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### Exhibition brings to life resource wars in the Arctic

Photographer calls for conservation in Arctic, the “most debated land in American history”

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Long before Sarah Palin said “drill, baby, drill,” during the 2008 presidential elections, politicians and environmentalists had clashed on whether to extract oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

For more than 30 years, preservationists have mostly won their battles, but photographer and activist Subhankar Banerjee is not letting down his guard.

“Although the Arctic refuge is the most debated land in American history, it is still not a part of the American consciousness,” he said during a recent telephone interview. “We need to keep having dialogue on this issue so as to keep the goal of conservation alive.”

His photography exhibition, “Resource Wars in the American Arctic” opens Friday in the Indiana University School of Fine Art gallery and will feature pictures of refuge wildlife and landscape, and other ecologically rich areas in the Arctic.

The open-to-the-public, free event consists of a lecture by Banerjee on opening day at the School of Fine Arts Room 015 at 5:30 p.m. This will be followed by a reception at the SoFA gallery from 7 to 9 p.m.

Banerjee, a New Mexico photographer of Indian descent, is the founder of [climatestorytellers.org](http://climatestorytellers.org) and a contributor to [Huffington Post](http://HuffingtonPost.com).

He said that the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the most ecologically and biologically rich lands with about 180 of species mammals, such as caribou. It is also rich in natural resources, including oil.

#### Window to the Arctic

Human rights — not just ecological rights — have to play a part in this land because of the presence of two indigenous communities who sustain themselves on these resources.

Born in 1967 in Berhampore, a small town near Kolkata, India, Banerjee’s upbringing in his parents’ tropical home in rural Bengal helped him understand the value of land and its resources. After completing an undergraduate degree in electrical engineering in India, Banerjee left for New Mexico to do graduate work at New Mexico State University in physics and computer science.

He got involved with the college environment club and participated in hiking and backpacking activities. He got

reacquainted with nature through his trips to the New Mexican desert, where he developed his passion for photography.

On earning his masters degrees, Banerjee moved to Seattle to work in the research arm of Boeing as a scientist. His love for photography grew during this phase, and in 2000 he left his career in science to embark on a 14-month trip to the Arctic for a photography project.

In 2003, he published a book based on his Arctic travels titled "Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Seasons of Life and Land." His activism through numerous photography exhibitions has helped raise attention to the conservation efforts in the wildlife refuge.

The exhibition at IU is "a little window to all the key themes of the Arctic," Banerjee said. One example of art displayed is a juxtaposition of images, "Caribou Migration I," an aerial shot of a Caribou herd, with a series titled "Gwich'in and The Caribou," comprising four images portraying hunters cutting up dead Caribou.

The piece is inspired by cinematography and French painting.

"My work is very interdisciplinary, containing ideas from environmental studies, history, human rights, and fine art," Banerjee said. "My hope is that this exhibition will engage people from different fields of study and backgrounds and get them talking about the environment because these issues will not go away anytime."

### **Veggies on show**

Held concurrently at the SoFA gallery is "Tending a Difficult Hope" by Leah Gauthier, a sculptor and art professor at Butler University. The exhibition showcases homegrown food items such as heirloom vegetables, grown in hand-sewn pods she crafted, and preserved food creations such as green tomato jam.

Gauthier's exhibition, which includes a series of public workshops on solar cooking methods among others, is part of her effort to inspire others to make green lifestyle choices through self-sufficiency in food production.

"I want to pass on the art of survival and renewal," Gauthier said. "Our generation is reliant on industry for food, but in this peak-oil period, you never know what's going to happen in the future. We need to be independent."

Sponsored by Themester 2010, "sustain-ability: Thriving on a Small Planet," a semester-long initiative by IU's College of Arts and Sciences, both exhibitions will last through Nov. 19.

### **And, finally...**

Also opening Friday at SoFA is "Playing Fields," an exhibit showcasing the work of five painters, each "playing a role in developing the current ethos of their field," stated a news release from the fine arts school.

Patrick Berran, Melissa Oresky, Ryan Schneider, Olivia Schreiner and Jered Sprecher are all contemporary painters whose works will give art students a "glimpse of the current state of contemporary painting," said Tyson Skross, associate director of the SoFA Gallery and curator of the exhibit.

The exhibit's opening reception is also 7 to 9 p.m. Friday in the gallery.

Schneider will give a lecture at noon Friday in Room 105 of the Fine Arts building.

The exhibit runs through Nov. 19. Learn more at <http://sofa.fa.indiana.edu>, or call 812-855-8490.

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If you go

**WHO:** Photographer Subhankar Banerjee and sculptor Leah Gauthier

**WHAT:** Photographic exhibition “Resource Wars in the American Arctic” and “Tending a Difficult Hope,” a mixed media exhibition featuring plants

**WHEN:** Opening reception 7-9 Friday, shows run through Nov. 19. Hours are noon-4 p.m., closed Sundays and Mondays.

**WHERE:** IU SoFA Gallery, 1201 E. Seventh St., Room 123 of the Fine Arts building.

**MORE:** Subhankar Banerjee will lecture Friday in Room 015, Fine Arts building; exhibition and talk are free.



Subhankar Banerjee’s photography will be on exhibit at the IU SoFA Gallery as part of the 2010 IU Themester on sustainability. His “Caribou Tracks on Tundra | Coal and the Caribou” is seen here. Courtesy image

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