Master of Science in Sustainability Management
SUMA K6135: Art and Sustainability
Meeting Times 6:10-8:00PM EST
Day: Wednesday
Place: Fayerweather 311
3 credits
Elective

Instructor: Dr. Julie Reiss, jhr2161@columbia.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 4-5:00PM EST and by appointment during the week on Zoom.
Response Policy: The best way to reach me is via email any day of the week, and I will generally respond within 24 hours.

Course Overview
Since the first Earth Day in 1970, artists around the globe have increasingly turned their focus to ecological issues, creating artwork that addresses threats to a sustainable future, including the impacts of loss of biodiversity, rising sea levels, extreme weather events, plastic pollution, and the fragility of our shared ecosystems, particularly on the most vulnerable communities. Through public and community-based art and exhibitions in local and international institutional settings, artists raise awareness of the need to act collectively, creating tangible points of public engagement. Beyond calling for immediate and sustained action, they point toward paths of resilience and adaptation, at times offering concrete and immediate solutions. Artists challenge worldviews that have led to the challenges faced today, and suggest conceptual alternatives to anthropocentric and colonial approaches to nature. They amplify historical inequities and the urgent need for environmental and social justice for underrepresented groups through their artwork. Artists thus inspire by cultivating new narratives and giving form to the invisible, unimagined or ignored, demonstrating how art can help awaken resolve and shape our next steps. They invite viewer participation and collective action, and in the process, they expand our potential for empathy and increase agency for all life.

This course will focus on how contemporary art can serve as an important catalyst in information sharing and changing perceptions, leading to increased participation in developing and supporting sustainable and equitable global futures. Artists focus on local and global environmental issues, and at times partner with scientists to offer novel solutions. In recognition of their potential contribution, numerous governmental and non-governmental environmental organizations have enlisted artists to serve as intermediaries between their work and a wider public. The artists covered in the course are cognizant of the need for systemic social change in order to achieve policy change. Blurring the boundaries between art and activism, many are working collaboratively across disciplines to address both the physical and ethical dimensions of sustainability. Others work independently to provide new visions for the future. The course will equip future sustainability managers with a language for cross disciplinary conversation, and deepen their understanding of different perspectives and concerns, strengthening their ability to identify and overcome obstacles to progress.

The course is designed for students who are interested in the contribution that art can make in creating fresh paradigms for promoting sustainability. The course is a full semester, in-person elective offered during the Fall semester. There are no prerequisites for this course. Students should have an interest in interpreting images and in

considering the relationship between cultural expression and sustainability. Cross-registration is available to students outside of the Master of Science in Sustainability Management program, space permitting.

**Learning Objectives**

- L-1- Identify and discuss the relationship between form, materials and content, enabling fruitful dialogue across sectors.
- L-2 Develop an informed critical perspective for analyzing and evaluating ecologically-themed artworks, identifying the strategies used by artists to communicate their message, including and beyond data visualization.
- L-3 Recognize contemporary art’s potential as a bridge to communicating issues of sustainability and the influential role artists can have as agents of change.
- L-4- Develop an analytical framework for the interplay between art and key texts drawn from the Humanities, Social Sciences and other disciplines.
- L-5 Explore how artists are amplifying the struggle for environmental justice, and the relationship between environmental and cultural survival.
- L-6 Recognize and explain alternatives to binary thinking about the relationship between nature and culture.

**Readings**

**The week-by-week syllabus will be updated at the beginning of the semester and may be updated to accommodate artists as guest lecturers.**

**Required Readings** (all available through Canvas course site)


Peter Boswell, “Invisible Aesthetic.”


