



MOUNT HOLYOKE
COLLEGE ART MUSEUM



Alternate Endings: *Conversations on Climate Change*

JANUARY 29 - APRIL 3, 2020

Curated by the students in Critical Social Thought 349: “Love, Sex, and Death in the Anthropocene, or Living through the Age of Climate Disaster”

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Thea Burke '19

Kai Chuckas '20

Lucy James-Olson '22*

Lex Jellema '20

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Ysabel Lavitz '20

Natalie Lewis '19

Maren McKenna '20*

Nadia Niva '21*

Indira Poole '20

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Note to reader:

When campus closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 13, 2020, the student work was still hanging on the gallery walls as if a presentiment of what was to come. Students, faculty, and staff, in their evacuation and displacement, continued the exhibition's meditations on apocalypses small, large, already and unevenly with us, and yet to come.

INTRODUCTION

In fall 2019, students in “Love, Sex, and Death in the Anthropocene, or Living through the Age of Climate Disaster” met to study the “Anthropocene,” a new epoch proposed by geologists and now widely discussed in many disciplines. The Anthropocene marks a distinct change in geological strata as well as that period in Earth's history in which human activity has become the predominant influence on the planet—from the effects of atomic weapons testing on the Earth's crust to greenhouse gases warming our atmosphere.

Students and faculty from across the campus marshalled new philosophy, social theory, and the arts to examine the Anthropocene as an interdisciplinary field able to address the causes, consequences, and imperatives of climate change. Compelled by questions of decolonization and gender, we likewise wondered how various media and rhetorics might offer alternative perspectives, solutions, and models for climate activism.

Colonial and patriarchal structures have wreaked violence on those with the least material resources to deal with various climate apocalypses, especially drought, flood, and fire. Apocalypse became, for us, a more ethical way to contemplate climate change and the alternative endings we might find for the climate emergency's most specious violences. Paramount to the exhibition's creation was the desire to engage the greater Mount Holyoke community and even the wider public in a conversation about our roles and responsibilities to the Earth through aesthetic provocation. As they planned the exhibition, students chose either to create art, through a variety of media, or to curate objects from the Museum. The exhibition's first section entitled “Apocalypse When?” was hung in the more public and liminal space of the museum's reception hall and accompanied by artist statements. Students solicited audience responses and dialogue with a talk back wall as part of the installation. From January 29-February 2, the exhibition continued in the Carson Teaching Gallery inside the Museum, where students curated a selection of works from the Museum's collection and wrote original object labels, offering an alternative environment for undertaking the problem of climate change.

The exhibition was made possible by the English Department, the Environmental Studies Department, the Critical Social Thought program, the Weissman Center for Leadership, the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, the Teaching and Learning Initiative, the Dean of Students, and the Miller Worley Center for the Environment.

Student artists and curators would like to acknowledge that we stand upon Native American lands.

PART I

APOCALYPSE WHEN?

Student Artwork in Hinchcliff Reception Hall



Our engagement with the artistic, literary, and theoretical works presented in this class inspired a collection of art objects in which we consider themes of intimacy, hope and grief, and temporality as part of an ongoing conversation about climate change.

We move away from the idea of apocalypse as a singular earth-shattering event and towards a conception of apocalypses that are multiple, many of which have already happened. In these works, we acknowledge how the mechanisms of the world we live in—capitalism, colonialism, and structural violence—inform how and when we live and die.

The art presented here grapples with the embodied, individual, and collective nature of apocalypse. We conceptualize apocalypse not only as the end of something, but as an ongoing process.

Maren McKenna '20
is/was/will be (2020)
Audio collage mp3, speaker

What is an apocalypse? What isn't? What moves us through each instance of apocalypse? Being a musician and writer, I have often found myself struck by the power that audio media have as deeply affective and evocative conveyors of emotion. My piece, affectionately titled *is/was/will be*, is a radio-style broadcast compiling a variety of poetic works, music, soundscape art, and news. By piecing together these samples, I hope to create an audio tapestry, a doomsdance away from the Anthropocene to convey emotion about some of the everyday apocalypses and joys that float through our lives each day. Until the next one, we are broadcasting live from here and into infinity.



