



WASHINGTON PROJECT FOR THE ARTS

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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NATURA NATURANS

Six weekends of talks and workshops on the Anthropocene

Curated by Anne-Sophie Coiffet + Tropism

Project Dates: September 13 – November 23, 2019
Opening Reception: Friday, September 13, 2019, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
Where: Washington Project for the Arts
2124 8th Street NW, Washington, DC 20001

NATURA NATURANS is an artist-driven educational experiment that consists of lectures, workshops, field trips, and an exhibition exploring our changing understanding of nature in the Anthropocene. Curated by the artist Anne-Sophie Coiffet, who divides her time between DC and Paris, this twelve-week project examines topics as varied and interrelated as the comingling of natural systems and human objects, securing legal status for ecosystems, silent places and acoustical trash, genetically modified crops and butterflies, space junk and oceanic micro-plastic, and more. All Friday-night lectures are free and open to the public. Participation in the weekend workshops or field trips requires advance sign-up and attendance at the previous Friday's lecture.

The organizing artist writes:

“From *natura naturata* (i.e., “nature natured” – nature as a passive matter) to *natura naturans* (i.e., “nature naturing” – nature as self-generating matter), the concept of “nature” has oscillated throughout the course of human history. This oscillation has accompanied the development of technologies that question the concept of creation itself. The Anthropocene defines an epoch dating from the beginning of the large-scale impact of human activities on the Earth's ecosystems. Since the industrial era, the environment has been particularly impacted, transformed with the considerable accumulation of human artifacts. The ecological crisis reminds us of the contingency and the danger of large-scale transformations: if humans have been able to shape the world, that transformation in turn

impacts our future. Despite various attempts to ignore climate change, we are now experiencing its consequences. As artists, scientists, activists and inhabitants of Earth, an increased awareness of this phenomenon should encourage a rapid response that also affords nature itself greater rights.”

SESSIONS

NATURA NATURANS is structured as six sessions, grouped under three overarching themes: Nature/Culture, Visible/Invisible Pollution, and To Create/To Transform. The sessions are comprised of a Friday evening lecture followed by a Saturday or Sunday workshop or field trip. All events are at WPA, 2124 8th St NW, unless otherwise noted. Registration is now open. Lectures are free and open to the public, workshops and field trips cost \$10, with the exception of the kayaking field trip which will cost \$30. [To participate, visit the website and click on the session you want to attend.](#)

THEME: NATURE / CULTURE

Session 1: Different Statuses for Nature | September 13-14

“Nature” and “wilderness” are cultural representations: they are reflections of our own desires and phantasms. Despite their meanings and differences, these concepts both refer to what is non-human. The evolution of these notions reflects our relationship with the world. Are the notions of “nature” and “wilderness” helpful when thinking about our relationship with the environment or are they restrictive and outdated concepts? What happens when parts of nature become legal entities? How do we discuss the notion of “property” in the Anthropocene? How do we evaluate our moral responsibility for climate change? How do non-human made objects raise ethical questions about their legal statuses in our contemporary society?

Friday, September 13, 7:30 - 9pm

Nature, Property, and Legal Rights

Lecture by Ben Price, Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund

Saturday, September 14, 2 - 3pm

Haunted Ground: Slavery, Trash, Soil, and the Logics of Ecological Destruction

Workshop with the artist Raina Martens

Session 2: Symbiosis / Reversibility | September 27-29

Human artifacts sometimes escape human control, interacting with the environment in ways that question the dichotomy between nature and culture. From abandoned materials to improvised habitats, these collaborations stimulate new interactions and illustrate the possibility of life in “capitalist ruins”. They gradually generate their own rules, construct new architectural forms through a variety of transformations, and they create new venues for life, enjoyment, and recycling. New kind of architectonics can provide a conceptual framework to re-think our relationship with the environment. How do artifacts and non-man-made objects produce new — and sometimes unexpected — partnerships?

Friday, September 27, 7:30 - 9pm

Microbial communities and micro-plastic particles interaction in the Chesapeake Bay's ecosystem

Lecture by UMD microbial ecologist Ana Sosa

Sunday, September 29, 11:00am - 4:30pm

The Ghost Ships of Mallows Bay

Kayaking Field Trip with Atlantic Kayak Company

Note: WPA will provide round-trip transportation; details provided upon registration

THEME: VISIBLE / INVISIBLE POLLUTION

Session 3: Human Sound Pollution / Silent Disappearance | October 11-12

Human noises affect wildlife. Scientific research has been conducted to show and to measure its impact on aquatic life (mammals, oysters, etc.). Acoustic transformations in nature tell us about the ecological impact of humans and climate change. What is acoustical trash? How do we measure its effects on the ecosystems? Quiet zones are places not disturbed by human noises, where we can listen to the non-human world. The United States National Radio Quiet Zone is an area in West Virginia where authorities limit all radio transmissions for scientific purposes. In the late 1960s, Bernie Krause started a bioacoustic catalog containing over 4,500 hours of wild soundscapes (aquatic and terrestrial). Half of the natural soundscapes are from habitats that either no longer exist, are radically altered because of human endeavor, or that have gone altogether silent. What is a silent place: a quiet place with no human noises or a soundscape losing its diversity?

