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Globalization and Me
Environmental Awareness through Art Education
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Introduction

Protecting the environment has always been a passion of mine since grade school when I learned about the 3 R's: reduce, reuse, and recycle. I have been conscious of creating a small ecological and carbon footprint long before the idea became popular. As the world becomes more industrialized and globalized, a new global society is learning how other countries impact the environment through capitalism and industry. This capitalism and industry produces greenhouse gasses that dissipate the ozone layer creating global warming which threatens all livelihood. Artists are influencers of social thinking and should use their visual influence to connect consumerism to the destruction of our planet (Rademaekers, 2011). Through this research brief, I will discuss environmental artists that utilized media, objects, and images to raise awareness to environmental impacts on Earth. I will also explore how art educators can bring environmentally conscious curricula in their classrooms.

Environmentally Conscious Artists

Some artists use environmental and ecological content in their work to comment on the current state of our environment both locally and globally. Artist Bob Johnson utilizes community members to harvest waste from waterways to create *River Cubes*. *River Cubes* are public sculptures made from the collected waste materials compressed into cubes that creatively engage communities to consider "what our cultures leave behind" (ATM & RiverCubes, Greenmuseum, 2010, para 1). *River Cubes* may be comprised of hubcaps, shopping carts, old tires, wood, and are placed along river walks or parks where the refuse items were found.

“Beautiful, shocking, uncomfortable and educational” Johnson aims at engaging the public “to bewilder, provoke, and inspire awareness & action” (ATM & RiverCubes, Greenmuseum, 2010, para 2).

Mishka Henner (n.d.) utilized satellite images and altered their coloration in his series of pigmented prints entitled *Feedlots* (<http://mishkahenner.com/filter/works/Feedlots>). The satellite images are of United States certified animal feeding operations (CAFO) containing animals, and some also contain the cesspools CAFO’s produce. These cesspools are an unpleasant result of the animal farming industry that threatens waterways with leakage and seepage. The environmental impacts of CAFO farming operations are questioned in Henner’s work and expose a side of the food industry rarely seen. Henner’s artwork uses mechanically captured images and manipulates their color to create works of art to educate the viewer.

Amy Franceschini is an educator, artist, and web designer that utilizes website and interactive physical environments to engage society in the “ multidisciplinary effects of globalization and its many environmental consequences” (Greenmuseum, 2010, para 1). Franceschini often works with unconventional materials such as soil, seeds, and plant materials in her artworks and installations. The interdisciplinary design collective website, *Futurefarmers* (<http://www.futurefarmers.com>), is devoted to her goal of cultivation of environmental consciousness and depicts collaborative works such as *Seed Mast*. *Seed Mast* is a traditionally constructed boat mast containing ancient grains suggesting as reverse migration back to the geographical location of origin. This work was created in an effort to protect the rights of small farmers and “imagines food, and grains in particular, as a symbol of resistance in the wake of intellectual property rights as they relate to biological matter” (Projects, Seed Mast, 2015, para 1).

Artist Jean Paul Ganem creates agricultural compositions, most notable *Le Jardin des Capteurs* or *The Sensors of the Garden*, which can best be viewed from the air (Greenmuseum, Jean Paul Ganem, 2010). Transforming landfills into beautiful earthworks, Ganem does not disturb biogas sensors, which capture escaping methane gas from the decomposing waste, while aesthetically accentuating components of the land. Ganem rehabilitated these sites utilizing annual plants such as Petunias, Cosmos, and perennials such as Echinacea and Phlox, as well as grains like Buckwheat and Rape (Jpganem, 2016, para10). Ganem considers these garden landscapes as “a cross between three different approaches to nature: the first, utilitarian; the second, esthetic; and the third, environmental and social” (Jpganem, 2016, para 9). Ganem’s work creates the notion that that landfills for human waste and consumption can be reimaged and recycled in the same way that the refuse contained inside them can (Greenmuseum, Jean Paul Ganem, 2010 para 3).

Meaningful Artmaking

Blandy, Congdon, and Krug (1998) posit that artists are empowered by using refuse as art (that which is thrown away is usable), through which a reclamation process comments on society’s throwaway mentality and that “the experience of transforming ordinary materials into something special is extended into a recreation of oneself and/or one’s environment” (p. 234). Similarly, through the research of two graduate students at the University of Florida, I have come to understand that meaningful artmaking captivates and engages students. Candice Blount (2016) created a club at her school that is centered on ecology and the environment. Initially called Eco Art Club, soon after the students changed the name to E(ART)H. From her capstone research website blog, she stated how the name evolved:

Initially they like Eco Art Club, but they thought that was too boring. So they focused on the word Earth with emphasis on the word art then with more thought our unofficial president added Omega to Plastic, meaning *End to Plastic*. This is wonderful, because it sums up what the club does quite nicely

(Blount, 2016, para 2).

Through education on the environmental effects of plastic, students became engaged and motivated to create art and environmental awareness. Students collected plastic discarded at the school to create works of art repurposing and upcycling the collected refuse. The sculptures students created can be viewed on Lindsay's website (<http://www.artecologyofplastic.com>).

Diana Santay's 2016 research led to student conversations about important and meaningful issues in students' lives. Some of the concerns brought up were waste, plastic, and environmental effect. Students in her class created recycling bins out of plastic water bottles, repurposing the plastic through sculpture to collect more recyclable items. This meaningful artmaking engaged students in current and global issues with a local action.

Conclusion

As artists' comment upon and influence society, they advocate for environmental concerns and promote sustainability through their artmaking. Art educators could guide students to do the same (Blandy, et al. 1998) Meaningful and beautiful artwork can be created with educational and environmental messages that speak to all inhabitants of Earth. As I ~~have~~ highlighted artists that use ecological and environmental content in their work, my aims were to raise awareness of significant environmental and ecologically conscious artists and their work. These noteworthy artists can inform art education in a positive and meaningful way for both educators and students. Inviting the community locally and globally to engage in our

environment and in our ecological impact through artmaking can raise awareness of global issues that can be implemented locally. Utilizing land, plants, and waste, artists can communicate the need for people to be conscious of their impact and protective of their world. Educating students about environmental issues both globally and locally can connect students to their daily lives and “encourage their students to see themselves as connected to nature, a part of nature, rather than apart from it” (Blandy, et al. 1998, p. 241) creating more meaningful learning. Through the action research of Blount and Santay, one can see how environmentally conscious artwork can be implemented in the classroom in a student directed way. Global issues such as environment, ecology, and sustainability addressed through artmaking can educate those students who will inherit the Earth and create significant interdisciplinary learning in preparation for their future.

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