Ysabel Lavitz '20
We Do, We Do (2020)
Digital video collage

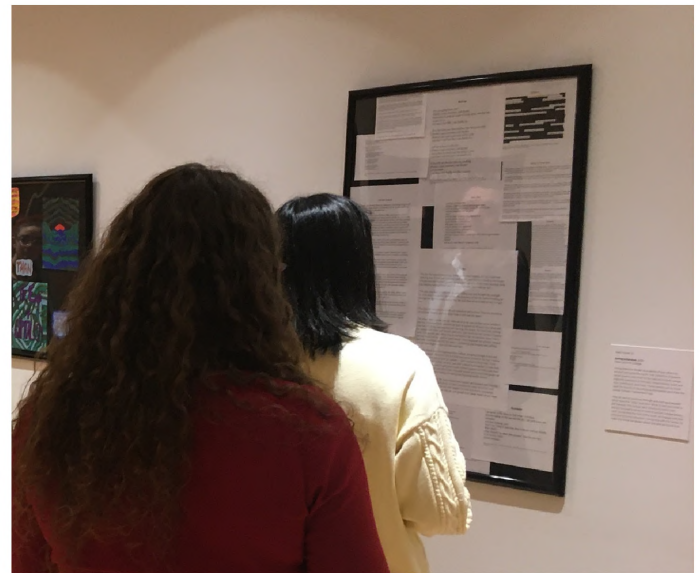
How much control do we actually have in navigating the ever-increasing frequency of apocalypse(es), personal and collective? Could there be playful engagement with apocalypse, or is any sense of humor necessarily inappropriate? In this music video, I communicate a sense of playfulness, using The Books' song "Take Time" from their 2003 album *The Lemon of Pink* to explore themes of control—or lack thereof. In *We Do, We Do*, personal and YouTube clips are combined in iMovie. With them, I present an assemblage of moving and still images overlaid with rhythmic, non-narrative music to consider how various people, things, and situations collide in destruction and play in the Anthropocene.

Ana Karolina Sousa '20

O Jardim (2020)

Metal suitcase, chlorophyll printed orchid leaves

Conversations around climate change and apocalypse continue to center around humans and their survival. This piece asks us to remember the animals that have gone extinct as a result of human activity. Using chlorophyll printing, images of extinct animal species were bleached by sunlight onto leaves, as an alternative to chemical photography, and gathered in a suitcase. The title translates to *The Garden* in Portuguese, as a nod to my Brazilian roots. Both the suitcase and those leaves from Brazil are meant to encourage viewers to think of the Anthropocene's global textures. This piece asks the question: what is the cost of capitalism, and is survival possible without the nonhuman world?



Kate Turner '21

loving/attention (2020)

Paper and ink collage

loving/attention began as a series of love letters to, around, and upon the earth. This collection of poems, prose poems, and short fiction placed in stark collage explores questions of intimacy, responsibility, grief and loss, community, and hope. These pieces aim to move past the events of the apocalypses themselves and draw the reader forward, somewhere new. How do we live and love through and past apocalypse? What does the “after” look like? What is lost, and what is left behind? The collage asks viewers to move non-linearly through a series of poems written collaboratively, each reorienting the rest of the work. All engage with the principle of loving attention, conspiring with the viewer to make the world we dream about the one we live in now.

Lucy James-Olson '22
hold(ing) (2020)
Cut paper collage on transparent vellum

In *hold(ing)*, I explore intimacy beyond the human, beyond the sexual. The yellow line of a bee in flight moves through a series of urban, rural, and blank vellum landscapes. This line of flight marks intimacy as a caring and reciprocal relationship experienced not only with other humans, but with animals and the environment. For profit and control, capitalism has taught us to restrict our intimate relations to the nuclear family, and to restrict our connections with nature to those of extraction or sporadic visitation. Fostering intimacy beyond capitalist expectations changes not only how we interact with each other, but how we interpret the earth and define our relationships with and within it.



Kai Chuckas '20
Thoughts From The End of It All (2020)
Paper and Colored Ink

How do we live through and survive the apocalypse in our everyday lives? What happens when the end comes today instead of tomorrow? What does it mean to be saved, and who is worth saving? How can poetry explore them? These are the questions I explore within *Thoughts From The End of It All*, a collection that questions the roles of religion and faith, and our relationship to both nature and our own humanity. Readers will interrogate their own positionality within the Anthropocene and ask how they are living, believing and surviving their own apocalypses as they are challenged to think about the human construction of the “end times.”

