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*As a reminder of the decolonization work necessary to build a truly sustainable society, we acknowledge that the process of putting together this issue took place on the territories of the following Indigenous nations:*

Anishinabek, Canarsie, Chochenyo, Esquimalt, Gitksan, Haudenosaunee, Homalco, Huron-Wendat, K'omoks, Kwantlen, Kwikwetlem, Laich-kwil-tach, Lisjan, Mississaugas of the Credit, Miwko? Waali?, Munsee Lenape, Musqueam, Muwekma, Narragansett, Nisenan, Patwin, Ohlone, Qayqayt, Quw'utsun, Songhees, Squamish, Stó:lō, Stoney, Stz'uminus, Susquehannock, Tla'amin, Tsleil-waututh, Tsawwassen, Tsuu T'ina, Wappinger, We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, Wópanáak.



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## Unfair Trade

Trading posts in the American Southwest can be spaces of pain and loss for the Indigenous people whose art they sell.

By **Larissa Nez**

Larissa is a master's student at Brown University researching the intersections of Indigenous and Black studies with critical theory, contemporary art, public humanities, and critique of collections and archives.



Photo courtesy Larissa Nez

When I was a child living on the Navajo Nation, I'd ride along on trips to nearby border towns in New Mexico with my parents and grandparents. My sister and I would be in the back seat of my dad or grandfather's old pickup truck, sharing snacks, playing, or napping as we made the 45-minute journey to Gallup, NM. Sometimes we would detour to the trading posts and pawn shops downtown.

As we approached the trading posts, my eyes would be drawn to the tall windows and the massive Diné weavings I could see through them (Diné is the name our nation uses for ourselves). The walls were covered in art, wooden dolls representing Zuni and Hopi kachinas (spiritual deities) were arranged in dancing scenes, countless pieces of silver jewelry sat neatly placed on pedestals. Baskets were stacked and elegantly displayed, and other forms of Indigenous expressive culture were arranged so precisely I could rarely see any empty wall or floor space.

I recall the smell of leather saddles, moccasins, hides, and bridles. Antique wooden furniture would be covered by piles of Diné weavings and horse blankets. Taxidermy animals and hides hung high up on the walls. All around the room, glass

cases displayed hundreds upon hundreds of precious stones and antique Indigenous-made jewelry.

Establishments like this dot the southwestern US. They're mostly owned by non-Indigenous settlers who purchase goods from local Indigenous artisans and craftspeople at rock-bottom prices and resell them for a profit. With few work alternatives, talented Indigenous artisans reproduce their nations' culturally sacred items without ever earning a comfortable living. Trading posts have long done harm under the guise of supporting communities. But the Covid-19 pandemic has broken some of those patterns, exposed the harms, and opened the door for Indigenous artisans to use the digital realm and Indigenous-led efforts to share their work with the world.

Trading posts were first established by settlers in the mid-to-late 19th century, to foster economic trade between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Typically, Indigenous people would trade handcrafted

**When I saw our baskets for sale—far from their homes and families—it stirred difficult questions in me. Who would care for them, and where would they find their final resting place?**

jewelry, textiles, baskets, and other goods in exchange for food, enamelware, fabric, manufactured wool, tools, saddles, and other necessities. The development of

capitalism, industry, and reservations as part of westward expansion altered social relations and created a brand new market for "Indian-made goods." Trading posts were an integral feature and facilitator of these changes.

Historically, trading posts played a major role in the expansion of Indigenous art markets in the southwestern US, which shaped popular ideas, myths, and stereotypes about the region and the tribes who inhabit it. Those who shop at trading posts may falsely believe that the items for sale have been ethically acquired, and that the shops have established friendly relationships that support Indigenous communities.

In fact, the posts take advantage of people who have been systemically impoverished through colonial policy, forcing them to create and sell items of personal, familial, and spiritual value. The posts also fail to honor the countless individual creators and knowledge-holders whose talents they benefit from, and the generations of Indigenous people who have passed through these spaces as a means of survival, to share their craft, or to search for their family's heirlooms.

For non-Indigenous tourists, trading posts and pawn shops are spaces where they can indulge in Indigenous culture. But for the Indigenous people who frequent the shops, these are often spaces of memory and loss where their tribe's objects are being pawned, traded, or sold, stirring complicated, painful, and overwhelming emotions.

My sensory memory of trading posts is intimately tied to my childhood sense of wonder. As a kid, I constantly questioned older family members about who made the objects being sold, and why they ended up in trading posts.

My family taught me the value and meaning behind various pieces of our regalia, family heirlooms, and the sacred items we use to protect our families and homes. When I had my *kinaaldá* (coming of age ceremony), I received my first basket



**FIRST VOICE** . — . — . — . — . — . — . — . — . — . — . — . — .

to hold and protect my jewelry, medicine bags, and cultural treasures. So when I saw our baskets for sale—far from their homes and families—it stirred difficult questions in me. More than that, I wondered who would care for them and where they would find their final resting place.

Many trading posts advertise Indigenous, antique goods as “authentic,” perpetuating the idea that Indigenous cultures are frozen in time. Non-Indigenous people then treat living, breathing Indigenous people as objects of the past and colonial subjects. For the non-Indigenous consumer, these Indigenous-made crafts do not come from sovereign nations with distinct cultures and languages, or any ounce of autonomy or agency. They’re just artifacts from a distant past.

In recent years, mainstream media has increased coverage of Indigenous communities and issues, which in theory could counteract this ignorance. But there can be negative consequences to this effort.

For example, non-Indigenous led or owned entities will seek to exploit issues in our communities to further their own business profits or organizational agendas.

The Navajo Nation and other nearby Indigenous nations and communities were hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. Not only did individuals' health suffer, but many families faced dangerous economic impacts. Tribal leaders, activists, youth, and grassroots organizations have stepped up and gathered resources to support those most at risk.

But in Gallup, the owners of trading posts and pawn shops were more concerned with losing revenue from low inventories and staff shortages. In July 2021, Albuquerque TV station KRQE interviewed shop owners about the impact Covid-19 has had on their businesses. Journalist Jackie Kent reported that “a few shops in Gallup say they’re hopeful more artists will return to work once the unemployment bonuses go away in September.”

Trading posts on the reservation and in border-towns—which are major economic centers along and outside reservation boundaries—have a particular historical importance. Beyond that, and considering all the points above, what purpose do trading posts serve? And who do they truly benefit?

The trading posts that are recognized as National Historic Sites help us understand the material, social, and economic conditions and relationships in those locations. But if, instead of looking at them historically, we consider trading posts as active sites of capitalist exploitation in the present, it is clear we must move forward toward a different model.

I believe we can come to a place where we put Indigenous people first and create our own self-sustaining and self-sufficient Indigenous-founded and led art markets that truly benefit Indigenous artisans.



# Thank You for Funding our Future!

Like many indie publications and small businesses, *Asparagus* had a difficult 2020. A year into the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a strong possibility that we wouldn't manage to stay afloat through the end of 2021. So, we asked our readers for help. And boy, did you come through!

Between April 15 and May 2, 2021, the *Fund our Future* campaign raised C\$15,690 in donations from 143 Gus readers. This issue you hold in your hands is a direct result of those contributions. While the future is still uncertain, there is one thing we know for sure. *Asparagus Magazine* has the best readers, and we couldn't do what we do without you.

The following brilliant, beautiful, unutterably kind, and supremely generous individuals contributed to funding our future in 2021 (\*indicates monthly donors):

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Send your feedback, stories, questions, rants to [editor@asparagusmagazine.com](mailto:editor@asparagusmagazine.com), or find us on social media.



## Letter from the Editor

Welcome to our first themed issue: Art for Earth's Sake! It's common for magazines our size to focus all their issues around a theme, but I knew from the beginning I didn't want to do that. For one thing, we have a wide range of interests, and I worried themes wouldn't let us explore them all. Also, I didn't want to commit to themes for every issue only to find it felt more like a trap than an inspiration.

However, after we finished our third issue, a theme seemed like a fun and interesting challenge. The question was, what theme? My first idea was the Arctic, and I reached out to a number of potential guest editors about it. (I was *not* about to publish an Arctic issue with a team entirely south of 60.)

We know we don't want a Big Brother state because of 1984. We know working hard and believing hard make goals achievable thanks to *The Little Engine that Could*.

I still love that idea, but making it happen started to feel like pushing the river, so I shelved it. And then a new idea surfaced: art! From the first phrases of our manifesto, to our In Perspective department, we've always included art and artists in our conversations about sustainability. A couple of issues ago, we published a column called "Artists Are the Architects of Activism We Need." Building an entire issue around these connections felt like a natural extension of this value we've always held. No guest editor needed.

And so here we are: an issue containing our usual departments and columns, but focused on the intersections of art and sustainability. We look both at how artists can help solve environmental or social justice problems—because humans are part of the Earth that's at stake—and at issues surrounding the materials, tools, and processes used to make and disseminate art. There's some less-usual-for-us content, too. Like cartoons! And a cycle of original poetry!

While we've worked on the issue, I've thought a lot about a dear family friend who died earlier this year. Is it weird to dedicate an issue of a magazine to someone? I'm going to do it anyway. This issue is

dedicated to Patricia Joan Ludwick, poet, playwright, actor, environmentalist, friend to animals, trees, and all life on Earth. Patsy supported both me and the magazine from our very beginnings. And the way her life braided together creativity, connection with the natural world, and fierce activism on its behalf is exactly what this issue aspires to. I'm sad she won't get to read it.

I'm thrilled that you *are* able to read it, though. Because earlier this year I didn't know if this issue would come to be. The fact that it has is thanks entirely to those generous readers named on the previous page who contributed to the Fund our Future campaign. If you're one of them, give yourself a hand. If you aren't, please consider

joining their number. Reader support is critical to the magazine's survival.

As I've been writing this letter, southern BC where I live has been utterly pummeled by rain and wind, leading to flooding, washed out highways, power outages, evacuations of entire communities. Some of which were evacuated only months ago because of wildfires. It's easy when living through a climate catastrophe to feel like art is a distraction, couldn't possibly be part of the solution.

But we're always told that humans solve problems through our "ingenuity." And what's "ingenuity" but "imagination" with the magic stripped out? Imagination isn't just one of the things that will get us through these crises. It's the only thing. We all know we don't want to live in a Big Brother state because Orwell wrote *1984*. We know working hard and believing hard make goals achievable thanks to *The Little Engine that Could*. To avoid the worst climate scenarios and find our way to a just society on a healthy planet, we need to imagine our way there. Let the artists in these pages be our guides.

—Jessie Johnston  
[editor@asparagusmagazine.com](mailto:editor@asparagusmagazine.com)



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## Spoken on the Shores

These Gitxsan siblings create impermanent formline artworks from natural objects they find along the Skeena River.

By **Whess Harman**

Photo by Alex Stoney

Driving up Highway 16 from the BC coast, you'll wind along a wide river through the curved, misty peaks of slow mountains densely populated by cedar, spruce, fir, hemlock, and alder. This river, the Skeena, has tides up until about Terrace, from where it begins to lose its memory of the ocean. During the spring ooligan-fishing season, families park on the sandbars to fish while seagulls, eagles, and ravens swarm waiting for their fill.

The Skeena guides salmon into other rivers, including that of my own nation, the Babine. However, before you reach the northern part of the river to follow that branch, you'll arrive where the Skeena meets the Bulkley, at the home of two Gitxsan artists and siblings, Alex and Michelle Stoney.

"I don't know if all young kids think this way, but I kind of took where I lived for granted, and always said to myself I was going to move away, can't wait to get out

of Hazelton," Michelle muses. "But after living down south and going to school in Vancouver, and travelling a lot of the world, I realized how special we have it here."

It is difficult to describe the depth of our relationship as Indigenous people to the water and salmon fed by this watershed. But I, like Michelle, also find my appreciation of our home communities has evolved over time. A few years ago,

while I travelled in the southern part of Sápmi—the traditional homelands of the Saami people in northern Europe—I was reminded heart-wrenchingly of home. When I began to see the fish farms dotting the fjords, I was overcome with a choking grief, imagining what could become of our waters. For many families, our reliance on the salmon run is, without exaggeration, life or death: If the salmon stop returning,





it would mark the death of one of our deepest and longest-standing relationships.

But this relationship isn't over, and with artists like the Stoney, its importance often becomes centred in their artwork. That art can be found along the banks of the Skeena and Bulkley: large-scale works composed of long, slender pieces of driftwood and stones carefully selected for their colour and how they contrast against the sand.

These pieces, designed by Michelle, are contemporary takes on traditional Gitksan formline art. Formline is a style that varies between Indigenous nations along the Pacific coast and its waterways, most quickly recognized for its use of ovoid shapes with connective "s" and "u" shapes. It's used to create portraits and animal forms, and can be applied across many media, including paintings, carvings, and tattoos.

