

Silk Painting Photography and Climate Change

 sustainablepractice.org/2017/06/30/a-silk-painter-and-a-photographer-collaborate-to-address-climate-change/

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[This post comes from the Artists and Climate Change Blog](#)

Visual artists are often solitary creatures, drawing their creative inspiration from the world around them – music, nature, relationships, politics –working sequestered in their individual studios. This typical artist way of working has been thrown overboard by us – myself, a silk painter and environmental planner based in Boston’s North Shore, and Leslie Bartlett, a photographer and Cape Ann, Massachusetts local historian. For the past three years, we have been working together as an artist collaborative – [SQ and LB Artist Collaboration](#). I work from a silk painting teaching studio/cooperative named Ten Pound Studio in Gloucester, Massachusetts, Ten Pound Studio. I bring my work to Les’ studio in Manchester, Massachusetts where we collaborate on our exhibits using Les’ computer and printers.

Our goal is to present – through silk paintings, photography, and montages of the two media – an emotional fusion of the art and science of climate change as it impacts Boston and the North Shore’s coastal landscapes. We draw deeply from our individual passion for pristine landscapes. Our past experiences of landscapes, however, are from two different countries, and two very different perspectives. I was born in Shropshire in the UK, a county of extraordinary beauty: green rolling hills, open fields still in agricultural use, the meandering River Severn, old castles, and Tudor and Stuart architecture. Leslie is from Epsom, New Hampshire and lived there before it was developed into many subdivisions. He knows the place as a rural town of remote houses tucked into deep woods of oak, ash, poplar and maple, where there were few open vistas but many opportunities to live quietly and deeply with nature. We both became artists in mid-life. I turned to silk painting after a career in urban and environmental planning; Les became a renowned photographer of the quarries and nature of Cape Ann following a sojourn as a juggler at Le Grand David Magic Company. Our collaboration is grounded in our desire to help natural landscapes survive intact and unsullied by human thoughtlessness, as well as in our commitment to high aesthetic standards in painting, photography and printing.



Skyscape silk painting, Shrewsbury, UK (left). Photograph of Magic Illusion, Le Grand David Magic Company (right).

We started off with an examination of the effects of sea level rise and storm surges on the North Shore coastal landscape. We worked closely with the environmental education department of Mass Audubon Society to understand the science of climate change and sea level rise in Essex County. Montages of silk paintings and photos of drowning iconic images followed in a series of exhibits on Climate Change and the Great Marsh; Storm Surge and Drowning Arthur Fiedler.



Exhibit of Climate Change and the Great Marsh, Ipswich, MA.

In 2016, we turned to looking at what makes a landscape resilient to climate change, drawing inspiration from scientific research on climate change resiliency by Dr. Mark Anderson of The Nature Conservancy. While walking through the quarries of Rockport, it occurred to me that the varied landforms – rocky coastlands, water-covered quarries surrounded by lichen-covered granite boulders left over from the quarry industry which deserted this area in 1930, forested wetlands of sumac and swamp white oaks – create a diversity of micro-climates. In turn, these micro-climates buffer the wildlife from the effects of climate change. The undeveloped lands serve as a stronghold for the natural habitats in the quarry landscape. Nature has a chance to survive. As an artist collaborative, Les and I decided to create an exhibit to illustrate [The Resilient Quarry Landscape of Cape Ann](#). With the assistance of a local non-profit organization, we secured grants from Applied Materials, Essex County Ecology Center, and Essex County Greenbelt Association to create an outdoor exhibit of silk paintings and photography. The silk prints hung from 10-foot high copper stands, and two boards displayed graphics of the science of climate change resiliency. The exhibit was in conjunction with a series of dazzling quarry dance performances by [Dusan Tynek Dance Theatre](#) over a three-day weekend at a quarry in Lanesville, Gloucester.



Quarry Dance 5 silk painting and photography exhibit, Lanesville, MA.

We collaborated closely with Windhover Center for Performing Arts, as well as Essex County Greenbelt Association, who owns the quarries in this locale, and who organized talks and tours of the area. The spectacular blend of nature, music, art and science is still remembered by people who came to this free event.

Today 'resilience' is a pressing topic for our Artist Collaboration, as shown on our [website](#). Drawing on our Cape Ann work, we were invited to create a dual exhibit on [The Resilient Landscape of Marblehead and Cape Ann: Viewed Through the Prism of Ecology and Stories](#) for the Marblehead Arts Association, (MAA,) May 5 – June 18, 2017. We looked at both climate change resiliency and the quarries of Cape Ann, and at community resiliency, expressed through the preservation of nature sanctuaries within the town of Marblehead. To do this work, we spent the winter walking through many woods, ocean side preserves, and an Audubon Sanctuary, in Marblehead. We collaborated with a local storyteller, Judith Black, who introduced us to local historians and recently presented a program of storytelling with us at the MAA. Les found an extraordinary rock in the woods of Steer Swamp, with unique granite markings. The rock became an iconic image of the exhibit – in both photography and silk paintings. This August the exhibit moves to the Lanesville Community Center in Gloucester, MA; next year to Cornell University.

As an Artist Collaboration, we have the luxury of exploring concepts, themes, and artistic media in a collaborative fashion. For me, this makes the 'work' in artwork more exciting, and it pulls me into new directions.

For Les, his love of rock and rural landscape gains a new focus when interpreted through my silk paintings – especially in the light of climate change.

(Top image: Collaborative collage of silk painting and photography, Marblehead Arts Association exhibit, 2017.)

[Susan Quateman](#) is an environmental planner, who formerly directed the Mass Dept. of Transportation's Open Space Program. After many years of working as an urban and environmental planner and landscape designer, she became a silk painter. Four years ago, Susan decided to combine silk painting with her environmental background, and focused on issues of climate change in the North Shore's coastal landscapes. She has since exhibited her silk paintings solo and with Les Bartlett's photography, in many Boston and North Shore locales. She has published articles in *Silkworm*, the *Gloucester Daily Times* and *Marblehead Reporter*, as well as Cornell University's College of Art, Architecture and Planning Newsletter.

[Leslie Bartlett](#) is a Cape Ann Historian and landscape photographer who loves climbing down into abandoned granite quarries to photograph mineralized rock walls in their luminescent colors. His scramble and free rock climbing is enabled by his some 30 years of juggling with a Stage Magic Company in Beverly, MA. During his stint with the Le Grand David Magic Company he learned to wait as long as 25 years for the right image to appear before the camera lens. He has exhibited at the Cape Ann Museum and Rockport Art Association on Cape Ann, SOHO Photo in NY, twice at the Vermont State Capital, and at the Michigan State University Law School.

About Artists and Climate Change:

Artists and Climate Change is a blog that tracks artistic responses from all disciplines to the problem of climate change. It is both a study about what is being done, and a resource for anyone interested in the subject. Art has the power to reframe the conversation about our environmental crisis so it is inclusive, constructive, and conducive to action. Art can, and should, shape our values and behavior so we are better equipped to face the formidable challenge in front of us.

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