

ART PAPERS

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REENACTMENT
A RETRO-NECRO
POLITICS

EVIL
BLACK METAL AS
CRYPTO LOGO JIHAD

ANXIETY
DAVID ROSETZKY'S
LIFESTYLE SUBLIME

AMBIANCE
MOVING-IMAGE
SOUNDSCAPE



WEATHER REPORT: ART AND CLIMATE CHANGE BOULDER, CO

The facts, to the best of our current knowledge, are in: an increase in carbon dioxide emissions and unsustainable exploitation of our planet's resources are driving global temperatures upward and life as we know it is on the wane. In order for us and hundreds of other species to survive, we need to change our rules of engagement with Mother Earth faster than most of us realize, much less accept.

In service of this laudable goal, the Boulder-based EcoArts group, the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, and renowned curator, critic, and writer Lucy Lippard have put together a sprawling, multi-site, and multi-faceted exhibition to educate and inspire us to change our collective ways. *Weather Report: Art and Climate Change* [Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art; September 14—December 21, 2007] presents work by fifty-one local and international artists. Some collaborated with scientists studying and documenting climate change in the field while others worked more personal ground. Attendant to the exhibit are dozens of related EcoArts-coordinated events across Colorado's Front Range, from a tour of the Ponsequin Wind Farm and a talk about flood danger along Boulder Creek to recycling, solar energy, and sustainable living expos.

The project reveals a real dichotomy. Yet it isn't, as some may have expected, a question of competing methodologies between art and science. If anything, the artists defer to scientific data and analyses as a foundation for their own elusive quests for truth. The divide lies between those who adhere to some interdisciplinary version of the phrase, "First, do no harm," and those who don't. Mind you, these are not hard and fast categories, and, indeed, that's part of the pointed and poignant nature of *Weather Report*. As Walt Kelly reminds us in his comic-strip excursions into political allegory, "We have met the enemy, and they is us."

Us, that is, the products we consume and the waste we produce in the pursuit of a better life. Visualizing this concept to its perversely literal extreme, Chris Jordan's series of large-scale inkjet prints entitled *Running the Numbers: An American Self-Portrait, 2006-2007*, marshals thousands, if not millions, of tiny digital images—jet contrails, for instance, or plastic beverage bottles—into pleasantly abstract patterns, a sleight-of-hand that obscures and aestheticizes the staggering volume of crap we

release into the environment every day. On the other hand, Iain Baxter's installation *Killer Still-life #5, 1993*, a shelf of toxic commercial products in front of a mirror placed at eye-level, leaves us nowhere to hide from the implications of our consumer choices.

Drawing political rhetoric and ironies into the mix, Kim Abeles' *Presidential Commemorative Smog Plates, 1992*, presents stencil images of U.S. presidents, from McKinley to Bush I, formed by exposure to particulate matter in the air for up to forty days—each length of exposure reflecting that particular president's environmental track record. Likewise, the Yes Men are as incisive as always in their video *Exxon Vivoleum, 2007*, which documents their militantly tongue-in-cheek June 2007 keynote speech at GO-EXPO, Canada's largest oil conference, where, impersonating ExxonMobil and National Petroleum Council representatives, they outlined the transformation of the victims of global calamities caused by continued oil production into a new fuel called "Vivoleum."

Several outdoor, site-specific pieces are aimed at raising awareness of the potential changes in the local landscape due to radical shifts in climate. For her study *Connect the Dots: Mapping the High Water, Hazards and History of Boulder Creek, 2007*, Mary Miss has placed hundreds of blue dots on trees along the Boulder Creek watershed—all about six feet off the ground—to give viewers a quick primer on the consequences of extensive building in a flood plain.

Another focus of *Weather Report* is the earth's polar regions, delicate and beautiful ecosystems that have already begun to pay the price of global warming. Several artists make those changes both visible and visceral. With their haunting views of the Antarctic landscape, Joan Myers' digital prints establish a shared visual reference for an audience that, likely, has never been to either pole. Subhankar Banerjee's pigmented inkjet and digital chromogenic prints approach the issue from two perspectives, documenting the damage done as well as the more harmonious conservationist ethos of indigenous peoples in the region. The allegorical resonances pile up fast: *Caribou Migration I, 2002*, an aerial photo of hundreds of caribou on the march due to loss of habitat, takes on the character of a modern-day Trail of Tears across the snowy, but quietly melting,

wastes; depicting a macabre beach littered with bones, *Caribou Skeleton, 2006*, suggests genocide as much as the threat of extinction.

But, almost miraculously, a number of works bring hope as they offer tentative but active solutions to finding new ways to coexist with each other and the planet. For instance, Patricia Johanson's pencil and ink drawings—from *Living Apartment Houses, 1969*, to *Air, Earth, and Water, all 2007*—imagine human buildings as anatomy- and plant-inspired ecosystems rather than blunt intrusions into the landscape. And Agnes Denes' documentation of *Tree Mountain—A Living Time Capsule—11,000 Trees, 11,000 People, 400 Years, 1992-1996*, an elegant reforestation project in Finland, demonstrates something of the potential of redirecting human activity toward living with the earth instead of trying to remake it in our own image.

In the wrong hands, *Weather Report* might have been an agitprop disaster—a naive, over-earnest sermon to the choir and a demonstration of the lost potential of advocacy art. But Lippard is both creative and thorough, adroitly anticipating the criticisms and sidestepping the pitfalls of utopian visions of better cooperative societies. Writing of Sherry Wiggins' work, a series of publicly posted interviews with Boulder citizens about their respective carbon footprints, Lippard states, "... viewers can identify, or not, and apply these analytical tools to their own lives ... or not." To date, Wiggins' is the only work that has raised any substantial local controversy. In an election year, some have proposed that the inclusion of an incumbent city council candidate in the mix of citizens might be giving her unfair political advantage.

This may seem a non sequitur, a deliberate missing of the point. But this emphasis on following rules is not so far afield from *Weather Report's* crux, which upholds the law over the letter. As corporations have shown us, the letter is all too easy to exploit. By contrast, awareness of and reverence for the spirit of a law—in this exhibition, the laws of nature—drive both artist and scientist to craft a future that will include so much more than us.

—J. Gluckstern

OPPOSITE, TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, from the series *Dauphin Island, Alabama, November, 2005, 2005*, inkjet print on paper, 16 x 20 inches [courtesy of The Center for Land Use Interpretation, Culver City, CA]; *Joan Myers, Iceberg, Crystal Sound, 2001*, digital print; Epson K3 inks on Hahnemühle paper, 30 x 20 inches [courtesy of the artist and Andrew Smith Gallery, Santa Fe]. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: *Subhankar Banerjee, Caribou Skeleton, 2006*, from the series *Oil and the Caribou, Barter Island, Alaska*, pigmented inkjet print laminated and mounted on Plexiglass [courtesy of the artist]; *Xavier Cortada, still from The Markers, 2007*, performance documented by video, digital print [courtesy of the artist]; last images courtesy of The Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, CO

