

Falmouth University

**How does JuanCarlos rLora use colour and
storytelling in his art to raise awareness
about the climate crisis?**

DFA120

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The artist JuanCarlos rLora uses his artistic practice to raise awareness about the climate crisis which is a very pressing matter and one that has been greatly aided by the power of the contemporary art world. Colour and storytelling are deeply important to rLora's work as well as many other contemporary artists, in many cases it can be argued that the story behind an artwork is more powerful than the art itself. Heather Houser quotes US Senator Edward Markey arguing that, "there are no emergency rooms for planets. We have to engage in the preventative care so that we deploy the strategies that make it possible for our planet to avoid the worst, most catastrophic effects of climate change" (2020: 65). This clearly outlines the issues our environment faces and suggests how if action isn't taken to prevent the climate crisis, our world may be heading towards a dystopian future.



Figure 1, JuanCarlos rLora, Memory Dissected, 2017, mixed media on canvas, 24 x 30 in

rLora started the series 'Art Against Pollution' (2017) at an attempt to raise awareness about the climate crisis and contribute what he can towards the preservation of our environment. Most notable in the series was his piece 'Memory Dissected'. The story behind this artwork depicts the aftermath of a scientist releasing an agent into the atmosphere and turning different pollutants different colours, shown by the streaks of paint in the melancholy sky of the artwork. The message behind the piece is to convey to people how much harm they're exerting into our planet and cause them to make a realisation that something has to change with the way humans are recklessly releasing harmful pollutants into the environment. When creating this artwork, rLora was referencing flowers frequently in his practice so he thought initially about showing a flower, representing nature as a whole, and its reaction to our dying planet, as evidenced in my interview, "the concept was supposed to be the way

the flower saw pollution in the sky, but he then decided that the story would work better if we had humans see the pollution in the skies instead” (2024). This new approach rLora decided to go with explores ideas of the Anthropocene epoch referencing how it’s humans that’re causing the damage, therefore they should be the ones reflecting. RLora initially used paint, collage and photography to produce this piece however he later added drawing as he thought it gave it a sense of decay which creates depth and adds to its story outlying the decay of our planet. This work is a key indicator of how the contemporary art world can make a difference and cause people to reflect upon their actions and consider what they can do to contribute to the preservation, not the downfall of the environment.

Hannah Stamler states that “Climate change poses many dangers, but perhaps the most insidious one is the erosion of our faith in the future” (2020). This is in reference to a show bringing together the works of four artists discussing how to cope with the end of the earth as a result of the negative effects that humans are having on the environment called ‘How Shall We Dress For The Occasion?’ (2020) This quote, as well as the show as a whole, significantly outlines how not only can the climate crisis produce physical damage it can also be psychological. Climate change is one of the great threats our planet faces and if its effects cause more people to give up, the negative effects will just grow stronger. Luckily however, the artistic community can have a greatly positive effect and raise a great amount of awareness about the topic and even cause change to occur themselves. Some of the biggest galleries and museums in the world including the Guggenheim and Hauser & Wirth set out to “preserve 200,000 acres of endangered rainforest in Peru” (Solomon 2022). As of March 24th 2021 the Chuyapi-Urusayhua Regional Conservation is now “permanently protected thanks to a matching funds program with more than 40 art institutions and individuals” after a long term effort supported since 2008 (Solomon 2022). This effort aided the contemporary art world in increasing its recognition to address the climate crisis and evidenced how much of a difference the art world can produce. In addition to this, the people’s climate march on 21st September 2014 greatly aided in recognition of the climate crisis. Taking place in Manhattan’s upper west side at an attempt to “raise awareness about global anthropogenic climate change, or global warming” (Neil 2014). The march, similar to JuanCarlos rLora’s work, links to the Anthropocene, commenting on how humans are the key instigators our the world’s climate issues. It sought out recognition, not to be seen as a

protest but as a large-scale collaborative work of performance art to cause the viewer to reflect on their contribution to the climate crisis.



Figure 2, Anca Benera, Arnold Estefan, Proxy Climates, 2019, ongoing installation, pollen grains, bio resin, sand, 6 objects (pollen cores) of 50 x 7 cm diameter

In addition to JuanCarlos rLora there are many others tackling the climate crisis in the contemporary art world, one notable pair being Anca Benara and Arnold Estefan. Their work 'Proxy Climates' (2019) comments on the "dire effects of climate change on the conditions for plant life in the geological present" (Fowkes and Fowkes 2022: 70). They created cylinders from pollen grains collected from desertified areas with limited vegetation left, these cylinders represent the sampling tubes used in exploratory drilling which causes a great amount of desertification. The story and materials behind this work produce a powerful message and, like JuanCarlos rLora, causes the viewers to reflect and reconsider what harm they're causing in relation to our environment.

