

INSPIRING TALKS

CINARS BIENNALE 2018



ARTS AND CLIMATE FUTURES

How can we, in 2019, not be concerned with climate change fighting to find ways to adapt and to build a future for the generations to come? Art can play a key role in addressing this crucial issue. Last November, during the CINARS Biennale 2018 international symposiums, under the theme SENS & MUTATIONS*, we invited the Futurist [Sanjay Khanna](#) to share his understanding on of the topic. The [video](#) is now available to the public, so I would like to take this opportunity to share my modest amount of research on the subject, as well as what I learned from my wonderful encounter with Mr. Khanna.

Art, an exceptional tool for awakening consciousness

Thanks to the work of scientists, we are all aware of the existence of climate change. Our interface with this frightening reality generally takes the form of graphs and numbers, which are processed by our analytical minds. However, when faced with the unthinkable, if we wish to reach a true understanding and achieve a personal transformation, it is essential to explore the emotional and intuitive dimensions of the topic. What better way to achieve this aspect than through the arts? The artistic experience, by its very nature, deals with emotion and intuition. It also requires a certain letting-go from the

audience, a complicity, as well as a suspension of disbelief, so that they may be open to an invitation, a proposal.

In the context of climate change, the contextual narrative is also very important. In a scientific article published in 2018 on art in the context of global warming, the co-signatories stated: "In order to envision a future in which the temperature will not exceed 1,5°C, we must develop hopeful narratives. Art can be a means to envision, to express and to shape the type of society which we wish to create collectively."¹

The movement of artists, who make the choice of raising their audience's awareness of climate change, is growing and is particularly vibrant thanks to innovative and inclusive approaches. The site, [Artists & Climate Change](#), led by five female artists from four different disciplines and hailing from three different countries, embody a diversity of perspectives and understandings of the topic.

Art could help creating connections and to building "commons"

Beyond helping us to achieve a deep understanding of global warming, as well as to help us imagine new narratives, art could also play a key role in

bringing people together. Natural disasters such as flooding, hurricanes, which are occurring with increased frequency, as well as the need to share resources, will considerably increase our dependence on one another and foster our need for “commons”². However, our societies, which have been mired in individualism during the last few decades, have many obstacles to overcome before they can envision collective pathways.

Cultural venues can truly embrace the mission of becoming spaces for bringing citizens together. They can be places where we can have collective meaningful experiences, where we can get to know each other better, and where we can create deep connections. The opportunity for creating inclusive cultural spaces, which lend themselves to new encounters and dialogue, takes on once again even greater meaning.

For more than 20 years, the work of the Quebec multidisciplinary company, Quand L’art passe à l’action ([When Art Takes Action](#)), is a wonderful example of this kind of initiative by creating spaces for dialogue in cities around the world.

The live arts: where the present moment resides

The psychological impacts of climate change are enormous and will become, in the decades to come, some of the most important issues in public health. One of the ways to address the anxiety and fear brought about by climate change will be to live in the present moment. In this way, we can maintain, as much as possible, control over our ship, as we navigate these stormy seas of inner turmoil. There is currently much discussion about the advantages of mindfulness. The performative arts, through their unique and ephemeral nature, can also become an exceptional space in which we can contact the present moment. “At a show, the moment in which you find yourself in a venue with other people, while event is taking place, is a moment that requires a deep commitment. When we become aware of the performance as such, even for a brief moment, we are asked to develop our capacities for attention and intention and therefore to cultivate the ability to enter into a deep state of consciousness.” Andy Horwitz³. In 2015, the British musician Rolf Hind pushed the research into mindfulness even further by composing the first mindfulness opera for the [Mahogany Opera](#). The possibilities are endless, and I will venture to say, that the medium of dance has an infinite realm

in which to explore this topic in order to wake us up to the present moment and to allay our fears.

The performing arts must also do their part for sustainable development

Art can have a positive role with regards to climate change, but the preacher must practice what he preaches. For instance, the performing arts can be a considerable source of pollution. Let’s take for example costumes and sets that sometimes are only used for a 10-night run. The tours that can’t be rationalized in terms of their carbon footprint. The general tendency to grow without questioning that growth. These are just a few elements in an extensive list of ways in which artistic productions contribute to climate change. Lowering the human impact on the environment is the responsibility of everyone everywhere. In 2012, the British Arts Council was the first, to put measures in place to encourage the cultural sector to go green. The results, five years later, were already very promising. Cultural organizations’ consumption of energy had decreased by 23% over this period, while the CO2 emissions had decreased by 35%⁴.

Certain festivals around the world have even chosen to base their entire strategy on climate change. An interesting example of this is in France with [We love Green](#), which is a temporary event with very little environmental impact or the [Sziget](#) Festival in Budapest.

Above are just some avenues for reflection on art as a means of addressing climate change. However, they are but a tiny fragment of the entire scope of the topic. Art, in this context, takes all its meaning and may even approach the realm of the sacred, if only the ego could be erased from the stage and leave space for the artist who is at the service of humanity.

** Sens could be translated by meaning, sense, line, direction, way, senses.*

¹ [Raising the temperature: the arts on a warming](#)

² [Commons](#)

³ [Live art in the age of Mindfulness](#)

⁴ [Sustaining Great Art and Culture Environmental Report](#)



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