

DIE GREEN  
LIVE PRETTY?



# FOREWORD

There has been an unprecedented growth in private wealth in this country over the last few years. London is a pre-eminent financial centre, and much of this wealth has been generated through our financial institutions. This growth has also thankfully seen a renewed interest in the notion of philanthropy demonstrated by some sizeable donations and philanthropic gestures within the arts in recent years. This exhibition commissioned for a private home and articulating issues around the environmental debate is an example of how these new philanthropists work.

Deutsche Bank's corporate support of the arts has been significant, most notably in contemporary art: through our support of The Frieze Art Fair, and through our own collection. We do this because we believe art has a positive benefit for our staff as well as the wider world that we inhabit.

In recent years we have worked hard to encourage our staff to lend their own personal support to causes that they care passionately about. We are proud to be a pioneer in championing the importance of philanthropy and have worked closely with Arts & Business over the last three years, finding ways to signpost opportunities where individuals within Deutsche Bank can make a valuable difference.

Our aim now is to issue a rallying call to other leading institutions and individuals who believe as deeply as I do that philanthropy has an invaluable role in supporting the arts in this country. Culture House will provide a wonderful forum for those who care about the arts to develop their knowledge and have access to unique projects that deserve support. Culture House has an undoubtedly important contribution to make in building a culture of giving in this country.

The arts matter: they stir our emotions, provoke thought and help us make sense of the world, as this exhibition highlights with profound effect. In times of change and uncertainty they become more vital than ever. To survive, thrive and speak with a free voice the arts need the support of those who share that passion and belief. That is why philanthropy matters.

Lord Aldington

Chairman, Deutsche Bank AG London

**A&B**  
Arts & Business *working together*





# GLOBAL WARMING IS GOOD FOR YOU:

## AESTHETICS AND THE POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

There is no scientific consensus over the causes and long-term effects of global warming on our environment; nor is there any agreement that global warming exists as an unprecedented phenomenon. There *is* scientific consensus over the causes and long-term effects of global warming on our environment; and there *is* agreement that global warming is an unprecedented phenomenon. The fact that both of these sentences contain a 'truth', however relative we may consider each to be, discloses a categorical and deeply unsettling dilemma at the heart of any discussion on the subject of the environment and the impact of climate change. In truth, there is a significant degree of scientific consensus on the matter of climate change but there nonetheless remains a troubling level of confusion on the part of politicians, policy-makers, lobbyists, economists, journalists, and hence the public in general. And this is not just a case of abstract sophistry. On the contrary, it has very real consequences: shaping, for instance, government reports on climate change and annual corporate report to shareholders about future growth and market-share.

Before we go any further, it is worth noting the following: whatever has been said on the issue of global warming, environmental degradation, and climate change, there is one thing that is undisputable: the last 100 years has

seen an unprecedented sharp and sudden rise in the earth's temperature.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the lines have been drawn and the rhetoric unleashed. The question we must therefore address is simple: where does these often confused and confusing debates leave us in relation to what are obvious changes in the weather systems of the world? We alight here on what at first sight seems to be an unlikely correlation between the ambiguities and ambivalences underlining the arguments outlined above and the inherent ambiguity associated with contemporary artistic practices. In using the term ambiguity here, I am referring to the levels of doubt and uncertainty that attends any act of interpretation. However, whilst doubt over the interpretation of scientific fact is not necessarily something we should encourage, doubt (in the form of ambiguity) underwrites aesthetic practice insofar as it renders art open to different interpretations. And it is down to the fact that art cannot be reduced to definitive interpretations that it remains relevant across time and space. Art interprets, some would say reveals, the world to us; and in that moment artistic practice can be seen to be responsive to the broader socio-political, economic historical, cultural and environmental issues of our day.

In suggesting that artistic practice could be seen, indeed *should* be seen, as a viable means for both highlighting and negotiating the debates that underscore discussions about global warming, I am proposing that it offers a means of engagement with these issues that avoids the dogma associated with either side in the climate debate. There are nonetheless dangers that need to be addressed here, not least the imminent concern that artistic practice could be reduced to an instrumental form of propaganda. To this we could counter, perhaps grandiloquently, that all art is environmental inasmuch as it draws upon its surroundings, whether the latter

