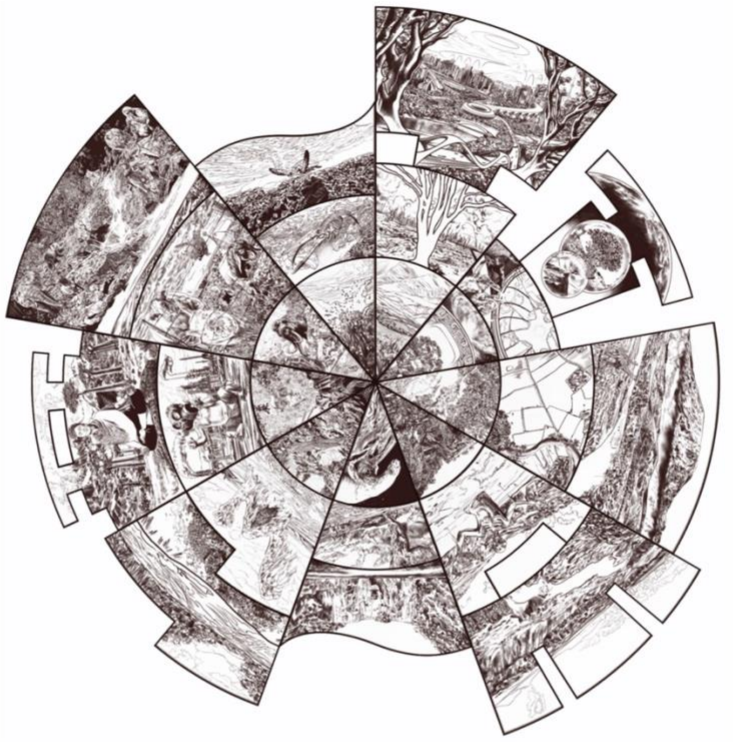
DI SOUP
GEOARTISTRY

"Art for Earth's sake"

by
Leighton Estick



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"We people are just like our planetmates.

We cannot put an end to nature;

we can only pose a threat to ourselves."

Lynn Margulis

Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution

DI SOUP
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Master of Fine Arts 2023

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Abstract

di Soup is an illustrative sculpture that visualizes the planetary boundaries responsible for regulating life on Earth. These boundaries comprised of nine interlinked systems were developed in 2009 by a team of scientists led by Johan Röckstrom. As corporate interests continue to undermine planetary health, this thesis complements the scientific knowledge that efforts at restoration. Even in its subtlest inferences, art comprehensively stores and provides insights about humanity's relationship with the natural world for future consideration. *di Soup* presents these boundaries as living and intimately connected, where together they contribute to, and depend on, the health of the entire Earth system.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge this research's locale of Peel Region is situated on Treaty Lands and is the ancestral home of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. This study credits the atmosphere, animals, plants, microbes and peoples who have called these lands home since time immemorial. This thesis recognizes the countless lives and cultures who had crafted and safeguarded knowledge for future inquiry. Feeling honoured and privileged, this thesis honours their sacrifices and lessons by preserving the cycles of knowing. I share this story with you my fellow peoples.

Of the mind, I neither own nor create knowledge. All the ideas gathered and shared here were inherited and grounded by those before me. Eons of investigation into the nature of our reality has resulted in a wealth of knowledge that guides, inspires and protects life today. My visual and literary art practice acts merely as reminders of ancestral ways of being. My mind is grateful for those who had thought before it.

Of the body, the energies that formed this body which facilitates artistic expression are not my own. They originate from our shared ancestry as Earthlings. When expired, the Earth will recycle this body to nourish future beings as our ancestors had for us. There is nothing new under the Sun; and all that I am, is because we are. My body is grateful for all those that felt before it.

I thank my parents, grandparents, aunts, cousins, advisors, cohorts, teachers, and all that has made this planet home.

This work exists because you exist.

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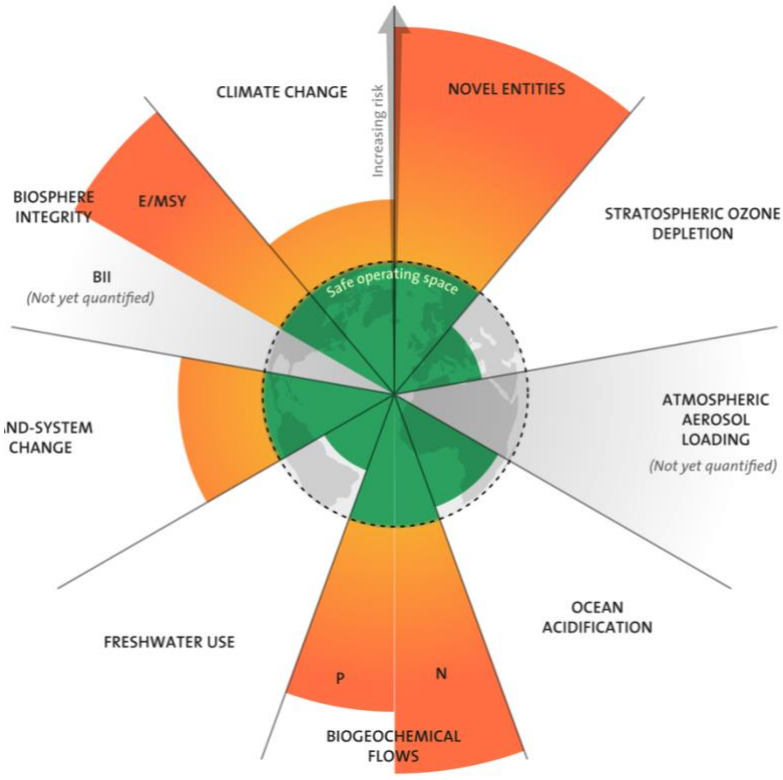
Additional Notes

Prologue

Earth is not merely an inanimate ball floating in a sea of infinity. Neither is it non-sentient nor non-feeling, an object of little consequence, or clump of mud. Its physical description never truly encapsulates it. Earth, an oblate spheroid of mass 5.9722×10^{24} kg and average temperature 15ºC, the third of its kind from a middle-aged yellow dwarf star, located in the outer edge of the Orion Arm, Milky Way, Virgo Supercluster and so on. Its surface consists of water in all three states, supported by a gyroscope of various rocks whose motion creates a forcefield for life to evolve. But there's another Earth, one more connected and sublime. Renowned chemist James Lovelock and biologist Lynn Margulis' co-developed the *Gaia Hypothesis*, that expands this perspective defined Earth as "the entire range of living matter constitute a single living entity."[1]



Estimates of how the different control variables for seven planetary boundaries have changed from 1950-present. Source: Stockholm Resilience Centre. Designed by Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, based on analysis in Persson et al 2022 and Steffen et al 2015.