**Recommended reading:**

For background on Land Art of the 1960s and 1970s, see:


Websites and Videos

Ursula Biemann, Deep Weather
https://vimeo.com/90098625. 8'58”

Eliza Evans, “All the Way to Hell”
https://eevans.net/all-the-way-to-hell

www.npr.org

Hugh Hayden, Hugh the Hunter. 2015. 10’30”
https://vimeo.com/144496579

Chris Jordan “Turning Powerful Stats into Art.” TED Talk, 2008. 11’14”
https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_jordan_turning_powerful_stats_into_art?language=en

Cannupa Hanksa Luger, Mirror Shield Project, 2018. 3'48”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vn9K0y55z94

Robert Morris, Keynote Speech, Land Reclamation as Sculpture, 1979. 24’50”

Tomàs Saraceno in Conversation with Harriet Washington: “Up Close: We Don’t All Breathe the Same Air.” 2022. 56’57”

Exhibition Catalogues – Preliminary List of Online Catalogues for locating artworks:

https://www.whatcommuseum.org/exhibition/endangered-species/

https://collections.stormking.org/Detail/occurrences/129


Footing the Bill: Art and Our Ecological Footprint (Artworks for Change)
https://www.artworksforchange.org/exhibitions/

Rooting for Change: Artistic Responses to Climate Change and Sustainability.

https://www.busan.go.kr/moca_en/exhibition01/1488230

Exhibition Currently on View:
*Water Memories.* Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC.

**Assignments and Assessments**
Further details and a complete rubric for all assignments can be found on the Canvas course site.

**Attendance and Class Participation** (10%) (L-1,2,3,4,5,6)
Attendance is expected for each class session. Come to class prepared to discuss the readings and assigned videos. Relevant, respectful dialogue, thoughtful comments and active listening are all required to succeed in this class and will lead you to contributing to all of the course learning objectives.

**Online Interaction** (10%) (L-1,2,3,4,5,6)
Most weeks students are expected to prepare a thoughtful and critically reflective statement related to a particular assigned reading. Your reflections should be posted on the discussion board by midnight the day before the respective class session. Posts should be roughly 250-350 words. When posting to the board, you may respond with your own observations or comments on what you find interesting, controversial or useful in the readings and in other students’ reflections. These statements should be used to help stimulate questions and issues, and to set the agenda for in-class discussions.

**Essay: Comparative analysis of artworks** (30%) (L-1,2,3)
Choose two artworks related to a similar environmental issue and write a detailed comparative analysis. The primary goal of this assignment is to strengthen competency in responding to ecologically-themed artwork through comparing and contrasting two artworks. Describe each artwork’s form, content and materials before comparing them. Consider the choices each artist has made and how those choices affect the overall impact of the artwork.

What kinds of collaboration and research were involved? Do concerns with environmental justice inform the artworks, and if so, how are those concerns apparent? Do the materials reflect a concern with sustainability? Essays should be 4 – 5 pages double spaced. Discuss the artworks in chronological order. Include illustrations of the artworks, with full caption information. The essay will be evaluated and graded out of 100 points as follows: 30 points for writing mechanics, structure and organization, 25 points for the quality and prioritization of observations of each individual artwork and 20 points for a meaningful and illuminating comparison.

**Group Project: How Can Art Support Sustainability Goals?** (15%) (L- 1,3,4,5)
This course has focused on the role that art and artists can play in raising visibility of environmental issues and breaking down the binary between nature and culture, demonstrating how art can act as a bridge to communicating issues related to sustainability. The group project asks you to creatively envision how you would apply what you have learned in professional practice, and consider how you would convince stakeholders that art can support an organization’s sustainability goals. Suggestions can be tangible, such as exhibition programming, embedded artist residencies, cross-disciplinary forums, and/or intangible, regarding art’s challenge to conventional or entrenched ideas. Organizations can be governmental, NGO’s, environment-oriented, or any for-profit sector. Consider the different ways that artists have worked with groups and communities and worked across disciplines and independently. Research and refer to precedents. Make a brief Power Point presentation using individual artworks or art projects to illustrate your arguments. Be prepared for follow-up Q & A from the class. Submit an outline of your key points on the day of your presentation. Grade will be based on written and oral components and overall coherence of vision. The project will be evaluated and graded out of 100 points as follows: evidence of collaborative group work and division of labor, selection and discussion of art, viable ideas for metrics, clarity of presentation and handling of questions. Detailed rubric TBA.

