

# Environmental Impact Panel Discussion Questions

Submitted by Scholars and Writers who have written about the Exhibition

2:00 p.m. on Sunday, February 14, 2016  
St. Mary's College Museum of Art, Moraga, CA

Painter, Chester Arnold, Sonoma, CA  
Painter, Britt Freda, Burton, WA  
Photographer, Peter J. Goin, Reno, NV  
Painter, Karen Hackenberg, Port Townsend, WA  
Painter, Mary Helsaple, Sedona, AZ  
Sculptor, Michael (Mick) Meilahn, Pickett, WI  
Painter, Suze Woolf, Seattle, WA  
Moderator: David J. Wagner, Curator

**I. Michael Tobias and Jane Gray Morrison**, President and Executive Vice President respectively of Dancing Star Foundation who co-authored the essay "Environmental Impact: The Global and Historic Context For Reflecting Upon Ecological Doom and Resurrection," <http://davidjwagnerllc.com/Tobias%20Essay.pdf> © Michael Charles Tobias and Jane Gray Morrison

**A.)** Jane and I tend to believe that art and our ability to celebrate nature may be key to our survival as a species. But the ecological trenches – as you have all endeavored to express in so many guises – are getting deeper by the minute. With this absolute avalanche of environmental crises, solely unleashed by Homo sapiens, what do you feel is more meaningful to our species, beauty or fear?

**B.)** Humans, who have been around for about 135,000 years, have evidenced only marginally, in our opinions, the ability to learn from their own destructive histories. Given our clear penchant for revisiting upon ourselves all those same endless tendencies to denude, denigrate, deforest, poach, fragment, kill, et cetera et cetera, wherein do you believe artistic expression can best serve beyond what Jean-Paul Sartre once referred to as “a useless passion” (despair, hopelessness, anguish)?

**C.)** In thinking about your myriad of art forms and specific expressions, we are reminded of a long tradition of artists from Thomas Cole to Anselm Kiefer who have stood up to the myths and realities of their times. Who among you remain optimistic, given a turn towards global denial and callous indifference to the suffering of others, while our embrace of the many myths of endless consumption without consequence escalates?

**D.)** If you had been one of the spelunkers who discovered the great French cave of painted animals in 1994, Chauvet, would you have ever revealed its location or kept it a secret? And please explain your thinking on this issue, either way. Our point of course is this: What in nature is sacred and how do we maintain that deep value?

**II. Robert Chianese**, Professor Emeritus at California State University - Northridge, and past President of the Advancement of Science, Pacific Division, who wrote a major review in American Scientist Magazine of Environmental Impact

entitled "How Can Art Move Us Beyond Eco-Despair"  
<http://davidjwagnerllc.com/Chianese-Eco-Despair.pdf>

**A.) Environmental Ethics in Eco-Art and Photography: Narratives of Explanations**  
Nature Photography: Full disclosure Requirement

i. Would you support a requirement that the photographer of a natural scene or subject disclose the basic environmental health or degradation of the scene or subject? For example the photographer of a California coastal island should explain that the waters around it are currently so warm due to global warming that sea lion mothers must swim so far north for food that some abandon their pups, which then wash ashore either dead or starving? In other words capturing the beauty of these islands requires full disclosure of their environmental status, whether represented or not, and the source of their health or degradation.

ii.) Would you support a requirement that the photographer of a natural scene or subject disclose the detailed extent to which the photograph was deliberately manipulated to emphasize a certain look or theme or content?

**B.) Nature Art: Artist as Ecological Visionary**

i.) Would you agree that representational depictions of environmental degradation should do more than expose the particular problem represented but also offer or hint at potential solutions to it in the work itself? For example, in the coastal island image discussed above, a painter might reveal off in the distance a solar array or windmill that suggests alternate energy sources can help curb global warming.

**III. Todd Wilkinson**, environmental journalist, longtime American writer about wildlife art, and author of the recent critically acclaimed books, "Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek, an Intimate Portrait of 399, the Most Famous Bear of Greater Yellowstone" and "Last Stand: Ted Turner's Quest to Save a Troubled Planet," who wrote a major review of Environmental Impact in Sculpture Review Magazine for The National Sculpture Society  
<http://davidjwagnerllc.com/Environmental%20Impact%20by%20Wilkinson.pdf>

**A.** Do you agree with this observation from Swedish-American sculptor Kent Ullberg, known for his public wildlife monuments, who says that far from being passé, anachronistic, and simplistic, wildlife imagery in 21<sup>st</sup>-century art is avant garde?

**B.** From droughts, fresh water shortages and destructive unseasonal storms to melting icecaps, wildfires, and such phenomena as oil spills and dead zones in the Gulf of Mexico, environmental stories dominate the news and they shape our daily thinking in this age of the Anthropocene. By being in this exhibit, you obviously care. Should art set the tone of social dialogue or respond to it? Moreover, what role does art play at all?

**C.** A major complaint of traditional nature art is that it's become boring and anodyne. Many artists I know fear that, in these politically divisive times, bringing an edge to their work will result in retaliation from the marketplace. For example,

the Western and wildlife art markets in the US have been heavily influenced by collectors who have made their money in the fossil fuel industries. As oil and gas prices have fallen, the art markets have dried up. All of you have the courage and conviction to make a statement. How do you do that and still make a living? Have any of you experienced a backlash?

**D.** When you think of artists, historically, whose works helped to bring issues of the day to the forefront of social consciousness or whose courage inspires you, which ones come to mind?

**E.** Are you optimistic about the future? Yes or no and why?

**IV.** Additional Discussion Questions submitted by several exhibiting artists and from members of the audience will be included.

**END**