Formline work from this region tends to be marked by bold shapes, with thick swathes of solid colour. In the work of the Stoney siblings, with these natural materials gathered from the shores of the rivers, they're muted. Each piece has a precise sparseness. Rather than giving a diminishing appearance, however, they look lively, as though they've been washed in by the water for a brief appearance.

The land art that is taught within art history is largely from the 1960s and '70s. Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) comes to mind first: a massive man-made berm curling into Utah's Great Salt Lake. Or Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969), two enormous trenches cut into the Moapa Valley near Overton, NV. Though the movement is characterized by largely white, male creators, I would be remiss to not mention Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1973-76), a work that placed concrete tunnels large enough to walk through in the Great Basin Desert outside the ghost town of Lucin, UT.

What marks that movement is that its works often leave an impression or monolith on the earth. The land is a medium or backdrop, the art less of a relational exchange between land and human entities. The works are intended to stay, until the people who made them decide to have them removed.

I imagine walking along the river and seeing the form of a hand with a palm so

large that two people can comfortably lie in it, as demonstrated by Alex's drone photographs of the work. What marks this as separate from the land art of the '70s is the modesty of the engagement despite its scale. Both say that initially they'd done the work for themselves, and Michelle adds wryly that she was "being selfish—I just wanted to see how it would look." How it looks is warm, inviting and joyful—and like it's about to be lovingly subsumed back into the middle place of water and land.

The work caught on though. Soon it appeared in Facebook feeds, with community members delighting and asking

**How it looks is warm, inviting, and joyful—and like it's about to be lovingly subsumed back into the middle place of water and land.**

who was responsible. It's a small community; there couldn't possibly be a way to stay anonymous. As new iterations came, the artists encouraged the community to add their own embellishments. People are usually shy about the invitation, however.

I ask the Stoney about the impermanence, if it feels like a natural part of the work. They both say yes, with the caveat that Alex's photographs preserve them, and say that as the work became more known they started getting questions about if they could make it a permanent public work. They've thus far declined, because, as Alex says, "what's important to us is we didn't want to harm—we're making art from nature and it's going back into nature."

For this reason, they were approached by a friend, Leah Pipe, a non-Indigenous artist in the area. Pipe asked if they would like to create a community-engaged work on behalf of the Skeena Watershed


Conservation Coalition (SWCC) to raise awareness of the dangerously low salmon runs that have been plaguing the region for the past dozen years.

Michelle and Alex tell me about growing up smoking fish in the traditional way. "We were working all summer growing up, and now we only work a couple weeks," Michelle tells me. This strikes close to home. Several years ago, my nation decided to take no fish from this same watershed due to low counts. "A bad year" can't explain what's happening to the salmon anymore, and the word "catastrophic" has begun to loom larger each year.

They accepted the invitation from SWCC and—with the help of volunteers—created a more-than-40-metre salmon on the riverbanks. A befitting, communal work to reflect the increasing enormity of the issue.

To describe these works as an act of decolonizing suggests that Michelle and Alex have been inspired by and are working back from the land art movement of the 1970s. But in my mind, they're more connected to a different tradition. I think instead of Rebecca Belmore's sound installations *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to their Mother* (1991, 1992, 1996) and *Wave Sound* (2017).

In each work, Belmore places large sculptural horns on the land. The sculpture from *Speaking* amplifies the voices of participants, and *Wave Sound* coalesces the natural sounds of the land to be reverberated back for listening. These contemporary Indigenous works invite audiences, especially Indigenous ones, to engage in instinctive, frank conversation with the land we're on—to recognize the land as in dialogue with human life, rather than as a static entity without agency, to be extracted from.

Similarly, Michelle and Alex Stoney encourage participation by extending an invitation to draw materials from your surroundings to collaborate with the banks of the river. Beyond spoken language, the time spent with their works—and potentially with your own welcome embellishments—places you between land and water to listen to the shape of the land, to consider who else, human and non-human, is in the conversation. 



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## SEW IMPORTANT

# Fiction Tells the Truth

In the wake of the Taliban takeover, an Afghan-Canadian artist reflects on family, migration, and identity.

By **Sun Woo Baik**

*After leaving Afghanistan as a refugee in 1996, textile artist Hangama Amiri migrated through numerous countries before arriving in Canada in 2005. Reflecting on those experiences, her identity, and her connections to family and the broader Afghan diaspora, she addresses themes of home, identity, belonging, women's rights, and global politics in her large-scale quilts.*

*She's had a busy 2021: gallery shows in Toronto and New York, and a commission from the UN High Commission on Refugees to design an emoji for World Refugee Day. Her most recent show, Mirrors and Faces, ran at Toronto's Cooper Cole Gallery until November 6, 2021. It dealt with similar themes, but focused on feelings of isolation and betrayal—things she felt intensely during the Covid-19 pandemic. Amiri, 32, says these new pieces are more figurative and surreal than her previous work.*

*The weeks leading up to her show were shadowed by the recent Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. In light of this, Amiri has been working on new pieces. Our conversation began there. (This interview has been edited for length and clarity.)*

### Sun Woo Baik: What are you working on right now?

**Hangama Amiri:** Right now, I am starting on two textile artworks that will depict the current situation in Afghanistan. It's through my personal take, but it's also through my engagement with my family back home during the last week of August. That month was very heavy for everyone, especially for the diasporic communities of Afghans living abroad. I'm making two works that reflect those social and political shifts and how [they impact] Afghan youths and their future.

### How have you navigated the recent Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, besides working on new pieces?

works that I have made previous of this event [became] archival to me. There's that history of [the] past, but also what is present. I'm still grieving, I'm still trying to understand.

I'm trying to reflect [and] bring more contemporary voices [into] my textile pieces. I hope that having this little privilege as an Afghan artist, I could give some platform for those other unheard voices to be in my work. And especially, I'm hoping to reflect on ideas of education, since women are still banned from education—especially young girls. I feel like art [is] a way for people, even from diasporic communities, to understand what's going on. Art has that power of reflection. It has fiction, but the fiction tells the truth. And [right now] it's the best time for artists not to be silent, but be much more vocal.

**You've talked about how working with other Afghan people informs your work. Why is working with the Afghan diaspora so important to you?**

When I meet other Afghans who have lived here more than me, it becomes an

educational platform to know more about their life in the Western culture and the Western societies.

But when I communicate with these people, it's also to bring their knowledge and their political views into my work. We have so many different intergenerational views. I'm a post-war generational person, so I've only known about the destruction of the Taliban regime in my country and what sort of impact they have done to my life and to many other Afghan women. My mom and dad have lived through those politics too, but they also lived through the civil war as well—so they might have different views on certain social or political things in Afghanistan.

**Much of your work focuses on the representation of women. How do you go about representing women, and why?**

If you consider the representation of Afghan women in the art context, it's very [little]. If they are, they have been misrepresented by whoever had the access to film or photograph them. I'm basically targeting the white viewer or the white male

having access to go into the country and photograph and [represent] that “this is the Afghan woman.” Like Steve McCurry’s [famous] photo. Part of me envies, [and] I respect his medium, but there are things that, anthropologically, do not sound right to me. I want to create more of this sort of representation through my voice because I am an Afghan.

I'm still grieving,  
I'm still trying to  
understand.

## What themes do you want to tackle in your work, moving forward?

I will keep making work while being aware of what's going on back home, through a third[-person] point of view. I do not have any access anymore. I can consider myself an exiled artist, but I am also a diasporic body. I'm also interested in my own experience of what the diaspora means, and what sort of migration or immigration stories take place in my life.

My recent exhibition, which was a couple of months ago in New York, was [on] ideas around home. Once you live for such a long time away, home becomes about feeling. It becomes about memory, not a territorial thing, because we are so distanced from the physical context. For me right now, home is a huge question again in relation to my identity, because what happened in Afghanistan is like repetitive history.

**You had a recent exhibit, *Mirrors and Faces*, at Cooper Cole Gallery in Toronto. Can you tell us about it?**

This exhibition [was] actually completed before [the recent Taliban takeover], so I was thinking maybe it's not the right time to show any of this work, because [it] reflected my time during this pandemic life [with] very dreamy, very surrealist landscapes that involve my personal, everyday stories. I'm touching on feelings such as loneliness, isolation, love, intimacy, hope, and rage.

These are the feelings that not only me, but maybe [most] people, have experienced. I felt [it was] really important to consider, and [not] forget about this time in my life. 🌱



***Amiri says the quilt called Wounded Deer is "dedicated to my time being away, and feeling hopeless, and feeling that I cannot do much except expressing what I'm feeling."*** Photo courtesy Cooper Cole Gallery

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## DEPT. OF WHITE WASHING

# Blinded by the White

AI has a bias problem. Could art be the solution?



By **Payal Dhar**

When Joy Buolamwini was a student, she had to interact with a social robot that couldn't detect her face. This was because the robot's artificial intelligence had only been trained on white skin tones and facial structures, and Buolamwini is Black. Repeated experiences of not being "seen" by AI inspired Buolamwini—a self-described "warrior artist, computer scientist"—to take creative action in addressing this problem. And she's not alone. As artificial intelligence creeps further into our lives, artists

look at how these 'engines of seeing' currently operate."

Ruha Benjamin, a race, justice, and technology researcher, says AI can't be impartial because machines—even so-called intelligent ones—do not exist in a vacuum. "Social norms, values, and structures all exist prior to any given tech development," she explained in a 2019 episode of the podcast *Data & Society*.

One of those social inputs is the systemic racism and gender bias that comes

it turns out, everything, says Buolamwini. "Art can explore the emotional, societal, and historical connections of algorithmic bias in ways academic papers and statistics cannot," she wrote in a *Time* magazine opinion piece.

Her experiences of being invisible to facial recognition led to *Coded Bias*, a film that explores the dangers of unchecked AI and the threats it poses to civil rights and democracy. The film tells individual stories of everyday harms caused by technology, especially to women and people of colour, and of Buolamwini's transformation from scientist to activist.

There is another way artistic expression and artificial intelligence intersect: how we imagine AI and its role in our future, as seen in pop culture and in the media. When researchers Stephen Cave and Kanta Dihal studied this, they found that the representation of AI in the public imagination is overwhelmingly white. This, they said, points not to just the whiteness of the AI industry in general, but also represents attributes that are ascribed to being white, those of intelligence and power. They go on to argue that, "AI racialised as White allows for a full erasure of people of colour from the White utopian imaginary." The fallout is representational harms, including amplifying racial prejudice, and distortion of perceptions of risk and benefit.

Ruha Benjamin's Ida B. Wells Just Data Lab explores these intersections between "stories and statistics, power and technology, data and justice." The lab uses social and scientific research along with art to visualise the complexities that exist when human beings interact with AI. Its projects span mental health, urban housing, surveillance, and the prison system. For example, in Digital IDs & Smart Cities, an interactive graphic of a woman walking down a street shows the many ways in which AI tracks our movements and behaviours.

The connections between art and technology, however, are not always obvious—a gap that the *Poetry of Science* public art installation in Cambridge, MA, set out to fill. A collaboration between the Cambridge Arts Council and the People's heArt Project, the installation paired scientists of colour at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with local poets of colour. The aim: to create "positive associations between people



Scientist, artist, and activist Joy Buolamwini

Photo courtesy Algorithmic Justice League

and scientists are working to creatively expose the ways it favours white people and harms people of colour.

A 2019 photography exhibit, *Training Humans*, laid bare the source of the problem with how facial-recognition AIs have been trained to see and categorise the world since the 1960s. The exhibit featured thousands of photographs taken from "training sets" used to teach AI what faces look like. "We wanted to engage with the materiality of AI, and to take those everyday images seriously as a part of a rapidly evolving machinic visual culture," stated data scientist Kate Crawford, who put the exhibition together with artist Trevor Paglen. "That required us to open up the black boxes and

from a history of colonialism, imperialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. These biases, which inevitably favour the rich and powerful, show up in the AI gadgets produced and sold by Amazon, Google, IBM, Microsoft, and others. One of the most glaring examples are the ways facial recognition softwares discriminate against people of colour, and anyone who isn't a cisgender man.

Buolamwini's experience with the robot AI inspired her to found the Algorithmic Justice League (AJL), which uses research and art to promote equity and accountability in AI. But what could the subjectivity of art possibly have to do with the cold, hard logic of machines and algorithms? As

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of color, the arts, the sciences, how nature is perceived, and what it means to generate knowledge.”

One of the pairs consisted of poet Rachel Wahlert and MIT PhD student Huili Chen, an AI scientist who studies how humans and robots interact. Chen said the project was an opportunity to make AI less of an enigma to non-scientific folks. “In daily life, when we talk with each other, we often talk about science...as purely objective, neutral facts or knowledge,” Chen said in an interview. “But we barely pay attention to the process of scientific production, how [it] is produced and who produced [it].”