Final Exam: (35%) (L-3,4,5,6)
In exploring how ecologically themed art can serve as a catalyst in challenging entrenched ideas around humans and nature that present barriers to sustainable futures, we have explored entry points including slow violence, toxic sublimity, ecofeminism, sympoiesis, agency, environmental racism, and the broad implications of the term Anthropocene, among others. The final assignment gives you the opportunity to explore one or more of these frameworks in relation to artworks in more depth. You might start by looking through your discussion posts to see which text(s) you responded strongly to and would like to discuss further, but you may use any of the assigned readings, and reference related readings if you choose. Identify between two and four artworks related to ecological issues and describe how they relate to ideas in the text(s) you have chosen. Use the formal analysis skills you developed in the comparative essay to consider scale, materials, medium, strategy, etc. If you are interested in an artwork we looked at in class, go to the artist's website and see what else they may have done in a similar vein, or look at catalogues from group shows in which they have been included. Your essay should be 5-6 pages double spaced. Include citations to the texts you use and full caption information and illustrations of artwork under discussion. Place illustrations at the end, rather than throughout your text. Include figure numbers within your text when referring to an illustration. Your exam will be evaluated based on writing mechanics and organization (20%), selection and analysis of artworks (30%), and the successful integration of discussion of the artwork with the texts you choose. (50%).

Grading
The final grade will be calculated as described below:

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<th>FINAL GRADING SCALE</th>
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<td>Class Participation and discussion</td>
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<td>Individual Grade</td>
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Online Participation

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<th>Assignment 1: <strong>Comparative Analysis</strong></th>
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<td>Assignment 2: <strong>Group Project</strong></td>
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<td>Assignment 3: <strong>Final Exam</strong></td>
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Course Schedule/Course Calendar

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics and Activities</th>
<th>Readings (due on this day)</th>
<th>Assignments (due on this date)</th>
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<td>9/7</td>
<td>Course introductions</td>
<td>Bulot, Nicolas J. “The</td>
<td>Discussion post</td>
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<td>Why Look at</td>
<td>Functions of Environment</td>
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<td>Environmental Art?</td>
<td>Art.” <em>Leonardo</em> 47, no. 5</td>
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<td>(2014): 511–12. (2 pages)</td>
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<td>Urgency and Agency.” In *Art,</td>
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<td><em>Theory and Practice in the</em></td>
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<td><em>Anthropocene.</em> Edited by Julie</td>
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<td>Reiss. Delaware: Vernon Press,</td>
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<td>2019. 65-76. (11 pages)</td>
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<td>Santiago Zabala, <em>Why Only</em></td>
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<td>New York: Columbia Univ.</td>
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<td>Redefinitions of the Artist</td>
<td>of a Radical Ecology.” <em>Art</em></td>
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<td>Denes, Agnes. “Notes on</td>
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| 9/21 | Problem Solving at the Local Level: Case Studies of Art Actions      | Boswell, Peter. “Invisible Aesthetic”  

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Recommended:  
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<td>Recommended: Cannupa Hanska Luger, <em>Mirror Shield Project</em>, 2018. 3’48”</td>
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<td>Dell, Alison and Mary Mattingly. “Soil Narratives: Towards a Symbiotic Art-Science Activism.” *Public</td>
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Tomàs Sareceno in Conversation with Harriet Washington: “Up Close: We Don’t All Breathe the Same Air.”  
Pinsky, Michael and Laura Sommer, “Pollution Pods: Can Art Change People’s Perception of Climate Change |
| 11/30 | Discussion Post | |


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<td>12/7</td>
<td>Final Presentations</td>
<td>Group Project due in class</td>
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<td>Final Take-home Exam</td>
<td>Due December 23</td>
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**Course Policies**

**Participation and Attendance**
I expect you to come to class on time and thoroughly prepared. I will keep track of attendance and look forward to an interesting, lively and confidential discussion. The class moves quickly, and if you miss an experience in class, you miss an important learning moment and the class misses your contribution. More than one absence will affect your grade.

