

The Power of Art to Inspire Environmental Activism: A Brief American History
by Beth Brownson

Art is a frequent mode of expression for American environmental activists – some use trash to create emblems of protest, some spur recycling by taking scrap metal or plastics and forging them into art objects. Industrial artists fashion park benches out of recycled plastics. Many acclaimed sculptors fashion works of art from recycled scrap metal – works that are now permanently featured at renowned art museums or installed in parks and other public spaces in cities and towns across America.

This association between art and environmental activism goes back over 150 years. The Hudson River School of Art, a genre of grand-scale landscape paintings, portray the essence of

America and have captured the eye of American audiences. The works are heroic in size, wild in the scenery depicted, yet romantic in the way light warms the scenes. The subjects were usually of the Hudson River Valley – the picturesque hills and river basin north of New York City, and expanded to include the Adirondack and Catskill Mountains of New York State, and the White Mountains of New Hampshire. The romantic paintings became hugely popular and sold for more than any American artist's work previously. The paintings inspired awe, and a great respect for the natural beauty of America.

During the same period, Henry David Thoreau wrote *On Walden Pond*, a story of taking time to notice the intricate



Artist Robert Wyland's finished painting of a three-acre image of planet Earth is seen atop the Long Beach Convention Center in Long Beach, California, on April 22, 2009. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)

The American Center

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H O L I D A Y S

November 11: Veterans Day
November 26: Thanksgiving Day

A WORD FROM THE CENTER

Greetings from South Mumbai! At the end of November is a favorite holiday, Thanksgiving Day, traditionally a time when families gather together to reflect on the year's blessings and good fortune, feast on traditional foods like roast turkey and apple pie, and watch "the big game" (American football, that is).

November is also a time, before the hectic Christmas season begins, to reflect on the strength of the human spirit and the hope and determination that motivates us to better ourselves and our communities. Women's and girls' rights are in focus this month at the American Center. American playwright and activist Eve Ensler will be in Mumbai to launch the "V-Girl" movement this month; check our web site for more information.

Positive change begins, in any society, with active and engaged citizens. The theme of this month's Bulletin is the nexus between art and environmental activism. There is a long and natural association between art and social action in the U.S., with some of the most creative and innovative minds directing their talents toward raising awareness of environmental degradation and encouraging positive change at the individual, community, and government levels.

Sincerely,

Robyn Remeika
Cultural Affairs Officer

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details of nature and contemplating man's relationship with nature. A nation surging through the industrial revolution found escapism in the simple pleasures of nature.

American painter Albert Bierstadt started his career as part of the Hudson River School of Art, portraying scenes of New England, but eventually traveled west and fell in love with the beauty of the Sierra Nevada mountains in California and Nevada. He brought to the urban areas of the east his imagery of the majestic mountains, trees taller than anyone had ever seen, and fantastic river gorges. The art of this genre inspired a nation to see the value in protecting precious habitats and scenic beauty. In 1892, John Muir created the Sierra Club, the first environmental preservation organization, and urged the nation to establish Yosemite National Park, the site of much of Bierstadt's work. That same year, Adirondack State Park was created in New York State, designating nearly three million acres of land as forever wild.

One of the most noted members of the Sierra Club was Ansel Adams, who, awed by the beauty he saw along California's coast and the Sierra Nevada mountains, became one of the most famous photographers of the 20th century. His 1920's monoliths of the Half Dome cliffs in Yosemite National Park are still prized today. The love of nature embodied in American

landscape paintings, and then photography, helped inspire President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to establish a program for the preservation and conservation of the nation's natural beauty as part of the New Deal. Known as the Civilian Conservation Corps, the program hired unemployed men to clear and construct paths, picnic shelters and campsites in forests across the country, helping to create the infrastructure for our national park system.

As the Industrial Revolution flourished, pollution began to degrade the air in America's cities and contaminate the rivers. Regardless of what scientists or environmental activists told the public, nothing was more convincing than pictures to document the damage being done to the environment. Though perhaps not the "art" of high-brow galleries or museums, photojournalism documented the facts, made us face reality, and helped persuade the nation that it was time to act. The photographs of the filth spewed out by power plants and factories helped convince Congress of the need for the Clean Water Act, initially enacted in 1948, and the Clean Air Act, enacted in 1963, and helped give impetus to establish the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970.

Art also played a crucial role in changing the mind-set of the youth, turning children into defenders of the environment with the "Don't Be a Litter Bug" media campaign. The image that moved Americans the most was a television spot showing the scenic beauty of the mountains, followed by a view of a Native American in tears at the sight of trash marring the view.

Today, there is a flourishing environmentally-focused arts scene in the U.S. and elsewhere. The aesthetics, drama, and power of nature photography, paintings, street art, murals, and performing arts, frequently serve to illustrate and amplify the message of environmental activism. From distant beginnings in the Hudson River valley, environmental art has grown into an exciting genre occupying space where creativity, innovation, and action meet.