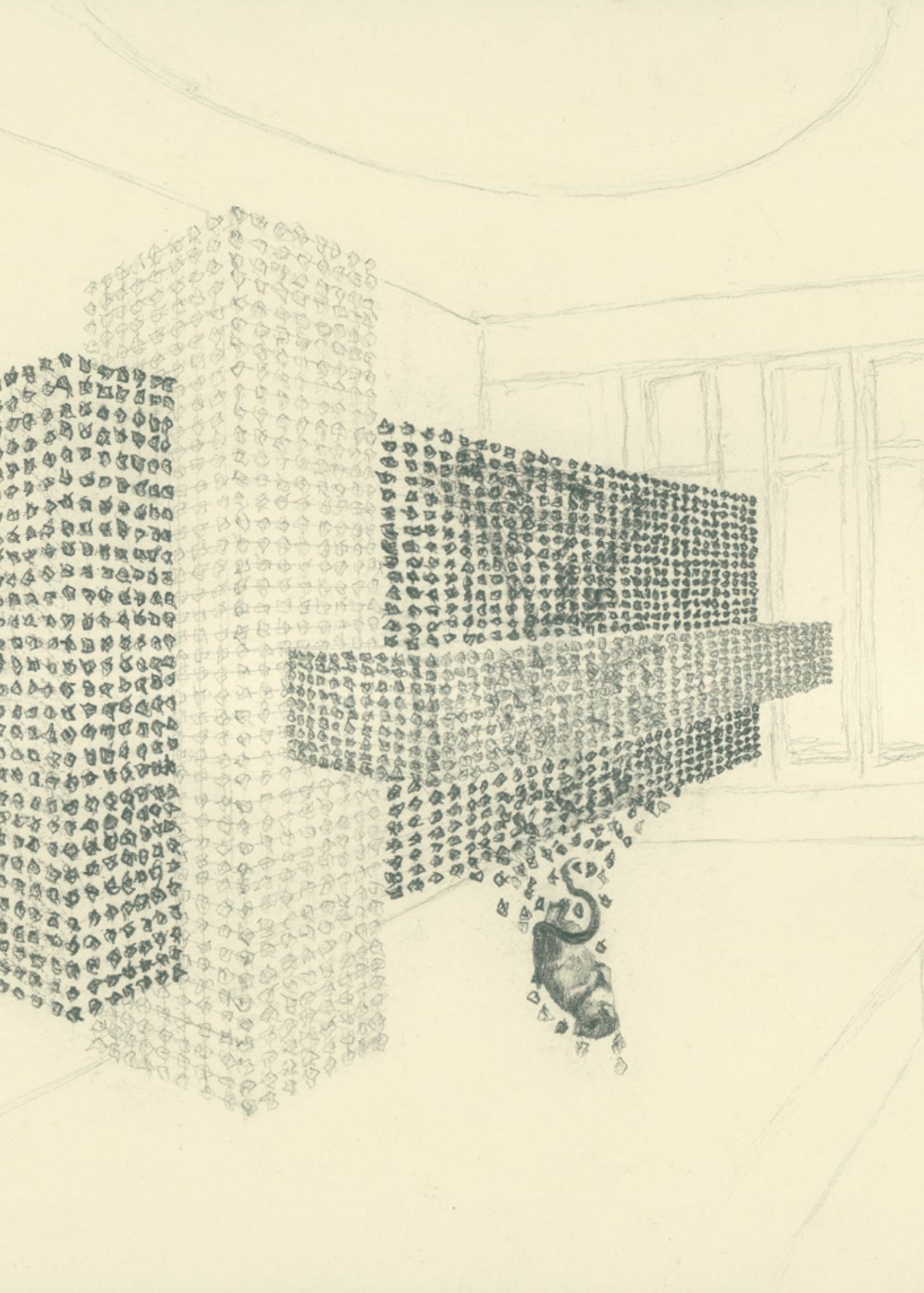
be aesthetic, political, social, economic, or cultural. In more apposite – and ultimately art historical – terms, we could point to the so-called Land Artists of the 1960s and 70s and the seminal figure of Joseph Beuys, a founder member of the German Green party in 1979 and (alongside Andy Warhol) widely considered to be the most influential post-war artist of his generation. Furthermore, and to partially gloss Walter Benjamin's insights, not all environmental art is necessarily good, whereas all good art is of necessity environmental in the expanded sense of how it interprets the world we live in. Which brings us to both the importance and import of 'Die Green Live Pretty?' and the artists it presents.

In Simon Heijdens' 'Lightweeds' (2007), we encounter much of the ambiguity noted above insofar as we are confronted with the uncanny return of nature itself.



