

Selected transcription of
panelist presentation and
audience discussion at:

PROJECTIONS & PRESERVATIONS

A roundtable discussion,
held at
Los Angeles
Contemporary Archive
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There is a push to use the term 'climate destabilization' instead of climate change. To use a term that is a lot less neutral. How will we make art in an unstable climate?

We are seeing the effects of climate change right now in California, it isn't something we need to wait two generations to see.

If there is any sphere of culture that is particularly good at reflecting upon itself, and restructuring itself to acknowledge changing politics, it is the art world. We are good at acknowledging our own critiques and adapting to them.

If I were to challenge any of you in your particular practices, I think an interesting challenge is communicating the very large, the very small, the very slow and the very fast, because climate change is happening on each of those scales and those scales are very difficult to understand.¹

Who is not an environmentalist today? And yet aren't environmental losses happening because of the status quo? If we're all environmentalists while collectively contributing to environmental problems, then we must draw a decisive political conclusion from this - that the status quo can no longer stand. Our status quo is that of multinational capital with its need for perpetual growth.²

Now I know that I can talk with any of you. Some of you who I know, some of who I don't, and I can say, I have these concerns - my work may not be directly about climate change, but now I know I can talk to [the people in this room] about these issues.

We are going to have to find new ways of restructuring this community [the art world] to reduce emissions.

What if the survival of an unregulated market is incompatible with our survival as a species ?

No market exists that is able to take our modest individual actions and combine them over time into a solution to the world's problems. We must instead seek collective solutions to the problems that exist in the here and now.³

We need to disregard environmentalism's narrative of return [to a natural state] as this narrative distracts us from the necessary desire for a radically new vision of the future ... we must turn towards the city. The city has an ecological potential that the village lacks.⁴

California has a law called AB32 and it is by far the most progressive anti climate change legislation in the country, and industry hates it, they hate hate hate it. Especially the oil industry, and there are multiple legal fronts where they're trying to kill it, and that's some of the work I do on a daily basis, trying to defend these things in court, against the oil companies and their very capable and very high priced lawyers.⁵

It's fascinating to work over there [in Beijing]. I grew up in LA and I remember when smog was really bad. It's 10 times worse in Beijing, on a bad day you can't see from me to you. The air is a yellow green-brown crud, you breathe it in and your lungs hurt. It's just unbelievably bad over there and that's apparently the price they're willing to pay for economic development. And part of the irony is that we in the US have outsourced a lot of our manufacturing over there and maybe we're thinking - oh they can eat the pollution; except, in respect to global climate change that's really not how it works, a molecule of carbon emitted in Beijing has exactly the effect as what I emit here in California.⁶

We are going to have to find new ways of restructuring this community [the art world] to reduce emissions.

What's a life worth two generations from now? You don't have to make that calculation because if you grew up here you'd know we used to have a brush fire season in October and November, now it's year round. That because we don't have as much water - we see tropical insects and diseases are making their way north. On the coast people are seeing aquatic species they haven't seen in decades, they're coming north because the oceans are warming.⁷

What's a story we can tell people about climate change and why it's something we need to fight? I don't think anyone in our movement has a clue about what that story is and how to make it powerful so people will internalize this value.

I'm not without hope, and I do hope that folks in your community can figure out a way to tell a story that hits you really in the gut, so people can start thinking and acting in a way that's going to deter this catastrophe that's happening right now.

This notion of artists being assigned a topic makes me very nervous, and some of the suggestions I have really fall more on the design side.⁸

The data is complicated. The story is complicated. It's not only a story that exists outside of the scale that we're normally representing, it also has lots of layers.⁹

I think we need a new generation of indicators for these processes that are going on as science has progressed past what we are able to simply and clearly communicate.

I'm not sure I've ever been convinced by an art work to make a political decision.

There's a tendency to want to produce an effect, and one of the main effects of art is often to be a free radical in the system. To show that there is something operating outside of the system ... taking environmentalism and thinking about it radically, as a space to move forward into something new as opposed to trying to preserve something we just imagined existing.

Propaganda can be used by both sides. Artists often do have some insight into the cultural psych-drama, and therefore might be able to produce really terrific propaganda for the movement.

The first earth day poster was created by Rauschenberg.

To me, giving up is not an option, even if we're out-funded, and out-spent.

Is it more important to make [political climate change] work that is part of our personal practice, or is it more important to get involved in organizations – such as the NRDC, and support them?

Having images of what a city can be is a really critical part of the discourse.

This plea from the NRDC - we need to support them visually - so supporting them with the proceeds of whatever you make from work is one thing, but supporting them with visual and interesting ways to approach problems and interesting ways to visualize and compose and to present things is maybe even more valuable.

But that was a radically different world [the social movements of the 1960s]. We've had protests here [recently] and they haven't had nearly the same effect, and we're really dealing with more money now than has ever existed in politics before ... it seems like we're moving towards an oligarchy ... do you not believe that both sides need to have the same amount of money?

What separates us from the 1960s is there's not really a mass movement that's concerned about climate change... There needs to be a movement that appeals to everybody, particularly the people at the bottom of the heap. That happened in the civil rights movement, so I do have some hope. But how do you get from where we are today, to a place where masses of people are incentivized to do something - I don't know.

At the same time super PACs control a lot of the public discourse and the way that they convey their message [is daunting] and [they] can do it so effectively... there are ways in which the internet has given people access to certain kinds of breaching that hasn't happened before.

I don't know the answer ... artists tend not to know the answer, and a lot of us don't want to know the answer and want our art to raise questions.

The internet, and over sharing, freak me out all the time, but again I see potential in those channels for the kind of consciousness change that could make an impact on the way these kinds of decisions get made.

An interesting thing for me about the convergence of art and climate change is that artists like to ask questions, and I think that one of the really fruitful things for me as an artist who makes work about climate change is that I can make work about climate change and it can be work about basically anything. I can make work about gender, history, inequality, about feelings, about sexuality, and those are all relevant issues to climate change, because it's so immense.

I think another role artists can play is revealing its complexity - talking about why there isn't one scientific consensus on it, there are parts of the scientific community that believe different things, and I think if we can talk about that complexity and understand it - at least amongst ourselves, that's a huge step.

And also broaden the debate, to say climate change is an issue of inequality - it's going to affect people with the least the most and the soonest - and that seems relevant to a lot of people, I know who make work about class and gender, so climate change is relevant to those discussions too.

The rich are going to be more comfortable for longer, that's for certain, but they aren't going to escape this problem.

The internet does hold a lot of potential but feels very self-selecting so it's speaking to people who already want to be spoken to. If the audience is a big question, which I think it is, how do we address audiences that aren't already represented in this room?... I always wonder why environmentalism isn't paired with mega churches and religion. I don't know if any of us would have any idea how to do that, but that seems like something that's exciting.

I take issue with this thing people are saying about needing to influence all the little people. The little people are actually already being beaten up all the time and they don't really need a hectoring lesson from people like us with multiple university degrees who are interested in art. I think we should leave them alone.

And since we're in art and have privileged access to the ultra-rich, who collect art and can afford to buy art, and may stand to be charmed by us as individuals at least... I think we should look at what the domains of competence are and render unto to sport what is sports, and render to main stream religion what is theirs and render unto art what is art's.

Special thanks to the Los Angeles Contemporary Archive.
All those who attended and especially the panelists:
David Pettit, Peggy Weil and Dylan Taylor.

Excerpts from the panelists presentations and
comments during the discussion are referenced.

1 Peggy Weil
2,3,4 Dylan Taylor
5,6,7 David Pettit
8,9 Peggy Weil