Chen and Wahlert’s partnership was driven by the shared belief that demystifying the nebulousness of science (in this

**Art can explore the emotional, societal, and historical connections of algorithmic bias in ways academic papers and statistics cannot.**

case, AI) must lie at the heart of an inclusive future, and that art was one medium to achieve that.

Wahlert’s poem based on her interactions with Chen was called *To be Understood*. It contains this stanza:

I have 10 light sensors for eyes  
But can’t perceive tricks or lies  
I’m designed in pink, orange and blue  
All my undertones are decided by you

The exhibition, comprising 13 poems and photographic portraits of the poets and scientists, will be on display at the Mass General Cancer Center until the end of November 2021, then moves to the MIT Rotch Library for exhibition through January 2022.

“It’s like creating a narrative that is alternative to how sci-fi portrays [artificial intelligence],” said Chen. “Only by doing that demystification and democratisation, [can we] empower the public to know more...and [enable] young generations to shape the future of this field.”

## KNOW LOGO

# Fact or Pulp Fiction?

Let’s cut into the controversial world of wood and paper certification.



By **Kevin Jiang**

Ever notice a little green logo stamped on a package of paper or stack of plywood? These labels promise sustainable and ethical wood products—but are they all bark and no bite?

Forests are disappearing at an alarming rate. Roughly 10% of the world’s forests have vanished since 2000, including some 411 million hectares between 2001 and 2020, according to nonprofit consortium Global Forest Watch. In 2019, a football-field-sized swathe of tropical rainforest disappeared every six seconds.

Researchers and environmentalists agree that certifications for sustainable forest management could be part of the solution. In North America, the major certifiers are the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). Here’s how they compare.

## The Forest Stewardship Council

After the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro failed to produce a binding agreement to stop deforestation, disgruntled environmentalists, Indigenous groups, and timber-industry stakeholders united to address the issue. One year later, FSC was born.

Its mission, according to François Dufresne, CEO of FSC Canada, is to use a market-powered system to halt deforestation, promote sustainable forest management, and protect workers and Indigenous communities. Companies that meet FSC’s sustainability standards and undergo routine audits are granted permission to stamp FSC’s logo on their products, for a fee. The idea was to encourage sustainability by making it profitable, on the understanding customers would pay more for certified products. And, for some companies, it worked.

Today, FSC has certified over 229 million hectares of forest in 89 countries—about the size of Saudi Arabia—and is probably the most prominent forest management certifier in the world. Its labels aren’t

restricted to timber, but cover all forest products, from mushrooms to natural latex.

## The Sustainable Forestry Initiative

SFI was launched two years after FSC. It was originally a voluntary code of conduct for members of the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), a US trade association. Today, SFI is a recognized certification system operating in the US and Canada. Even so, by 2020, SFI had certified over 150 million hectares of forest, an area slightly smaller than Mongolia.

According to Jason Metnick, a senior vice president at SFI, the organization is dedicated not only to developing forest management standards and promoting conservation, but also to improving communities, Indigenous relations, and sustainable forestry education.

## Know your label

FSC’s checkmark-tree logo comes in three versions: FSC 100%, when all a product’s materials come from certified forests;



FSC Recycled for products made entirely from recycled goods; and FSC Mix, for products containing both certified new and recycled material.

SFI’s leaf-and-tree logo has two main variations. Products stamped with SFI’s Certified Sourcing label are made from materials that are either recycled, sourced from SFI-certified forests, or produced by certified companies (but potentially sourced from non-certified forests). The Chain-of-Custody label ensures that all the product’s components have been tracked

and certified from sourcing through manufacturing to delivery.

In order to use both certifiers’ labels, companies must complete a strict application process and pay membership fees, as well as pass an audit by an independent organization, like the Canadian Standards Association. Using third-party certification bodies is important for eco-labels’ legitimacy, because it means the certification authority—which stands to receive fees from certified companies—doesn’t decide who gets approved.

## What are their standards?

FSC lists its expectations in 10 principles and 57 criteria, which range from respecting Indigenous peoples’ rights, to implementing a clear forest management plan, and more. Likewise, SFI’s standards detail strict rules meant to “protect water quality, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, species at risk and forests with exceptional conservation value,” according to its website. Both FSC and SFI prioritize “high conservation value” forests—regions with significant biological, social, cultural, or ecological importance.

In an upcoming update, SFI will focus on adjusting forest management techniques to mitigate the effects of climate change and improve forests’ abilities to capture atmospheric carbon. It will also introduce a new objective focused on minimizing the impacts of forest fires.

Meanwhile, FSC has just adopted a new, Canada-specific standard with a focus on protecting the habitats of endangered boreal woodland caribou.

## How are they different?

Although FSC and SFI began as different systems, over time their standards have grown similar, until the difference “could even be imperceptible to some people,” said Dr. John Innes, a professor of forestry at the University of British Columbia.

Any differences stem from their fundamental values, Innes said: “The FSC is more ecologically oriented, whereas the SFI is more production oriented.” In other words, SFI might make decisions to benefit industry at the expense of the environment, within limits.

For example, Innes said SFI is more permissive of clearcuts. Meanwhile, FSC discourages clearcuts, preferring single-tree harvesting. However, FSC does allow clearcuts in certain countries like Canada, Sweden, and Russia, with limits based on the

area’s importance for biodiversity, culture, and other values. There, clearcuts help thin forests as wildfires do naturally, FSC’s Director General Kim Carstensen wrote in 2014.

## How are they funded?

In the past, SFI faced criticism for receiving a majority of its funding from the paper and timber industries. However, Metnick asserted that the organization today is a far cry from its origins. In 2007, the certification program fully separated from AF&PA and became an independent nonprofit. Now it runs mostly on fees charged to SFI-certified companies.

According to its 2020 annual report, those fees comprised 79% of SFI’s revenue. The remaining 21% came from “annual conference revenue, service agreements, investment income and other sources.”

Meanwhile, “annual administration fees” made up 82% of FSC’s total income in 2020, according to its annual financial statement. These are fees charged to affiliated accredited certification bodies, which perform third-party audits. The remainder came from certified company membership fees, donations, and more.

## Indigenous relations

Another major difference, according to FSC Canada’s Dufresne, is that FSC requires companies to obtain free, prior, and informed consent from Indigenous people before sourcing from any land they own, occupy, or use—unlike SFI.

When told about Dufresne’s statement, SFI’s Metnick pointed to the initiative’s partnerships with over 120 Indigenous communities. According to its new standards, SFI requires companies to be aware of traditional forest-based knowledge.

## Are certifications helping?

Despite deforestation prevention being a central motivation for both certifications, multiple studies show they’ve made little impact on deforestation worldwide. A 2018 study by US nonprofit Resources for the Future found no evidence that FSC certification reduced deforestation in Mexico, a country host to both “considerable FSC certification and deforestation.”

The authors speculated this was either because FSC certification resulted in minor improvements rather than dramatic results, or that certification had more

substantial impacts on forest degradation—a factor the researchers didn’t measure—rather than deforestation.

FSC’s Dufresne believes his organization does prevent deforestation in certified areas, but that the result is outweighed by deforestation in largely uncertified regions. “It’s very difficult as a voluntary system to increase our footprint in those parts of the world where deforestation is, unfortunately, a big deal,” he said.

UBC’s Innes said while certifications haven’t slowed deforestation, they do provide other benefits, like “new techniques, new methods, new data that is now being collected to actually support forest management.”

## Illegal logging and enforcement

Illegal logging has taken place within forests certified by both systems. Undercover investigations by the Environmental Investigation Agency, a Washington, DC-based nonprofit, connected FSC-certified companies to illegal logging in countries including Peru and Romania; in the latter two cases, FSC revoked the companies’ certifications after the reports became public.

Likewise, Plum Creek, an SFI-certified logging company, faced 11 civil penalties in five years from Oregon’s forestry department, following numerous clearcutting offenses. In 2014, environmental think tank Centre for Sustainable Economy filed a formal complaint with SFI asking to revoke Plum Creek’s certification.

An SFI-affiliated third-party organization—the same one that had audited Plum Creek since 2009, according to environmental group Sierra Club—audited the company, and concluded there was “insufficient evidence” that Plum Creek’s actions were “either negligent or willful” and cause for suspension. The following year, Plum Creek CEO Rick Holley received an award from SFI. Holley also served twice as chair of SFI’s board.

“Nobody has ever lost an SFI certificate,” said Shane Moffatt, a Greenpeace Canada campaigner. “I think that gives you a comparative sense of the relative rigor of those two systems.”

SFI’s Metnick accused Moffatt of making a semantic argument. Non-compliant companies can’t lose their certification because they won’t get a certificate in the first place, he said. “It’s not like we’re taking a certificate away... because at the end of the day you just don’t get a certificate if you don’t pass the audit.” He added that SFI is not directly



responsible for whether companies pass their audits—that’s up to the third-party auditors. Metnick did not confirm whether SFI had ever revoked any company’s certificate.

#### Environmental criticisms

Both certifications have also received flak from environmental organizations. In 2018, Greenpeace International (GI) withdrew its membership from FSC, despite being a founding member. “FSC is not consistently applied across regions, especially where there’s weak governance,” GI stated in a press release, adding that before it can endorse the certification, FSC needs to be more transparent about where certified areas’ boundaries are, and allow external monitoring.

Greenpeace Canada remains a member of FSC, though. “It addresses some of the critical challenges in Canadian forests at the moment,” said Moffatt, such as protecting woodland caribou. “It has much more robust ecological requirements [than SFI] when it comes to species protections, and very clearly requires free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples.”

Meanwhile, since 2011, a consortium of more than 25 environmental groups (including Greenpeace, Stand.Earth, and the Sierra Club) have released statements rejecting SFI over its stance on clearcuts, lack of mandatory Indigenous consultation, and activity in endangered forests. They’ve been joined by 38 major US companies—including Office Depot and AT&T—who agreed not to use SFI-certified products for these reasons.


#### Bottom line

When asked which certification he preferred, Greenpeace’s Moffatt replied quickly. “This leopard hasn’t changed its spots,” he said of SFI. “They may have changed in some way since their original founding, but have they improved to an extent that they offer any guarantees of social responsibility or sustainability? In Greenpeace’s opinion, absolutely not.”

“On the other hand, the FSC has accomplished a lot of good over the years,” he added.

UBC’s Innes gave a more moderate response: “I would recommend either,” he said. “I think they’ve done a lot of good and I think they will continue to do lots of good.”

#### Buzzword summary

FSC’s rigor beats SFI’s industry focus. Neither is controversy-free, but certification by either is better than none at all. 

## HARD-HITTING JOURNALISM

# The Story of Concrete

The grey stuff is central to how we live, but it’s killing our planet. Is there a green alternative?



By **Rebecca Gao**

It’s inescapable: our roads, buildings, dams, and homes are made of concrete. It makes sense that concrete is the material of choice: it’s dirt cheap (literally), durable, easy to source, and extremely simple to work with.

“Building something out of stone or brick, you really need skilled tradespeople to do that,” says Vince Beiser, author of *The World in a Grain*, a book about sand. “But concrete comes out in a liquid form, so all you need to do is build a form of what you want it to be, pour the concrete, let it harden, and boom: you’ve got a wall.” Plus, sand—a key ingredient in concrete—is found in virtually every part of the world, so it’s easy for construction companies to source.

**Architects are concerned we won’t reach climate targets as long as we continue to use concrete.**

“Concrete has enabled us to do all kinds of incredible things,” says Beiser. “If you need to build housing for tens of millions of people really fast, it’s hard to do that with wood or bricks, but you can do it with concrete.”

In its most basic form, concrete is made up of aggregates (a loosely compacted mass of fragments or particles, usually sand or gravel), water, and cement. Cement is manufactured from lime, silica, alumina, magnesia, sulfur trioxide, alkalis, iron oxide, and calcium sulfate. Cement and water are mixed together to make a paste to which the aggregates are added.

When the mixture hardens, it binds the aggregates into a hard, rock-like mass. That’s the most basic recipe, though Beiser notes that there are “probably thousands” of types of specialized concrete formulated for different purposes: faster or slower drying times, building types, flexibility, environmental temperature, etc. Modern concrete is also reinforced with steel rods to make it stronger. “Pretty much all the concrete in the world today has steel rods or mesh inside of it,” says Beiser.

#### A brief history of concrete

Concrete has a long history. According to Beiser, both the ancient Egyptians and Romans used the material. “[The Romans] used it all over their empire,” he says. They built roads, ports, and public buildings with concrete. The most famous example of Roman concrete use is the Pantheon in Rome—it’s a 2,000-year-old building with an arched concrete roof that is still standing.

