

Opening up to the beauty of nature and advocating it through art

Sailev Levasseur

Teachings of the Orangutan

Humidity was at its highest. The lush vegetation of the tropical forest of Borneo was inundating my senses with a frenzy of green and a collection of scents.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, the whole forest went from buzzing to silent, as if something remarkable was about to take place.

Here she was. Still far but moving surprisingly fast in the canopy, a female orang-utan was approaching one branch at a time, carrying her baby with infinite grace. Her fire-red fur was a magical contrast in the green jungle and I was in awe at this moment of exquisite beauty.

At that time I knew that I would soon take my brushes and paint this natural wonder on a canvas with the goal to share this vision of fragile ecology with others. Little did I know that it would also change my life.

Breaking with the illusion and developing a sense of contribution

I grew up in the countryside of the north of France. Even though my home village had 200 inhabitants at the most, my connection to nature didn't develop at that time. I was more attracted by man-elaborated subjects like the arts and sciences.

Stepping back and reflecting at my youth, it appears to me that I was mostly following what I was asked to do and what society was expecting from me: I was good at school, got a good diploma, started a career. Everything was going well so I climbed the ladder as more business opportunities unfolded. In the span of 15 years, I ended up almost naturally at the management committee of a large international group of the food industry. I was 20 years younger than all the other members. But as I was going through this busy life, it never really seemed to carry a lot of meaning to me nor did it make a lot of sense.

Two developments were about to change this for good. The first one happened as I was expatriated at the Asian entity of my company in the Philippines. Isolated and with high managerial freedom, I devoted my time to creating a positive workplace for my employees. Seeing a community thriving in harmony made me realize that my actions could make a difference and have a positive impact beyond my own person and onto the outer world.

The second unraveled as I was traveling the world. I made countless trips to some of the wildest places on Earth, making numerous encounters with rays, whales, pythons, tarantulas, and rhinos. I realized, sometimes violently, that no matter how remote this

natural wealth was located, it was everywhere threatened and endangered by the actions of man, littering an abundance of plastics or shrinking natural habitats.

Going back to the daily routine of increasing the profit of my processed food company, eventually at the expense of natural resources, felt increasingly wrong. I was missing the point and nature was reaching out to let me know.

Continuing with the same life principles would not move the needle. A transformation was necessary and it would not be light of consequences. In 2019 I decided to end my business career, I would become an environmental artist and dedicate my entire time advocating environmental protection through art.

About the importance of stimulating environmental engagement

My late awakening and rather slow apprenticeship to the importance of the protection of nature made me ask questions.

Why did my wake-up call happen so late? Growing up in the French countryside, I could have developed a deep connection to nature much earlier after all. Maybe nature felt safe and not endangered when seen from a teenager's perspective in western society.

Why did it take me to travel the world to recognize the necessity of protecting our precious planet? It is almost as if I had to contribute to its destruction with multiple flights to fully start having compassion for nature.

Finally, just like it took me some time to wake-up to nature, would it take the same amount of time to everybody else? Could it be even harder for some? Could others never feel the need to protect nature? I can easily conceive that a poor community surviving in the slums of Manila has other immediate worries than global warming. On the opposite side, a Hong Kong teenager living on the 30th floor above a metro station and a shopping mall may not experience enough of the natural world to feel the urge to act towards its protection.

Even if they are aware of the climate challenge, many humans will cling to the everyday comfort or rhythm of their lives. They will need help to see and recognize the threat that is upon nature.

As a consequence, the responsibility belongs to those who are already awakened to the beauty of nature to take the lead and promote its conservation everywhere they can. The task isn't small, and its execution will take time, perseverance, and energy. It will require every ounce of environmental engagement available. But the end result will be rewarding, for there is no greater cause than the one of healing our world.

As for me, I will continue to promote environmental awareness with my paintings and make the best use of the healing power of art.

Sailev is a French artist based in Hong Kong. After a business career at executive level, he left the corporate world. He is now promoting environmental art in the art scene of Hong Kong. His poetic yet provocative visions of the world are displayed in a dreamlike universe where he combines psychedelic constructions with symbols and humor to create several layers of interpretation to his works.

Sailev's artworks are currently exhibiting at the PMQ art center of Hong Kong at a duo exhibition titled 'Explore Engaged Art' with the other engaged artist Tito. Both artists promote social and environmental engagement through art. You can find more of Sailev's and Tito's artworks on Instagram.

The [MAHB Blog](#) is a venture of the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere. Questions should be directed to joan@mahbonline.org
