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Surface Patterns & Textiles

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The impending feeling of Earth's end has become increasingly popular as society observes the rapidly changing climate. While most of society agrees that the Earth must be restored to a more natural state, the motives behind this belief are widely debated. Philosopher Holmes Rolston III introduced the concept of nature possessing an intrinsic value, which is explored in this exhibition entitled 'Dependent', a commentary on humans' dependency on the planet.

Investigating themes of biocentrism and environmental ethics, three different art pieces will be displayed in a deforested path within the Amazon Rainforest. This location provides the context for the exhibition, as the juxtaposition between the path and the forest surrounding it symbolizes mankind's responsibility for the destruction of natural beauty.

The Amazon Rainforest is widely known for its biodiversity, providing an ideal space for the exhibition, as the location heightens the observer's awareness of anthropogenic activities on nature. The disregard for other species is observed in this environment, augmenting the theme before the audience even sees the artwork. The exhibition space is just as much a part of the exhibition as the art within it. In his book *Ways of Curating* (2014), Hans Ulrich Obrist details how artist Marcel Duchamp utilized the exhibition space to enhance the theme of his shows. Obrist explains how Duchamp had "treated the exhibition itself as the relevant carrier of meaning", which set the precedent of artists treating "rooms or even entire museums as the context for a work (2014, p. 29). The brown deforested path stands out against the lush green of the forest. The stark contrast is a shock to the observer, as it reinforces the fact that people have had little consideration of the consequences of global warming.

Responsibility for the detriment of the planet is a conversation only humans can have, however, that does not mean other species should not be taken into consideration. Decentering economics and resource use from the discussion of *why* nature should be conserved and restored, will allow for the consideration that the Earth does in fact have inherent value beyond the benefits we may reap. Holmes Rolston III explains in the book *The Blackwell Company to Philosophy* (2003), the importance of environmental ethics and the intrinsic value of the planet, stating that humans “have a responsibility to respect the vitalities of the fauna and flora around us, a full ethics is inclusive of every living organism” (2003, p. 522). The discussion surrounding whether humans should worry about other species is controversial in the sense that we may be able to sympathize with other species but are unable to empathize. Rolston discusses this in UNESCO’s book *Environmental Ethics and International Policy* (2006) that to utilize this point as an argument for us to disregard the wellbeing of other species is to “underestimate the human genius for thoughtful appreciation and considerate respect for alien forms” (2006, p.51). The exhibition observes this, as it displays artwork appreciating other life forms for their inherent value away from their economic benefit.



Fig One

As the audience approaches where the artwork has been setup, one will see that it is set up in a circular manor, with a painting by Christi Belcourt titled 'My Heart is Beautiful' to the left of the entrance, shown in Fig One. Standing at 7'11" and 12' wide, this piece displays the vibrant beauty of the Earth and its inhabitants. While aesthetic value is heavily appreciated in this work, it is not the only reason to preserve the natural world. In an article by Author Alison Tedford Seaweed, Belcourt states that ""The animals and plants, lands and waters, are our relatives each with as much right to exist as we have"" (Seaweed 2022). The Indigenous artist emphasizes the importance of preservation and how the beauty of the planet should be protected rather than exploited. While there is little realism within the painting, Belcourt's interpretation of the flora and fauna are a lively interpretation of what nature *could* be, given the chance to thrive without

human interference. The painting's message is extended given the exhibition location, a show of what-ifs. What if this path had not been cleared – perhaps the forest would look similar Belcourt's painting.



Fig Two

In the middle of the other two artworks is Thijs Biersteker's project titled 'The Voice of Nature', as seen in Fig two. This artwork demonstrates the realtime effect climate change has on trees, utilizing technology, the very thing that may be responsible for the very same tree's demise. Trees are an important indicator of the pollution levels, which one can tell based on the rings of the tree. Sensors linked to the tree turn the tree's response to the environment into understandable visualizations. Linda Valenta describes how one "can see when the tree is affected by a change in light spectrum, soil, temperature, moist levels, air quality and co2 levels" (Valenta 2018). A unique piece that combines science and technology with art, providing a statement against technology being utilized to destroy our planet. The project's main purpose is to change society's belief that "monetary assets prevail over the intrinsic value of nature" (Valenta 2018). The irony of placing a tree being saved by technology in a forest that has been

destroyed by technology shows that it is not necessarily technology that is doing the damage, but the people that operate it.



Fig Three

The final piece in the exhibition, pictured in Fig Three is to the right of the entrance where Daniel Popper's sculpture titled 'Basilica' can be seen. Two hands reached out, vines intertwining over the wrists, exemplifies the connection between humankind and the natural world. In an interview Popper explains the piece, stating he is "trying to draw a parallel between the esoteric nature of trees and the esoteric nature of human beings" (Popper, 2021). The interrelation between humans and the world around us is often forgotten as we have placed our species on a pedestal, refusing to acknowledge the similarities, and forgetting the humans are in

fact animals. Robin Wall Kimmerer addresses this in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013) where she reminds us that “we must look to our teachers among the other species for guidance. Their wisdom is apparent in the way that they live” (2013, p. 23). The harsh reality that we have become arrogant as a species has led us to our own demise, at our own hands. Kimmerer uses Indigenous teachings and beliefs to remind us how to live with the land as equals, for we have shown that we cannot manage our own species let alone the rest of the world. The exhibition embodies this message, emphasizing the importance that one must view the world as a whole system, with every species being an integral part – not just humans. It is a reminder that we are reliant on the Earth for our own survival, not the other way around.