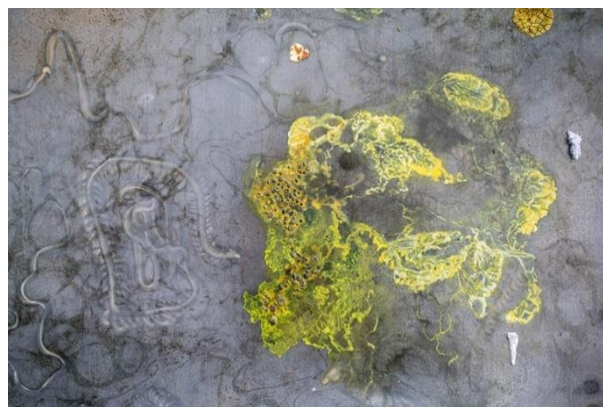


Figure 3, Alma Heikkilä, Soil - minerals mixing with the living, 2019, acrylic on canvas, plaster, 265 x 240 cm

Another artist taking a different approach to raising awareness about the climate crisis is Alma Heikkilä. In her work 'Soil - Minerals Mixing With The Living' (2019) along with many others in this series, Heikkilä guides the viewers to "recognize our dependence on life-supporting microorganisms" (Fowkes and Fowkes 2022: 113). Her work not only outlines the issue humans are having on the environment but also references how much microorganisms do for our planet. The artist conveys that as a precondition for dealing with the climate crisis we must first understand this invisible world of microorganisms. Alma Heikkilä created a very powerful narrative with this piece and greatly delineates the issues produced by humans and what action is needed to occur for change to be evident.

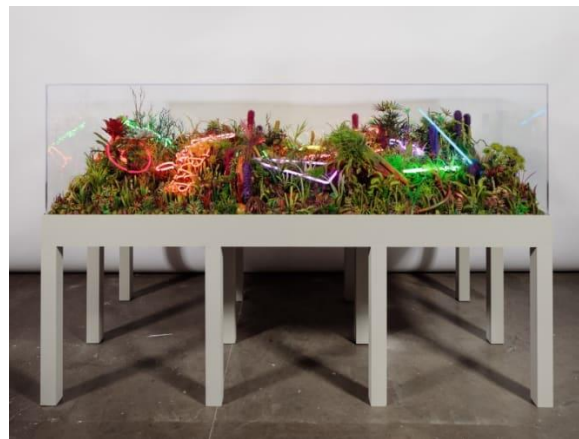


Figure 4, Max Hooper Schneider, The Extinction of Neon 4, 2018, sculpture, neon signs, modelled landscape, artificial plants, powder-coated steel, aluminium, resin, paint, electronics, 152 x 243 x 122 cm

Max Hooper Schneider explores the toll taken on coral reefs as a result of nuclear weapon testing along with other nuclear incidents such as the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. His sculptures outline how each reef had been "compromised by its contact with humans" however they also explore "how human and non-human agents have acted over time to remediate the damage" (2017). This is an interesting and somewhat unorthodox approach in relation to some other art revolving around the same issue as most artworks tend to simply convey how humans are the issue however this work also evidences how humans are trying to help the issue. This can be arguably more effective as it suggests that when humans actually try to make a difference, positive change can occur.



Figure 5, Zaria Forman, Svalbard #33, 2014, Soft Pastel on Paper, 60 x 90 in

In 2019 Zaria Forman introduced her next exhibit 'Change' with the aim to move people with her landscapes and hopefully in doing so cause people to want to protect and preserve them. She said that "every piece of art is proof of the profound impact this environment can have on an individual" which outlines the power of art and the level of change that it can implement (Forman 2019). Overall, it's evident that the contemporary art world can make great positive development in regards to the climate crisis however sometimes the negatives can be overlooked.

It can be argued that "artworks designed to raise awareness about climate change have their own blind spots" (Smith 2020). They risk an unintentional irony as sometimes the carbon emissions produced by creating or transporting artworks and running events can act against what the artwork is standing for which causes them to ask themselves, can the harm they cause be justified by the greater political effect of the artwork? For the most part, artistic activism is greatly positive however sometimes more bad can be produced than good. Regarding the issue of climate change, in some instances the preservation of the environment can be deeper than what's seen at face value, politicians use the negative effects of climate change to get ahead in the political world. Artists tend to "personalise highly complex and often rather abstract issues such as climate change" at an attempt to enable themselves and their viewers to connect with the art and raise awareness to the issues

they're conveying (Jurriëns 2023: 16). Politicians act similarly and enable their listeners to connect with the issues they're raising solely at an attempt to gain votes and popularity. Heather Houser argues that "While ecologically damaging, climate change has been an effective pretext for colonization in a regime that uses ecology as a political tool" (2020: 212). Houser's perspective outlines a large issue with the climate crisis and the preservation of our environment, however due to JuanCarlos rLora (along with many other artists tackling the issue) great awareness can be, and has been brought to the climate crisis and there is evidential progress thanks to the power of the contemporary art world.

Overall, JuanCarlos rLora uses his artistic practice, encompassing his use of colour and engaging storytelling ability, to raise awareness about the climate crisis as well as many other 'artists'. Edwin Jurriëns states that "Artivism moves people politically because of its capacity to move them aesthetically" (2023:16). JuanCarlos rLora, along with members of the contemporary art world are successfully raising awareness about the climate crisis, however the extent of change still has room for growth. As JuanCarlos rLora and the artistic community gain more recognition for the service they're giving our planet, one day we could finally move on from the climate crisis and live in an environmental utopia.

Word Count - 1643

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