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# Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet

April 1, 2009 through September 27, 2009



Xu Bing at Mount Kenya National Park, 2005. Photo: Hu Zheng.

*Collaborative exhibition features works by eight contemporary artists created in response to their travels to eight threatened World Heritage sites*

Berkeley, CA, February 2, 2009 — The Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) presents **Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet**, opening April 1, 2009, and running through September 27, 2009. Organized by BAM/PFA and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD), in partnership with the international conservation organization Rare, **Human/Nature** is a pioneering artist residency and collaborative exhibition project that, for the first time on this scale, uses contemporary art to investigate the relationships between fragile natural environments and the human communities that depend upon them.

This collaborative multi-year exhibition project sent eight leading artists to eight **UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM & PACIFIC ARCHIVE**  
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UNESCO World Heritage sites around the globe to create new work informed and inspired by their experiences in these diverse cultural and natural regions. **Human/Nature** initially opened at MCASD on August 18, 2008, and ran through February 1, 2009. On view at BAM/PFA from April 1, 2009, through September 27, 2009, the exhibition features new commissioned, site-specific works by **Mark Dion, Ann Hamilton, Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, Marcos Ramírez ERRE, Rigo 23, Dario Robleto, Diana Thater, and Xu Bing** created in response to their travels to these threatened sites.

### **Mark Dion**

#### **Komodo National Park, Indonesia**

Famous around the world for their aggressive behavior and curious appearance, Komodo dragons, the world's largest monitor lizards, inhabit the rugged hillsides and dry savanna of this Indonesian World Heritage site. The site also includes a vast marine reserve with one of the richest underwater environments in the world, formed of coral reefs, mangroves, sea grass beds, and semi-enclosed bays. These habitats contain more than 1,000 species of fish, 260 species of reef-building coral, and 70 species of sponges. Dugong, sharks, manta rays, at least 14 species of whales, dolphins, and sea turtles also inhabit the park.

In May 2005, Mark Dion traveled to the Komodo and Rinca Islands, inspired by a childhood fascination with the Komodo dragon. Once at the site, however, the artist's attention was captured by the park rangers who guided and instructed him. He was impressed with their knowledge, commitment, and their surprising lack of resources. Dion returned to Komodo National Park in 2007 to create a functional work of art: a supply cart for the rangers, consisting of books, flashlights, batteries, maps, and other essential supplies. A replica of the cart was created for the exhibition.

### **Ann Hamilton**

#### **Galápagos Islands, Ecuador**

Situated in the Pacific Ocean some 1,000 kilometers from the South American continent, these 19 Ecuadorian islands and the surrounding marine reserve have been called a "living museum and showcase of evolution." Ongoing seismic and volcanic activity reminds us of the processes that formed the Galápagos Islands. These occurrences, together with the extreme isolation of the islands, have resulted in the development of the unusual animal life—such as the giant tortoise, the land iguana, and the many types of finch—that inspired Charles Darwin's theory of evolution following his visit in 1835.

After visiting the Galápagos in June 2005, Ann Hamilton proposed to create a poetic text performed by local elementary school students and heard in the museum galleries, juxtaposed with footage of a wavering horizon line shot from a camera suspended in water. Hamilton returned in spring 2008 to realize her project.

**Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle**

**El Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve, Mexico**

Both the Whale Sanctuary and the Rock Paintings of the Sierra de San Francisco are located within El Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve in central Baja California, the long peninsula that extends south from the California-Mexico western border. From the gulf coast to the Sierra Mountains of the Sonoran Desert, the reserve encompasses the bays and lagoons of the sea, and the cultural and archeological sites of the mountains. The coastal lagoons of Ojo de Liebre and San Ignacio are important breeding and wintering sites for the gray whale, harbor seal, California sea lion, northern elephant seal, and blue whale. The area is also home to four species of the endangered sea turtle. However, the region's marine resources have been declining due to unsustainable fishing practices and illegal wildlife extraction.

On his visit to El Vizcaíno in February 2005, Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle was inspired to create an artwork that both depicts the natural beauty and ecological importance of the place and raises awareness of the industrial development that threatens it. Manglano-Ovalle has created a multi-sensory installation featuring a film that uses local actors and incorporates iconic images from recent art history. He returned to his site in 2007 to complete the filming for his piece.

