

# Rocky Mountain News

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## VOELZ CHANDLER: The art of climate change

Exhibition displays issues and solutions throughout Boulder

September 22, 2007



The cultural conversation about our relationship to Planet Earth took a big leap forward when the phrase "global warming" morphed into "climate change." After all, how warm was Denver last winter?

But change? That we can see. Repeated images of glaciers peeling off layers of ice into the sea, scientific notices about rising water levels and conference proceedings that wake up the world offer tangible evidence as to the health problems of the big round ball we call home.

It's with an eye toward ways of demonstrating this change through art that the group EcoArts and the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art organized "Weather Report: Art and Climate Change," on view through Dec. 21.

"Weather Report" is a sprawling, ambitious endeavor, with 51 artists showing at the museum, the University of Colorado campus, the National Center for Atmospheric Research and other locations throughout Boulder. Much of that work has been documented and is shown in a gallery at the museum, for those who want to keep their carbon footprints small and their cars in the garage.

But, however you decide to navigate this show, BMoCA is the place to begin. And be prepared to read. Just as the Center for Visual Art's current design show "Substance: Diverse Practices From the Periphery" is heavy on text, so is "Weather Report." That is not a complaint; this type of background adds firepower to the art.

"We believe you open people's hearts with art, then give them the science," EcoArts founder Marda Kirn said of this venture. "Then you give them some choices."

Kirn, former director of the now-defunct Colorado Dance Festival, began organizing EcoArts several years ago for a 2006 debut. The major visual arts component, though, had to wait until 2007, she said, because the person she asked to serve as guest curator, noted New Mexico-based critic and activist Lucy R. Lippard, had other commitments.

But Lippard knows the art scene, both artists long in the trenches in terms of work that addresses the environment as well as newcomers to a genre that depends on science as much as it does on aesthetics.

"Its time has come," Lippard said in May, while in Boulder for a planning meeting with museum officials. "It involves scientists as much as possible. Virtually everyone in this has been doing pieces on climate change or doing ecological art."

"I'm very pleased with what's here," she said recently, as installation was nearing an end. "It touches every aspect of our lives, from the

computers we use to the storms we are going to get."

"Weather Report" includes numerous photographs, documentation panels, sculpture, constructions, furniture, ceramics, drawings, videos, artificial hemp trees (representing plants banned because they could reduce the use of oil) and installations so dramatic they need little support material.

One of those starts at the museum's front door (as do Marguerite Kahr's hemp trees): Mary Miss' *Connect the Dots: Mapping the High Water, Hazards and History of Boulder Creek* snakes through town. The piece announces its presence with impossible-to-miss big blue circles (colored paint-can lids) affixed to trees and walls far off the ground, indicating where water would reach in the event of a 500-year flood.

Apparently, these dots have become collectors items - a shame, since they need to stay in place to have an impact.

Also of note is Kim Abeles' 1992 *Presidential Commemorative Smog Plate (George Bush in 40 Days of Smog)* installation. Abeles left small porcelain plates with gold trim (and presidential faces and quotes) out in the Los Angeles air for lengths of time determined by the officials' stated views on the environment. The range of gunk on their faces tells the story.

The guerrilla art group the Yes Men participates via a video of their appearance as oil men at a conference in Canada. There, they advocated melting down people to create a product called Vivoleum and demonstrated the quality of a candle purportedly made from an Exxon janitor - until the others figured it out.

Subhankar Banerjee, noted for his controversial work in the Arctic, here is represented by large-scale photographs from several series documenting wildlife and the symbiotic relationship of man and animal in that region. And Agnes Denes turns a reforestation project in Finland into a swirl of geometry, in panels that depict the trees as seen from the air.

What is most evident in "Weather Report," besides the melding of science and art, is the tone throughout. It is as confrontational as it needs to be, and as earnest as it has to be. But it never whines.

## If you go

- **What:** Weather Report: Art and Climate Change; work by 51 artists, including Subhankar Banerjee, Gayle Crites, Agnes Denes, Rebecca DiDomingo, Basia Irland, Chris Jordan, Buster Simpson, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Patrick Marold and Sherry Wiggins
- **Where and when:** Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, 1750 13th St., in conjunction with EcoArts; through Dec. 21
- **Information:** 303-443-2122; [www.bmoca.org](http://www.bmoca.org), [ecoartsonline.org](http://ecoartsonline.org)

## Free events

- **"Art Meets Science: Colorado-Based Collaborations,"** 7 p.m. Wednesday, NCAR, Mesa Lab, 1850 Table Mesa Drive
- **Visiting Artist Program lecture by Chris Jordan,** 7 p.m. Oct. 2, University of Colorado, Fleming Law Building, LAW 155
- **Gallery talk by Chris Jordan,** 6:30 p.m. Oct. 3, BMOCA, 1750 13th St.

- **"The Science Behind the Blue Dots,"** walking tour, 8:30 to 10 a.m. Oct. 6; meet at the Justice Center parking lot, corner of Sixth Street and Canyon Boulevard
- **Lecture by guest curator Lucy R. Lippard,** 7 p.m. Oct. 25, University of Colorado, Wolf Law Building, Courtroom, 2450 Kittredge Loop Road
- **"The Thirteenth Tipping Point,"** performance/procession by Bobbe Besold, 5 p.m. Oct. 27 (her piece for "Weather Report"), meet in front of BMoCA
- **Visiting Artist Program lecture by Marguerite Kahrl,** 7 p.m. Nov. 7, Fleming Law Building, LAW 155; free

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