When the Roman empire fell, concrete use stopped as “people sort of forgot how to make it,” continues Beiser. It wasn’t until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that British bricklayer Joseph Aspdin accidentally burned powdered limestone and clay to create Portland cement, which is the basis of modern cement. Concrete took its current form and became widespread after Ernest Ransome, a San Francisco engineer, saw potential in concrete and perfected the process of reinforcing the material with iron (later steel) rods.

Ransome’s innovation has stood the test of time: his formula is the basis of the concrete we use now. But, when he first figured it out, he had a hard time convincing people to build with it. Back then, people were using bricks, stone, wood, and steel, and no one wanted to take a gamble on

an untested material. Even so, Ransome managed to get a few concrete buildings built around the US, a couple of them in San Francisco. When the 1906 earthquake hit, the ensuing fire destroyed much of the city—but Ransome’s concrete buildings remained standing. Since then, the world has embraced concrete. Today, twice as much concrete is used in construction as all other materials combined.

#### Are we building our environmental downfall?

While concrete’s strength, durability, and ease of use is impressive, perhaps the most mind-blowing thing about it is its huge environmental impact. Manufacturing cement, one of the main ingredients in concrete, is responsible for 8% of global carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. A 2020 Princeton University report notes that the cement industry contributes 4 billion metric tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> annually. All of these emissions contribute to climate change and worsen its effects: hotter temperatures, extreme weather, rising sea levels, and a melting Arctic.

Then, there’s the damage that sourcing sand is doing to the planet. The UN Environment Program estimated in 2014 that more than 40 billion metric tonnes of aggregates are used every year, and their extraction is causing massive environmental damage to rivers, lakes, and shorelines. We mine so much sand—not just for concrete,

the glass we use for windows and screens is also made of sand—that the world is actually facing a sand shortage. Most of the sand used to make cement is from the ocean or beaches, since the type of sand found in deserts is actually too fine to use for cement. Dredging the ocean for sand damages coral reefs, tears up marine habitats, makes flooding worse, and affects aquatic life.

On top of the environmental harms of sourcing and producing concrete, now that we’ve paved much of the Earth with concrete, it’s worsening the impact of global warming. Urban heat islands—regions where the temperature is higher than surrounding areas—can be blamed on the stuff that cities are made of: concrete. If you’ve ever walked across an unshaded parking lot, you know that they get hot as the concrete soaks up the sun’s heat. That’s what’s happening in cities on a large scale.

“Concrete retains heat and keeps putting it back out into the atmosphere, even after the sun’s gone down,” says Beiser. “So when we’re talking about a world where we keep getting hammered by heat waves, concrete is making it worse.”

#### Greener grey stuff?


Luckily, there might be some greener alternatives to concrete. One Halifax-based company called CarbonCure is replacing some of the cement that goes into concrete

with carbon. The company injects captured carbon dioxide into its concrete mix, which then chemically transforms into calcium carbonate and strengthens the cement. Not only does this reduce the carbon footprint of concrete, but it removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

CarbonCure’s product costs the same as conventional concrete (or even less, in some cases), according to the company’s website. In early 2021, the technology was adopted by a US concrete business that has used it in residential and commercial projects, including the Kansas City Zoo’s aquarium.

In Vancouver, BC, construction business Nexii has created Nexiite, a concrete alternative made with water, sand, and a proprietary mix of materials that, according to company studies, has a 30% smaller carbon footprint because it is made without Portland cement and lime. Nexii has struck deals with chains like A&W and Starbucks, and was valued at \$1 billion in September 2021.

Despite promising developments in greener concrete, architects are concerned we won’t reach climate targets as long as we continue to use concrete—even if it’s more carbon-efficient. Some climate activists are calling for abandoning concrete altogether and replacing it with massive timber, which is created by fusing pieces of softwood (usually from pine, spruce, or fir) together to make larger pieces of wood. It’s durable, cost-effective, and less carbon-intensive than concrete. However, there’s concern that the mass adoption of timber as a building material might drive up demand for wood and accelerate deforestation.

In the meantime, using less concrete can help cut down on its damaging impacts. One big way to use less concrete is to discourage car use and encourage other forms of transportation, to reduce the need for roads, driveways, and parking lots. So, green solutions aside, disincentivizing concrete-use should be step number one. As for the future, it’s hard to know exactly what concrete’s role will be as we battle the climate crisis. What’s certain is that, to build a better future, we need to think deeply about how we build our world. 



The silos at Vancouver’s Ocean Concrete factory are adorned with the mural *Giants*, by Brazilian artists OSGEMEOS. | Photo by Sun Woo Baik





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## Quantum Garden

Tee Fergus' upcycled denim conjures a world of possibility and connection.

I'm a big believer in the universe and there being more than what we see with our eyes. The Quantum Garden is an idea of being able to think beyond what we think we know. Everything I use is secondhand. I found this old thrift shop in Kensington Market [which] had recently closed, so I decided I would collaborate with [the owner] because she had a bunch of denim. I reworked everything [to make] the pieces.

The illustrations are another way to share art. I find that people want art, but they might not want it as a print or a tattoo.

The art has to do with nature and the magic of the universe. For me, it's all about connection. I think everyone's connected somehow, though you might not know. The art allows that connection.

The pieces are not for everyone, because you have to be willing to be looked at. You have to be totally comfortable being the weirdo in the room. The people who wear them rock them so well. For me, having people feeling like their own little superhero when they wear these pieces, that's what's important.

— as told to Sun Woo Baik





By Beverley Kort



"We've been hacked!"

By Susan Camilleri Konar

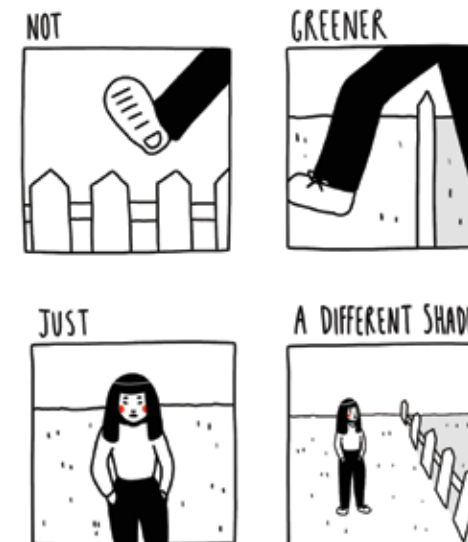


"If you hold that discarded plastic bottle to your ear, you'll hear the scream of environmentalists."

By Catherine Martha Holmes



By Justine Crawford



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"We've got to strike the setup. The patron wants organic."

By Joana Miranda

By Brian Tate





By Phil Witte

## FURNITURE FOR THE AGE OF ANXIETY



By Paul Kales



*"Anything else you did for social justice besides retweets and hashtags?"*



By Kent Chan-Kusalik

## BLACK SHEEP PARENTING FOR A GREENER FUTURE

# Books for Budding Activists

These five books inspire kids to be kind and use their voices for justice.

By **Janel Nail**



Julie Flett's cover illustration for *When We Were Alone*

Image courtesy HighWater Press

I am in awe of young children, first as an educator and now as a mother of two young kiddos. I wish we were more like these thoughtful, empathetic, loving little humans. The way they notice and observe the tiniest of bugs on the sidewalk, the wholehearted love they have for their family, their natural kindness towards others, and their continual efforts to strive for justice and fairness.

As expectant parents, we begin to think about how we will teach our children about life. We lie awake at night questioning our job as parents and teachers. What kind of role model will I be? How will I educate my child about kindness, empathy, and a belief in equality and inclusivity in a world that challenges these qualities even as an adult?

When my son entered grade 1, my abilities as an educator and mother were tested. Every day as I picked my little man up from school, we had discussions about the “happenings” of the day, what words were used by students, what actions were displayed, and what feelings were expressed. He now had to navigate a new world full of different people with diverse beliefs, values, and behaviours, just like an adult entering a new job environment.

As my son's world transformed, my guidance and teachings suddenly required modification and questioning: How do I teach my child to be kind and stand against injustice? How do I encourage empathy among students that mistreat him? How do I teach him to be brave and use his voice for peace?

Books have a way of influencing. They're also a great tool to teach children some of the most important lessons in life. Here are five books (appropriate for ages 4-7, give or take a year) that will inspire children and adults to try and make the world a better place with their words and bravery.

### *Say Something*

written & illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds

*Say Something*, written by Canadian author and illustrator Peter H. Reynolds, uses simple yet powerful words to encourage his readers to, “Say something. With your words. With your art. With your music. With your poetry. With your courage. Or simply with your presence.” The positive messages like, “If you see someone lonely... SAY SOMETHING... by just being there for them,” resonate like a choir in a concert hall. Large bold words are combined with colourful textured backgrounds.

As an artist, I appreciate how he uses specific colours to create emotions. For example: blue for loneliness, green to represent speaking up for nature, and red for standing up against a bully. His artwork is simple yet impactful. This book sits on my special bookshelf at home, and is a favourite with both of my kiddos. I love this book for the powerful evocations and messages of positivity and kindness.

### *One*

written & illustrated by Kathryn Otoshi

*One* is a symbolic book about standing up to bullies. This story is about Blue, a quiet colour who enjoys looking up into the sky and splashing in puddles. The conflict occurs when Red, a hothead, picks on Blue. With colours as characters in the story, Otoshi does a wonderful job evoking compassion and empathy from readers by incorporating relatable human qualities into each character. Even as an adult, I have authentic sad emotions when Blue is mistreated.

The story continues as Red picks on Blue and the other colours, and grows more powerful, hotter, and redder until One comes along. Number One uses his voice, brings the colours together, and stands up to Red. This thoughtful, character-building book brings the reader into the story with a brave and positive message of how to stand one's ground. It really does only take one person, one child, one “number” to make a difference.

### *Speak Up*

written by Miranda Paul, illustrated by Ebony Glenn

“There are times we should be quiet. There are days for letting go. But when matters seem important—SPEAK UP! Let others know.” Miranda Paul uses a melodic, rhythmic writing style to voice a clear message: SPEAK UP! Paul provides opportunities for young readers to participate in the story by using repetition. My own children love joining me on each page in unison as we cheer loudly, “SPEAK UP!”

The story gives tangible examples of how together—through kindness, thoughtfulness, empathy and resilience—we make a positive difference with our everyday actions. “When a rule just isn't fair, or has gotten much too old—SPEAK UP! Work



for change. Justice comes when we are bold.” This book is a no-nonsense, literal guide that provides solutions to simple, real life scenarios. As an educator, I appreciate all the teachable moments and opportunities for discussion and learning.

#### *When We Were Alone*

written by David A. Robertson, illustrated by Julie Flett

*When We Were Alone* won Canada’s 2017 Governor General’s Literary Award for picture books. In this touching story, a grandmother (Nókom) and her granddaughter garden together. The little girl asks her Nókom about her colourful clothes, long hair, and Cree language.

The grandmother describes how the residential school she attended “far away from home” attempted to strip away Indigenous children’s culture through haircuts, uniforms, and language rules, and prohibited them from seeing their own families. Nókom shares how she and

her friends resisted these injustices, and how as an adult she lives true to herself and her Cree culture.


Julie Flett’s art captures our hearts with her soft colour washes and overlapping collages creating texture and depth. I love how she contrasts Nókom’s bright red dress with the neutral colours of the environment, symbolizing the strength and determination of a woman who found joy in a difficult, unjust time in her life. Robertson addresses a painful topic in a story children can relate to and empathize with. Through his words, they are empowered to embrace their own cultures and respect others’. It’s the kind of story that instills the importance of standing up for each other to prevent future injustices.

#### *Little Blue Truck*

written by Alice Schertle, illustrated by Jill McElmurry

This book was my children’s favourite read when they were young, and we still

share our love for it today, years later. *Little Blue Truck* is a fun book, full of heartwarming messages, and teachings of friendship. The author uses sing-song rhyming that creates a joyful reading experience for all. Children are captivated by the cheerful illustrations and the anthropomorphic farm animals.

The story follows the eponymous little blue truck who shows compassion and love towards his community, including a rude, grumpy dump truck. In the end, Blue’s animal friends rally behind him when he finds himself stuck. “Now I see / a lot depends / on a helping hand / from a few good friends.” Like all the books in this list, Schertle’s story motivates readers to be kind, help each other, and to join together to make a difference. 

Guest columnist **Janel Nail** is an educator, artist, and momma of two. She resides in Calgary, AB, with her family, where she juggles entrepreneurship, teaching art, and designing beautiful practical spaces for families.

## ENVIRONMENTALIST FROM HELL

# Filling the Climate Crisis’ Art-Shaped Hole

A gathering of concerned artists showed me the role my art can play in protecting the planet.