**Marcos Ramírez ERRE**

**Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas, China**

Northwest Yunnan is the richest area of biodiversity in China and may be the most biologically diverse temperate region on earth. The outstanding topographic and climatic diversity of the site—coupled with its location at the juncture of the East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Tibetan Plateau and its function as a north-south corridor for the movement of plants and animals—marks it as a truly unique landscape, which still retains a high degree of natural character despite thousands of years of human habitation. The region is the last remaining stronghold for many rare and endangered plants and animals, such as the Giant Panda, the Red Panda, and the Golden Lion Tamarin and is also home to many Chinese ethnic minorities.

ERRE visited this mountainous region in May 2005. A conceptual artist with a background in construction, ERRE worked with local residents to build a wall using traditional, regional building methods and materials on his return trip in 2007. Into this wall, he has placed video screens that serve as “windows” into the everyday lives of the residents and the landscape in which they live.

**Rigo 23**

**Atlantic Forest South-East Reserves, Brazil**

The 25 protected areas that make up this site epitomize the biological richness of the few remaining areas of Atlantic forest of southeastern Brazil and are home to a diverse group of communities that depend upon healthy forest ecosystems for their livelihoods and cultural

survival—from the indigenous Guaraní people to the Quilombolas, descendants of African slaves who escaped from plantations and established villages throughout the region. The Atlantic Forest has exceptionally high numbers of rare and endemic species—including a great diversity of primates and other mammals. From mountains covered by dense forests to wetlands, coastal islands, and dunes, the Atlantic Forest South-East Reserves are a rich natural environment of great natural beauty and biodiversity.

Rigo 23 first visited the coastal village of Cananéia and the surrounding forested areas of southeastern Brazil in early spring of 2005. From 2006 through early 2008, he took four additional trips to the site, forming strong connections with three local communities. Working in collaboration with the local artisans, Rigo 23 has created two sculptures using their traditional materials and methods. Together, they have built replicas of contemporary weapons of mass destruction—a cluster bomb and a nuclear submarine—and through the process of collaboration have turned the sculptures into celebrations of life instead of death.

### **Dario Robleto**

#### **Waterton Glacier International Peace Park, U.S. (Montana) and Canada (Alberta)**

Straddling the U.S.-Canadian border, Waterton Glacier International Peace Park was established in 1932 as the world's first International Peace Park. More than a billion years ago, the movement of massive bodies of glacial ice created today's contrast of fields and prairies against rugged, snow-capped peaks. Small alpine glaciers of relatively recent origin dot the mountainous landscape. Noted for its importance to bird and mammal migration, the park is populated by American black bears, mountain goats, elk, Bighorn sheep, and the endangered bald eagle. Once under the control of the Blackfoot confederacy, the region was largely untouched by exploration and development until the 19th century. Perhaps as a result, the area contains the highest density of archaeological sites of any small valley system in the northern Rocky Mountains.

During his site visit in 2005, Dario Robleto spent much of his time with a prominent glaciologist who is monitoring the park's melting glaciers. On his second visit in 2006, Robleto, a conceptual sculptor, participated in a glacier measuring expedition. He has created a series of sculptures that focus on the disappearance of species; the mourning we collectively experience as we witness the changing of the earth; and the ways in which loss can inspire new ways of thinking.

### **Diana Thater**

#### **iSimangaliso Wetland Park (formerly Greater St. Lucia Wetland Park), South Africa**

The iSimangaliso Wetland Park is one of the most diverse regions in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province. Located on the northeastern coast of the country, stretching from Kozi Bay in the north to Cape St. Lucia in the south, the park was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1999. Spanning more than 280 kilometers of coastline, iSimangaliso's wide variety of pristine natural ecosystems—wetlands, grasslands, forests, lakes, and savanna—provides for an

astounding diversity of species in the area, including some 521 bird species. The interplay of the park's environmental heterogeneity with major floods and coastal storms, and a transitional geographic location between subtropical and tropical Africa, has resulted in exceptional species diversity and ongoing speciation. Experienced in capturing footage of animals in the wild, Diana Thater conducted her residency in 2007 filming the many species of wildlife in the iSimangaliso Wetland Park. She will create a gallery installation featuring imagery from her filming.

