense making or meaning making derived from an image occurs by audience members placing themselves in relation to the image—literally searching its face. From meeting the local face of global problems, a more personalized understanding may be realized. By inviting a personal encounter, green art makes abstract problems tangible, visceral, and specific to local places, neighbors, and selves.

The green art we observed did not attempt to ignore or devalue existing activities, objects, and relationships within our highly technologized society. Members of Sustainable Ballard used recognizable caution tape to signify rising sea levels. Salt Lake City residents staged their ritual of gathering the desert's water on the shores of a human-made pond in a city park maintained by a sophisticated irrigation system. The dramatic form of the plastic-shopping-bag sculpture relied on a framework of steel bars. Instead, each of these performances gave audience members an opportunity to "know the textures, rhythms and tastes of the bodily world, and to distinguish readily between such tastes and those of our own invention" (Abram 1996, x). Sustainable Ballard participants shivered through an hour's vigil on the cold, windy beach. Those who gathered the waters in Salt Lake City felt the moisture on their faces and listened to the sizzle of water disappearing into the atmosphere. The audience flinched and grimaced when they encountered the gooey residue on the plastic bags they attached to her sculpture. These green-art performances made otherwise ephemeral connections between local communities and global climate change more tangible at the same time as they encouraged audiences to register uniquely evocative meanings.

One powerful dimension of these examples of green art was that people experienced them directly with their bodies rather than as electronically mediated experiences. Audiences had the opportunity for personal experience, even becoming creative producers. Although green artists were pleased to receive mainstream-news coverage and to post photos of their performances on the SIU Web site, the face-to-face encounter was a more central objective. The more fully audience members interacted with the art, the greater the opportunity for understanding. These green-art installations were designed to be thoughtfully pondered, read, touched, criticized, taken in, and experienced.

Within the cacophony of environmental discourses and argumentation, green art offers an important option for constructing and voicing alternative meanings from the dominant political-economic voices. The artistic expressions encountered at SIU do not suggest that we apply a more accurate renaming or any ideal frame to communicate climate

change. Instead, these examples of green art suggest ways to communicate climate change so that persons can locate themselves in relation to the problem, so they look into the face of climate change and sense its impacts on everyday practices, places, and people. Whether an individual interpretation resists or resembles the artists' interpretation is less important than the experience of seeing how climate change places one's object of desire (e.g., self, local beach, clean water, good health, fresh air) in jeopardy. Green art fosters a meeting between the local self and the global problem. This intimate encounter enables powerful imagination of the local impacts of global phenomena and positions the local self in relation to the global problem.

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