

September 22, 2016



Bhavna Karki, Capturing the colors of nature

Spreading the word through Eco Art

Bhavna Karki

With time, change is inevitable. Our earth has undergone changes since the time of its formation through natural processes but in the most recent decades all such processes have accelerated in a completely uncontrolled way due to anthropogenic activities. This has resulted in many problems ranging from uncertainty of climate, increased disaster events, increased pollution level, melting of glaciers, and decreased bio diversity –the list is too long.

It is now an established fact that earth and its environment are experiencing stress and if actions are not taken in time the results will be catastrophic. The current global economic system is maintaining control over everything else and natural resources are being depleted at an accelerating pace. Lack of general awareness about the state of our natural world will result in nothing but destruction.

This is why there is a need to strengthen information sharing and public participation in all environmental decision making. It is important to share what is happening with our environment with people at all levels. It is urgently required to bring about a change in people's outlooks towards the environment and nature so that each one of us acts in ways that promote sustainability and harmony with nature.

There are various media for sharing the information and presenting the message to the audience. Earlier information about environmental impacts was supported and strengthened by figures, data and big numbers. But not many people liked or understood the numbers well enough to understand or assess the changes. The message is important, but it is also important that an effective and strong medium is used for conveying it and for inspiring people to feel their responsibilities towards our natural world. Hence, new methods and media are explored so that people can be educated or informed about the problems in the environment in effective ways.

Art came up during this process as a perfect medium that can explore aspects of the relationship between humans and nature. *Ecological Art* or *Environmental Art* developed into a medium which enhances the degree of our relationship with nature. My own experience shows that exploring the art in nature can successfully engage common community members of all age groups and backgrounds to experience and understand their contact with nature. The more they feel the connection and comprehend its beauty or see the changes that it has undergone, especially due to anthropogenic activities, the more they are inspired to make a commitment in preserving nature.

Ecological Art specifically, also known as *eco-art* or *sustainable art*, addresses environmental issues directly and often involves collaboration, site restoration, and *eco-friendly* approaches and methodologies. It often emerges out of the work or functioning of communities and ecosystems. The aim of *eco-art* is to inspire people and encourage a long-term flourishing relationship between the social structures and natural environments in which we live. In simple words, it discusses the state of the environment, and explores innovative ways to communicate and search for answers to our pressing concerns.

I started capturing nature in its pure form and showcasing the images with minimum but important pieces of information. I kept the artwork with beauty of nature alongside a completely contrasting picture. The contrast easily captured the audience's attention and thought. It left questions in viewers' minds and compelled them to think about the issues, making them more aware and active.

The more I interacted with my audience and tried to address more environmental issues I realized how much needs to be done. There is a need to create a system or culture through

social process. This is why I started emphasizing traditional and indigenous sustainable practices. Culture or traditional practices have always played an important role in creating sustainable, environment-friendly societies. When we talk of sustainability we are talking not just about global climate change but we are referring to much wider concerns including resource depletion, population pressure, climate induced migration, urban and rural issues, changes in lifestyle, changing needs, changing cultural values, and so on and so forth.



Bhavna Karki *Depicting Vernacular houses in the Himalayas:* The houses since ancient times were designed so scientifically that it ensured long life, safety and planned colonies. These traditional practices were the result of knowledge and time tested technique that ancestors accumulated and evolved through many generations, adapting to the constraints and potentials of the place. Traditional practices have always linked place, people and nature.

With time people have changed their traditions and lifestyles which has resulted in more pressure on earth and our environment. But now there is a growing recognition that culture and arts are capable of contributing to finding creative solutions for global challenges. The preservation of the environment is directly connected to betterment of human kind and the treatment of the environment is impacted by existing cultural practices of communities. Therefore, environmental and cultural factors should be seen in a more collaborative way. By addressing all such concerns, the aim is to make the community and government take collective actions to save our natural environments through social innovations, revival of the diminishing traditional sustainable practices, and a recognition to start the change from within our own selves. As an artist I try to bring attention to our every action around sustainability and climate

change, because it is time that we all take a stand rather than continue living in ignorance about the reality that we are facing today.

I feel that art has a potential to act as an agent of change. It is now becoming more popular as artists are exploring innovative methods and techniques to express their creativities. What is really fascinating is the fact that an artist and a scientist can now think of working together in order to generate a way of thinking and knowledge sharing. *Eco art* has enabled us to re-think and re-interpret the relationship between human and nature. Though the fields of a scientist and an artist are different, what brings them together is the common fact that both fields act out of curiosity towards a subject or topic and both try to bring it into real terms through different methodologies so that others can see it too.

I believe that art activates the *human* part in all of us. It makes us more sensitive, in other words, more human. In order to be sustainable or achieve sustainability, we all need more artists who are willing to attempt to connect the dots for making the image clearer for everyone else to see. I can see that changes are happening. There are more voices that can be heard in favor of conservation and sustainability. Someone very rightly said, “Art can’t change anything except people—but art changes people, and people can make everything change.” This is exactly what I hope to achieve through my work and efforts. If we can bring about change in the mindset we can change anything.

Bhavna Karki is an environmentalist and eco-artist currently based in Tustin California. Karki began working in the field of environment and sciences during college. Since then, Karki has been advocating for environmental causes through work with organizations like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre (DMMC) Dehradun, Govt. of Uttarakhand. As a climate reality leader and a team member of the TEDx Cart Road, a Shimla based TEDx event, Karki has contributed in bringing the best ideas to the global audience. Karki has also written extensively on environmental issues on various platforms to reach more people and spread the information.

Most of Karki’s environmental work is also converted into artwork. Karki mainly works in photography, focusing on capturing images close to nature, ecosystems and other environmental issues. Karki also works with photo art effects as well as canvas/water color. Karki’s aim behind this work is to explore eco-art as a medium through which active environmentalism can be made a priority for one and all. Currently, Karki’s work explores the issue of global warming and climate change and trying to bring together the scientific and creative worlds through artwork. More of Karki’s work can be found [here](#).

This post is part of the [MAHB's Arts Community space](#) –an open space for MAHB members to share, discuss, and connect with artwork processes and products pushing for change. Please visit the [MAHB Arts Community](#) to share and reflect on how art can promote critical changes in behavior and systems and [contact Erika](#) with any questions or suggestions you have regarding the new space.

MAHB Blog: <http://mahb.stanford.edu/creative-expressions/ecoart/>