By **Sara Bynoe**

Creating art in a climate crisis, while the world is on fire, sometimes feels frivolous. People are fleeing their homelands due to natural disasters, we’re living through a global pandemic, and I want to produce a comedy show? Aren’t there better things I can do with my time?

In September, I observed part of a workshop with 100 artists who were asking similarly vexing questions. Over two days, they explored how art can transform the environmental movement, and discussed what the organizers called “the art-shaped hole in the climate problem.”

The event, called Greenhouse, took place at the University of British Columbia’s botanical gardens near Vancouver, BC, and

was hosted by the Only Animal, a local theatre company that mounts shows in natural, outdoor spaces. Greenhouse was part of the Only Animal’s larger project of engaging artists in climate action through a movement they call the Artist Brigade.

In the morning of the last day of workshops, several dozen of us gathered in a circle to hear Sherry Yano speak about the philosophical intersections of art and activism. Yano is an oil and gas engineer who’s now a climate activist. “Artists are change-makers, and activists are always about change,” she pointed out. But, Yano said, the human brain is resistant to change and craves familiarity. Getting people to change their daily habits to more sustainable

ones is a hard sell because it’s in most people’s nature to resist change.

### *Climate feelings*

Yano asked how we felt about the climate emergency. We—a group of actors, dancers, writers, puppeteers, painters and more—told her we felt anxious, overwhelmed, frustrated, and that we wanted to cry all the time. Yes, we are feelers, and I have a lot of climate feelings. That’s why I was assigned to write about this workshop. *Sara, you’re an artist who cares about the climate, my editor said. Go meet a bunch of other touchy-feely artist types and see what’s going on.*

During the workshop, Yano shared her critiques of leafleting and petitioning. She’d seen activists use horrifying images of fire and brimstone to convince others to sign a petition, but saw how those who’d signed never actually got involved. She had also seen activists pour hours into making pamphlets without actually building relationships or sparking a movement.

Instead, Yano encouraged us artists to create experiential learning to build community, and then help raise voices from within those spaces. We cannot connect through guilt and anxiety, she said. For example, she told us that the UBC Climate



Artists gathered in the UBC Botanical Garden for the Greenhouse workshop.

Photo by Sophia Dagher

Hub has a policy of putting on a dance party after its events, because there is no community without joy. And we need to connect with each other if we’re going to change the world.

It reminded me of the quote attributed to activist and writer Emma Goldman, “If I can’t dance, I don’t want to be in your revolution.”

### *Artists are changemakers*

Historically, artists have been activists. A quick Google search of “activist artist” turns up names like the street artist Banksy, the Dada artists who opposed bourgeois

oceans. Alisha Lettman is an eco artist who teaches people about farming sustainability. Munish Sharma is a theatre artist who spent the second pandemic summer putting on impromptu dance parties in parks around Vancouver.

And then there was me, a performing artist of two decades. I’ve been an actor, a storyteller, and a comedy show producer. I also used to run a weekly dance party class, which offered women a judgement-free dance space that didn’t require them to dress up or worry that they were going to get hit on.

I’ve been passionate about preserving the environment and reducing consumption since I was a kid. But apart from refusing to sell merchandise—also known as “stuff you don’t need”—at my comedy shows, I hadn’t really thought about how my art and activism intersect. Though I do have a show, Teen Angst Night, where people read from their embarrassing teenage notebooks, and transforming adolescent angst into comedy gold *is* a form of recycling.

### *Effecting change locally*

In another Greenhouse workshop, Coast Salish dancer and theatre artist Tasha Faye Evans sat under a cedar tree and asked the group, “Who has ever loved a tree?” Several people raised their hands and told stories of their relationships to specific trees. Evans told us how she had loved a forest in Kaxi:ks (the Pacheedaht name for the Walbran Valley on Vancouver Island) and protested for years to save it from

destruction. But despite her and others’ efforts, it was razed to the ground, and it broke her heart.

After the forest was destroyed, a fellow Indigenous artist suggested she focus her efforts locally, advice that inspired her to become a leader in her community, the Vancouver suburb of Port Moody.


With the goal of sharing knowledge about Indigenous history, Evans coordinated a project that supported First Nations carvers to create house posts that would be publicly displayed in the area. House posts are tall, cedar carvings traditionally displayed in longhouses. As part of that project, Kwikwetlem First Nation artist Brandon Gabriel carved a 600-year-old cedar tree into a house post called *The Spirit of Kwikwetlem*, which tells the Kwikwetlem’s “Strong Fish” story.

### *Be in reverence*

Evans said she was once told by Chief Arvol Looking Horse—a Lakota spiritual leader who opposes the Dakota Access Pipeline—that we are all born with our own unique gift. And, it’s our sacred responsibility to use that gift to ensure the health and wellbeing of all our relations. This made me think of how artists who are activists might not do or create what we traditionally think of as “art,” or “activism,” but their contributions are just as worthy.

At the end of my day at Greenhouse, I felt inspired. The message I was receiving was that my artistic gifts and impulses were powerful, and part of my gift to the world. I learned that I should act locally to guide people into a more sustainable, compassionate, and joyful world. When artists engage with our communities, it has ripple effects on the greater world. And we are best positioned to inspire change within our own communities, where people know and trust us.

As the workshop was coming to a close, I could see the faces of the artists light up with inspiration and motivation.

“When in doubt, be in reverence,” Evans advised us, as we sat with her under the cedar tree. “Be in service to the things that mean the most to you, and you never know what might help change the world.” 

*The Environmentalist from Hell is what Sara Bynoe’s mother called her when she became obsessed with reducing, reusing, and recycling at the age of 10.*



## VIEWS FROM THE INSIDE

# Apocalypse Never

When Hollywood fast-forwards to climate devastation, it wastes an opportunity to ignite our imaginations.

By **Jesse Firempong**

*In media res.* Latin, meaning “into the middle of things.” It’s a storytelling technique that dates back to Homer’s epic poem *The Iliad*. The ancient Greek tale opens not at the beginning of the Trojan War, but in the midst of battle.

But when it comes to climate fiction, or “cli-fi,” Hollywood usually skips right to the apocalypse. The beginning of the movie is often the end of the world. Think of the catastrophe of *The Day After Tomorrow*, in which melting ice sheets trigger major disruptions in climate-regulating ocean currents just 10 minutes into the film. Then there’s the dusty hellscape of *Mad Max: Fury Road*, which opens on an endless

desert through which deranged man-boys driving tricked-out pick-up trucks hunt survivors. Can Hollywood imagine a future where humanity thrives? Can *we*?

By rewinding from the end of the world and diving into the middle of things, filmmakers can flip the script on depressing disaster tropes. The mucky, ferociously fought struggles for a liveable world are teeming with stories: tender, loving, gut-wrenching, hilarious, twisted, and incandescent with rage. By leaning into this complexity, climate movies can become playgrounds for ideas—“imaginariums,” if you will—to help chart our course to a better future.

The US-based environmental nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is trying to supercharge Hollywood’s climate takes. Its Rewrite the Future initiative aims to “enlist the power of storytelling to help us turn the climate crisis around.” The program offers filmmakers support with legislative advocacy for climate, production tax incentives, writers’ room presentations, and more. In September, the NRDC partnered with entertainment industry groups to award US\$15,000 each (plus mentorships) to screenwriters working on climate justice stories.

Dorothy Fortenberry, a writer and producer on Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, spoke at an NRDC panel in February. “The most challenging, most important stories are ones where there are no easy fixes, but there are also no easy catastrophes,” she said. “Instead, what you show is the difficult and valiant work of communities congregating and finding common cause and organizing against the entrenched interests that want us to perceive ourselves as powerless.”

It’s a dogged kind of resistance we’ve seen play out in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The spirit and aesthetics of the on-screen rebellion by young women forced into reproductive slavery inspired women from Argentina to the UK to don handmaid costumes as part of real-life protests against the Trump administration and abortion bans.

Contrast that with HBO’s *Reminiscence*, which depicts residents of a future Miami escaping the despair of rising seas and blistering heat into a virtual reality of their own happier memories. Like Christopher Nolan’s mind-bending science-fiction film *Tenet*—in which the denizens of the future seek to escape climate disaster through time travel—*Reminiscence* tells us humanity’s best days are behind us.

Instead, the silver screen could galvanize people through stories of communities fighting tooth and nail for their futures. An example Hollywood could draw on? The 1996 disaster flick *Twister*. Inspired by actual American scientists, *Twister* pits a ragtag crew of university researchers against a sleek squad of corporate scientists in a race to collect atmospheric data to design better tornado warning systems that could save lives.

But good cli-fi storytelling needs more than scrappiness. To be relevant, the genre will need to reckon with its own #OscarsSoWhite tendencies. Inclusive casting is inching up, but rarely does cli-fi centre worldviews outside White, middle-class America’s imagination. A welcome exception will be the upcoming adaptation of Black feminist sci-fi trailblazer Octavia Butler’s environmental dystopia *Parable of the Sower*.

University of Manitoba film professor Dr. Hee-Jung Serenity Joo points out that racialized people tend to enter the frame only at the end of the world, like when the White protagonists in *The Day After Tomorrow* seek refuge in Mexico. Busying itself with disasters affecting White heroes, cli-fi “racializ[es] the Anthropocene by depicting the end of the white world as the end of the world,” she explains in a 2018 article for *Environment and Planning*.

This is a missed opportunity to make sense of both resistance and apocalypse, since colonized peoples have already lived through the end of the world as they knew it. “We’ve survived genocide. We’ve survived

ice ages,” says Mark Tilsen, an Oglala Lakota poet and educator with the Indigenous-led NDN Collective in the US. “This is not our first rodeo. This is not our first apocalypse.”

Tilsen, joined by other young Indigenous leaders, was speaking on a virtual panel about Indigenous storytelling methodologies at September’s Hollywood Climate Summit. For him, impactful storytelling

**Losing our imagination is a symptom of trauma. Finding our way back to it is a healing act.**

means seeding “narratives that are unabashedly radical and revolutionary,” ones that don’t flinch away from the notion that people can unite to create lasting anti-capitalist change.

The early episodes of the hacktivist thriller series *Mr. Robot* are a great example, he says. Tilsen saw the series galvanize youth around him to organize against digital surveillance (though he was disappointed the series watered down this theme in later episodes).

Climate change can also be a compelling backdrop—like in *Parasite*, in which the fictional Kim family’s *banjiha* (semi-basement apartment) floods, underscoring the environmental precarity of the poor. In the 2019 raunchy rom-com *The Long Shot*, Seth Rogen stars as a lefty journalist wooed by an American Secretary of State (Charlize Theron) and her diplomatic gambit to save “bees, trees, and seas.”

“I think any story can and probably should be a climate change story,” said *Handmaid’s Tale* writer Fortenberry at another NRDC-led virtual panel at the 2021 Sundance film festival.

Climate change is part of the fabric of our reality now. How will it shape the stories we tell about nature and our relationship to it? What could a political

thriller with a climate emergency backdrop involve? How might plots take on fossil fuel producers?

Among the 70 or so cli-fi movies Yale University researchers say were produced in the past 30 years, many leave the reason for the withering of the world ambiguous. Blame is lazily assigned to “humanity” or overpopulation (think *Avengers: Infinity War* or *Downsizing*). Not only is this a missed opportunity for provocative storytelling, but it holds back crucial mindset shifts. A problem without a clear cause breeds apathy, since there is little we can do about it.

So, let’s give whistleblowers on the oil and gas industry the full *Erin Brockovich* treatment. Reboot *Thank you for Smoking* as a dark comedy about Big Oil’s shills. Channel *The Trial of the Chicago 7* vibes with stories of badass activists and land defenders fighting legal cases against extractive industries and the governments backing them.

“I wanna see a pilot of a bunch of young, Indigenous people counting coup on oil executives and holding trials for them,” says Tilsen. (“Counting coup” refers to the Lakota practice of shaming your enemy by being unafraid to get close enough to touch them without harming them.) “I’d watch that show. I’d watch it twice.” I’d watch it, too.

Cinematic stories about people coming into their own as political beings can help us map out our future en masse. A retreat of *cinema apocalyptica* would cede space for the movies we need here and now, giving us permission to dream that our best days are still to come.

“Losing our imagination is a symptom of trauma,” writes activist adrienne maree brown in her book *Emergent Strategy*. Finding our way back to it is a healing act.

Audaciously hopeful and subversive speculative stories are wormholes, transporting us to a better future lurking somewhere out in spacetime. In a world where capitalism and White supremacy have colonized the outer limits of what is deemed possible, this is not an escape. It’s a radical exercise of political imagination. **I**

**Jesse Firempong** is a writer and nonprofit communicator living on a rocky, mossy patch of Tla’amin traditional territory in BC. She lives with a rowdy bunch of humans and three sensible cats.



