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Artists getting involved with change, climate change that is!

Imagine a car powered by compressed air technology that travels up to 93 miles in the city.¹ Such a pollution-free car would produce minimal emissions of a regular automobile and is considered a zero-emissions vehicle, comparable to the zero-emissions of electric cars.²

Imagine a community where greywater exists. Grey water is the residual water from washing machines, tubs, showers and sinks. Although it may look grey and be mixed with things like dirt and washed away products such as food, grease, hair, etc., greywater is not harmful to use on lawns and plants. In fact, it can be used to irrigate lawn water and to fertilize plants. But the nutrients in greywater pollute waters sources like lakes, river, and inlets, so it should just for irrigation purposes. Such a product promotes maintainable ecological yard environments. It also may reduce "wastewater" use the commercial industries.³

Imagine a community where vegetables and fruits are grown on a designated acreage, not needing to be purchased in supermarkets and are free of GMOs and other unhealthy pesticides.

Next, we can try to imagine a home heated not by oil, gas, or electricity but by solar energy panels installed on its roof or windmills on its lawn.

All these ideas sound intriguing but still strange, different the today's current lifestyles in typical society. Air powered vehicles, greywater, community organic farming, solar energy and windmills are actually concepts that are realities in today's world. But they are taking a while to catch on because of their "newness" factor. People seem to like the same things day after day and not change, especially including big businesses who probably do not want to bother with switching to such ecologically efficient products that are affordable and self-sustainable. While these "modern" products are efficient and less industrially processed, people need to understand why changes in their current, everyday lifestyle may be needed.

During the past few decades, climate change has happened. What is climate change? Defined as "change in global weather patterns" or "long-term alteration in global weather patterns, especially increases in temperature and storm activity, regarded as a potential consequence of the greenhouse effect,"⁴ climate change has affected the entire world's ecological system. Its harsh effects may be seen in the Arctic and Antarctica with the rise of warmer waters and the demise of the icebergs. It has been suggested that this unfortunate happening is due to the increased amounts of

1 YouTube, "Air Car by Guy Negre on The Science Channel", February 24, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgwfplIOOb-c&list=PL964C267D89E51C94&index=4>

2 YouTube, An Air Powered Car!

3 "About greywater reuse", July 25, 2014.

<http://www.greywateraction.org/content/about-greywater-reuse>

4 "climate change", Encarta Dictionary, Microsoft Word 2010, July 25, 2014.

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mainly carbon dioxide in the air and methane levels⁵ coming up through the water due to pollution.⁶

The animal population has been greatly hurt by climate change. Many species that are so loved by mankind are endangered like the polar bear, seals, Monarch butterflies, bees, and barn owls.⁷ Even weather patterns have changed from the advancement of pollution due to mankind. The cold air that used to be stagnant in the poles now moves throughout various areas of the globe. The unusually freezing temperatures experienced last winter in the Northeast support this theory. Severe weather like the recent Californian drought, the flash flooding in the Mid-West and the Southeastern parts of the countries are some examples, too. And the increased number of tornadoes and powerful storm systems have developed throughout the United States itself, such as Hurricane Sandy in October 2012.

What does all this mean? People have to work together to try to slow down the climate change and its harsh effects produced throughout the globe.

Now, let's understand, not imagine, the reality that people, including many artists, around the world are looking for solutions to this menacing thing called "climate change".

"Artists do much more nowadays than make images," said Dr. Amy Ingrid Schlegel, Director of Galleries and Collections, Tufts University, in a recent email interview. "Social practice and community collaborations are an increasingly prevalent way that artists work, sometimes along-side object making."

Extreme photographer Camille Seaman seems to think that "positive and creative solutions for our Climate Change issue" are required. She has created The Earth Academy "to build self-sustaining, environmentally responsible communities as beacons to the world that it is possible to live in a way which will ensure a healthy environmentally environment for future generations."⁸ Seaman has traveled to the Arctic and the Antarctica to photograph the icebergs and glaciers there. She has seen powerful images of disintegrating ice blocks over the past 10 years. For the past six years, Seaman has been photographing extreme weather in the United States, "chas(ing) storms", as she said in "Let's find a way forward together The Earth Academy", a video located at www.theearthacademy.com.

A TED Senior Fellow 2013 and a Stanford Knight 2014, Seaman explained that she has been trying to educate the public about the seriousness of climate change through her photography. But she does not believe it is working as efficiently as she had originally hoped.

5 "The Art of Climate Change", Dorsi Lynn Diaz, April 4, 2014

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/211393631/the-art-of-climate-change>

6 "Methane", Ocean News, August 16, 2014

oceanlink.island.net/ONews/Onews7/methane.html

7 "The Art of Climate Change", Dorsi Lynn Diaz, April 4, 2014

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/211393631/the-art-of-climate-change>

8 "What's she up to now? Your support to build the Earth Academy: A 21st Century Hyper-Local Sustainable Village", online press release, July 2, 2014

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So “out of frustration, I began a quest for ideas, technology, and other people who were interested in making this planet a safer, cleaner, better place. That inspired me to start The Earth Academy. The 21st century is not going to be like the 20th century. It’s going to require different thinking and different behaviors. Sorts of useful and empowering ideas are found on our Facebook page and website,” she said.

But more importantly, Seaman said, “The second aspect of The Earth Academy is that we are going to physically build small sustainable communities in diverse geographical locations around the United States. These affordable, safe, clean communities will act as inspirations for other towns and villages as to what is possible.”

She is targeting Detroit as the first place to build this ideal community because this city has affordable and available land; is redefining itself after being a “once great motor city”; and is currently a happening place, she said.

