

# **Is Photography helping climate change?**

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## **Introduction**

Coastal pollution has been my main area of study for many years and highlighting coastal detritus is close to my heart; however, I cannot help but feel that with the technology advancement over the years and the continued growth in use of social media and other media platforms isn't facilitating the issue of the exponential growth of the amount of plastics and destruction of our coastlines and oceans. Artists are able to create large powerful imagery with the intention when creating and publishing the work to promote how pitiful state of pollution is but some people might see the image, sculpture or painting as a thing of beauty and just another piece of art that majority will forget about the subliminal messaging, and overlook the real meaning the artist is trying to portray and potentially in a few years we may glamorise how the coastal pollution is overlooked by the majority of the public. I intend to look at both sides of the argument to my title question. Is coastal pollution being glamourised? Yes and no, and the views and beliefs on the issue. Personally I believe overall it isn't being glamourised when you look at the bigger picture and the artists intentions and what they are doing for the world but countering my own beliefs and the point I just made is that coastal pollution is getting worse and even with all the imagery being produced to depict the issue

nothing seems to be improving and the latest climate change situation is dire. Many artists speak about how we are killing the planet, for example Aude Bourguine says “if we don’t rapidly change our relationship with our environment, oceans will be dead by 2050” (Aude Bourguine – my modern met 2019)

Chapter one will focus on how coastal pollution isn’t being glamourised but being promoted, to show how prevalent the issue is and discuss how the problem can be improved, not solved because I do not think it can be resolved anymore. I believe the damage is too far gone and for the oceans to recover fully the human race will have had to be gone and extinct for hundreds of thousands of years and I fear some of the damage is now irreversible and it’s a matter of time before we kill the oceans and ultimately kill our way of living and eventually the human race. I will be looking into Aude Bourguine, Marie Antuanelle, Mat Miller and a few other artists and activists for marine conservation to help support the argument that we aren’t glamourising coastal pollution and the work being produced is helping to solve and try and turn the world around and not destroy ourselves slowly, and their philosophy and intentions for how the work is being portrayed by the artist themselves and how others see it.

Chapter two will discuss coastal pollution and detritus and the effects it is having on the world.

## **Chapter 1 – How are artists showing climate change and pollution?**

*“As a sculptor with a background in marine conservation science and policy, I believe art impacts our emotions and can move us to value the blue planet we live on in ways that scientific data often cannot. We protect what we care about, and we care about what we know and understand. Art can bring the beauty and peril of coral reefs above the surface and into view and can inspire us to protect the ocean.”* (Courtney Mattison)

Mattison’s statement predominately highlights the way the human race functions by saying “we protect what we care about”, these six words are the basis and essential thought process behind how people live, people fight and protect the people and ideas they believe in and love but many people don’t believe or chose not to believe that coastal pollution is as major and as much as a threat to the human race and even the survival of the planet as we know it is. Although the news and media promote and talk about coastal pollution and how much of an issue it is, they don’t talk about it enough in my opinion. For example the global pandemic with Coronavirus, it has been on the news every single day with various sources advising us how critical the situation is, how much of a global issue it is but if you ask me, as serious as something like this is, we should be utilising the same platforms to raise awareness around the global pandemic of our oceans on a daily basis but when was the last time you saw global news about the destruction in the waters? This is the point I’m making and is backed by Mattison again when she says,

“we care about what we know and understand”

if people we more sensitised by the news and social media as they are with Coronavirus again as an example, people would care more and understand how to help and know how much of an issue and how prevalent coastal pollution is and what they could do to make a difference. Artists like Mattison, Aude Bourguine, Vanessa Barragão, although their work is a

thing of pure beauty, their philosophy, the people they work with to create and understand, and they want their work to make an impact on people and make people think and try and promote and show how big an issue coastal pollution is and how it is destroying us slowly.

Another artist Marie Anuanelle promotes the same ideas and supports marine conservation through recreating the beauty of the coastlines but removing humans, she depicts the scenery by completely removing human presence and shows the world for what it is without human interference and I think this is an interesting way to promote coastal pollution because when you first look at the artwork you would just think it is a normal basic landscape however, when delve into her thought processes behind creating the work you will find the erasure of human presence is done on purpose is make her the scenery she is depicting look untainted and untouched which she believes conveys a stronger message about marine conservation and the importance of it but to random person who wouldn't look into her philosophy would just see it as another landscape piece which is part of the problem as people would see the absence of the portrayal of the real issue as they haven't looked into the background of why the work was made. In saying this Anuanelle's work allows people to see the world as how it should be, untouched, barren from human existence, she wants to

“Connect people to the pure beauty of beaches and ocean reserves” (Maria Anuanelle 2018)

Mandy Barker is an international award winning British born photographer. She has been recognised for over 12 years because of her diverse series of work which shows the detrimental marine plastic debris from across the world. Barker, working with many scientists, aims to raise awareness about plastic pollution in the world's oceans and highlighting the harmful effect this plastic has on marine life and the affects it will have on humanity, with her ultimate goal to lead the viewer to take action. The series SOUP is one of Barker's most famous and most recognised bodies of work worldwide.