Photo by Sun Woo Baik



# The Asparagus Stand

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ENVIRONMENTALIST  
FROM WELL

YOUR COFFEE  
CUP MAKES  
ME HATE YOU

## MONETARY VALUES

# Babbling Brooklyn

An interactive texting tour helped me understand gentrification.

By **Jeremy Friedrichs**

On a drizzly, overcast afternoon in late August, I gear up to go for it.

*Getting there is gonna be annoying, I think to myself. And I'm going to get soaked.*

I'm from Vancouver, but I have lived in Brooklyn for almost a decade. Like most people I know, I rely on the train to get around. Usually that's fine, but getting from my home in the center of Brooklyn to Bushwick in the borough's northern

I've been to Bushwick a handful of times, but I never spent much time there. I don't know much about it other than the fact I've met many Latino individuals over the years that called Bushwick home. According to a 2019 study done by NYU's urban-policy focused Furman Center, over 56% of Bushwick's 127,000 residents identified as Hispanic.

*Textilandia* is a texting-based walking experience that shows participants the

experience is still available thanks to "Bushwick and the Beast," an episode of the podcast *Resistance*.)

For Jimenez—who moved to Bushwick from the Dominican Republic when he was 9 years old—*Taxilandia* and *Textilandia* are rooted in his struggles growing up in the neighborhood. He told the *Resistance* host, Saidu Tejan-Thomas, Jr., that "Erasure is happening to me and my peoples, and the only way I know how to talk is through my art. If not, we're gonna fight or some weird shit."

Jimenez told the Foundation for Contemporary Arts that, "As an artist, I feel my goal is to bring people together to start a dialogue over political and social issues critical to our community's growth." It was through this passionate desire—to help preserve his neighborhood's identity



Textilandia creator Flako Jimenez drives past murals in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

Photo by Maria Baranova-Suzuki

tip requires a jaunt on the L Train through Manhattan.

I'm off to Bushwick to partake in an interactive theater experience called *Textilandia*, described on its website as "[immersing] its audience in the flavors, sounds, sights and dynamic history of a neighborhood confronting social stigmas and the realities of gentrification." My goals in seeking out this experience? Try something new, learn about an historic neighborhood, and get out of my comfort zone.

neighborhood through the eyes of creator Modesto Flako Jimenez, who grew up there. Jimenez is a multidisciplinary artist who drives a taxi to make ends meet between theater gigs. During April and May of this year, he drove small audiences around Bushwick in his cab in an intimate theater piece called *Taxilandia*.

I'm embarking on its offshoot, *Textilandia*, a text-message version that was available through September for those of us who didn't get to ride with Jimenez in person. (An audio taste of the taxi

and educate people about its legacy—that his immersive theater experiences were born.

*Textilandia* aims to capture both the past and the present of a changing neighborhood. And certainly, the neighborhood is changing as a result of gentrification. (Quick refresher: "Gentrification" is when an influx of middle-class and wealthy people enters a historically poor neighborhood, bringing with them building renovations, increased property values, and often increasingly unaffordable rents for long-time tenants.)



The Furman Center also found that between 2000 and 2019 the white population of Bushwick more than doubled, while the Latinx population declined from nearly 68% to just over 56%.

Though she isn't present with me on this stroll, that's something my friend Sharon Davila told me she noticed firsthand. Sharon is from Puerto Rico, but came to New York in 2015 for work. She found her first apartment in Bushwick. "I had just moved to the city, and it felt like home," she told me. "The barbershop with the bachata or the reggaeton [music]. It minimized the homesickness."

But things didn't stay like that for long. "It wasn't fully gentrified yet, the way that Downtown Brooklyn or Fort Greene is, but it was starting to happen. You could notice on Wyckoff Avenue that things were starting to bump up. Coffee shops, restaurants, bars. More and more bougie and expensive places started to pop up."

Eventually, she moved to Queens.

But while Sharon was looking for a taste of home in Bushwick, for Jimenez, Bushwick *was* home. This becomes apparent the minute I start the tour, which begins on a side street just off of one of the neighborhood's main drags, Knickerbocker Avenue.

I find the location via my free downloadable "ticket," which directs me to look for the sign with big letters at the listed address on a densely populated residential street similar to many others in the neighborhood.

I find the address and don't see a sign. I look up a floor. Nothing.

Then on the third level I see something. O Y E.

*Wait, is that it? That has to be it. Is that where he lives? Maybe.*

The directions instruct me to text that word to a listed number. This begins the flow of text messages which guide me along an approximately 35-minute stroll through some of Jimenez' old haunts in Bushwick.

Two doors down from the starting spot is a wall of vibrant murals featuring prominent Puerto Rican figures, including independence advocate Pedro Albizu Campos, baseball legend Roberto Clemente, and champion boxers and Bushwick natives, sisters Amanda and Cindy Serrano.

Murals are such a central part of Puerto Rican culture and identity. Damaly Gonzalez wrote on *HipLatina.com*, "Murals

are an important form of art accessible to people who usually wouldn't go to museums. Not only are they necessary, but they also dismantle the idea that art is exclusive." To me, this wall stands out as a clear beacon of the neighborhood's deep connection to Puerto Rico.

*Textilandia* directs me to various destinations while Jimenez offers memories tied to those locales. I can't remember ever having done anything like this before, and juggling my phone, notebook, and quickly-running-out-of-ink pen while trying to read the directions makes for an extra layer of stimulation.

*Hey, at least it isn't raining anymore.*

One of the first stops is the Hope Gardens housing project, which Jimenez notes as an important symbol of white flight (the gradual departure of white populations from urban centers as they become more racially diverse). It happened here in the 1970s

**Erasure is happening to me and my peoples, and the only way I know how to talk is through my art.**

and 1980s, when many of the neighborhood's German and Italian residents moved north to Ridgewood, across the Queens border, or decamped to the suburbs.

The texts I receive point out that these apartments were constructed after the devastating fires of 1977, which torched a large portion of the neighborhood and put a national spotlight on the plight of one of the city's poorest areas at the time.

The fires—a result of insurance-fraud-spurred arson and electrical fires in unmaintained buildings—also resulted in looting and a widespread blackout.

A few blocks down, I'm told to stop at the Santa Barbara Roman Catholic Church. The Baroque-style building, which is currently covered in scaffolding, was originally built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to serve the neighborhood's German population. However, by the 1960s, it was largely attended by the growing Hispanic population.

Jimenez notes that I should pay close attention to the adjoining building, which

houses *El Puente* (The Bridge) after-school program. He mentions that this was a crucial place for him and other youth in the neighborhood. Homework, snacks, resumé-building, and a safe alternative from the perils of the street were on offer.

*Cool name, I decide. Very apt.*

Along the walk, Jimenez frequently advises me to use all my senses.

"Breathe it in."

"Close your eyes."

"What do you smell?"

"What do you hear?"

At that point, it is mainly cars driving over wet streets. This is an unfamiliar way to learn about and appreciate a neighborhood. But my guide is clearly so passionate about it, and I am starting to pick up on his rhythm and hints. I start listening a little more closely.

I'd heard the term "gentrification" many times. Maybe I'll never be able to fully internalize it, but at least now I have some stronger reference points and visualizations.

One thing I notice on nearly every block is some variety of Spanish-language music or radio blaring out of a car or window. And I mean every block.

Whether it is due to the dreary weather, or the lingering impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the streets are fairly unpopulated today. The unmistakable pulse of reggaeton and salsa wafting out of the closely packed buildings helps to balance that out a little.

The rest of the stroll highlights a handful of other notable spots for Jimenez and the community: where he got his first job; where he would grab a haircut; where the local dope-slangers would hide their stashes.

I think it may be impossible for a non-native New Yorker to fully comprehend the impact of gentrification, but Jimenez's unique creation certainly helped me get closer.

"I wrote these *letras* for us," Jimenez texts near the end of the tour, "to journey into the past and see the flaws and resilience of the people. Step in the concrete, peep the traces fighting to survive this beast!"

As I head for the L train, I look around and listen for the bachata once more.

*Hey, the sun's out!* }

**Jeremy Friedrichs** is a Vancouver-born, NYC-living educator.

## NATURAL HISTORY

# As the World Burns

A cycle of poems written in the glow of the embers of 2021's heat dome.

By **Anjalica Solomon**

## I May Not Even Have a Decade to Write this Poem

Hands of the climate clock  
grip me firmly

saying *seven years left*  
to do something.

A summer of wildfires comes  
stealing the evergreen from our eyes,

billowing smoke over the city  
making outside—  
unbreathable.

Oil is spilled into the ocean  
spoiling the feathers of a loon.

Trees older than this country are  
cut down and carried away  
whispering *time for change*.

A dying planet sighs—  
the way my grandfather  
took his last breath,  
cutting a forest clear in me.

## Lytton

A whole is town engulfed  
in the flaming tongue of  
climate change.

What caused it?

Could have been anything.  
The smallest spark  
from the wheel  
of a train.

A gender  
reveal party.

A hundred eyes  
officially looking away.

Illustration by Itzel Bazerque Patrick





## With Our Home Up in Flames

We raced barefoot onto grass calling,

*Someone! Help!  
Put out this nightmare!*

Our small sanctuary crumbled under the heat changing the shape of our lives before us.

We had to hold our breath when we crawled through the window to pull each precious photograph, instrument, party dress, and sliver of hope out of rubble and ash.

We just took whatever we could hold, wiped off the residue of destruction washed out the smoke and walked gently into a new beginning.

Illustration by Itzel Bazerque Patrich



## Summer After the Fire

We took shelter in the deep old green.  
Running through the cottonwood and swinging under the vine maple.  
Finding joy wherever life abounded.

We found a tree swing and pendulumed spinning and growing giddy with laughter.

We washed off the soot in the ocean.  
Where we prayed for ease, rest and comfort.

We slept on mossy logs.  
We sang  
*let there be life.*

We grew roots, resilient as dandelions and made friends with the ancient spirit of the trees.

**Anjalica Solomon** is a gender-fluid Desi poet, spoken word artist, organizer, and multi-disciplinary performer based in what is colonially known as Vancouver, BC, on the stolen and unsundered territories of the Coast Salish, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam nations.

Born during her Argentine parents' political exile, freelance illustrator **Itzel Bazerque Patrich** moved to Canada as a baby and grew up inspired by the Latinx community in Vancouver. She now works and lives with her young family in Spain.

# MUSIC TO GREEN EARS



Story by Imari Scarbrough  
Illustrations by Doan Truong

## At the Protest

Seagulls gasp  
fire alarms ring  
young people  
on the street sing,

*How can we love a house on fire?*

Cars drive away  
fearing the flame  
in the rearview mirror.

The same ocean that  
renews my trembling spirit  
becomes a swirling horrific  
sight of waste.

Where northern flickers nest,  
we form circles sometimes  
12 arms' length wide

We do not leave the forest.  
We huddle around the holy fire  
blocking traffic and singing,

*We will not let our house burn down.*

Guitars are traditionally made from "tonewoods."  
Their growing scarcity has some luthiers and  
researchers looking for other options.



TO THE UNTRAINED EYE, a pile of logs or slab of wood might appear uninspiring, lifeless. To a luthier, they can hold the key to music yet unplayed. An instrument-builder can look at this raw material and see the finished product: carefully joined wood, polished surfaces, and stretched strings ready to come to life in a guitarist's hands.

Guitars can be a tangible journey, connecting disparate parts of the globe all in one instrument: a fretboard of dark ebony from Cameroon, a soundboard of golden Sitka spruce from Alaska, a body of ruddy sapele from Ghana. Musicians treasure their instruments for cultural, spiritual, and artistic reasons, but may not know the ecological stories built into their prized possessions.

For centuries, luthiers have selected "tonewoods" like spruce and rosewood for their acoustic properties. But some tonewood species have become vulnerable, making them harder to source for those who wish to work with them, and causing others to question whether it's ethical to do so. Faced with these challenges, environmentalists, researchers, and luthiers alike are seeking ways to make instruments whose materials and ecological bonafides both ring true.

## Worrying overtones

Every continent with forests produces tonewoods, which include: Sitka and red spruce; mahogany; Malagasy, Brazilian, and Indian rosewoods; maple; ebony; and koa. An article on guitar manufacturer Fender's website describes woods on this list as having tones that are "punchy," "transparent," "powerful," "rich," and "sparkly."

While instrument-making uses only a tiny proportion of harvested wood, luthiers are increasingly concerned about the sustainability and ethics of using certain tonewoods. Sitka spruce, for example, is one of the most popular woods in guitar-making, valued for its sound and durability. But the ideal Sitka for guitars is at least 400 years old, and logging old-growth forests is controversial, even if the species being logged isn't endangered.