[1] James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford University Press; 1987), 4.

Definitions of Ancestral Terms

I was born and raised in Jamaica and my ancestral language "patwah," has been integrated throughout this thesis to better express moments of overwhelming emotion. The following list shows those terms and their English translation. It also helps to speak it aloud.

TERM	TRANSLATION
Start	Some patwah words are spelt in English and the incorporation of the body in its speech makes it patwah.
bwoil	Phonetic spelling of the English word 'boil' in patwah accents.
Ovah	Phonetic spelling of the English word 'over' in patwah accents.
A wah diss?	What is this?
A wahpm?	What has happened?
di Soup	the Soup – The project title and grounding concept that we are all connected ingredients in a great cosmic soup.
It ah bubble	It's bubbling
oh rah	No English equivalent. A censored version of the expletive "OH RASS" Jamaican for "ASS"
An ah	And is.
look deh bobo	Look at that fool.
Wah wi ago do	What are we going to do?
look deh	Look at that.
It ah dry up	It's drying up

TERM	TRANSLATION
Lawd da air ya dutty sah	Lord this air is dirty Sir. Although "Sah" translates to "Sir" is a gender-neutral term used to acknowledge any great elder
Nuff pea-ple pass thru	Many persons visited.
inna di shawt istri ah di	In the short history of the Caribbean.
Caribbean	An ancestral term for the region whose name originates with the Karibs, the indigenous peoples of the Lesser Antilles.
Blackbud	Blackbird, more specifically the Jamaican crow (*Corvus jamaicensis*). An inquisitive creature associated with death.
Da greenery ya strange	This greenery is strange.
Wi call di most fame-us group Taino	We call the most famous group the Taino.
Taino	A contested term for the peoples of the Greater Antilles
an dem call dem yaaaad	They call their home
Yamayeka "land ah springs"	Ancestral name for Jamaica "the Land of Springs"
Yamaye	The inhabitants of the island of Jamaica specifically.
Dem live inna sed worl	They live in same region
crass di sea	Across the sea. Some terms are expressive forms of English.
an dem identity get cyarve out	Their identities were carved/chiseled/sculpted
by di rainfarist mown-ten,	By the forested mountains.
sweet fruit, ice wata and sea life.	sweet fruits, cold waters and marine life.

TERM	TRANSLATION
Di climate smoode nuh rah	the climate is mild.
an kip dem warm year roun,	It keeps them warm perennially.
an aldoh more while	although sometimes hurricanes destroy their homes.
hurricane mash up di rass	
place	
wan labrint ah tree an cave	A labyrinth of trees and caves provide shelter
sheltah dem	
Dem sumn ya mek di people	This makes the people so happy.
dem soh irie	
dat even Christifah	That even Christopher Columbus had to acknowledge.
Bombolus affi recagnize	
Bombolus	A term of my own making used to mock ‘Columbus’.
	It borrows the first two syllables of a patwah expletive that refers
	to used toilet paper.
Mi go fass and land pan	I went to investigate and landed upon a soft bed of earth.
saff Eart	
an wid folded wing,	And with folded wings and piercing gold eyes. The crow
an piercing gol yeye,	is describing its own physical features.
mi see di piktcha clear.	The picture becomes clear
Ah dat amonize di miserable	That settled the unpredictable climate so creatures could live.
klimate an mek nuff	
kreachah pass tru.	

TERM	TRANSLATION
Di whola dem move similah tu	They behave similarly
But wan two-legged kreachah	One bipedal creature
*And life threaten dem yes, but dem remain **human**.*	their existence was threatened by natural forces but they remained human.
Human, whaddat mean…	Human? What does that mean?
Sumn nuh right yah	Something isn't right here
Tkaranto	Mohawk word meaning "where there are trees standing in the water." Present-day Toronto.
Ka-iri	Ancestral Kalinago term for Trinidad, "Land of Hummingbirds"
Huracan	Name for the Caribbean and Mexica god of chaos from the seas. It was translated into the English word Hurricane.
Abya Yala	Kuna word for "Land in its full maturity," referring to the Darien gap between today's Columbia and south-eastern Panama. Currently being expanded to include South and Central America.
tabako	Yamaye word for "tobacco"
cacao	Caribbean word for "cocoa"
cinteotl	Mexica word for "maize"
waŋblí wíyaka	Lakota word for "eagle feather"

Glossary of Figures

Introduction: A vessel drifting among the stars…

Long, long, ago, there lived a tiny vessel. Of ultramarine broth and chunks of moss. Sloshed and bobbed on tides of pitch, its broth was seasoned with the ashes of stars. Wave after wave it tossed and tumbled, always resurfacing and never once sinking. But suddenly, suddenly, it start bwoil ovah! Ah wah diss, ah wahpm? di Soup! It ah bubble oh rah! An ah spill! look deh bobo! Wah wi ago do? O savoury soup, we need you, don't drown, don't spill. Should we save you, should we not, what to do, it's our fault, hurry hurry, look deh! It ah dry up! Please help us.

On June 1, 2022, the global average for atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO2) reached 418 ppm. Since the onset of modernity, CO2 levels have skyrocketed from a preindustrial average of 280 ppm, an unsettling 33% lower than it is today.[2] Planet Health Report explains "if carbon dioxide is at 416 parts per million (or ppm), that means in one million particles of air, there are 416 particles of carbon dioxide."[3]As a greenhouse gas, CO2 absorbs heat and contributes heavily to variances in global temperature. Venus, our nearest celestial neighbour, provides harrowing clues to the nightmare that will be unleashed with elevated levels of atmospheric greenhouse gas. Due to higher concentrations of atmospheric CO2, Venus' surface temperature reaches an infernal 820º C (900º F), hot enough to melt lead and too hot for life. But what do these numbers mean, what insights do they provide about planetary health, and how does this impact life on Earth?

David Attenborough, Elena Bennett and other top environmental activists contend that human activities are eroding the natural world's ability to support life. This is evidenced by rising global

[2] Earth Science Communications Team, "Carbon Dioxide," *Global Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet,* March 17, 2023, https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/carbon-dioxide/.