Lightweeds  
Simon Heijdens

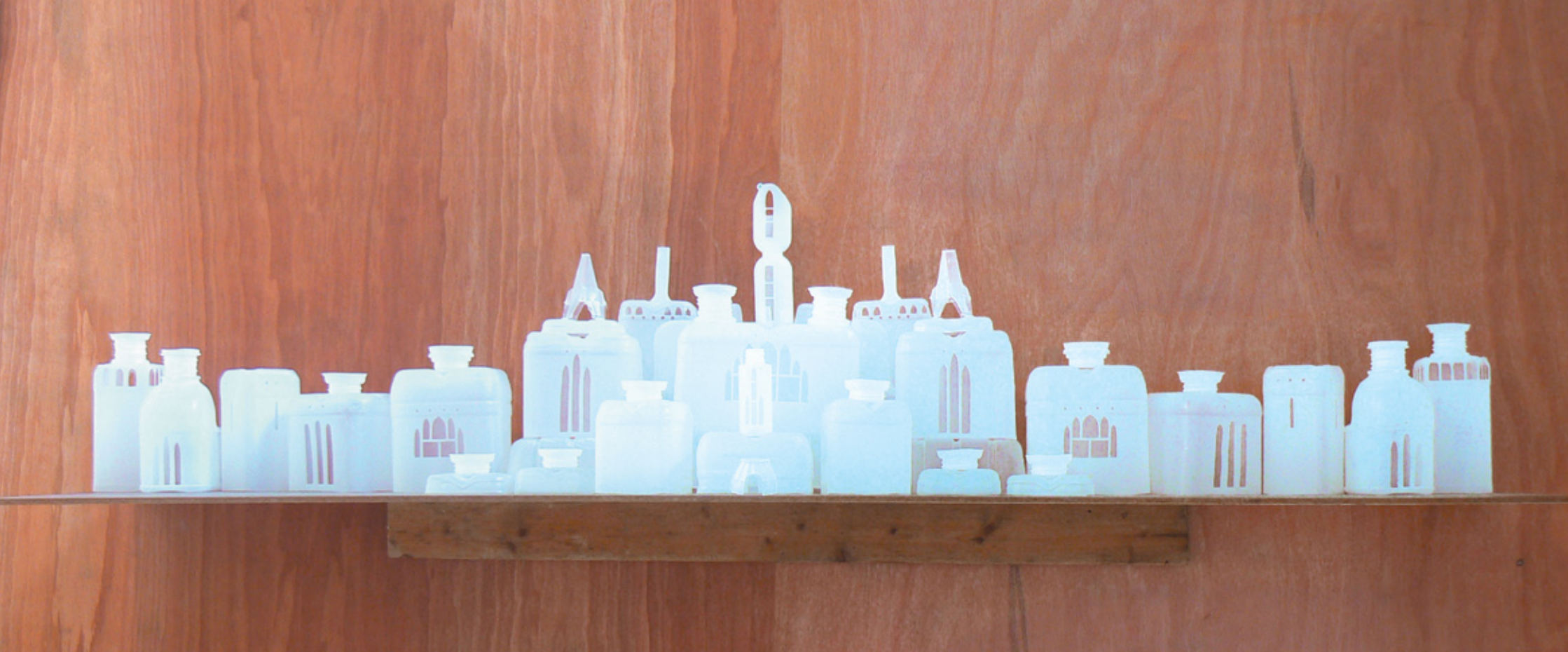
<sup>1</sup> In a 2004 essay by Naomi Oreskes she noted a survey of 928 abstracts of peer-reviewed papers related to global climate change. 'Remarkably', she wrote, 'none of the papers disagreed with the consensus position. Admittedly, authors evaluating impacts, developing methods, or studying paleoclimatic change might believe that current climate change is natural. However, none of these papers argued that point. This analysis shows that scientists publishing in the peer-reviewed literature agree with IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change], the National Academy of Sciences, and the public statements of their professional societies. Politicians, economists, journalists, and others may have the impression of confusion, disagreement, or discord among climate scientists, but that impression is incorrect.' See Naomi Oreskes, 'Beyond the Ivory Tower: The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change', in *Science*, vol. 306, no. 5702 (December, 2004), p.1686.



Spreading across the walls of a house designed in 1872 by George Devey are a series of sinuous 'lightweeds'; the latter being living digital organisms that grow within an indoor space and are dependent for their shape, growth, behaviour and propagation on the levels of sun, rainfall and wind measured live outside the exhibition. Whilst it is debatable that anyone would actually want weeds in their home (indeed, we may want to pause here and define exactly what is meant by the term 'weed'), the sight of a rat in a house is likewise undesirable. However, for Claire Morgan a rat, in the artist's words, provides a source for reflection upon 'the processes of life and death, and the beauty of nature, found in all its perfection and ugliness'. Nestled amidst a geometric sculptural arrangement fashioned out of polyurethane carrier bags that most vociferous of nature's survivors, the brown rat (or *rattus norvegicus* to be precise), is indicative of a breach in our self-imposed order. Or, to put it another way, it is a further indication of the inherent unpredictability of nature and the often rude awakenings it visits upon the unsuspecting.

