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LISA REINDORF MERGES ART, ACTIVISM, ENVIRONMENTALISM

By [Emma Kahn](#)

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March 24, 2017

Architect, artist and climate activist Lisa Reindorf gave a guest lecture that provided an overview of the interconnections between politics, economics and environmentalism, along with other fields, on Wednesday, March 22.

Touching upon the works of other artists and environmentalists as well as her own oeuvre, Reindorf highlighted the ways in which artists can serve as important educators in the realm of environmental action. Reindorf was introduced by Prof. Aida Wong (FA), who later helped to mediate the subsequent discussion.

She began by asking her audience what they believed was the largest source of energy consumption in the United States. Although many may assume that transportation consumes the largest amount of energy, development and building infrastructure are actually the culprits. In a modern age in which infrastructure is only growing and energy demand is reaching all-time highs, targeting climate change is antithetical to economic interests. The drive to develop larger territories and the issues of urban sprawl account for growing carbon dioxide emissions and increased instances of severe weather, threatening the sustainability of the planet.

Artists, within this context, are developing new ways of interpreting the landscape and visually rendering these complex realities. Some artists, such as Jill Pelto and Eve Mosher, take literal approaches and portray scientific data in innovative ways. Others, such as Diane Burko, Resa Blatman and Han Seok Hyun, approach the topic in abstract or interpretive ways.

Pelto works with graphs that contain data on the four most common indicators used to track climate change: rising sea levels, glacial ice melt, carbon dioxide emissions and rising global temperatures. Instead of working with figures and facts, she paints beautiful works that represent these graphs in less explicit and technical ways.

“Scientific research and data fuel the content of my artwork. I create pieces to raise awareness about interesting and important environmental topics ... I hope to cover both positive and negative issues which depict the reality of our current ecosystem,” Pelto writes on her website.

Eve Mosher similarly tackles the subject of climate change through her art by using data to explicitly visualize climate change’s effects on urban landscapes, even stimulating conversations while in the process of making her art. The project “HighWaterLine” visualizes rising flooding areas throughout cities in numerous ways, most notably by delineating these lines in chalk onto cities throughout the country. On “HighWaterLine’s” website, Mosher writes, “I was struck by both the inactivity around what I saw as a pressing issue—climate change and its related impacts—and the power of a visual story. I realized that while I didn’t have the skills to be a lobbyist, lawyer or politician, I didn’t have the money to make huge investments or sway opinion, but what I did have was creativity and my art.”

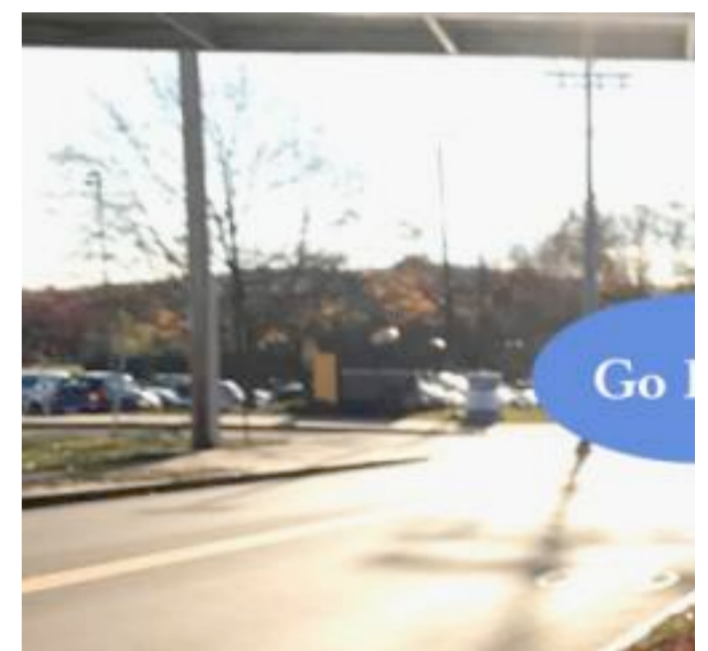
Burko may not work with specific data, but her art powerfully bridges the boundaries of art and science. She monitors melting glaciers with her photography and through her paintings. Reindorf highlighted Burko’s impressive and large painting standing at 5 feet by 7 feet, titled “Arctic Melting, July 2016 (After NASA)” which closely resembles what you may imagine as a high-quality aerial view of a glacial shelf. Colorful, visceral and captivating, Burko’s painting calls to attention scary realities that most of the public comfortably ignores.

Blatman, another artist Reindorf featured, is a resident of Somerville whose works can often be found exhibited locally. Her work includes paintings as well as dimensional works that are comprised of materials such as cut mylar, silk or even knitted yarn. Describing these dimensional works, Blatman explains that they “[offer] the viewer a peek into an unsettled environment or landscape, wherein perilous notions reside within nature’s bounty and beauty.” Devoid of explicit references to certain environments, her work instead urges the viewer to grapple with ambiguous notions of environment, natural beauty and space.

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Finally, Reindorf included artist Hyun, demonstrating his environmental activism through his artwork titled "Natural." Displayed last year as part of a Museum of Fine Arts series on the subject of supercities in Asia, his sculpture consists of small waste parts, mainly plastic scraps, that combine to form a vast green environment. The work presents conflicting notions of nature and of manufacture in utilizing recyclable refuse to assemble a natural landscape.

Reindorf's own art fits neatly into her overall narrative. Having a distinct perspective as an artist and architect, her works are largely centered around the didactic between infrastructure and the natural landscape. Utilizing vivid colors influenced by her upbringing in Mexico, and playing with urban and natural representations of space, her paintings such as "Water Drain," "Tsunami" and "Toxic Bloom," to name just a few, represent her frustration with the incompatibility of land development and environmentalism, which she feels do not need to remain at odds. Despite her adamant stance that climate change poses a serious risk, her works ultimately engage in the beauty of landscape and invite the viewer into the work and into the cause.

During her lecture, talk of politics, architecture and history came to the forefront. Instead of these discussions detracting from the art, however, they served to lay an important foundation to the activism found within these artists' works. Reindorf hopes that artistic representations of environmental concerns will build a greater degree of sensitivity toward the way society views our landscapes. She hopes to see more thought put into what is built, where it's built and how people are living within these infrastructures.


When advocating for action against climate change, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary, as Reindorf demonstrated through her brief but compelling lecture. "Artists are great observers and great collectors of data," she said, reminding the audience of the need for nuanced perspectives and open mindedness within the realm of activism.

Reindorf's lecture was a great opportunity for the Brandeis community, and the only disappointment associated with it was the lack of attendance. The Department of Fine Arts frequently offers remarkable opportunities for students, faculty and staff to hear from noteworthy artists on a range of topics, and the events offered merit far more participation by the community than is typically seen.

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