Friday, October 11, 7:30 - 9pm

Soundscape: silent place and diversity

Silent Lecture with acoustic anthropologist Gordon Hempton

Saturday, October 12, 2 - 3:30pm

(Soma)tic Poetry Rituals

Workshop with Philadelphia-based poet CA Conrad

Session 4: Micro / Macro Pollution | October 25-26

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP) is the largest of the five offshore plastic accumulation zones in the world's oceans. It covers an estimated surface area of 1.6 million square kilometers and its mass is estimated to weigh 80,000 tons. It is also estimated that 1.15 to 2.41 million tons of plastic are entering the ocean each year from rivers.

Many plastics break into smaller pieces and becomes microplastic pollution. Some plastic fragments are already 5 millimeters in size or less before entering the environment. What are the consequences of microplastic pollution in local and international waters?

The term space debris originally refers to the natural debris found in the solar system. However, it also describes the debris from the mass of defunct, artificially created objects in space, especially in Earth's orbit. These include old satellites and spent rocket stages, as well as the fragments from their disintegration and collisions. In 1957, Sputnik brought to space the first pieces of space junk. In January 2019, more than 128 million bits of debris smaller than 1 cm, about 900,000 pieces of debris 1–10 cm, and around 34,000 of pieces larger than 10 cm were estimated to be in orbit around the Earth. What are the technical, economic, and legal aspects of the orbital debris?

Friday, October 25, 7:30 - 9pm

Tragedy of the Commons: Ocean Plastics & Space Junk

A conversation with NASA attorney Steven Mirmina, Oceana scientist Kimberly Warner and Oceana attorney Alicia Cate

Saturday, October 26, 2 - 4pm

Plastics in Our Local Waterways

Anacostia River Explorer Boat Tour with Anacostia Riverkeeper

THEME: TO CREATE / TO TRANSFORM

Session 5: GMOs | November 8-9

Man-made objects question the notions of “nature” and “culture”. They also question the notion of “creation” itself, as humans have developed technologies capable of editing the DNA of living organisms. From genetically modified plants and animals to gene editing on humans, scientists are now able to modify the whole ecosystem. Will science and creativity become a tool to face – for example - climate change? Will animals, plants, and humans be obsolete in the future? How will the concepts of partnership and power be redefined? How is technology transforming the world?

Friday, November 8, 7:30 - 9pm

GMOs: history, perspectives, ethics

Lecture by ecological anthropologist Glenn Davis Stone

Saturday, November 9, 2 - 3:30pm

CRISPR Genome Editing and Butterfly Genomics research at George Washington University

Lab visit with biology professor Arnaud Martin

Session 6: Reality / Fiction | November 22-23

The International Dark Sky Places (IDSP) Program was founded in 2001 to encourage communities, parks, and protected areas around the world to preserve and protect dark sites through responsible lighting policies and public education. Light pollution is a macroscopic phenomenon which will transform the history of astronomy for the next generations. The sky has been gradually re-shaped by luminous objects set in orbit in the last century: satellites, planes, artifacts. How will our representation of the sky change as humans populate it with more and more luminous artifacts?

Friday, November 22, 7:30 - 9pm

Luminous artifacts in the Universe: Reality or Fiction

Lecture with Kevin B. Marvel, American Astronomical Society

Saturday, November 23, 2 - 3:30pm

Re-representing the Celestial

A movement workshop with physics and astronomy professor Gregory Mack

Presented in partnership with the Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences (CPNAS); Note: The event will take place in the National Academy of Science’s Great Hall.

ABOUT THE ARTIST-CURATOR

Anne-Sophie Coiffet is a French artist and a visual art teacher based in Washington, DC. She has a Bachelor's degree in literature and the history of art, and Masters degrees in theater. She has worked at various cultural institutions and art publications in Sicily, London, Spain, and France. Currently, she is working toward a Ph.D. in aesthetics while also producing multidisciplinary projects with her association **Tropism**.

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Anacostia Riverkeeper is a non-profit organization working to protect and restore the Anacostia River and create opportunities for the community to connect to the river. Anacostia Riverkeeper is a member of Waterkeepers Chesapeake, a coalition of the full-time Waterkeepers that span the Chesapeake Bay Watershed (MD, PA, VA, and DC).