[3] "Planet Health Report: AIR," *NASA Climate Kids*, n.d., https://climatekids.nasa.gov/health-report-air/.

temperatures, habitat destruction, wildlife loss, worsening weather and various forms of pollution (see appendix A). The Paris Agreement was established to combat these threats with a goal of "holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels."[4] This goal requires collective effort, so I offer my own contribution in the form of this thesis as an alternative to information-based approaches to understanding environmental crises. It engages these issues through artistic expressions to offer insights into how the Earth system is linked and changing. Art has historically served as instruments for pursing knowledge and providing insights into culturally significant moments from our past. By art, this study references Arthur Danto's definition "as artefacts of embodied meanings that elicit viewer interpretation."[5]

This paper entitled *Geoartistry,* describes and contextualizes an illustrative sculptural artwork of my making called *di Soup*. The term Geoartistry is an admixture of Geo (relating to Earth) and Artistry (art practice), making its definition "art about Earth." *di Soup* reinforces and visualizes the *planetary boundaries framework*, pioneered in 2009 by a team of 28 Earth System scientists led by Johan Rockström. Collectively, these boundaries define the "safe zone" for society in an unambiguous way and provides the foundation for this artistic exploration. These boundaries expand on **climate change**, a single Earth system feature which has become an epithet for humanity's onslaught on the planet. Instead, it proposes nine interlinked boundaries that together supports healthy ecologies, including: the climate system, the ozone layer, land system, novel entities, freshwater, nutrients, aerosols, biodiversity and the oceans (see appendix. B).[6]

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[4] "The Paris Agreement," *UNFCCC*, 2022, https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement.

[5] Arthur C. Danto, *What Art Is* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 154.

[6] Johan Rockström and Owen Gaffney, "Planetary Boundaries," *Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our Planet* (London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 2021), 74-88.

di Soup visualizes these nine boundaries through the lens of their past and potential future states, supported by discarded wood to give the artwork its conservational value (see appendix. C, D). Its title "di Soup," is inspired by the concept of a "primordial soup" from which all matter originated. Soups are common across cultures, and like this artwork, are usually made from available ingredients. This artwork also emphasizes personal memories of a childhood nestled in problem solving, whether through crossword or jigsaw puzzles, riddles, Lego® bricks, encyclopedias and documentary films of all sorts. These memories collectivize in the irregular shaped illustrative surfaces, supported by a wooden core of flat coloured oblique blocks, each reflective of Earth's 23.5º axis. At its core, *di Soup* center's ancestral ways of being, particularly in immutable principles of an ideal state of matter, where all things are alive, cyclical and harmonious. Its visual portrayal of the past and symbiotic future serves as direct indicators of those ancestral ways, alongside the allegorical play between the bowl (as *di Soup*), and the gallery floor/Earth (as dining table) in its exhibition. In dialogue with this paper, the artwork acts as a bridge connecting knowledge and observer to cycle into new forms of ecological art.

Referencing the planetary boundaries framework, Geoartistry explores whether there is art historical precedence for *di Soup*'s current objectives. Take the land system boundary for instance, this writing considers what pre-modern paintings of 'virgin' landscapes reveal about the impact of natural terrain on the human psyche. Do they support notions of "environmental imagination" which according to Purdy, claims "the natural world has a purpose, to serve human needs richly, but only if people do their part by filling it up with labour and development."[7] Or perhaps, they support the contrary romantic ideal as "a key part of the world's value being

[7] Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 16.

aesthetic and spiritual, found in the inspiration of mountain peaks, sheer canyon walls, and deep forests."[8] Conceivably, both ideas impose humanistic functions on wild spaces and their inhabitants. I use images, stories, history, language (patwah), ancestral and scientific knowledge, to forge a discourse around this human-nature relationship, which culminates in *di Soup* with the hope of inspiring future connectivity between all things.

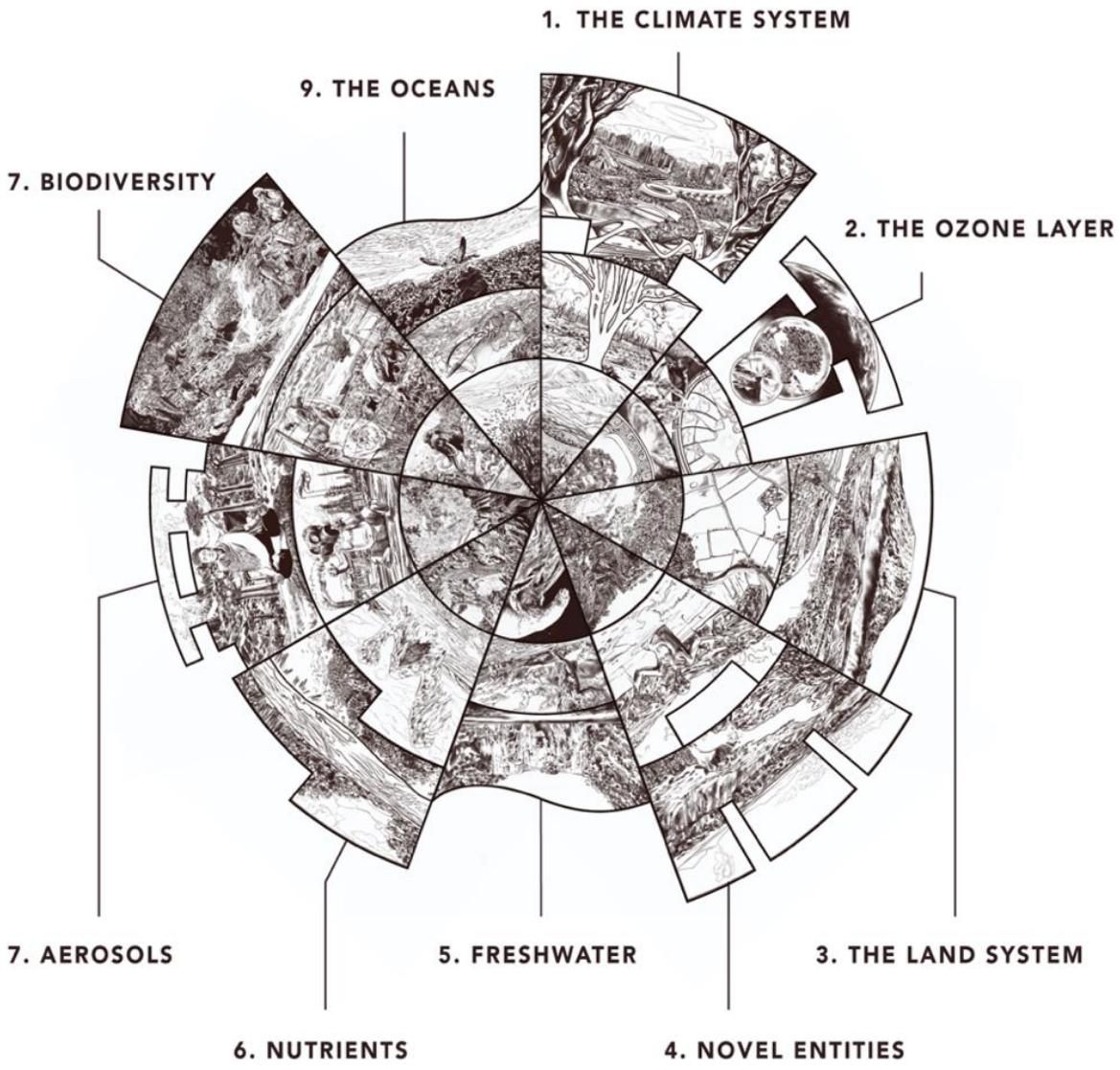

Fig. 0. Leighton Estick, *di Soup (Plan view)*, 2022, Digital drawing.

