

A SKEPTICAL CELEBRATION

SHARED HABITAT EARTH RESPONDS TO CLIMATE CRISIS

Currently in its seventh exhibition at the Atlantic Wharf Gallery in downtown Boston, the group show Shared Habitat Earth is a vibrant and eclectic collection of works all connected to the central theme of combating climate change. The words “Shared Habitat Earth” came to local artist Barbara Eskin while walking through the woods, and the meaning behind them was revealed through conversations with her creative community. The intent of the show is to interweave art and activism, using the works as a way to inspire viewers into action, all the while keeping them grounded in their empathy and humanity. In the show’s description: Shared Habitat Earth (SHE) suggests cross species respect, intercultural solidarity and a shared sense of responsibility, and, in the face of enormous threats to our habitat, it calls for action. The 40 artists in the exhibition use their creativity to fight against discouragement in the face of the daunting task of stopping climate change, and the strength of emotion displayed is palpable.

One of the first pieces in the exhibition is an interactive installation created by Eskin and several other SHE artists titled “Give Green a Chance.” Visitors are presented with two canvases covered in photographs and are invited to remove images of drought ravaged landscapes to reveal a lush green painting underneath. The written description provides messaging about what people can do to fight climate change and asks the viewer to choose an action.



There are several levels to this, choosing which piece to remove, seeing what’s underneath, and contemplating how the viewer can act.

“Give Green a Chance” introduces the narrative of Shared Habitat Earth, and it is not the only place in Shared Habitat Earth where the artists choose to directly involve the viewer in their personal climate activism. QR codes spread around the gallery also link to articles about the climate issues alluded to in the visual works.

Visitors to the exhibition will find depictions of familiar visual themes in nature that are beautifully curated in a space with difficult nooks and crannies to work with. Trees are one of the first things you notice upon entering the first-floor gallery, exquisitely detailed paintings of trees, and photographs capturing a particular tree’s independent character. Who gets tired of trees? However, after encountering several images depicting arboreal



REVIEW

SHARED HABITAT EARTH

THE GALLERY AT ATLANTIC WHARF FORT POINT ARTS COMMUNITY

280 CONGRESS STREET

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

THROUGH DECEMBER 10

LEFT: Lisa Goren,
Nurse Iceberg,
2013, 24" x 24".

RIGHT: Rebecca
McGee Tuck, *Aerie*.

beauty, seeing C.J. Lori's surrealist painting "Rising" feels jarring. In this piece, trees along a familiar New England saltmarsh are uprooted and floating up into the sky. Initially inspired by Magritte's floating men, Lori's "Rising" is at once whimsical, but in the context of climate change, also evokes a feeling of desperation.

The ocean is also explored extensively in the exhibition, many of these pieces by artists who chose to depict its beauty rather than its destruction. Lisa Goren's watercolor technique in "Nourse Iceberg" expertly captures the vibrant glowing blue of an iceberg and blends it beautifully with the rest of an arctic landscape. Joe Caruso's giant charcoal pieces depict the varied forms along a rocky coastline at low tide; people who spend any amount of time on a New England coast will feel drawn to his work. They are perhaps the least colorful works in the show; however, the bulbous forms of seaweed ridden, barnacled rocks are dynamic and other-worldly.

The Shared Habitat Earth artists are not afraid to depict their rage about humanity's unceasing destruction of the natural world. Many of the pieces are created to inform the viewer, while others were made to challenge us. Helen Canetta's black and red abstract piece, "Threatened," is a painting the curator decided to place on its own, as it is powerful in its darkness and ferocity, and demands your attention. Self-described "Found Object Fiber Sculptor/Collector of Lost Objects" Rebecca McGee Tuck, a vocal advocate for reducing plastic waste, creates sculptures made of debris that she collects from the beach. Her activism is her art. "Aerie" is a monstrous tangle of fishing nets and other twisted forms. Tuck adroitly arranges these unconventional, and harsh materials into a potent sculptural work, up for reinterpretation at each new angle.

Many of the SHE contributors create works that play with abstraction, and reinterpretation of our environment. In "Liminal Point," a small, yet impactful work by Niamh Ultaigh, oily drips of black paint almost entirely cover a square board, a layer of bright orange and green peeks through underneath. The piece and its title are suggestive: are we at a liminal point? or, like the quickly disappearing patches of color, are we getting to the point where it's too late? Artist Marjorie Kaye breaks down nature's forms into geometric shapes in her paintings 'Mother Tree' and 'After a Storm.' It is clear to see the joy Kaye derives from her



Joe Caruso, *School of Rocks*, charcoal with pastel on Strathmore paper mounted on aluminum, 42" x 64".

exploration of the sacred geometry found in natural things with her use of vivid colors, and the meticulous approach to these works. These kaleidoscopic paintings mesmerize as one spends more and more time with them up close.

The artists in Shared Habitat Earth explore many aspects of the wider conversation about climate change, and how our world is affected. Their works showcase curiosity, delight and celebration of the natural world, as well as the

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desperation and anger experienced by the artists when asked to respond to the climate crisis. The only thing missing from this absorbing exhibition, oddly, is people. Not the artist themselves, but in thinking about the human destruction of the earth, one must also remember that there are Indigenous communities around the world who have been living in symbiosis with the planet and its creatures for eons.

"Art is good, but it's the combination of art and activism that we're after," stated Eskin when speaking about her

motivations for putting together Shared Habitat Earth. The show delivers. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of these works will be donated to climate action organizations such as the Sunrise Movement, the NRDC and Mothers Out Front, along with others listed on the exhibition's website. Shared Habitat Earth is on display at the Atlantic Wharf Gallery until December 10; a special reception with live music will be held on November 4 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

TOP LEFT: Helen Canetta, *Threatened*, 24" x 48" x 2".

TOP RIGHT: Marjorie Kaye, *After a Storm*, 2020, gouache on panel, 36" x 24".

BOTTOM LEFT: Niamh Ullaigh, *Liminal Point*.

BOTTOM RIGHT: C.J. Lori, *Rising*, 2021, oil on canvas, 30" x 40".

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