### **Xu Bing**

#### **Mount Kenya National Park, Kenya**

At 5,199 meters, Mount Kenya is the second highest peak in Africa. Twelve remnant glaciers remain on the mountain, all receding rapidly. With its rugged glacier-clad summits and forested middle slopes, Mount Kenya is one of the most dramatic landscapes in East Africa. Its Afro-Alpine flora also provides an outstanding example of ecological evolution. Xu Bing's initial visit to Mount Kenya National Park occurred in late spring 2005. While there, he spent time with local community members who spoke with him at length about their concerns for the health of the Mount Kenya ecosystem. After a number of discussions with locals about the impact of deforestation in the Mount Kenya area, Xu identified trees as the *raison d'être* and motif for his **Human/Nature** project. Long interested in the visual and metaphorical power of written language, the artist plans to work with Mount Kenyan schoolchildren to develop artworks using the Chinese characters relating to trees (such as the ideograms for "wood," "woods," and "forest"). His project consists of original work created in collaboration with the children as well as individual works created by the children that will be reproduced and available via a specially created website; the proceeds from the works will go toward a reforestation project in the park. Xu returned to Kenya in late spring 2008.

### **Related Materials**

In conjunction with the exhibition **Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet**, BAM/PFA and MCASD have produced a **40-page gallery guide** featuring a joint statement from the organizing institutions; a curatorial statement; images and documentation of the artists' residencies and process of the projects; maps and information on the World Heritage sites visited; and artist commentaries about their projects.

An **exhibition website** has also been created to provide visitors with more opportunities to interact with and respond to the exhibition. The site ([artistsrespond.org](http://artistsrespond.org)) includes artist bios and photos; image galleries documenting the artists' residencies and art-making process; interactive maps and information on the World Heritage sites visited; and artist commentaries about their projects.

## **Support**

**Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet** is co-organized by the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, in partnership with the international conservation organization Rare. The Berkeley presentation is supported by The Christensen Fund; the Columbia Foundation; the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency; Bank of America; the Walter & Elise Haas Fund; the East Bay Community Foundation; the Baum Foundation; the Rotasa Foundation; Christina Desser; Nancy and Joachim Bechtle; and many other generous donors. The project's website is made possible through the efforts of the Studio for Social Sculpture and the Annenberg Foundation.

Programs at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive are supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Packard Humanities Institute, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Bernard Osher Foundation, The Henry Luce Foundation, the Koret Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Columbia Foundation, The Christensen Fund, and other private foundations, corporations, government agencies, and individuals, including the BAM/PFA membership. Major endowment support has been provided by the Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation and by George Gund III.



## **About BAM/PFA**

The UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) aims to inspire the imagination and ignite critical dialogue through contemporary and historical art and film, engaging audiences from the campus, Bay Area community, and beyond. BAM/PFA is one of the largest university art museums in the United States in both size and attendance, presenting fifteen art exhibitions and five hundred film programs each year. The museum's collection of more than 15,000 works includes exceptional examples of mid-twentieth-century painting, including important works by Hans Hofmann, Jackson Pollock, Eva Hesse, and Mark Rothko, as well as historical and contemporary Asian art, early American painting, Conceptual and contemporary international art, and California and Bay Area art. The PFA film and video collection now includes the largest group of Japanese films outside of Japan, as well as impressive holdings of Soviet silents, West Coast avant-garde cinema, seminal video art, rare animation, Central Asian productions, Eastern European cinema, and international classics.

## **Museum Information**

**Location:** 2626 Bancroft Way, just below College Avenue near the UC Berkeley campus.

**Gallery and Museum Store Hours:** Wednesday to Sunday, 11 to 5. Closed Monday and Tuesday.

**Admission:** General admission is \$8; admission for seniors, disabled persons, non-UC Berkeley students, and young adults (13 – 17) is \$5; admission for BAM/PFA members, UC Berkeley students, staff and faculty, and children under 12 is free; admission for group tours is \$3 per person (to arrange a group tour, call [510] 642-5188). Admission is free on the first Thursday of each month.

**Information:** 24-hour recorded message (510) 642-0808; fax (510) 642-4889; TDD (510) 642-8734.

**Website:** [bampfa.berkeley.edu](http://bampfa.berkeley.edu)