[8] Ibid., 16.

Theoretical Framework: A brief introduction to nature in art

Given this research employs techniques of thinking, feeling, making and informing through the arts, I chose an art historical methodology. This methodology analyses the relationships between humanity and nature, as indicated in unspoken eco-centric ideas that are embedded in historical drawings, paintings, sculptures and other art-forms. Because this study emphasizes past knowledge, I cite the Akan philosophy of *Sankofa* as a critical research tool and directive. The Akan are the most prominent peoples of present-day Ghana, whose famed subgroup, the Asante, are renowned for their *adinkra* symbology (see appendix. E). Adinkra symbols represent powerful concepts and maxims, that includes Sankofa among them. Sankofa, argues that in order to move forward, one must retrieve what was lost or abandoned.[9] What was lost in this case are those poignant lessons in earth-conscious initiatives that permeate historical art and culture, many of which may be adapted to engage today's environmental issues. Although considered a theoretical approach, Sankofa has practical utility in restoring reciprocal attitudes towards nature, instead of the linear thinking which breaks cycles and destabilizes the Earth system.

I also draw from romanticism given its philosophical underpinnings posit the ancient ideal of coexistence with nature. In 1757, Edmund Burke described evocations of what he called the "sublime in art" as "whatever is in any sort terrible or is conversant about terrible objects or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime."[10] In short, the sublime is discernible both in the natural world and its artistic imitations. Burke adds that terror can be appreciated as both a negative and positive experience. Positivity is found in feelings of awe,

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[9] Appiah Kubi Kwarteng, "The Sankofa Bird and Reflection," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership,* Vol. 10: No. 1 (2016): 1-2, https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol10/iss1/6.

[10] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2015), 111.

humility and grandiosity which manifests when confronted by nature's power. Today, nature documentaries and ecological art offers affective platforms for evoking the sublime through sensational audiovisual storytelling to cultivate a love of nature in all its diverse forms. The sublime transcends literalism by expanding our zones of perception. When for example John Martin's *The Great Day of His Wrath* (c.1853) is observed, one experiences additional insights, such as metaphysical and ethical ideas about nature's significance packaged into a single form.

In my research, I argue that eco-arts can accelerate the process of finding solutions to environmental threats. I also consider arguments that oppose our "saviour mentality" towards nature, like Margulis' view of "our self-inflated moral imperative to guide a wayward Earth or heal our sick planet as evidence of our immense capacity for self-delusion."[11] I've since deduced humans, like all lifeforms, as natural consequences of cosmic pinball do have a responsibility to look after the planet. Opposing theories provide vital substance for debate and assists in identifying the value of artistic initiatives when addressing global warming, pollution, and other threats. The contradictory, assumptive, philosophical nature of the analysis, along with its concern with immanence and potential lack of resolve gives credence to an art historical inquiry. Deleuze claimed the task of art was "to produce signs that will push us out of our habits of perception into the conditions of creation."[12] This art historical methodology allows for the analysis of those signs for knowledge that elude literary forms of communication.

Modernity's apparent disregard for the Earth system manifests three simple research questions as addressed by hand-rendered illustrations of the nine sections of *di Soup*. These questions are:

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[11] Lynn Margulis, *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look At Evolution* (New York City: Basic Books, 1999), 100.

[12] Leon Niemoczynski, "Nature's Transcendental Creativity: Deleuze, Corrington, and an Aesthetic Phenomenology," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 31, https://doi.org/10.5406/amerjtheophil.34.1.0017.

how did ancient peoples view the natural world? How does modernity regard it? And how can future society coexist with nature? Another reason for prioritizing an artistic rather than scientific inquiry (considered more thematically analogous), is because art combines multiple layers of knowing. Art not only connotes the aesthetic virtues of allegory and representation, but as Barrett reasoned also "reflect life issues, or existential issues with which we are all involved."[13] In other words, like all art, *di Soup* provides access to knowledge but never imposes "truth." Instead, they merely offer relatable perspectives that asks observers not to observe and believe, but to observe and think. Crucially, art-based knowledge clarifies planetary issues for those organisms most affected by ongoing ecological destruction, its unborn children.

Clues about our ancient ecologically sustainable practices can be understood through artefacts like effigies and other historical embodiments of nature. This research employs a cyclical view of art history to include extant works that align with traditional, rather than modern ways of being. Questions of today's ecological giving's and misgivings considers modern art—from the age of enlightenment to present. Those works expose personal reflections on the natural world versus modernity by artists who were eyewitnesses to the transition to industry like John Constable, Hokusai and Thomas Cole. I consider their artistic reflections relative to my own particularly when discussing our current challenges in achieving Earth system harmony. I also explore contemporary art that engages and condemns ecologically harmful practices like global warming, pollution, and deforestation. When constructing images for *di Soup*'s future tier, I envision scenarios of human-nature cooperation for the common good of all Earth's inhabitants.

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[13] Terry Barrett, *Interpreting Art: Reflecting, Wondering, and Responding* (New York City: McGraw-Hill Education, 2002), 217.

Contextual Overview: Art for Earth's Sake…

On an isolated windowsill sits an empty bottle plastered with fragments of leftover protein supplement. After several days exposed to sunlight, the originally sandy residue began glowing in neon green. Due to its pungent odour, the contents were merely ignored and washed down the drain. After subsequent washes, I noticed that when flooded with water the mixture foamed like soda and released an unidentifiable gas. Further investigation unmasked this chemical reaction as photosynthesis by an organism most integral to life on Earth–cyanobacteria, commonly known as "blue-green algae." But the bottle was seemingly lifeless, how did life get in there? Life on this blue planet seems pervasive, yet as Rockström professes "Earth has a hair-trigger where the slightest provocation can send the system spinning and wheeling out of control."[14] Given the right conditions as shown in the story above, life may arise from an empty bottle, but can just as easily be washed away. Like all art-forms, stories are critical sites of inquiry, so this chapter explores art history for those stories about humanity's relationship with the natural world.

