


The Art And Science Of Coping With Climate Change Around The World


Eva Amsen Contributor 


Writing about the overlap of science and art

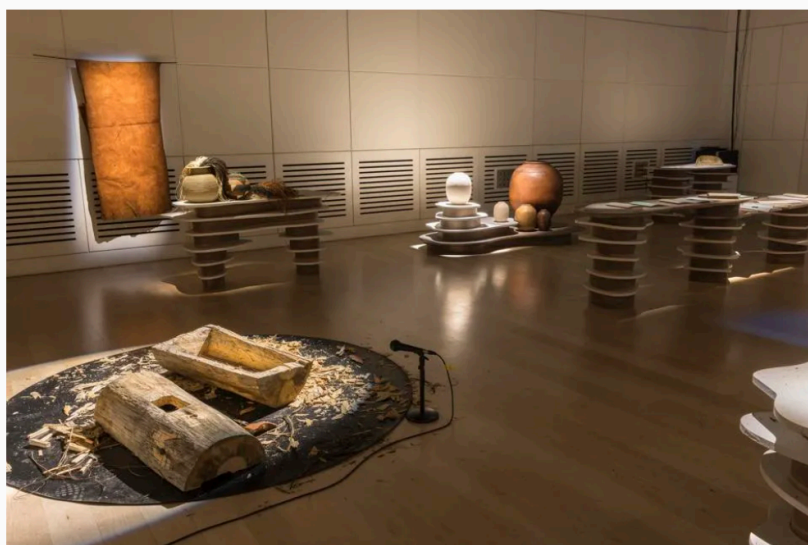
Follow

Jul 7, 2023, 07:30am EDT

 Can you be homesick without leaving home? What if your home changes so dramatically that it's no longer how it was before? With climate change, that is a real occurrence for many people around the world and a recent festival in London combined art and research to highlight some of the effects of climate change on mental health.







Installation view of Forum exhibition, Stories of Entanglement at Land Body Ecologies Festival in Wellcome Collection. Centre stage is live Ogiek hive-building by craftsman John Sironga, from the Mau Hub, Kenya. (Ogiek Peoples' Development Program (OPDP); background: bark fabric made by Eliphazi Kapere from the Bwindi Hub, Uganda. © Image courtesy of Kathleen Arundell. [-] KATHLEEN ARUNDELL

The theme of the four-day [Land Body Ecologies Festival](#) held at the end of June was “Solastalgia”. It was a new word for many attendees, but not for philosopher Glenn Albrecht, who coined the term in 2003. “Nostalgia is the homesickness you have when you’re away from home and wish to return. Solastalgia is the homesickness you have when you’re at home, and your home is leaving you,” says Albrecht, who was Professor of Sustainability at Murdoch University in Perth, Australia, until his retirement in 2014.

Twenty years after Albrecht came up with the neologism solastalgia, the term has inspired artists and researchers from different parts of the world. “When you name it, it helps people share the grief and distress that they feel,” he explains.

The Land Body Ecologies Festival included stories from Uganda, installations from the Arctic, workshops from Thailand and much more.

Albrecht’s own experience with solastalgia, and the event that inspired his search for the right word, was the disruptive transformation of the Hunter Valley in Australia by the coal mining industry.

But the negative feelings of seeing your home being affected by climate change are sadly universal. At the Land Body Ecologies Festival, exhibits and workshops demonstrated how people connected with their own homes. For example, members of the Pgak’yau community in Northern Thailand held workshops to share a coffee ceremony, prepare snacks and discuss how they use rotational farming practices.



Coffee with Swae workshop at Land Body Ecologies Festival in Wellcome Collection. Featuring in the image: Siwakorn Odochao, founder of Lazy Man Coffee.
© Image courtesy of Franky Murray Brown. [-] FRANKY MURRAY BROWN

One of the installations was a soundscape of the river Kemi played over speakers throughout the central stairway of the Wellcome Collection building where the festival was held. Sound artist Chris Watson used audio from different parts of the river to demonstrate how a hydrodam and other factors influenced the river soundscape.

Another exhibit was Stories of Entanglement, which showed some of the transdisciplinary research that Land Body Ecologies had been doing over the past years. This included, among other objects, a traditional Ogiek bee hive from Kenya and a community-led research project where people took photos and shared stories of their homes and communities around the world.

The festival was the culmination of a two-year residency at the Wellcome Hub, which provides space and resources for researchers and creatives to work together on topics related to health.

Victoria Pratt, Director of art studio [Invisible Flock](#), was initially unsure whether to apply for the Hub residency. “Quite often it’s academics or university collectives,” she noticed. However, at an open day she found out that climate change wasn’t really represented yet, and that was the collective’s area of expertise.

Invisible Flock had been working with global artists and researchers on environmental topics. “More and more we would hear the same stories, about the losses they were experiencing and the inability to change that,” says Pratt. She shared an anecdote of visiting biologist Kaisa Kerätär’s childhood hometown during an artist residency in Finland, during which Kerätär recounted how, when she was a child, a new dam had entirely changed the village and how this experience inspired her to become a biologist.

“They were trying to understand what had happened to their community,” says Pratt, emphasizing that this was just one of many similar stories she heard from people around the world. “The more you speak to people about it — it’s in everybody’s lives.”

That universality came across at the Land Body Ecologies Festival, with so many interpretations of the same idea from all over the world.

When asked what he thought of this global response to the concept of solastalgia, Albrecht said, “These colossal changes that are taking place are happening on a global scale, they’re happening all over the world, and they are happening in slightly different ways in slightly different cultures and contexts.” He adds, “the culture and the language may be different, but the globalized experience of distress and change is universal.”

Follow me on [LinkedIn](#). Check out my [website](#).



Eva Amsen

Follow

I'm a freelance science writer, focused on stories behind the research. My writing about the intersection of science, art and culture has appeared in Undark, Nature, The Scientist, Hakai Magazine and other places. **Read Less**