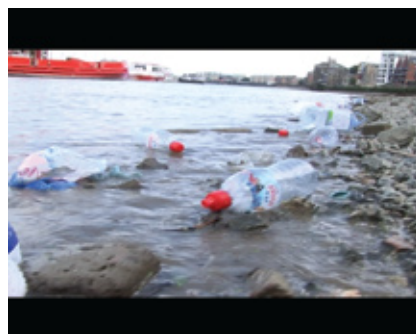
In both Heidjens' and Morgan's work, we see the delicateness of the art object, one made from light and the other suspended precariously from a ceiling. This sense of fragility – the susceptibility to being broken or destroyed – is taken to another formal level in Adam King's work. In 'Ambivalent Apocalypse' (2007), we are presented with a disarmingly fragile looking assemblage that is seemingly held together by paper-clips alone. The form this takes mutates and spreads outwards in a viral fashion, but the imagery retains a degree of familiarity that is at odds with its formal presentation. Resembling the Victorian practice of *decoupage*, surfaces decorated with paper cut-outs, these works – made up of images that the artist gleans from magazines, catalogues, markets and thrift shops – also reveal the manner in which images of the natural world are strategically used and mediated through the visual detritus of urban consumer culture.

Like Claire Morgan and Adam King, Gayle Chong Kwan's 'Atlantis' also utilises found materials in the form of plastic food containers; however, this is not just an earnest attempt to use what was already there – and thus engage in a rhetoric of recycling – insofar as the materials used have a metaphoric



resonance. Often found at the bottom of the sea, plastic food containers are not only a source of pollution, they are non-biodegradable. To fashion a model of Atlantis out of them alludes to a number of interconnected ideas. Firstly, Atlantis is often seen as a prelapsarian Utopia, a land that existed before our fall from (ecological) grace. The fact that Atlantis purportedly disappeared into the sea and has never been found since is both testament to the inherent ambiguity in the term utopia – in Greek it means both ‘some place good’ and ‘no place’ – and the level of environmental devastation that we would appear to be willingly sleep-walking towards. In the monitory words of Plato, who was the first to mention the mythic existence of Atlantis, ‘there occurred violent earthquakes and floods. And in a single day and night of misfortune [and] the island of Atlantis disappeared in the depths of the sea.’ Although this account was written by Plato more than 2,300 years ago, it is possible that lost cities may soon become a more than just mythic feature of our environments.

The sea and that which it conceals and at times yields is a feature of Mark McGowan and Rose Cecil’s ‘Plastic Tears’ (2007). Referring to microscopic particles of plastic, the non-degradable and resilient by-product of industrial and domestic waste, ‘mermaid’s tears’ can be found on almost all the world’s beaches. These pellets could have also entered the food chain and are therefore as much part of us as they are the sea. For ‘*Die Green Live Pretty?*’, McGowan and Cecil have filled two fishing nets with plastic recovered from a London waste centre. This is but a fraction of what is disposed of each week – a virtual tear in an ocean of waste, so to speak – and yet it is chastening to consider the environmental implications being explored in this work. The politics of production and waste is likewise central to ‘*Small Global*’ (2007), a multi-media work by a collective of London based artists – operating under the title D-Fuse – who explore a broad spectrum of creative media. Utilising technology itself, D-Fuse interrogate the role of technological advancement in environmental degradation. In a multi-dimensional installation, the collective looks at one



of the key signifiers of globalisation: namely, the ubiquitous presence of McDonalds. In this work, or 'module', they trace and map the company's exponential growth against an equally in-depth graphic of environmental destruction – the latter being the often unsustainable price to be paid for economic expansion the world over.

Finally, can art change the world? Or, more pertinently, can art about the environment and its impact upon our daily lives effect a shift in attitudes and a subsequent clarification of the debates? In itself, the question is a non-question insofar as the means of measuring such change are, like the issues noted above, open to debate in and of themselves. The question needs to be put thus: can art further our understanding of the broader social, economic, cultural and political issues that affect our environment? And to that I would answer with a resounding yes. What art can offer, that is to observe, is a means of engagement with the issues raised above. Engagement, in this instant, can be a process of yielding information that needs to be further understood as a form of participation. And is this not exactly what activist-based environmentalism advocates: initial engagement, information retrieval, and participation in the debate? What each of these artists do is interpret one of the most profound developments of the last 100 years of world history through aesthetic practice – and, in doing so, relate the enormity of what could be possibly cataclysmic climate change on our lives. And if that does not warrant our full and undivided attention, I do not know what does.