So it seems all is not lost. Mankind has to work hard at correcting the damages that pollution has done to our environment. These clean and safe communities that Seaman has suggested are beginnings. Other people, including several United States artists’ communities, are getting involved with educating the public about climate change and are looking for and offering solutions.

Artist Dorsi Lynn Diaz has created an interactive art exhibition called “The Art of Climate Change” that took place from June 19, 2014 - July 27, 2014. The reason for curating this art show is because “Climate Change is HERE and climate change is happening NOW. It is not a figment of your imagination....” Diaz wrote in her online kick starter campaign dated April 21, 2014. She hopes that “The Art of Climate Change” may journey to various places in the United States.

Unlike Seaman, Diaz did not choose to try to build communities that are clean and sustainable. She chooses to educate people through art in an art show and exhibition. In this venue, children’s paintings of endangered species like Polar bear cubs, and a video of “The Arctic Death Spiral”, and she even skyped a show with Professor Paul Beckwith on climate change may be viewed. A portion of the show discussed solutions to climate change offered by some very “creative” friends of Diaz, she explained.

“As I write this [kick starter], the UK is getting battered by unprecedented storms and in California where I live, we are facing the possibility of a MEGA drought. As a long time artist, writer and educator, I have been sounding the alarm bell for years. The questions loomed large for me. How are we, as a collective society, going to tackle a huge problem?” Diaz questioned.

The temporary solution for her was in the form of an idea, which “came to me last years when I realized we need to have a multi-modal approach to addressing climate change. A hands-on, interactive dialogue with great visuals. In order to tackle this problem we needed to look at all the different aspects of climate change. And, thus, the “The Art of Climate Change” was born – and the idea for a project: an art show and exhibit.”⁹

9 “The Art of Climate Change”, Dorsi Lynn Diaz, April 4, 2014.

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While both Diaz and Seaman are artists with different view on how approach educating the public on climate change, in London, England, Artist David Buckland saw a need to begin the Cape Farwell project “to instigate a cultural response to climate change” in 2001, as cited on the Cape Farwell website home page.

Since its beginning, Cape Farewell has become “an international not-for-profit programme based in the Science Museum’s Dana Centre in London and a North American foundation based at MaRS centre in Toronto,” the website informed.

Cape Farewell exists “to deliver an innovative climate programme of public engagement” and conducts organized trips to the “Arctic, Island, Urban, and Conceptual to interrogate the scientific social and economic realities that lead to climate disruption and to inspire the creation of climate focused art which is disseminated across a range of platforms – exhibitions, festivals, publications, digital media, and film,” the website confers.¹⁰

Seaman, Diaz, and Buckland have dedicated time and energy to guiding people through this situation called climate change, but some artists prefer not to get involved with the politics of everyday climate change. Why?

Cambridge, Massachusetts artist Irene Koronas explained in a recent interview that climate change to her is “the seasonal change in New England. How it effects my work is I tend to create more in the winter than the warmer day I spent outside. I know that is not what your question implies but I do not take a stance on climate change because I am changing and can do almost nothing to stop the change other than to try to keep my mind focused on my creative life. My family does the same. We enjoy our life and recycle our leftovers.”

Koronas, who is the poetry editor at *Wilderness House Literary Review*, chooses not to get involved with educating people on climate change and global warming through her artwork because, as she said, “Each person does what they need to do. I am no longer into saving the world.”

Schlegel agrees with Koronas that even a simple act like simply recycling, may help slow the advancement of climate change. “Do you recycle? If you do, then you are involved with the topic of climate change,” said Schlegel.

“Many but not all” artists understand climate change and what it is all about, said Schlegel. “Artists are generally very curious and informed people, if not politically and civically active, even more so in countries other than the U.S.”

And what type of artist chooses to deal with climate change in his or her artwork?

“Someone who is already civically, socially and/or politically-minded in their daily living and upbringing,” Schlegel replied.

The curator of “Seeing Glacial Time: Climate Change in the Arctic” at Tufts University’s Tisch Family Gallery from January 30 – May 18, 2014,

¹⁰ <http://www.capefarewell.com/>

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Schlegel has a background in climate change and global warming. And she has actually noticed an increase in the number of artists who are getting involved with the subject of climate change.

“Yes, perhaps in part this is a response to the increasing media coverage of climate change and the general awareness that this is ‘THE’ paramount challenge of our time. I’m sure there are many factors, but some artists have been addressing environmental concerns in their artistic practice for 40 or more years as activists, preceding this rise of the discourse about climate change in the popular media and academic press,” she informed.

Many of these politically, socially, and/or civically minded artists have worked on solutions to hopefully slow down, and eventually stop, climate change. “Artists may use a range of strategies in their practice to raise awareness and to try to educate viewers about climate change, such as storytelling, witnessing, and quasi-scientific documentation over time, performance, and elegy. They may borrow strategies of representation from earlier traditions of landscape painting and photography as well.”

Climate change has been making appearances all over the globe. The most significant changes seem to be seen in the Arctic and Antarctica and the increased water temperatures along with the melting of the icebergs and the glaciers. But even here in New England, climate change has been evident. Extreme weather such as the freezing cold winters and the flash floods in the summer have been occurring, as mentioned earlier.

In the past, people could ignore climate change and its impact on mankind and nature. Now it is important for everyone, artists and the public, to get involved. What used to be a taboo subject is no longer one.

“This is not taboo subject,” Schlegel corrected. “Articles and stories appear every day in all kinds of media about it. President Obama called climate change ‘a reality’ in his 2014 State of the Union address ... This is not a controversial subject on a university campus, but one of great interest and concern.”