The term 'soup' is given to describe plastic debris that are suspended in the sea, most specifically the 'garbage patch' that exists in the north Pacific Ocean. Mandy wanted to create a body of work which represented a global collection of refuse that exists in our oceans throughout our lifetimes. This series of work has a hidden narrative behind it, which is quite evident when researching into the work and Barker's philosophy on this subject. Barker creates her work compiling a collection of mass amounts of plastic and rubbish from oceans and coastal debris washed up whilst travelling. Once satisfied with her find she photograph each individual object on a black background. Images are overlay to create collages with similar objects, like the ones on the left.

She creates a feeling of depth/suspension by presenting from smallest to largest items if



rubbish.

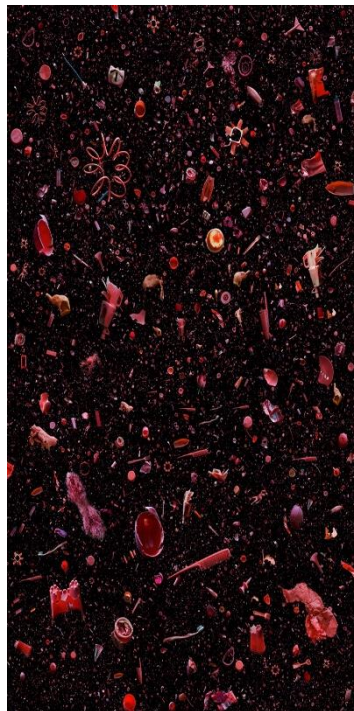




Fig. 1 'Soup: ruinous remembrance', depicting the foreseen

death of maine life.

Barker says the aim of her work is “to engage with and stimulate an emotional response in the viewer by combining a contradiction between initial aesthetic attraction along with the subsequent message of awareness. The research process is a vital part of my development as the images I make are based on scientific fact, essential to the integrity of my work. The impact of marine plastic is an area I have documented for more than 10 years and am committed to pursuing through visual interpretation, and in collaboration with science I hope it will ultimately lead to positive action in tackling this increasing environmental problem, which is currently of global concern” (Mandy Barker)

## **Chapter 2 – How serious is climate change and pollution?**

Coastal pollution and aquatic pollution have been around since the beginning of the history of human civilization. However, pollution hasn't and didn't receive much or any attention until it reached a threshold level which has had adverse consequences on the ecosystems and the world as we know it with very little opportunity to reverse the effects. The pollution rates have risen so high it is now a global concern but even despite this scary fact, major and developing nations are still continuously producing large quantities of pollution on a daily basis with this the trends are increasing and are expecting to increase more and more and are close to an irreversible amount of damage if the limit hasn't already been reached. We do have knowledge about the sources of pollution and the impact it is having on our ecosystems and coastlines, however this knowledge needs to be increased and answers to controlling, minimalizing, and ultimately preventing these pollutants needs to be talked about and promoted more to the general public before it is too late. Vast efforts have been made to control pollutants and new concepts are emerging everyday but these new ideas and concepts need to be spoken about more so people can help the cause and try turn round some of the damage before we destroy everything.

Land based activities and manmade products across the globe make up over 80% of the ocean's pollution. Although most people think waste 'just disappears', or it is not their concern where it goes, most waste produced by humans ends up in our oceans. This happens through, run-off from drains, sewage pipes, even after water companies have dredged the waste going through their treatment plants, rivers, estuaries, people dumping their waste into our waters or coastline. This waste ranges from large manmade objects, plastic bags all the way to pesticides.

Oil is one of the most damaging forms of waste that enters our seas every year damaging the marine environment. The majority of people only think about this when they hear about an environmental disaster via a ship burning oil, however oil spills contribute to 12% of oil

that enters the ocean each year, 36% of oil in our oceans comes from runoff waste from the cities and industry, down the drains and rivers.