Anthony Downey, September 2007

Dr. Anthony Downey  
Programme Director, MA in Contemporary Art,  
Sotheby's Institute of Art, London



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**ROSE CECIL** was born in London and lives and works in Cornwall. Her work explores the human relationship with nature and the feminine.

Recent exhibitions include: Second Xposure, PZ Gallery, Penzance 2007; Newlyn Society of Artists Working Small 2006; Campden Gallery, Chipping Campden; NSA Christmas Exhibition 2005.

**GAYLE CHONG KWAN** was born in Edinburgh and lives and works in London. Her work explores histories, memory and the senses through the personal and global politics of food, trade and tourism.

Recent awards include: Pepinieres Europeenes Pour Jeunes Artistes Award and an Arts Council England Award. Recent exhibitions include: Tate Britain; National Portrait Gallery; A Foundation, Liverpool; European Forum Emerging Creation, Luxembourg; Fondazione Pistoletto, Italy; Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester; Opera North, Leeds; Great Eastern Hotel, London; Macroproyecto de Moravia, Colombia and Venice Printmaking, Italy.

**D-FUSE** are a group of London based artists founded in the mid 90's by Michael Faulkner. Working convergently with cutting edge technology D-Fuse encourage their audience to reflect on the process of experiencing art in a multi-dimensional, multi-sensory way emphasising the relationship between sound and image.

Recent installations and performances include The V&A Museum London, Sonar Barcelona, onedotzero festivals, Nokia Labs in St Petersburg and Moscow, Mori Arts Center Tokyo, Rotterdam + Seoul film festivals, Eyebeam NYC, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Prix Ars Electronica Linz, and the Lisbon and Valencia biennales.

**SIMON HEIJDENS** was born in The Netherlands and is based in London. His studio works on a broad range of projects from outdoor installations to products, both self-initiated and commissioned for organisations including Droog Design and Swarovski Crystal Palace. Heijdens' work references nature as a model of transformation and change.

Recent and upcoming exhibitions of his work include Dutch Port, Netherlands; Forret Mobile, Paris; Tokyo, Japan; BKVB Netherlands; Royal Festival Hall, London; Get It Louder, China.

**ADAM KING** was born in Norfolk and lives and works in London. His practice explores nature and the pastoral re-configured through an urban sensibility and consumer culture.

Recent exhibitions include: Salon 2007, Portobello Rd, London; Celeste Art Prize Finalists Exhibition, London and Edinburgh, 2007; Distant Echo Wilderness, Lounge, London, 2007; Republic, L'Est, London, 2007; Second Time Around, Adventure Ecology Gallery, London, 2007.

**MARK MCGOWAN** was born, lives and works in London. A performance artist, he has entered the headlines a number of times for his unconventional approach which merges the boundaries of art making, public protest and demonstration.

Current and upcoming exhibitions include: Deep Inside Russia Part 2, Tbilisi, Georgia 2007; No Future, Bloomberg Space, London 2007; Artist Eats A Corgi, Resonance FM, London, 2007; Kick George Bush's Ass, New York, 2007; The Re-enactment of the Piccadilly Line Tube Bomb, Guy Hilton Gallery, London 2007.

**CLAIRE MORGAN** was born in Belfast and lives and works in London. Her work shows a strong interest in the organic, in natural processes, in the bodily connotations of natural materials and frequently uses the power of objects and scenarios that simultaneously illustrate acute beauty and horror.

She was awarded first prize for her work *Red or Dead* in the Premio Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro International Competition for Young Sculptors 2006. Claire is currently working on projects in the UK, Italy and Sweden.

Die Green Live Pretty?  
Presented by Adventure Ecology and Pia Getty  
Curated and project managed by Arts Co  
London, 11-17 October 2007

Adventure Ecology uses adventure, education and the arts to address global sustainability issues.

Founded by adventurer and environmentalist David de Rothschild in 2005, Adventure Ecology creates educational resources that make learning an adventure and effect change through a youth-led community that learns and speaks about the environment, shares and acts on this knowledge.

Alongside the education programme and arts programme, Adventure Ecology is undertaking the ARTiculate™ series inviting high profile artists and creative influencers on field expeditions to explore some of the world's most fragile regions with the end goal of presenting work in response to their findings. The first expedition was to Ecuador in April 2007 and included artists Gabriel Orozco, Adam Broomberg, Oliver Chanarin and Dustin Lynn. These expeditions provide us with research, raise awareness and act as a catalyst for change.



[www.adventureecology.com](http://www.adventureecology.com)

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