Let's pause briefly to discuss endangered species. This article refers to two resources that assess whether a species is threatened. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and

Flora (CITES) is an international treaty whose "aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species." There are three CITES appendices, each for species under different levels of threat: Appendix I, "threatened with extinction"; Appendix II, "not necessarily threatened with extinction" but still in need of protection; and Appendix III "protected in at least one country." The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species marks species as being of the "least concern," "near threatened," "vulnerable," "endangered," "extinct in the wild," and "extinct," if it has data about them.



**It may be that using old-growth Sitka spruce is no longer justifiable.**



So, back to Sitka spruce. It isn't listed in CITES and is rated of "least concern" on the Red List, but there are plenty of arguments against logging 400-year-old trees. "Guitar industry figures are coming to grips with the ethics of using old-growth Sitka, and it may be that the line is looming where it is no longer justifiable," Dr. Chris Gibson wrote in an email. Along with Dr. Andrew Warren, a colleague at Australia's University of Wollongong, Gibson wrote *The Guitar: Tracing the Grain Back to the Tree*, published earlier this year. To research the book, Gibson and Warren conducted interviews and visited forests on five continents over six years.

"Burdening guitar makers with the entire ethical burden for Sitka's future is unfair," continued Gibson, who has no relation to the guitar-making Gibson family. He pointed out many factors can be considered when deciding whether using a particular species is ethical: threats to the species, but also First Nations' rights, biodiversity loss, and the purpose it's being used for.

"It is a tragedy to see wood from 400-year-old trees being made into budget guitars that aren't playable and won't last, simply because large scale offshore manufacturers use their market power to leverage down

prices with timber suppliers," Gibson wrote. "But at the same time, the guitar industry is a tiny player compared with industrial forestry, monocultural plantations, and most other timber-dependent industries."

Another controversial tonewood is ebony, prized by luthiers as a material for fingerboards. There are over 700 species of *Diospyros*, and only a few have solid black heartwood. It has been threatened due to illegal logging, agriculture and other factors. Madagascar banned exports of both ebony and rosewood (genus *Dalbergia*) in 2010.

In 2013, all *Diospyros* and *Dalbergia* from Madagascar were listed in Appendix II of CITES, helping to shelter them. In 2019, the CITES standing committee recommended continuing a trade suspension on Malagasy rosewoods and ebonies it first instituted in 2013. The committee also asked Madagascar to take more action against illegal logging.

"Shortages of rosewood and CITES controversies in the guitar industry are the tail end of an ongoing, uninterrupted process of colonization, urbanization and development," Gibson and Warren wrote in *The Guitar*. They also pointed to the Chinese market for rosewood furniture as a factor in its disappearance.

Brazilian rosewood (*Dalbergia nigra*) is treasured for guitar-making, but the IUCN Red List marks the species as "vulnerable" due to logging and deforestation. ("Vulnerable" species "have a high risk of extinction in the wild.") The species is also listed in Appendix I of CITES.

The largest guitar manufacturers have largely switched from Brazilian rosewood to Indian rosewood due to declining supply and quality, according to Gibson and Warren. But Indian rosewood (*Dalbergia latifolia*), is also listed as "vulnerable" by the IUCN.

"The possibility that Brazilian rosewood could one day return as a factory guitar species seems forever gone," wrote Gibson and Warren. "Grieving for losses and past mistakes will be necessary."

Beyond conservation issues, harvesting trees valued as tonewoods can cause human rights concerns, according to Rolf Skar, a special projects manager with Greenpeace USA.

Skar compared certain woods to "blood diamonds," saying that because of their value, unethical harvesting can lead to deforestation, damage to land belonging to Indigenous peoples, and supporting

dictatorships. The amount harvested doesn't always fully represent the problem, he said, since the "first cut can be pretty deep."

"It's the thing that starts the domino effect of full deforestation, and human rights abuses, and land-grabbing in these places, because of the high value."

## Concerted efforts

Given the downsides of using traditional tonewoods, environmentalist groups, guitar manufacturers, and academics are all involved in exploring alternatives. An early effort in this direction was Greenpeace's Music Wood campaign. In 2007, the nonprofit partnered with major guitar manufacturers like Fender, Martin, Gibson, and Taylor to encourage the Sealaska logging corporation to seek Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for forests where Sitka spruce are harvested.

The manufacturers were interested in protecting future wood supplies. Skar gave the example of Martin Guitars (founded in 1833). "They started experiencing something they hadn't seen before: 'We can't get that wood like we used to. What's going on?'"

While the campaign didn't achieve its goal, Skar says the partnership created

opportunities for conversations with forestry interests that wouldn't have happened without the guitar companies. It helped Greenpeace understand the companies' tonewood needs, and created a foundation for future collaborations among instrument companies.

Some more recent efforts have focused on planting new trees rather than reforming logging practices. Pacific Rim Tonewoods (PRT)—a sawmill in Concrete, WA—is working with Taylor Guitars to plant koa in Hawaii. "We're making that forest from what is now a grassland, from what was 150 to 200 years ago the biggest koa forest in Hawaii," said PRT founder Steve McMinn



"It's not reforestation at this point because there's no remnant of the original forest in the soil." Koa isn't listed in CITES, and is deemed of "least concern" by the IUCN, but McMinn and Taylor want to ensure a long-term source for the wood.

PRT also started the 100 Figured Maples Project to create genetic lines of fast-growing big-leaf maple trees that have favored figuring



—ripples and waves in the wood grain—for use as the back and side pieces of guitars. The project is early in its development, and admittedly not critical to the industry as other woods are available. But McMinn said it could help both luthiers and local forests.

He explains that this native maple species has often been eliminated from working forests in the Pacific Northwest in favor of lumber species like Douglas fir. And while they're not currently classed as endangered, recent studies show they're threatened by climate change. "If you can make a reason for re-introducing it and you can make it valuable to grow maple," McMinn explained, "you start making a good argument for re-enriching, for re-invigorating, the diversity of the local forest."

Another effort, Taylor Guitars' Ebony Project, is working to grow and sustainably harvest ebony, while also changing minds about using marbled ebony, which contains natural streaking and variations in color. According to the company's website, co-founder Bob Taylor realized a large amount of ebony was wasted if it wasn't the pure black traditionally used for instruments. He committed to using marbled ebony in order to reduce waste. The company also now co-owns an ebony mill in Cameroon and works to replant ebony there. Taylor switched to sourcing from Cameroon after realizing illegal logging and sustainability issues plagued ebony from Madagascar, even before exports were halted.

Greenpeace's Skar said tonewoods can be sustainably harvested, but there must be restraint. Using old-growth Sitka spruce as an example, he suggested it could still be carefully used if properly valued and thoughtfully cut. "You can make soundboards for cellos and everything else for a long time to come," he said. "As long as you live within the limits ... and you're more selective."

## Toning it down

A 2018 study published in the *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* found that the type of wood used for the back and sides of a guitar may not make a large difference in sound quality. Part of the study tested six instruments built with backs and sides made from different woods, some rare and highly valued (Brazilian rosewood, Indian rosewood, and Honduran mahogany), others "less well regarded" and more widely available (North American maple, claro





walnut, and sapele—which is rated “vulnerable” by the IUCN but not listed by CITES). All had Sitka spruce soundboards, the top piece of the instrument PRT’s McMinn calls “the engine of the guitar.”

For the study, 52 guitarists were given the different instruments to play. To prevent them from visually identifying the woods, they wore goggles and played in a dark room. Afterwards, the guitarists assigned “very similar” ratings for each instrument’s sound quality.

In a press release, one study author—Lancaster University’s Dr. Christopher Plack—summarized its findings: “Overall our results suggest that the back wood has a negligible effect on the sound quality and playability of an acoustic guitar, and that cheaper and sustainable woods can be used as substitutes of expensive and endangered woods without loss of sound quality.”

## To aluminum and beyond

Some luthiers are avoiding wood altogether and exploring materials ranging from aluminum to linen to carbon fiber.

Aluminati Guitar Company in Asheville, NC, makes guitars from aluminum and lucite. James Little, Aluminati’s CEO, began the company in 2009 to spread the love of aluminum guitars he first developed on a friend’s 1970s Travis Bean model. “It was a little hard to play,” he said, “but something about the sound—it hooked me in.”

Unlike the prohibitively heavy aluminum guitars of the past, Little’s models benefit from new technology that allows him to build instruments that are at least as light as their wooden counterparts.

While Little appreciates their sound, he also values their longevity. Aluminati

instruments are largely made from recycled materials, and don’t need to be tuned or maintained as frequently as wooden guitars, he said. They can also be recycled rather than trashed. (Repairs to broken, cracked, or warped wooden instruments can become expensive.) Waste material from Aluminati production is sent back to the Alcoa Corporation for recycling as well.

They’re expensive, though, ranging from US\$2,899 to US\$5,700. Decent entry-level wooden guitars can start as low as US\$149, though prices do increase significantly from there. Gibson’s electric guitars range from US\$1,000 to US\$3,999, with custom instruments listed up to US\$9,999.

San Francisco-based Blackbird Guitars has created Eko, a composite material made from linen fiber and resin derived from industrial waste, which it touts as an environmentally friendly and durable alternative to wood. “It is lighter than carbon fiber, stiffer than fiberglass and makes a better soundboard than spruce because of its superior stiffness-to-weight values,” the company states on its website. Guitars made from it retail for about US\$3,000 to US\$4,000.

Another company, KLOS, uses carbon fiber in its designs. Typically derived from fossil fuels and difficult to recycle, carbon fiber isn’t an obvious environmental choice (though in future it may be made from algae). The current argument in its favor is its incredible durability, reducing the need for musicians to replace their instruments.

Carbon fiber guitars stay in tune longer, have more consistent tone, and are less prone to damage, according to KLOS. On its website, the company shows a carbon fiber ukulele surviving being run over by a Prius. (It is afterwards crushed by a heavier Toyota 4Runner.) They’re also cheaper than the previous examples, with a travel-sized instrument priced at US\$839.

KLOS makes a controversial claim: “Wood guitars had their place for a couple hundred years, but the times have changed.”

Wood is still the traditional favorite among guitar-buyers, but *Guitar*-author Gibson said consumers are becoming receptive to alternatives if they’re well-made.

“The traditionalists will likely insist on ‘classic’ woods, and frankly, most players believe that you need wood rather than synthetic materials,” said Gibson. “But the market is opening up for alternative materials. Some of that demand for alternatives

will be driven by environmental concern. But a lot of it will be driven by other factors such as playability, maintenance, and sound.” Alternative instruments must be affordable to gain popularity and be accessible to children and those with limited budgets, he added.

## The traditionalists will likely insist on “classic” woods. But the market is opening up for alternative materials.

With consumers interested in sustainably made instruments, and non-traditional materials rising in popularity, Aluminati’s Little sees other companies looking at their options. “More and more companies are starting to get on board with building sustainable instruments and using different materials other than wood,” he said.

## Solo efforts

Buying new instruments made from alternative woods or materials isn’t the only way individual musicians can help effect change. Shopping for quality used instruments, or repairing old ones are also good ideas.

“Encourage the small industry that does repairs and refurbishing of instruments,” Greenpeace’s Skar suggested. “That can go a long way.” Consumers buying new instruments can look for those made with FSC-certified wood, he added.

Sawmill-owner McMinn suggested consumers can purchase guitars made by manufacturers interested in ethical and sustainable practices.

Ultimately, author Gibson feels the question of sustainability in guitars will be answered in a variety of ways: “Use of more plentiful plantation timbers, use of local, native and urban trees, careful salvaging, and composite and manufactured materials such as laminates, carbon fiber and metals are all part of the mix,” he said. “Like many other industries, the guitar

industry is gradually becoming a kaleidoscope of niches rather than an oligopoly dominated by a small number of companies and standard designs.”

Customers can also let companies know they want ethically harvested materials used in their instruments. Skar recommended musicians reach out to manufacturers through their customer service lines to ask about environmentally friendly options with questions like “Where is this wood coming from? ... What can you tell me about the sourcing of this wood, and how do I know it’s free of human rights abuses?”

Even though customers might feel too small to cause change, Skar said the pressure can add up. The more manufacturers are asked about their wood, he said, “the more they’ll realize their customers care.” }

*Imari Scarbrough has been a freelance journalist since 2017. Prior to freelancing, she was a staff reporter at a weekly newspaper.*

*Doan Truong is a Vietnamese illustrator and printmaker based in Vancouver, BC. Her work focuses on immigrants, refugees and the lack of freedom of expression in her motherland.*

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## People need affordable housing and people need art. In Vancouver, these needs are competing for real estate, and it's putting a beloved institution at risk.

EVERY THURSDAY NIGHT for nearly 10 years, Ross Dauk has walked to the corner of 26<sup>th</sup> and Main Street in Vancouver, BC, and set out a sandwich board that reads “Jokes Please.” The sign has a big white arrow pointing toward Little Mountain Gallery—a nonprofit comedy venue you might miss if not for the sign.