Lex Jellema '20
SubUrban Decay (2020)
Paper and Ink

In a multitude of ways, the end of the world as we know it is approaching. The earth that we inhabit is dying a slow, painful death. This anthology reflects the complex microcosm of emotions that may be exhibited throughout apocalyptic experiences. Ranging between grief, panic, pain, and euphoria, the affective symptoms of humanity at its conclusion are unlimited. I uncover the ways the apocalypse is experienced as a slowly unfolding process of destruction and decay, rather than a big bang. The forms of poetry and short prose within this collection lend themselves to the construction of miniature worlds, each destined for certain doom.



Linda Zhang '20
Letters of Survival (2020)
Paper and Ink

Letters of Survival incorporates poetry, short fiction, and open letters to the artist's niece. It represents an ongoing journey in which I grapple with the consequences of climate crisis. This zine challenges the privilege and inaccessibility of elite academic spaces with its accessible medium and language, prompting viewers to question the value of remote theory and disengaged scholarship in the face of the Anthropocene and climate change, especially for those who feel and experience its impact daily. This work confronts whose notions of apocalypse and survival are included and excluded in climate change discourse. It asks how we as a society talk about those affected by the apocalypse and who is allowed to participate in the conversation.

Indira Poole '20

In-Grave-d (2019)

Digital photographs engraved on recycled plywood with a laser cutter

For many people and beings the apocalypse has already happened, is happening, and will continue to happen. 2.47 million trees are chopped down each year; 79% of these trees are killed to profit human society. Before you are different assemblies of trees. Please, pick up, touch, and look closely at these pieces of wood. These engraved images come from trees found on Mount Holyoke's campus. In this work, I encourage an acknowledgement of the life force trees have. By seeing the fingerprints of trees put back onto processed, used wood, I encourage individuals to think about the ways trees have been and will continue to be exploited. I have paired these images with poetry to further extend the voices of the trees. I can not assume to understand their lives, but these poems attempt a tree's perspective to encourage "ethical relationality," a sympathy that respects a tree's unique being and humans' ethical responsibility to it.



Photos courtesy of Rosemary Geib, Mount Holyoke News

Indira Poole '20

Deep Vulnerability (2019)

Medium format, black and white photographs

The images convey a multispecies narrative within the ecosystem of the woods, the trees, and Mount Holyoke College students. By incorporating the naked bodies of trees and humans, I am speaking to a deep vulnerability: humans are in their most vulnerable form when completely exposed and naked, but trees are always in their most vulnerable form by virtue of coexisting with our world. The trees arc over these human bodies, just as climate change and destruction loom over these trees. The human bodies are disappearing into the woods, just as trees disappear into this world. Close-ups of students' sorrowful faces intertwined behind a singular tree's branches are a representation of the unitedness of all things. We are all in this world together through our violence and vulnerability.

Rory Yarter '20

Turner's Oil Spill (2019)

Handsewn quilt made primarily from synthetic fabrics

Made from an array of recycled fabrics, this quilt depicts a ship on fire in the ocean, using luxuriant but contrasting textures. This work takes its point of departure from an image in Alexis Pauline Gumbs's *M Archives*: bioluminescent light at the ocean's nadir is revealed to be decayed elements from the bones of the slaves who died during the transatlantic voyage. The text made me think of J.M.W. Turner's *Slave Ship*, which depicts slaves being thrown into the sea during a storm so the owners could collect the insurance money. While slavery and the oil industry are not equivalent evils, both reflect an exploitative, extractive relationship that created the climate crisis. It is crucial to keep an awareness of the role of colonialism in the Anthropocene, and how the costs of this system are unevenly distributed, both in the past and the present.



Photo courtesy of Rosemary Geib, Mount Holyoke News

Nadia Niva '21

Chronicles of Dread and Hope (2020)

Markers on paper

A conversation can be endless. As beings on Earth, each of us have been involved in ever-shifting conversations with our environments since before we were born. *Chronicles of Dread and Hope* constitutes a micro-attempt to parse through the trials and tribulations of living with hope on a damaged planet. To help me with this project, I contacted three friends from various realms of my life, and I have pulled quotes from conversations with them to use in my work. Our dialogues address questions of intimacy and art-making in the face of capitalistic narratives of “progress,” as well as the struggle to make art when you inhabit a marked social position. By illuminating these small moments of connectivity, I hope to center the radical nature of conversation as it helps us talk through questions of, and answers to, the Anthropocene.

Special thanks to Tamar Kharatishvili for installation and opening event photos.