Alicia Cate is a senior counsel at Oceana. Prior to joining Oceana, Ms. Cate served as an Attorney-Adviser in the Office of the Legal Adviser at the U.S. Department of State and as an Associate at Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP. Ms. Cate's prior experience also includes environmental law and policy work for the Environmental Law Institute, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Shizuoka Prefecture Government Environmental Policy Office, and the Center for Environmental Information Science in Tokyo. oceana.org

CA Conrad is the author of nine books of poetry and essays. He is a recipient of a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, The Believer Magazine Book Award, and the Gil Ott Book Award. They teach regularly at Columbia University in New York, and Sandberg Art Institute in Amsterdam. He lives in Philadelphia.

Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences (CPNAS) organizes a diverse set of activities that explore the intersections among the arts, science, medicine, engineering, and popular culture.

Glenn Davis Stone is an ecological anthropologist who has studied indigenous agricultural systems for the past 20 years. A focus of his present research is the spread of genetically modified crops in developing countries. He lives in St. Louis.

Gordon Hempton is an international acoustic ecologist and Emmy Award-winning sound recordist who lives in Washington State.

A modern dancer with a PhD in theoretical astrophysics, **Greg Mack** is Senior Program Officer with the Board on Physics & Astronomy at the National Academy of Sciences where he manages the Committee on Astronomy and Astrophysics, the Committee on Radio Frequencies, and helps to manage the Astronomy and Astrophysics Decadal Survey (Astro 2020). Previously, he was Manager of Grassroots Advocacy for APS Physics where, he was in charge of grassroots advocacy and worked on education policy.

Arnaud Martin is an Assistant Professor of Biology at George Washington University, where he researches the genetic and developmental mechanisms underlying pattern formation and structural coloration in butterfly wings. He lives and works in the DC area.

Kevin B. Marvel is the Executive Officer for the American Astronomical Society, the largest professional organization for researchers in astronomy and related disciplines.

Steven Mirmina has worked as an attorney at NASA since 1999 in the International Law division of the Office of the General Counsel. Professor Mirmina has helped negotiate and conclude more than one thousand international agreements for missions across all NASA Mission Directorates, including activities ranging from human space flight and Mars exploration, to Earth science missions and aeronautics research. He lives in the DC area.

Ben Price is the National Organizing Director at Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund. He has advised and organized in hundreds of communities, many of which adopted community bills of rights that codify the rights of human communities and the rights of nature, while prohibiting corporate activities that violate those rights. He lives in rural Pennsylvania.

Ana Sosa is a Ph.D. student in the Marine Estuarine Environmental Science program in the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. Her research is on the taxonomy and ecological roles of microbial communities forming biofilms on microplastic particles in the Chesapeake Bay.

Kimberly Warner is a senior scientist at Oceana. Since 2005, she has researched and developed scientific basis for Oceana's successful campaigns on contaminated seafood and seafood fraud, and marine plastic pollution. She has represented Oceana in over 100 interviews with regional, national and international newspapers, radio and in documentary films. She earned her Ph.D. in marine, estuarine and environmental sciences from the University of Maryland and her B.S. in environmental science from the University of the District of Columbia. oceana.org

SUPPORTERS

This and other WPA projects are made possible by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, which receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts; Bloomberg Philanthropies, The Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Hickok Cole Architects, and many other generous foundations, corporations, and individuals.

ABOUT WASHINGTON PROJECT FOR THE ARTS (WPA)

WPA supports artist-driven projects, advocacy, and dialogue so that artists can live, work, and flourish. WPA invites artists to conceive of programs that showcase the work or ideas of other artists (or creative thinkers, scholars, activists, etc.) and then supports them with money, introductions/connections, idea-development, planning & production, communications, marketing, and promotion.

WPA was founded in 1975 by the art impresario Alice Denney, organizer of the legendary NOW Festival in 1966. Over the past four decades, and under the leadership of nearly a dozen directors, WPA has presented more than 500 exhibitions; 1,000 performances; 700 lectures, workshops, and symposia; 250 screenings; and 58 public art projects. Nearly every major visual artist in the District between 1975 and today has had some connection with WPA. Many have sat on WPA's Board of Directors, including William Christenberry, Gene Davis, Sherman Fleming, Sam Gilliam, Martha Jackson-Jarvis, and Maida Withers. Walter Hopps, the legendary curator, was also a board member.

WPA has also brought hundreds of extraordinary artists and curators from outside the area to DC over the years. They include Robert Ashley, Alice Aycock, Eric Bogosian, Chris Burden, John Cage, Ullises Carrion, CoLab, Lucinda Childs, Simone Forti, Hollis Frampton, Group Material, Doug Hall, Deborah Hay, Jenny Holzer, David Ireland, Danny Lyon, Meredith Monk, Antonio Muntadas, Steve Paxton, Howardena Pindell, Adrian Piper, Nancy Rubins, Allison Saar, Jacolby Satterwhite, Carolee Schneemann, Joyce Scott, Alan Sekula, Nancy Spero, Haim Stainbach, Alan Suicide, Saya Woolfalk, Robert Wilson, among many others.

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