HUMANOID NON-HUMANS OF ABYA YALA

Nuff pea-ple pass thru inna di shawt istri ah di Caribbean. Wi call di most fame-us group Taino, an dem call dem yaaaad Yamayeka "land ah springs." Dem live inna sed worl crass di sea, an dem identity get cyarve out by di rainfarist mown-ten, sweet fruit, ice wata and sea life. Di climate smoode nuh rah an kip dem warm year roun, an aldoh more while hurricane mash up di rass place, wan labrint ah tree an cave sheltah dem. Dem sumn ya mek di people dem soh irie

[14] Johan Rockström, *Breaking Boundaries*, 16.

Fig. 1. *Zemi carving on staff representing Yucahu perhaps?* ca. 900-1500 AD, Taíno peoples, Jamaica, National Gallery of Jamaica, woodcarving.

Fig. 2. Leighton Estick, *detail showing the core (from di Soup),* 2023, wood assemblage.

dat even Christifah Bombolus affi recagnize…

"they are a loving people, without covetousness– there is no better land-nor people. They love their neighbours as themselves."[15]

Yamayeka made natives of these people called *Yamaye*, and their experiences of the land was personified into powerful totems, the most cherished of which were humanoid figures carved into wood, stone, or sewn called *Cemí*.[5] The core structure of *di Soup,* is an attempt at restoring the Yamaye use of Cemí as ceremonial and culturally supportive instruments (see fig. 2). They are often described as portable artefacts used to channel the magical and supernatural powers of its encased spirits. Oliver explains these artefacts "are social agents of causality, each with definable powers that were either highly beneficial or extremely dangerous to society."[16] Many cemí, like the *Yúcahu* effigy pictured in fig. 1, represent supreme manifestations of nature thought to serve political functions as "an actual symbol of authority of the principal Cacique of Jamaica."[17]

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[15] Christopher Columbus and Paolo Del Pozzo Toscanelli, *The Journal of Christopher Columbus (during His First Voyage, 1492-93) and Documents Relating the Voyages of John Cabot and Gaspar Corte Real*, edited and translated by Clements R. Markham (London: Hakluyt Society, 1893), 135.

[16] José R. Oliver, *Caciques and Cemi Idols: The Web Spun by Taino Rulers Between Hispaniola and Puerto Rico* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 73.

[17] National Gallery of Jamaica, "Jamaican Taíno Art at the NGJ," *National Gallery of Jamaica Blog* (blog), November 28, 2009, https://nationalgalleryofjamaica.wordpress.com/2009/11/28/jamaican-taino-art-at-the-ngj/.

Fig. 3. *Three-Cornered stone* (Trigonolito), c. 1200-1400 AD, Taíno peoples, Dominican Republic, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, limestone carving.

Representations of nature spirits like Yúcahu (spirit of the cassava) or his counterpart Atabey (spirit of freshwater and fertility), along with their usage of yuca (cassava) as a primary staple crop has led some scholars to identify Yamaye (peoples of Yamayeka) as "agriculturalist." But the island's mountainous topography and rainforest biome presents natural barriers to large scale farming. One wonders if the spiritual benefits of cassava/cemí outweighed their agricultural or political function. Its erect phallus, lifted chest, stony facial expression, and rigid stature certainly implies authority. However, its political function may have stood secondary to or even supported the spiritual, as "the culture that conceptualized such artifacts held an animalistic view that animals, objects, places, things, spirits, plants, and even places in the landscape can be persons or parts of persons."[18] Perhaps the Yamaye, like *di Soup's* core that supports its nine sectors, personified those natural forces into these relics to show kinship with or gratitude towards the non-human world. Father Ramon Pané, a friar who was hired by Columbus to live on Hispaniola from 1492-1498, described one benign cemí as "three-pointed stone," believed to cause cassava to thrive (see fig. 3).[19] The encased nature spirits could then be honoured and petitioned through

[18] José R. Oliver, *Caciques and Cemi Idols*, 73

[19] Hostos, Adolfo de, "Three-Pointed Stone Zemi or Idols from the West Indies: An Interpretation," *American Anthropologist* 25, no. 1 (1923): 57. http://www.jstor.org/stable/660585; Oliver, *Caciques and Idols*, 73.

Fig. 4. Left - *Piedra del Sol (Sun Stone)*, c. 1502-1520 AD, Mexica peoples, Mexico, Museo Nacional de Antropología, basalt.

Fig. 5. Right – Leighton Estick, *Terra Incognita (from di Soup)*, 2023, vector illustration.

ritual ceremonies involving their cemí forms, which corresponds to a philosophy of equilibrium between humans and nature common across the peoples of pre-Columbian America. As Cemí are portable spiritual instruments, so *di Soup*'s core retains those values as a modern agent of causality, in this case it supports the nine planetary boundaries (see appendix F).

A panoramic view of pre-Columbian society paints the picture of peoples indistinguishable from the lands, organisms, climate, food, waterways, and the artifacts they belonged. No concept of "art" in the modern sense existed, rather, artifacts were considered living incarnations of the natural world. One prominent incarnation was manifested by a society neighbouring the Yamaye known as the *Mexicas*. Mexica civilization (known today as Aztec) were comparatively agriculturalist, having revolutionized progressive systems of social order, farming, architecture, labour and cultural practices all supported by maize cultivation. Yurval Noah Harari, author of the human history bestseller *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014), challenges the modern conception of "agricultural progress" calling it "History's Biggest Fraud". He notes

"rather than heralding a new era of easy living, the Agricultural Revolution left farmers with lives generally more difficult and less satisfying than those of foragers."[20] Unlike the Yamaye artifacts, the sun-stone pictured in fig. 4 defines an agriculturally empowered people, who due to the complex nature of their society had to deal with the real threat of "loss of civility" caused by both human and natural calamities. Today's world can relate to the pensive Mexica.

The pied shape of *di Soup* is an acknowledgement of what the Mexica recognized about the nature of reality: as perpetual, cyclical and dynamic (see fig. 5). *Tonatiuh*, the Mexica sun god whose head centres the stone as shown in fig. 4, "represents the current world, the Fifth Sun, whereas the surrounding symbols represent the calendric signs of the past four eras."[21] Those four eras ended in cataclysm and this fact was not lost on the Mexica, whose practices of ritual sacrifice were meant to "feed" and "encourage" the god to make his journey across the sky each day. Mexica believed the agricultural and mineral riches of the Earth were paid for with blood, and for that reason "sacrifices were needed to keep the Sun moving; and that flint knife tongue is said to be Tonatiuh's thirst for blood."[22] These practices are considered crude by modern standards, yet today's society may require similar sacrifices in leaving things like fossil fuels, minerals, and other ancestral materials buried, or face the identical cataclysm warned against in *di Soup's* second tier (see appendix G). This relief stone also connotes the significance of time. The concentric rings surrounding Tonatiuh's head inspires the similar layout of *di Soup*'s tiers, as both represent divisions of time, whether into days, weeks, months or years. For this reason,

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[20] Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York City: Random House, 2014), 128.