Fertilizers are a huge contributor to ocean pollution and destroys areas of the coast all over the world, the worst areas affected are the Gulf of Mexico and the Baltic Sea. Fertilizers add extra nutrients to the sea water and causes eutrophication to happen, eutrophication is the flourishing of algal blooms which depletes the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water which suffocates other marine life. Sewage can also cause eutrophication and is also being constantly dumped in the oceans worldwide, with much of it being untreated. This subsequently causes more damage to the sea life but also humans, causing many diseases.

It was once thought by humans that the ocean was so large that all pollutants that were in the oceans would be diluted and dispersed to a safe level, but years of research has proved this concept as untrue and has been disregarded as the reality by many, but many sceptics still believe this is a possibility. Many manmade chemicals have become so concentrated that they have entered the food chain. for example, starting from plankton all the way up to polar bears who are eating food which has contaminations reaching up to 3 billion times higher than it should be.

Humans also come contaminated from household products and from eating contaminated seafoods and animal fats. This amount of manmade chemicals can cause serious health problems, including cancer, damage to the immune system, behavioural problems, and reduced fertility.

Plastic is one of the worst materials to enter the ocean. Plastic decomposes very slowly, with many plastic taking hundreds of thousands of years to decompose. High concentrations of plastic materials have been found lodged and blocking the breathing passages and stomachs of whales, dolphins, seals, puffins, turtles, and many other marine animals. Also,

plastic six-pack rings for drink bottles a found choking and preventing marine life to grow and live. This waste also makes its way back to land on many coastlines across the world, where it then begins to pollute the coasts.

Caroline Williams talks about and has criticized the grouped idea of pollution into categories and observed that there is only 'one pollution' as every pollutant will most likely end up in the ocean at some point whether its from the land, air or manmade.

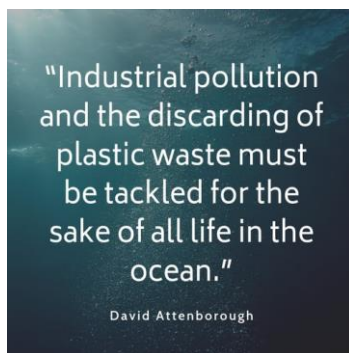
Pollution is the effect when there is an introduction of contaminants into a natural environment that cause adverse change. The definition of water pollution is, the release of substances into subsurface groundwater or into lakes, streams, rivers, estuaries, and oceans to the point where the substances interfere with beneficial use of the water or with the natural functioning of ecosystems. In addition to the release of substances, such as chemicals or microorganisms, water pollution may also include the release of energy, in the form of radioactivity or heat, into bodies of water. Britannica. The Glassbook edition, that features the Zena Holloway, Body of Water series, she explores reflection of the human race's influence of pollution in our oceans and other natural waterways and shocks us by recreating famous poses such as Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man on a bed of humanmade debris, in another the model hangs lifeless which in interpret the messaging as we are killing our planet.

Fig.1 'Photographed in the ocean around the island of Bimini, close to the mystical Fountain of Youth; a fabled wellspring thought to give everlasting life to whoever bathed in or drank from it.' (Glassbook, 2020) A quotation from Zena Holloway Interview with Manual Productions

*"The oceans used to represent an escape, a space to disappear in; but less so now. There's no getting away from human impact, even underwater. In my lifetime I've seen the quality of our oceans decline. The Anthropocene is a scary reality and with words like drought, melting ice caps, flood, rising sea levels and ocean acidification I often think that water is the face of*

*climate change. Our oceans, lakes and waterways are the lifeblood of our planet and increasingly, they are being shaped by human processes. I see water as a bridge between us and the natural world. Capturing this connection is what informs the images I create"*

Zena Holloway This resonates that we as humans are responsible for destroying the planet. There is a plethora of artists and influencers that highlight plastic pollution, in particular, most of us are aware of The Blue Planet effect where Sir David Attenborough raised awareness of the effect plastic waste was having on oceans and sea life in his popular TV programme Blue Planet II and most of us were appalled by the plight however I can almost certainly say that whilst we talk about it how many of us actually do anything about it.



In this quote Fig.2,

. Sir David Attenborough states that it's not just about plastic industrial pollution also needs to be exposed. Water Pollution can be split into two categories, natural and manmade sources, this can occur in all waterways including freshwater and seawater. Some pollutants, that

are devastating to our water are oil leaks, sewage, chemical additives, and farming runoff.