Associate Professor of English and Critical Social Thought, Iyko Day, speaking at the reception.

PART II

APOCALYPTIC INTIMACIES

MHCAM Artwork in Carson Teaching Gallery



JANUARY 29 - FEBRUARY 2, 2020

The word “apocalypse” often signals catastrophe or the imminent end of the world. For communities continuously impacted by white settler colonialism and racial capitalism, many apocalypses are already here. Through this collection, we reconsider apocalypse from the Greek *apokalupsis*, as a “revelation” or an “unveiling” of truth.

Apocalyptic Intimacies evokes two paradoxical revelations. First, these works urge viewers to consider the climate change enacted by racism, patriarchy, colonialism, slavery, and capitalism: for whom are these apocalypses and by whom have they been executed? Second, objects in this section reflect artists’ ideas on the intimate, everyday: how is the apocalypse individual and intimate?

The artworks in this exhibition explore apocalyptic relationships to identity formation and intergenerational memory. They reclaim intimacy as a mode of survival through a series of entangled temporalities that, in resisting closure, help us persist.

These works also carry interpretative connections to the student art exhibited in the Museum lobby. Instead of fatalism around climate change, there is a reimagining of the breakdown of social boundaries, transcending colonial temporalities of linear progress. There is pleasure, hope, and strength through the sensory elements of these pieces that attest to survival.

— Rachel Kim '21 and Thea Burke '20



Pieter Hugo, South African (b. 1976)
Thoba Calvin and Tshepo Cameron Sithole-Modisane, Pretoria from the series *Kin* (2013)
Digital C-print photograph

Pieter Hugo's work focuses on intimacy in the wake of Apartheid in South Africa. This photograph portrays two men married during the country's first gay tribal ceremony, joining the Zulu and Tswana traditions. Hugo navigates the boundaries between intimate and public spaces, and what he describes as the conditions of a still "fractured" and "wounded" South Africa. The artist's use of portraiture centers identity and representation of racially and sexually marginalized groups in the country. A part of Hugo's series, *Kin*, this photograph offers a reflection on how intimacies that cross boundaries might help us survive national and global ruptures in the Anthropocene.

— Natalie Lewis '20



Alison Saar, American (b. 1956)
Fall (2014)
Etching and chine colle, printer's proof, edition 3/5

The body is a site of identity formation. The woman in the print, with a head of robust branches, bears the pomegranate fruits of her labor. Alison Saar meditates on embodiments and the lived experiences of people of the African diaspora, specifically focusing on women's identities. Here, Saar draws on both the cycles of nature and the cycles of women, alluding to an intimacy between humans and nature. A modern-day Persephone, Saar's subject embodies the earth's fertility and our connection to it. A modern-day Persephone, the subject embodies the earth's fertility but perhaps within the context of the histories of slavery.

— Natalie Lewis '20



Kara Elizabeth Walker, American (b. 1969)
No World from the series *An Unpeopled Land in Uncharted Waters* (2010)
Etching with aquatint, sugar-left, spit-bite, and dry-point

In *No World*, Kara Walker uses a silhouette style, usually associated with Victorian portraiture, to confront racial histories. Dominating hands hold a ship above the water, physically prioritizing the destructive exploitation of people and nature, while a giant figure swimming away seems to join with the ocean in an effort to escape from that violence. Walker, well-known for her work exploring African American identities in the pre-war American South, here portrays the human-made apocalypse of the transatlantic slave trade. This artwork dramatically juxtaposes two sorts of relations between humans and the environment: one of aggressive intent, and one of deep connection.

— Maeve Brady '20



Edward Burzynsky, Canadian (b. 1955)
Nickel Tailings #30, Sudbury, Ontario (1996)
Chromogenic color print; Edition 6/10
Purchase with the Madeleine Pinsof Plonsker (Class of 1962) Fund

The tangle of fiery orange liquid looks almost volcanic. However, it was not a natural disaster that created these hues but mining. The bright colors are the chemical wastes produced by the oxidation process to separate nickel from ore. Edward Burzynsky explains that these startling colors are “metaphors to the dilemma of our modern existence.” They are sublimely alluring to human viewers, yet their unnatural color signals man-made destruction of the environment. While the aesthetics of the picture are beautiful, they remind us that the world is paying the cost for our gain.

— Annika Sante '20



Zebulon Ober taking photo of *Nickel Tailings #30, Sudbury, Ontario* by Edward Burtynsky