[21] Klein, Cecelia F. "The Identity of the Central Deity on the Aztec Calendar Stone." *The Art Bulletin* 58, no. 1 (1976): 2. https://doi.org/10.2307/3049459.

[22] Edwin Barnhart and Vejas G. Liulevicius, "Illuminating Works of Aztec Art," *Maya to Aztec: Ancient Mesoamerica Revealed*, 2015, 264.

scholars believed this stone a calendar, but it also describes a people deeply aware of their ancestry, purpose, and eventual ruin due to disease.

H. SAPIENS LESSON I: STUDIES FROM THE WILD

Numerous examples of the deep connections between ancient humans and nature lies eastwards of the Mexica towards modern-day France. People painted, drew and chiseled their impressions of the world with mythical permanence directly into Upper Paleolithic earth. The Chauvet cave drawings are perhaps humanity's oldest-known indicators of this connection, with representations of rhinos, lions, and horses, taking precedence over the anthropomorphism of later eras (see fig. 6). What inspired artists to adorn this chasm with 49 feet of illustrations. In an interview for his documentary *Cave of Forgotten Dreams,* filmmaker Werner Herzog spoke of the "complete and overwhelming awe experienced when he first saw these drawings."[23]

Fig. 6. *Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc Cave,* c. 30,000 BC, Aurignacia peoples, Ardèche, France, cave painting.

[23] Kat Long, "13 Facts About the Chauvet Cave Paintings | Mental Floss," *Mental Floss,* May 17, 2019, https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/577563/chauvet-cave-paintings-facts.

Perhaps this was one goal—to inspire awe in the face of natural power with similar intent and tone as I reason 30,000 years later. Like *di Soup*'s innermost tier, these aspects of nature may have been deemed important to humans and worth recording (see fig. 7, appendix H). Further study describes them as "zoological records of species now extinct like, mammoths, megaloceros deer, wholly rhinoceroses, cave lions, and a wild ancestor to domesticated cattle."[24] Some record animal behaviour like the frozen frames of a great projector, such as the moment cattle herds get stirred into a frenzy caused by encroaching bloodthirsty lionesses. Human and cave collaborate to enhance this singularly geological record, into an expansive chronicle of palaeontology, anthropology, ontology and archaeology, a collective story of Earth.

Fig. 7. Leighton Estick, *di Soup (The First Tier)*, 2023, graphite on board.

These illustrations may embody all the described purposes or more, given that "no single interpretation is exhaustive of the meaning of an artwork, and there can be different, competing, and contradictory interpretations of the same artwork."[25] But when I consider the artist's viewpoint relative to my own work these images ultimately had primary intent–to record human impressions of the wild. Viewing these scenes, one imagines several relatable thoughts and emotions; terror for the speed and power of the coming onslaught, awe over the coordinated

[24] Kat Long, "Chauvet Cave Paintings."

[25] Terry Barrett, *Interpreting Art*, 9.

predation, greater awe for prey animal evasiveness, lessons on hunting by observing these beasts, and excitement for *leftover meat!* Interest in the non-human world's power to change fate, may have led to the rise of animism and zoomorphism in the ancient world; that through art, stories and ritual, humans assign animal qualities to non-animal subjects.

ANIMISM SLITHERS THROUGH THE BLACK LAND

One culture renowned for conceiving animal-human subjects were the people of *Kemet* (meaning the "Black Land"), commonly known as Ancient Egypt. The Kemet are possibly history's best-known example of peoples who although blazoned with the badge of "agriculturalist state," had not fallen prey to the relentless over-extraction that modifies atmospheric chemistry, pollutes waterways, and destroys ecosystems today. Modern scholarship rejects this notion, claiming that had Kemet been as technologically advanced as we, they would have undergone a similar progression. It seems myopic to assume "advancement" as chronologically linear, assuming our present civilization as the pinnacle of human achievement. It is equally conceivable that Kemetians may have foreseen the folly of industry and chosen less ecologically disruptive pathways, implied through advances made in irrigation, timekeeping, recording, the veneration of animals, and an unyielding respect for life and death. For these reasons, the speculative futurism illustrated by the third tier of *di Soup*, was motivated in part by reimagining the present world based on the Kemetic love of life (see appendix I).

Animal forms were featured prominently among several members of the Kemetic pantheon illustrated in fig. 8, from the left: Anubis the jackal-headed god of the underworld, Ammit the crocodile headed/lion fore-quartered/hippopotamus hind-quartered man-eating goddess, Thoth

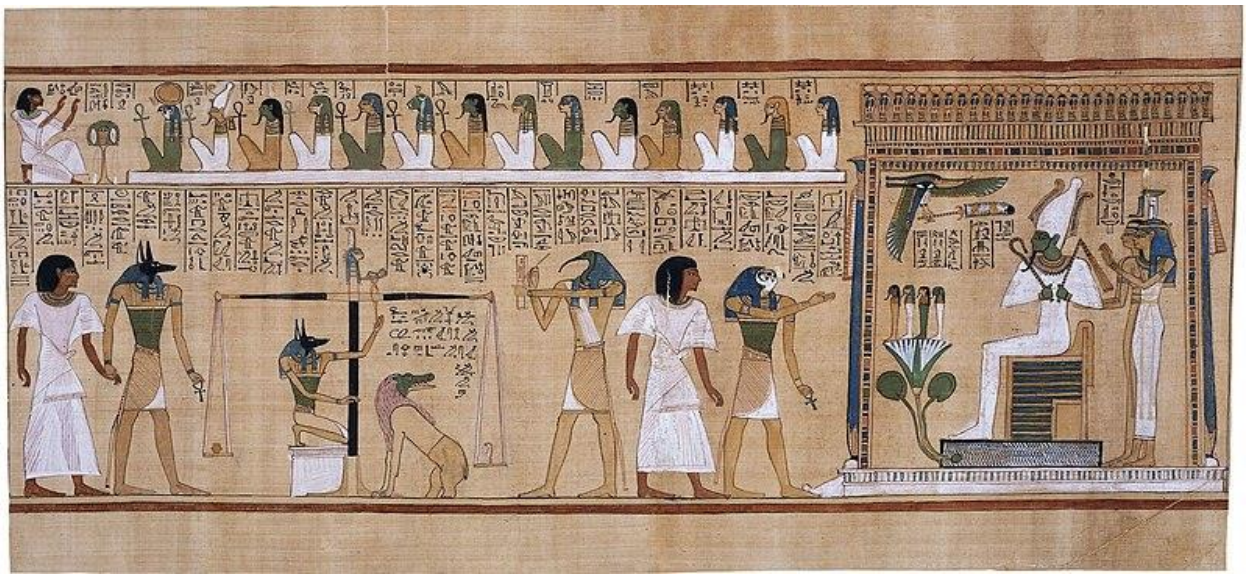

Fig. 8. *Last Judgement of Hu-nefer* (Book of the Dead of Ani), c. 1275 BC, Kemetic peoples, Thebes, Egypt, funerary text.

