

**“We are the Earth.
We are the Problem.
We are the Solution.”**

Kalamazoo College Library Exhibition
Artist Reception and Poetry Reading

Late last year I was approached separately by members of the planning committees for both the Reading Together Program of the Kalamazoo Public Library and the Earth Day Celebration sponsored by the Kalamazoo Nature Center. Each wanted to coordinate an ART connection to compliment their community events. And as it would happen, both events revolved around an awareness of nature and our connections to it — with emphasis on climate change, how humans impact on the environment, on social and political activism — with awareness of the practical changes we can make in our own lives and our connection to our emotional, metaphysical or spiritual beliefs.

About twenty Kalamazoo Area Visual Artists of many backgrounds and life experiences were asked to participate in an Exhibition of work that explores their reflections some of these concepts. It should not be surprising that there are as many perspectives and points of view as there are artists.

Among the themes that have emerged is mankind’s direct negative impact on the environment.

From Randy Walker’s blazing red Pyrocumulus Clouds that accompanied the wild fires that raged in California and Australia, to Nancy Payne’s barren trees mired in ashes as they seem to consciously reach for the heavens, to Martha Rosenfeld’s House on Fire, we see how the gasses and pollutants that we have pumped into the sky have taken a toll on weather patterns worldwide. In the same way, we have used the world’s ocean’s as a garbage dump to the point that fish are dying and there are plastic islands that are bigger than some countries. Cathy Green’s captures the complexity of this disrespect in her figurative ceramic sculpture, while Mark Rainey’s abstract painting memorializes a 2010 oil spill.

While these pieces are suggesting horrific activities or events, aesthetically they can be beautiful and compelling — suggesting the beauty or the power of the situation.

Many artists focused of loss or change of habitat.

As research shows us that trees can communicate with their own species in forests for food and information of insect invasions, The Lonesome Pine's isolation can be problematic in Elaine Seaman's quilt, and the polar bear On Thin Ice suggests its loneliness and vulnerability in Pam Nivala's stainless steel wall sculpture. Changes in gardening styles and the use of various chemicals on crops has the world bee population in jeopardy — being Redacted in Michael Dunn's photograph. Nonetheless countering that feeling of loss, we have Susan and Tom Rumsey's Regrowth and Jamie Michael's Hope. Both of works reflect the rhythms of the earth and the cycle of rebirth.

Other artists looked to inner concepts and values that have been part of the human story for centuries.

Anna ILL has connected with the universal invocation to the gods for succor. Her Rainmaker's Hands petition for nourishing rain to relieve the parched Earth — While Karen French seeks relief from this world of garbage and toxins, in a boat that navigates with memories of the past to new homelands, relying on Water Wisdom. Drawing more specifically on a specific Hindu goddess, Nancy Stroupe has Kali focus directly on us. Rather than mankind petitioning the gods, here the goddess of creation and destruction is warning us to COOL IT.

Obviously, there are more ideas and stories that these artworks have to share with us. Each artist has approached the topic from his/her life experiences and values. Now the work of art stands on its own. When you bring YOU to the conversation, the story may open differently. What are you connecting with?

This event was organized to connect the Kalamazoo Arts Community together with the Kalamazoo Public Library's Reading Together 2020 Program and the Earth Day Celebration for 2020 sponsored by the Nature Center.

Original Dates: March 2 - May 1, 2020

Maryellen Hains, Curator