An area of interest is how the coastal waters are affected by the development of offshore windfarms, and the removal of the seabed does this affect what is washed up to our shores and has it impacted the dispersal of sewage and chemical pollutants. Welsh Water and National Resources Wales both report on significant events when pollutants are dispersed into the waterways however smaller breaches are classed as acceptable and do not need to be reported or available for the public to review. These smaller leaks still have a detrimental effect on the water quality in Wales and not only impact the fauna and wildlife it can also impact humans with quality of drinking water and sewage in our rivers and seas. 'Healthy' chemicals that are used in the wastewater filtration and clean water processes will end up in our water at some point in the cycle. Farming run off, pesticide and fertilizers often end up in

our waterways, these are often the hidden pollutants, but these are just as deadly to our climate as plastic waste.



Fig.3 Edward Burtynsky's Water series showcases oils and chemical spills in rivers and oceans. Burtynsky travelled to capture BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2013 and this quote depicts that whilst this was a large-scale spill this was still not reported on international news channels. "I understand

that it has an editorial aspect to it, but nothing I photograph is typically a news event. I'm not so much into chasing disasters as I am into looking at big industrial incursions into the landscape or in this case, the seascape." Burtynsky Fig.3 I am intrigued that this style of photography, capturing a menacing environmental disaster has a powerful impact, the image is a surreal atmospheric thing of beauty. During my research it was harder to find artists that are capturing this style of photography in their art to raise awareness however there is an overabundance of plastic pollution artists. However, there are many informative articles that could support this development idea of exploring other types of pollution in our waterways including the article, Welsh Government tackles agricultural pollution to protect Wales' rivers which can be found on gov.uk. Fig.2 Deforestation In Wales particularly the South Wales valleys, vast forestry has been felled due to disease. The impact of disease has forced the clearance of very large areas of larch. Climate change, extreme storms have been landing in these areas and significant flooding has occurred but is the long-term effect of deforestation in the areas impacting drainage and the water has nowhere to go. Tackling this disease in our larch trees is a difficult task. We are working on a new Welsh government strategy which aims to slow down the disease by felling in new areas of infection However, there is a positive side to this disease as we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to redesign the forests, we manage to make them more resilient to disease and a better place for people

and wildlife. Muir, N. National Resources Wales Lesley Griffiths, the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, has stated in the revised strategy management of tree disease affecting larch. High quality woodland ecosystems can provide real benefits both on a local and national scale. We know that Wales's woodlands enhance our landscape and increase biodiversity and we are committed to ensuring ecosystem services have the ability to respond to climate change and support woodland-based industries. We recognise pests, pathogens and invasive non-native species have significant potential to impact on the health of trees and woodlands in Wales. The refreshed strategy will play a key role in minimising the social, environmental, and economic impacts of *P. ramorum* in the CDZ2 area whilst maintaining our commitment to managing the spread of the disease.



Griffiths, L In Fig.4,

Dharshie Wissah, winner of Water, Equality and Sustainability prize for his image Water Scarcity captured the emotive image of a young boy drinking from muddy water a resultant negative effect of deforestation in the area. This image is a commonplace plight for many and the mass destruction of forests in the UK could affect our water supply and chemical imbalances within the local ecosystem. Could this be our future if we do not replant what is being destroyed by disease? In addition to deforestation due to disease, there is increase over the last 50 years in woodlands being removed for housing and industry and for

manufacturing means. The BBC news article Climate Change: Wales could be 'first deforestation free nation' Every year an area of woodland about nine times the size of Wales is lost globally. Charities say the Welsh Government must curb the use of some goods in a bid to make Wales the "world's first deforestation-free nation". The Welsh Government said tackling deforestation was "vital". A report, compiled by WWF Cymru, RSPB Cymru and Size of Wales, calls for action to limit the amount of goods being imported into Wales linked to deforestation. Raises awareness that Wales are leading the way in trying to influence the global market in not using biproducts of deforestation, for example products that contain palm oil may be banned from import into Wales. In the Scientific deforestation case study, The Effect of Deforestation on Water Quality: A Case Study in Cienda Micro Watershed, Leyte, Philippines Deforestation has an impact on the quality of water flowing through the watershed and alters the discharge, chemical and physical properties of water. This paper presents the effect of deforestation on water quality, in particular on physical and chemical characteristics of water and evaluates the community-based watershed management schemes. SABUP Fig.4 Confirms that ultimately any deforestation whether for culling disease or for-profit reasons affects the water quality and the fragile water ecosystem and that any deforestation activities we should be aware that this can have a devastating long-term effect.