Little Mountain Gallery (LMG) is housed in a former auto shop, now painted bright orange, and tucked on a side street that quickly turns into residential housing. This Thursday, like most, there's a line of people waiting to get in. Those in the lineup may be here to laugh, but there's an issue casting a shadow on the stage. The building has been approved for redevelopment, and the landlord is evicting the performers to make way for apartments. After tonight, there are only a few weeks left for Dauk and others to put on shows in the tiny but cherished community arts space.

“I love Little Mountain Gallery, and I love Jokes Please, and I love standup comedy in general,” says Dauk. This has been what he describes as his “home comedy club” for the past decade. It's been a place where he and other comedians can take risks, build their own audiences, and develop their art.

Fellow comedians and best friends Abdul Aziz, 32, and Brent Constantine, 36—who both play key roles at LMG—have been working hard to find an affordable new space for the comedy club. After two years of searching, they're still empty-handed.

It's possible, they say, that the organization will fold if they don't find a new space. “We're really worried that if LMG doesn't exist, if there isn't a hub for comedians, we'll see a deterioration

of the art form in the city quite quickly,” says Aziz, LMG's operations executive.

The urgency to save LMG comes at a moment when comedians are still feeling the impacts of Covid-19 restrictions, and several comedy venues in Vancouver have closed. In April 2019, the Comedy Mix, a major venue, closed its doors. Then it was the local Yuk Yuk's, and most recently the Kino Cafe, a bar that frequently hosted comedy shows. “This is the last permanent comedy venue in the city,” says Aziz. There are other spaces that focus on improv, but for standup comedy this is it.

LMG closing for good would mean that standup comedy would exist primarily in bars, explains Dauk. “Regular patrons are going to be there, not for comedy, just there at a bar. And obviously those venues can be great, but it's just a different thing.”

### Lack of arts spaces

As a nonprofit, LMG's mandate is to provide a financially accessible space for comedy to happen—whether it's classes for amateurs, or professionals performing live. Comedians can rent out and host a show in the space for C\$150 (about US\$120), and admission price is capped at C\$15 (about US\$12). Any money from ticket sales and the bar goes straight to the comedians. Ultimately, the goal is to create an appetite for the art form, while giving comedians a way to sustainably earn money from their work.

Rent on their current space, which seats up to 90 people, is quite low at only C\$2,300 (about US\$1,800) per month. But the market has become pricier, and a new space will cost them at least



To have a developer be like,  
“Let's use this coolness  
to give me more money,”  
feels really bad.



Abdul Aziz stands outside Little Mountain Gallery. The “Comedy Community Centre” has occupied this former auto shop for over 10 years.

double, Aziz says. And they will need to renovate and get new permits if they are to create a sustainable live comedy venue.

There's a serious lack of available arts space in Vancouver, explains Alix Sales, head of cultural infrastructure for the City of Vancouver. “It's just like the housing affordability crisis,” says Sales. “It's a huge challenge.”

The crisis of affordable arts space is backed up by data. In a one-year period, 16 studios in industrial spaces, accommodating approximately 300 artists, either closed or were at risk of closing due to increasing property taxes, rental costs, and development pressures. A report by the non-profit Eastside Arts Society found that about 37,000 square metres of artist studio space had been lost in a 10-year period. It also describes how landlords welcome artist tenants in their old and poorly maintained buildings, and then evict them as soon as developers express interest.

“Most arts groups are in old buildings because they're affordable,” explains Sales. “You always have gentrification within cities, and in Vancouver it's astronomical.” LMG is a textbook example. The venue has been on a month-to-month lease for about 20 years. When it registered as a non-profit five years ago, the comedians renovated the former auto shop themselves, insulating the space and adding a stage and bar.

“Everyone's put a lot of themselves into it,” says Aziz. On any given night you can find award-winning comedians, folks who have Netflix specials, Juno awards, regular sets on CBC shows, and more. “If this space goes away, comedy in this city will take a real hit,” says Aziz.

### Competing priorities

Housing affordability is arguably the most pressing issue in Vancouver, and the city has implemented myriad policies to try to address it. But, much like with housing, the cost of commercial and industrial real estate has skyrocketed here. Many of the city's independent arts and culture hubs operate out of commercial and industrial spaces, and are vulnerable to rapidly increasing land values and redevelopment. “It's an affordability crisis for arts and culture,” says Sales.

After the comedians are out, the LMG building will be knocked down and a four-storey mixed-use building will go up in its stead. Within that building, there will be 10 secured market-rate rental apartments. “There's competing priorities,” says Constantine, LMG's executive director. “We all want more housing, we all want to make safe cultural spaces. So when the two come into conflict, I mean, what is the ultimate good there?”

# WATCH THIS SPACE

Story by LINDSAY SAMPLE

Photos by SUN WOO BAIK





Vancouver's mural festival—with its own complex relationship to affordability—works in 11 neighbourhoods. Cas Nahui's Huey Tonantzin Tlalli Coatlicue graces the River District.

Aziz and Constantine point to Hot Art Wet City, a former art gallery and comedy venue about 20 blocks north of LMG on Main Street. The venue was evicted to make way for condos. When it was announced in 2017, the building proposed for the location was branded Main Street Arts, in tribute to the Vancouver Mural Festival that originated in the neighbourhood.

The mural festival itself has been a lightning rod for debate. Critics denounce festival organizers for accepting funding from major condo developers, only to pay artists to make neighbourhoods more appealing to wealthier people. But supporters of the festival say artists should have well-paid opportunities to showcase their work, and argue that developers play an important role in increasing the city's housing supply.

"I don't know what's good and what's bad," says Aziz. "I do know how it feels to have a developer come in and use the cultural foundation that you've built over 20 years of doing your art, to then be like, 'Yeah, let's use this coolness to give me more money.' That feels really bad."

Aziz and Constantine are open to talking with developers or anyone else who might have a lead on a new space. They've met with local and provincial government officials, developers, and other arts organizations. Constantine, who was the driving force behind turning LMG into a nonprofit, even did a master's in urban planning motivated, in part, by what was happening with the venue.

They've found a number of places that seemed promising, but between accessibility, zoning bylaws, code issues, and affordability, nothing has come to fruition. "If we find another space, it will be through grit and luck," Aziz says.

### End of an era

The City of Vancouver currently has a 10-year plan for the arts. Its vision is to make space for arts and culture, prevent displacement, and support "affordable, accessible, secure spaces." The goal is to have no net loss of arts space. "We need to know when a development permit comes up and someone's going to be renovicted. And then we need to say 'Why and how do we fix it?'" says the City's Sales.

**Lindsay Sample** is a journalist working in x'məθkwəyərɪ, Skwxwú7mesh, and Salilwataʔ territory. She's an editor at the Discourse and IndigiNews, where she's committed to making the journalism industry more equitable and sustainable.

**Sun Woo Baik** (he/him) is a photographer and writer based in Vancouver, BC, on unceded Coast Salish territories.

Her small team is working on planning and policy so these issues don't continue to come up in the future, but it's hard to support everyone who needs help now. "For groups losing their space, we do what we can, but we don't have a lot of time to work with them because we're working on long-term planning," says Sales. Among those long-term goals is making it easier for arts organizations to own their venues.

But, the team is still trying to help LMG. Sales recognizes that comedy is under-resourced in Vancouver and, all things considered, the size of space they need is quite small.

As part of LMG's efforts to keep their doors open, they received a C\$11,000 grant (about US\$8,700) from the city in 2019 to support space planning. They now have a 97-page document that outlines their exact needs. There's the dreamy "full-scale" version that's about 300 square metres, has two performance spaces and a licensed bar, allowing LMG to grow and meet the ever-increasing demand for affordable space for artists. Or there's the "modest" approach, which would have one performance space and require about 115 square metres. "We have a very good idea of what we need to be sustainable and exist for a long time," says Aziz.

Both comedians say they know more about zoning requirements and liquor licensing than they ever wanted to. "This feels like it shouldn't be us that is doing this, it should be someone else that has this responsibility," says Aziz.

"I inherited this as a curse," jokes Constantine, who took over running LMG six years ago. He and Aziz continue to volunteer their time to find a new space out of their love for comedy.

"It's tough to start a whole venue. And it's also very tough to start a show somewhere from scratch," Constantine says. "The

work people have done to get people out to their shows week after week is something I feel responsible for. I don't want these people that have done all this work to lose what they've done."

Until the end of December, LMG will continue to be a place for comedians to run their shows. Their fundraising efforts include an eviction party, a GoFundMe, and limited edition t-shirts. "Give us money and give us a venue and we promise that we won't waste most of it," says Constantine.

Whether they find a new venue or not, the last shows in this comedy community centre are imminent. Aziz says he's hardly had time to consider how he'll feel when their time in that space is up. "[LMG] makes a tapestry of what comedy is in the city. And losing it ... it'll feel like losing a part of that history."

Thinking about his last Jokes Please show at the venue, Dauk says he's rotating between nostalgia, gratitude and heartbreak. "I'm trying to enjoy every show to the maximum while also having to navigate that my life is about to be turned upside down." }

I don't want these people that have done all this work to lose what they've done.



Constantine and Aziz share a laugh at Little Mountain Gallery.





REUSE  
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Words & crafts by  
**Tharapim Rehe**

## Moments of Paper Zen

Making baskets from unwanted paper gives me relief from a busy day.

It has always bothered me how much paper is wasted and thrown away. Even if we recycle it, there's a long process of collecting, sorting, shredding, and de-inking before it's made into new paper. All of which requires energy, labor, and resources. Ultimately, it's best to reuse materials when we can.

Much of my life, I've done my best to reuse and recycle. As a teen, I made woven and coiled paper baskets for a school project and was able to sell them. I've resumed the hobby now that I have children. I create paper baskets in my small amount of spare time, while my two toddlers are asleep. Crafting is my way of recuperating from a busy day of screaming kids and household chores.

With an endless supply of junk mail, I thought I'd try selling the art I make out of unwanted paper, and last year started an Etsy store called PaperZen Designs. I use magazines, newspapers, catalogs, junk mail, paper bags, or any other paper I have around.

I don't dye my paper. Instead, I use its original colors to create a piece that evokes the paper's original purpose. My baskets are eye-catching and functional, while reminding those who see them about the importance of reuse and conservation.

Since I started selling baskets, I also work with donated magazines and newspapers from my neighbors. I believe my efforts make a small-scale impact, and hope they inspire a mindset of collective saving and reusing.

Making these baskets is inexpensive—the materials I use other than paper are all things I have on hand for my kids' crafts. The biggest investment I make into a piece is time, which is worth investing because this is what I love to do.

You will need these to begin:

- Old magazines or newspapers
- Box cutter
- Wooden skewer
- Small rolling pin or other cylinder
- White glue, like Elmer's
- Bowl or container to use as a form for your project
- Waterproof glue, like Gorilla Clear Grip
- Dishwasher-safe découpage medium, like Mod Podge
- Paint brush

- 1 Stack 3 or 4 sheets of your paper and cut it with a box cutter into strips that are about 2.5-3.5 cm (1-1.5") wide. If I'm working with thicker paper, like junk mail, I cut narrower strips. For lighter-weight magazine paper, I cut wider strips.
- 2 Roll the strip of paper around a wooden skewer in order to make a uniform tube. Make sure the side of the paper with the color you want to show faces outward. You can also roll the tubes free-hand if you prefer.
- 3 Use a cylindrical object like a glue stick to flatten out the tube. (I use a small rolling pin.) Then roll it into a coil, making it as tight as you can.
- 4 Glue the coil closed with white glue. Only use a touch of glue on the tip of the paper and hold it with your fingers for a few seconds. I usually make 10-20 coils before I start assembly. You can make different sized coils to add visual contrast to your basket.
- 5 Use a round container or a bowl as a form to shape your basket. Lay down some of the coils on your form, and when you're happy with how they're arranged, glue them together with white glue. Follow the shape of the form and continue adding coils until you complete your work. It's up to you how deep you want your basket to be.
- 6 Use waterproof glue to fill in the gaps between the coils. It makes the basket more secure and durable.
- 7 After the glue dries completely (which takes about two hours), take your project out of the form, and brush the whole thing with the dishwasher-safe découpage medium.
- 8 Allow it to dry for about an hour, until it's ready to for handling.

**Congratulations! You're now the proud owner of an eye-catching creation that shows your passion for waste-free living!**



*Tharapim Rehe's work is all about repurposing unwanted paper into beautiful and functional arts. She makes everything by hand, and loves creating one-of-a-kind functional artwork, which can be purchased online at [etsy.com/shop/PaperZenDesigns](https://etsy.com/shop/PaperZenDesigns).*

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