When the motivation to conserve nature is rooted in greed and economic gain, eventually the resource will run dry. If the purpose to save the natural environment is then rooted in a belief that this environment has intrinsic value, then there is a much higher chance for it to be preserved, for the sole destroyers have been humans and their cruelty. That is not to say humans are inherently “bad” by nature, but gratitude for the planet must be relearned.

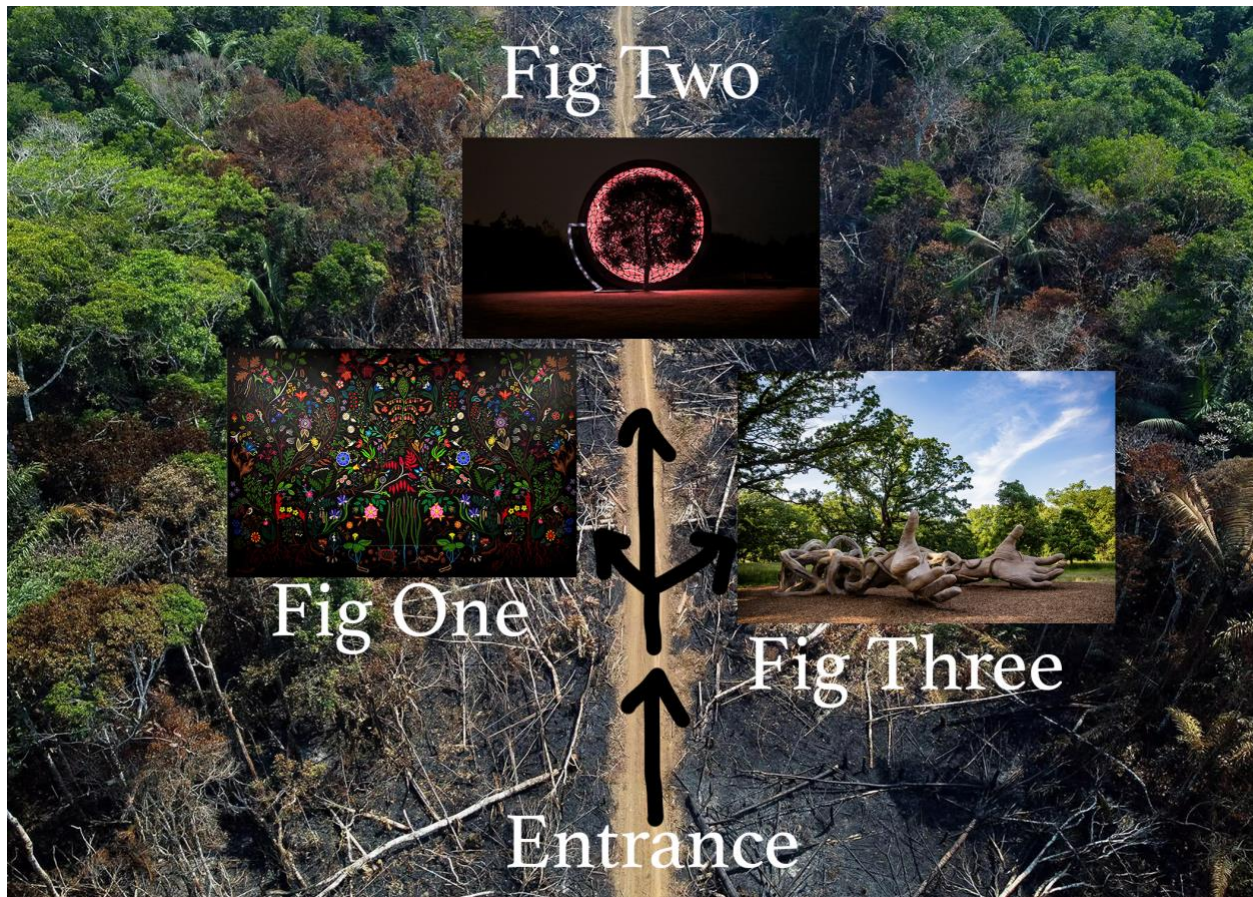


Fig Four

As pictured in Fig Four, a map lays out the setup of the exhibition. The entrance is along the deforested path, and as the observer stands in front of the artworks, depending on the angle at which they are looking at the artwork, the audience member may see a vibrant forest or a dead aftermath as the background. The thriving forest provides a more hopeful, and vitalizing aspect to the artwork, while the dead clearcut area gives a contrasting backdrop to the vibrant art pieces. This forces the observer to decide which they believe is more pleasing to them, symbolizing that whichever background they like more will become their environment everywhere depending on what actions they take in the future. If they enjoy the vibrant forest, then they must work towards conservation.

The exit within the exhibition is ambiguous. The authors and artists mentioned previously all share a common belief that the best way to reconnect with nature is to be present in nature. With that, the exit is wherever the audience wishes. Whether it is through the forest, or continuing along the path, it is up to the observer which way they wish to leave. Wherever they go however, is likely to be the direction that the rest of humanity chooses as well.

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- Fig Two: Biersteker, T. (2018) *The Voice of Nature* [Electronic Sensors, Tree] Chengdu, China.
- Fig Three: Popper, D. (2021) *Basilica* [Concrete, Fiberglass, Steel, Wood] The Morton Arboretum, Lisle, IL.

Fig Four: Dantas, M. (2022) *Exhibition Map* [Digital Image with photoshop]