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'Weather on Steroids' exhibit takes two-pronged approach to climate change



A portion of one of the three panels in "Dust, Dissolution, Ablaze" by Marcela Paz Luna Rossel, on display at "Weather on Steroids." (Courtesy photo)

By **Martina Schimitschek**

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With climate change once again at the forefront of political discussions, the La Jolla Historical Society's new exhibit offers a fresh perspective on the issue through a collaboration of artists and scientists.

"Weather on Steroids: The Art of Climate Change Science" pairs scientists from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography with local artists (except one from the Bay Area) to visually portray the effects of our changing climate. The result is a collection of work from 11 artists in a range of styles, including sculpture, mosaic and photography. Each piece comes with two panels of text — one from the artist and one from a scientist.

"The idea was to bring artists in to create a thought-provoking show that was very relevant to society," said Heath Fox, executive director of the historical society. And, he said, because Scripps "is the epicenter on research into climate" and a La Jolla organization, the global problem takes on a local perspective that fits within the society's mission.

"Science is about facts, but typically misunderstood. Scientists don't know how to communicate their knowledge to the public," said Alexander Gershunov, a research meteorologist and climate expert at who coordinated the scientists for the project.

This exhibit is an effort to change that.

A work by Tiersa Cosaert, titled "Curios of the Future," is a modern take on the embalming jars of the 17th-century Dutch botanist and anatomist Frederik Ruysch and warns of a changing ocean environment. Cosaert created sculptures of cold-water fish that might disappear from our region as the Pacific waters warm and placed them in resin-filled jars. The jars are topped with sculptures of shells and fish that might thrive in warmer waters.

"It's an interesting take on that phenomenon happening," Fox said.

Warming waters and the rising ocean is also the topic of a sculpture by Lilleane Pebbles, titled "Tipping Point Climate Change." A blue-gray marble globe is perched tilting on a sloped slab of marble. The Earth's landmasses are carved so they are lower than the ocean. A wire-framed man who is stepping on a book has his hands on the globe.

"This means different things to different people," Gershunov said.

The man can be seen either as humanity trying to keep the Earth from tipping over, or as a representation of greed, ignoring facts and pushing the world past the point of no return.

"Dust, Dissolution, Ablaze," three mosaic panels, each of a human silhouette, depicts global warming, drought and flood. Artist Marcela Paz Luna Rossel uses found materials, such as sand, pebbles, animal bones, ceramic shards, and glass and slate pieces from the 2007 wildfires to set the tone through color and texture.

"Her work is really visceral," Gershunov said. "It transforms the global climate issue into a human experience."

Other artists take a direct approach to their subjects through photography of dying trees at Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve, the Laguna Mountains and Joshua Tree National Park.

Whether it's changing weather patterns or the loss of crops, the exhibit takes scientific facts and turns them into tangible images that add meaning and urgency to the problem. "We want to stimulate public discourse on climate change," Fox said. "It's so timely and so important."

Schimitschek is a freelance writer.

"Weather on Steroids: The Art of Climate Change Science"

When: Noon to 4 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays. Through May 21.

Where: La Jolla Historical Society, Wisteria Cottage Gallery, 780 Prospect St., La Jolla

Tickets: Free

Phone: (858) 459-5335

Online: lajollahistory.org

When: June 10 to Sept. 3

Where: San Diego Central Library, 330 Park Blvd., downtown

Tickets: Free

Phone: (619) 236-5800

Online: sandiego.gov/public-library/about-the-library/projects/newcentral

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