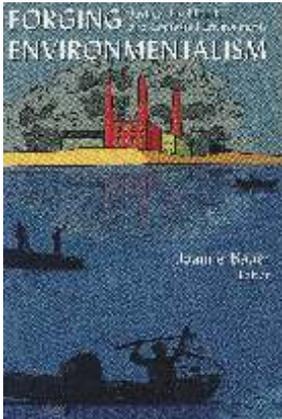
Beth Browson works at the U.S. Consulate General, Mumbai



Visitors to the Rose Garden at Exposition Park view one of 50 globes, part of a public art project, "Cool Globes: Hot Ideas for a Cooler Planet," on display as part of Earth Day activities, near downtown Los Angeles, April 21, 2009. Each five-foot globe was custom-designed by local and international artists to showcase a variety of ways to reduce global warming. The globes were officially dedicated on Earth Day, April 22, 2009. (AP Photo/Reed Saxon)

NOTES FROM THE AMERICAN LIBRARY

Select Resources Available on the Environment



Forging Environmentalism: Justice, Livelihood, and Contested Environments

Edited by Joanne Bauer
M. E. Sharpe, 2006

Forging Environmentalism brings to light the cultural assumptions, standards, and analytical techniques implicit in environmental values, actions and policies. It draws on fieldwork conducted at ten sites in four countries – the United States, China, India and Japan – to analyze community responses to environmental degradation and to government policies that address the issue.

Environment and Society: Human Perspective on Environmental Issues

by Charles L. Harper
Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004

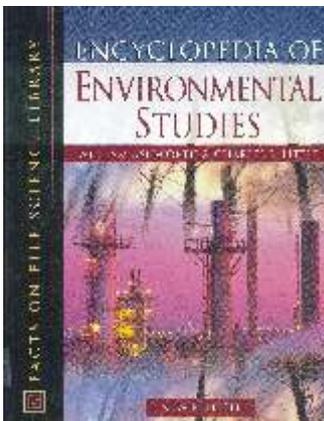
This book gives an introduction to environmental problems and issues and examines how the problems are caused by human behavior, culture as well as political and economic systems. Topics include “environmental racism,” environmentalism and environmental movements, population, and the social distribution and globalization of environmental problems.



Encyclopedia of Environmental Studies

by William Ashworth and Charles E. Little
Facts on File, Inc., 2001

The encyclopedia is an expanded, up-to-date edition which now features more than 4000 A-to-Z entries that reflect the diverse disciplines within the field of environmental studies. Topics include anti-environmentalism, ecoterrorism, forest types, human population trends, medical waste and water power.



***Going Green: Real-World Solutions for the Environment* (44 mins)**

ABC News, 2007

Compilation of 12 ABC News stories on how governments, businesses, and individuals around the world are taking eco-friendly action.



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Coming Out: A History of the U.S. Gay Rights Movement

Discussion led by Beth Milton

Monday, November 16, 2009
American Center Auditorium

6:00 p.m.

This month's Mumbai Monday talk is on the history of the gay rights movement in the U.S. From the time of America's founding, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) individuals have played an important, yet controversial, role in society. Come join us as we explore topics such as the origins of the Stonewall movement, the significance of Harvey Milk's election, the impact of the HIV/AIDS crisis, and the current debate over gay marriage.

Beth Milton joined the Foreign Service as an Economic Officer in 2008. Prior to this, she worked as a digital proofreader for a publisher in New York City, and as a program assistant with the Danish Institute for Study Abroad in Copenhagen, Denmark. She earned a B.A. in Political Science from Columbia University in 2006.

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Activists of the environmental organization Greenpeace install a 16-meter inflatable iceberg down the Seine River in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, July 7, 2009, to protest against climate change on the eve of the G8 Summit in Italy. The banner reads *Sarkozy: Climate Leadership Now!* (Sipa via AP Images)

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American Center Auditorium
3:30 and 6:30 p.m.

Friday, November 13

Gorillas In The Mist
(1988, 130 mins)

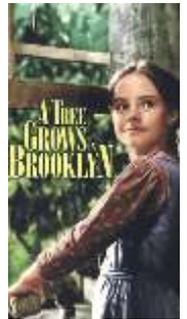
Sigourney Weaver stars in this biography of Dian Fossey, the American naturalist who lived amongst the mountain gorillas of Central Africa, and whose unflagging crusade for their preservation may have cost her her life. The lush and lovingly rendered film costars Bryan Brown and Julie Harris.



Friday, November 20

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn
(1945, 128 mins)

Academy Award-winning adaption of the classic story of a young girl growing up in the crowded tenements of New York. Her closest relationship is with her charming, but alcoholic father and while she resents her mother, tragic developments lead the girl to discover her parents' true worth. Starring Peggy Ann Garner, James Dunn, and Joan Blondell.



Admission to all American Center programs, restricted to persons over 16, will be on a first-come, first-served basis. The auditorium doors will open 30 minutes before the start of the program.