the ibis-headed scribe of the gods, and Horus the falcon-headed sky god. Horus is "known to have emerged from numerous ancient avian and falcon gods. His name means "the distant one" with the sense of the one who flies high, and so establishing the link between birds, flight, and religious awe."[26] But why did Kemetians opt for animal rather than human forms especially when illustrating divinity? Equally acclaimed Greco-Roman, and Norse gods were conceived as humanoids with animals/plants considered companions, guides or hostiles. Wilkinson explains this "anthropomorphosis of powers" was associated with a fundamental change in human perceptions of the world occurring between the time when Predynastic kings still had animal names, and a time in which humans began to impose their own identity upon the cosmos."[27] In

[26] Elisa Castel, "From Cats to Cows to Crocodiles, Ancient Egyptians Worshipped Many Animal Gods," *NatGeo*, April 1, 2022, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/history-magazine/article/egyptians-worshipped-many-animals-cats-cows-crocodiles.

[27] Richard H. Wilkinson, "Anthropomorphic Deities," *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (April 2008): 1. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5s54w4tc.

other words, anthropocentrism, the belief in "humankind" as the most important entity in existence, can be traced to this inflection period. Acquiring power over fate as facilitated by agricultural food surpluses, some cultures sought to conquer the Earth as exemplified by the *Barnyard* illustration from *di Soup,* provocatively shows humans as livestock (see fig. 9).

Fig. 9. Leighton Estick, *Detail of 'Barnyard' (from di Soup)*, 2023, acrylics on board

The natural world, as in the Yamaye/Mexica examples, continued to stir Kemetic culture. Egyptologist Joann Fletcher affirms "in the earliest times their gods resembled familiar things from the Nile Valley around them such as its heavens, plants, animals, and the river itself whose characteristics overtime would distill into divine figures each worshipped for different qualities." Fletcher continues "in the case of the ram, they were worshipped for their procreative powers—the calf, for their motherly instincts—and dangerous creatures who lived on the peripheries of the Egyptian world, such as lions, crocodiles, and jackals, became associated with danger."[28]

[28] Joann Fletcher, narrator, *The Story of Egypt*, episode 2 "The Road to the Pyramids," aired 2016, on Primevideo, https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0Q38ABT5FEQ4OLVQ5P6PKVSKAD/ref=atv_hm_hom_c_cjm7wb_2_1.

This relationship between peoples, animals, and places underlying the ancient world are examples of animism, which holds that "there is no barrier between humans and other beings. They can all communicate directly through speech, song, dance, and ceremony."[29] Even the famed hieroglyphs on the procession's background are indicative of an in-depth knowledge of their locality; comprised of stylized yet identifiable birds, eyes, pottery, scarabs, snakes, and other native things. These symbols serve spiritual and hierarchical functions outside the decorative, by providing detailed funerary instructions for the living (mourners) and the deceased (Hu-Nefer) who was an administrative official as he navigates the afterlife.

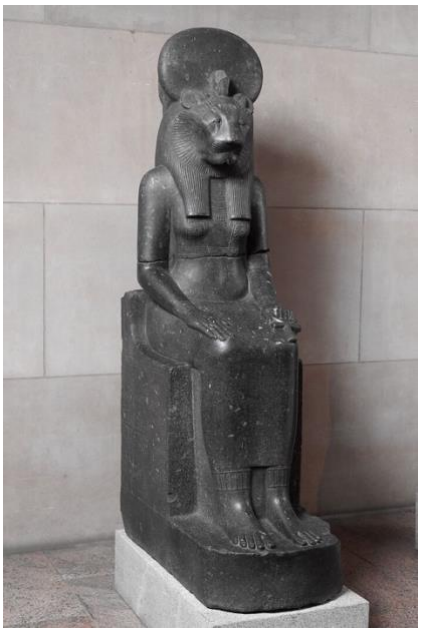

Fig. 10. *Statue of the Goddess Sekhmet,* c. 1390-1352 BC, Kemetic peoples, granodiorite sculpture.

Another Kemetic artefact shows the hybridized lion-headed goddess Sekhmet, seated mightily (see fig. 10). Unlike Horus, Hathor, and others who defined what was good for humans, Sekhmet defines humanity's worst nightmares. These nightmares came from natural maladies familiar to today's communities, like foul weather, crop infestation, disease, and death that constantly threatened to destroy Kemetic ways of life. Kemetians "wished to gain power over these natural maladies, by transforming them into a deity as a way of controlling her destructive powers. By worshipping Sekhmet, it was believed that she could be placated and transformed into a more benign deity." On so many levels, Fletcher continues "the Egyptians were trying to tap into nature, to affect the way it affected them."[30]

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[29] Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind,* 108.

[30] *The Story of Egypt,* "The Road to the Pyramids."

Fig. 11. Left - *Sekhmet "Mistress of Dread" gameplay still from Assassin's Creed: Origins*, 2017, Ubisoft.

Fig. 12. Right - Leighton Estick, *Novel Entities (Exhumation) from di Soup*, 2023, acrylics on board.

One can attest to this sense of overwhelming terror for natural maladies transformed into divine/artistic form, when compared to a battle scene from a present-day interpretation of Sekhmet from Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed: Origins* video game (see fig. 11). The game controller vibrates constantly within my hands, making it difficult to maintain control over Bayek (the foreground character) amidst Sekhmet's fiery onslaught. Her unmeasured violent attacks, hellish setting, imposing scale and open-armed posture were designed to shock users into submission. This horror inspired my *Exhumation* panel above, which shows humanity melting in the noxious hellscape of their own making (see fig. 12). Although Exhumation captures the visual terror of Sekhmet, it was her meandering and incoherent screams that really incited fear, as if I was being ground to dust between Earth's tectonic plates. If the Kemetic concept of Sekhmet as avatar of Earth's wrath was anything resembling Ubisoft's ferocious interpretation as oppressive, divine, armoured, incendiary, and apathetic to feeble creatures, then should humanity not respect it?