**Late work**
Work that is not submitted on the due date noted in the course syllabus without advance notice and permission from the instructor will be graded down 1/3 of a grade for every day it is late (e.g., from a B+ to a B).

**Citation & Submission**
All written assignments must use standard citation format (e.g., MLA, APA, Chicago), cite sources, and be submitted to the course website (not via email).

**School and University Policies and Resources**

**Copyright Policy**
Please note—Due to copyright restrictions, online access to this material is limited to instructors and students currently registered for this course. Please be advised that by clicking the link to the electronic materials in this course, you have read and accept the following:

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. Under certain conditions specified in
the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of
these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose
other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a
photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for
copyright infringement.

Academic Integrity
Columbia University expects its students to act with honesty and propriety at all times and to respect the rights of
others. It is fundamental University policy that academic dishonesty in any guise or personal conduct of any sort that
disrupts the life of the University or denigrates or endangers members of the University community is unacceptable
and will be dealt with severely. It is essential to the academic integrity and vitality of this community that
individuals do their own work and properly acknowledge the circumstances, ideas, sources, and assistance upon
which that work is based. Academic honesty in class assignments and exams is expected of all students at all times.

SPS holds each member of its community responsible for understanding and abiding by the SPS Academic Integrity
and Community Standards posted at
https://sps.columbia.edu/students/student-support/academic-integrity-community-standards. You are required to read
these standards within the first few days of class. Ignorance of the School's policy concerning academic dishonesty
shall not be a defense in any disciplinary proceedings.

Diversity Statement
It is our intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that
students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that the students bring to this
class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is our intent to present materials and activities that are
respectful of diversity: gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality,
religion, and culture.

Accessibility
Columbia is committed to providing equal access to qualified students with documented disabilities. A student's
disability status and reasonable accommodations are individually determined based upon disability documentation
and related information gathered through the intake process. For more information regarding this service, please
visit the University's Health Services website: https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services.

Class Recordings
All or portions of the class may be recorded at the discretion of the Instructor to support your learning. At any
point, the Instructor has the right to discontinue the recording if it is deemed to be obstructive to the learning
process.

If the recording is posted, it is confidential and it is prohibited to share the recording outside of the class.

SPS Academic Resources
The Division of Student Affairs provides students with academic counseling and support services such as online
tutoring and career coaching: https://sps.columbia.edu/students/student-support/student-support-resources.

Columbia University Information Technology
Columbia University Information Technology (CUIT) provides Columbia University students, faculty and staff with central computing and communications services. Students, faculty and staff may access University-provided and discounted software downloads.

Columbia University Library
Columbia’s extensive library system ranks in the top five academic libraries in the nation, with many of its services and resources available online.

The Writing Center
The Writing Center provides writing support to undergraduate and graduate students through one-on-one consultations and workshops. They provide support at every stage of your writing, from brainstorming to final drafts. If you would like writing support, please visit the following site to learn about services offered and steps for scheduling an appointment. This resource is open to Columbia graduate students at no additional charge. Visit http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/uwp/writing-center.

Career Design Lab
The Career Design Lab supports current students and alumni with individualized career coaching including career assessment, resume & cover letter writing, agile internship job search strategy, personal branding, interview skills, career transitions, salary negotiations, and much more. Wherever you are in your career journey, the Career Design Lab team is here to support you. Link to https://careerdesignlab.sps.columbia.edu/

More guidance can be found at: https://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no1/mintu-wimsatt_0310.htm

Netiquette is a way of defining professionalism for collaborations and communication that take place in online environments. Here are some Student Guidelines for this class:

- Avoid using offensive language or language that is not appropriate for a professional setting.
- Do not criticize or mock someone’s abilities or skills.
- Communicate in a way that is clear, accurate and easy for others to understand.
- Balance collegiality with academic honesty.
- Keep an open mind and be willing to express your opinion.
- Reflect on your statements and how they might impact others.
- Do not hesitate to ask for feedback.
- When in doubt, always check with your instructor for clarification.