Industrial Industrial water pollution is caused when heavy industries such as oil refineries, coal mining and steel works of which historically were the main industries in Wales, leached harmful chemicals and other compounds into the rivers or other water sources either by accident, overflow or within the acceptable discharge criteria. Within Wales, heavy industry has dramatically reduced over the last 50 years. However, the potential long-lasting effects of seeping these chemicals into our freshwaters could cause issues with quality of water for humans and other wildlife. The mining industry and the extraction of minerals through mining and drilling caused industrial water pollution in Wales. These processes caused the landscape to become swamped with slag heaps, flooded mineshafts, which culminated in

the land useless for agricultural purposes. Even though all underground mining has drastically reduced, the rainfall, surface and ground water flowing through the abandoned mine sites leaches out metals and making many of the discharges acidic. This polluted drainage has severe environmental impacts and likely to affect the surrounding waterways. Another hidden danger of water treatment plant is when raw sewage is released into the rivers and ultimately the sea. A recent Panorama investigation has found that Welsh Water has had been discharging raw sewage into rivers illegally. Recent figures published by the Environment Agency reveal untreated sewage, including human waste, wet wipes and condoms, was released into waterways for more than three million hours last year. • Sewage discharged into rivers 400,000 times • Hundreds of sewage leaks detected thanks to AI. One of the worst offenders was the not-for-profit company, Welsh Water. The data shows three of its treatment works were in breach of their permits. Its Aberbaiden plant illegally dumped untreated sewage into the River Usk on 12 consecutive days in December. The Usk is supposed to be a protected river, as it is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation. Panorama also discovered Welsh Water has been using a sewage overflow pipe on the River Usk that doesn't have a permit. BBC Panorama (2021). Thought provoking, isn't it? Shouldn't the media and photographers be highlighting this type of blatant disregard for our environment with the same veracity that plastic pollution has been to force a behaviour change. Andy Hughes, a renowned environmental photographer has fuelled my inspiration as he captured plastic pollution across the UK coastline. He is an active member of Surfers Against Sewage.



Fig.6

was Fig.6 taken at the surfers against sewage demo at Langland Bay in 1992. This group have been very successful in making a difference so much so the following

positive impact can now be heralded a long-term success '98.5% of England's bathing waters passed the Bathing Water Directive's minimum standards in 2016, compared to what would have been only 27% in 1990 when Surfers Against Sewage started campaigning'.

Surfers against Sewage Oil leaks and spills are a daily occurrence but whilst we hear on the news about the large oil tanker spills and disasters, it isn't well known that our oceans are polluted every day. Some facts are:- Oil spills make up about 12% of the oil that enters the ocean. The rest come from shipping travel, drains and dumping. An oil spill from a tanker is a severe problem because there is such a huge quantity of oil being spilt into one place. Oil spills cause a very localised problem but can be catastrophic to local marine wildlife such as fish, birds and sea otters. Oil cannot dissolve in water and forms a thick sludge in the water. This suffocates fish, gets caught in the feathers of marine birds stopping them from flying and blocks light from photosynthetic aquatic plants.



water-  
pollution.org.uk

Fig.7

In Fig.7 Edward  
Burtynsky

highlights the effect of continual leaching of oil on local wildlife. This documentary photography subject has the potential to highlight not just the large environmental events as this often has impact on wildlife not just water quality however the everyday leaching and constant discharge of industrial waste could be more detrimental to our rivers and oceans than plastic. There are informative articles that could support the development of this keyword and would give a wide base to delve into understanding the impact on the ecosystem.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, us humans will be our own demise and this viscous cycle of life and death will probably continue for thousands of years, however, if we continue the same trajectory as we are the world may be very different in 50-100 years' time with expediential rates of climate change and pollution and the human species might not be able to survive or adapted the

predict climate change for the future. Humans will never change; we will adapt slightly to try and cover up our mistakes and the truth behind the world ending issues that are coming but in due course we will destroy the world before we know it.

Artist and photographers like Mandy Barker, Courtney Mattison and many more are really at the forefront of expressing and showing the world the true beauty of our planet and how we are destroying our planet by just being humans and being too stubborn to change. They show us the destruction in beautiful bright ways which people are more interested because of the bright vibrance to them, whereas images that are dark and really show the real truth aren't as viewed as much by the general public, but these sorts of images should be brought into light to show the harsh reality we are living in. What is the most effective way to show to show the true colours of climate change and the pollution levels? I think its down to a matter of opinion and how much you really care about our planet.

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