As shown in examples from Kemet, Mexica, China, and later Europe, nature's antagonistic qualities could be precisely what pushed humanity to exploit it in committing the ecological malfeasances for which we are familiar today. Lovelock shared some insights on how humanity

has shaped the planet in his novel *Revenge of Gaia*. Its opening sequence speaks of Earth's chaotic side and how humanity constantly tests its patience, stating "the planet we live on has merely to shrug to take some fraction of a million people to their death." He further claims this as nothing compared to what humanity shall unleash given that "we are so abusing the Earth that it may rise and move back to the hot state it was in fifty-five million years ago, and if it does most us, and our descendants will die."[31] Allegorically, Bayek represents ancient humanity who confronts Sekhmet, as an embodiment of planetary rage so his people may survive.

THE IMMEASURABLE WRATH OF AN AGGRIEVED PLANET

Innovations made in scientific approaches and technology during the period known as the Renaissance, expanded our ways of seeing, representing, and interacting with the natural world.

Fig. 13. Giorgione, *The Tempest*, c. 1508, oil on canvas, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice

The art of this period is worth mention for it demarcates a significant shift in perspective from the natural world encased in humanoid or background matter like the art of earlier traditions–to humanity within nature like landscape painting in later traditions. Giorgione's enigmatic painting shown in fig. 13 marks the shift clearly; humans are reduced to naturalistic scales, proportional to the vegetation, landforms, and other elements of the scene. But puzzlingly, it is not evident

[31] James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate Crisis & The Fate of Humanity* (Basic Books, 2007), 1.

whether focus should be placed on the humans or landscape. The nursing mother and the staved gentleman are surely focal points, so why did Giorgione render such an engaging natural setting? Was it merely to frame or decorate the scene, or perhaps it holds deeper function. Lightning slices through the above storm clouds for which the work is named, aiming squarely at the oblivious gentleman to the left. English art critic and presenter Waldemar Januszczak offers his interpretation in *The Many Perplexing Interpretations of the Tempest*:

> The lightning in the background indicates the presence of Zeus, the Greek god of thunder, and thrower of lightning bolts. It shows Zeus, angered by the relationship between his former lover (the nursing mother symbolizing "Demeter-the goddess of fertility") and the gentleman (her new partner), jealously striking the man dead with a lightning bolt.[32]

The painting captures those anxious moments before the gentleman's demise, but crucially, it implies nature's triumph over man's salacious appetite for her, naturalistically styled in place of previous anthropogenic suggestions of control.

H. SAPIENS LESSON II: THE TAO ART, HARMONY WITH NATURE

Deepening the theme of man-in-the-wild, its forests spread to unveil the vast undulating vistas, and mythical forests of landscape painting as illustrated in *The Kangxi Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour*.. shown in fig. 14. Rooted firmly in ancient artistry, landscape painting exposes humanity's historical connection to wild spaces. Consider the panorama shown in fig. 14, its thin rolling brushstrokes delineate the shapes of mountains and trees, underlain by a faded blue-green wash emblematic of East-Asian landscape painting. Although the image in question

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[32] Waldemar Januszczak, "The Many Perplexing Interpretations of The Tempest," *Perspective*, January 2, 2021 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypJEsnjt0qk.

dates to 1698, China lies among the humanity's oldest and continuous practitioners of landscape painting as sited in the works of Gu Kaizhi (344–406 AD), Qu Ding (1023-1056 AD), and Wang Xi Meng (1096-1119 AD). This most common style of landscape painting called *shan shui*, is believed to be inspired by *Taoism*, which maintains that humans and animals should live harmoniously with the Tao (the universe) —the basis of *yin* and *yang* philosophy[33].

Fig. 14. Wang Hui, *The Kangxi Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour, Scroll Three: Ji'nan to Mount Tai*, c. 1698, ink on silk

Maeda explains this duality as expressed in terms of measurement, where "mountains are arranged in a principal-auxiliary, superior-inferior order and are in accord with the contrasting dualities of Yin and Yang (Earth and Heaven); each having its own form and designation."[34] As its title suggests, the scene depicts a grand tour of newly consolidated territory in southern China by the Kangxi emperor and his companions. Similarly, albeit more accurately than *The Tempest*, the human presence is rendered as tiny multicoloured dots, hurdled by an imposing mountain range

[33] Lao Tse and James Legge, *The Book of Tao: Tao Te Ching - The Tao and Its Characteristics* (ARC Manor, 2008).

[34] Robert J. Maeda, *Two Twelfth-Century Texts on Chinese Painting* (U of M Center for Chinese Studies, 2021), 16.

to imply the diminutive stature of human concerns. A similar treatment of humanity was also applied to several panels from *di Soup*, but most prominently in the image entitled *Family*. Instead of the conventionally human family portrait, this image opts for one that is organismic with its inclusion of reptiles, mammals, an avian, the aquatic, rocks and trees to show oneness between all life. Humans are shown proportionally sized, not larger-than-life or separate as became the standard of modernist thinking, but an intrinsic part of life (see fig. 15).

Fig. 15. Leighton Estick, *Biodiversity (Family) from di Soup*, 2023, oils on board

Another prominent landscape painting can be discussed through the lens of romanticism given its global reach. We speak of course about *The Great Wave of Kanagawa*, by Japanese master illustrator Hokusai (see fig. 16). Hokusai was a remarkable storyteller, who emphasized man's subservience to Earth's power. The illustration not only depicts a monstrous tsunami but exaggerates its proportions to such an extent that the sailors, and for that matter Mount Fuji, are utterly consumed by water. The wave crests like the massive claws of a mythical beast—tearing at humanity—testing its willpower. Studying the prevalence of wave motifs in 19th-Century

Japanese visual culture, Guth noted "the idea that the waves encircling the Japanese islands sheltering them from outside intruders was deeply rooted in Japanese thinking—waves were thought to have divine agency"[35] (468). Comparing Hokusai and Ogata Kōrin's waves (see fig. 17), Guth claimed "the thrashing sea is creatively transformed into a drama at once fanciful and disturbing as two anthropomorphized waves with tentacle-like arms confront one another, the smaller one seeming to recoil in horror."[36] Like many pre-modernist cultures, the Japanese were (and still are) deeply aware and respectful of nature's power to create and destroy civilization. But what if one inhabits lands less geologically active than Japan and has the wherewithal to exploit nature on industrial scales—how then does art help maintain eco-cultural humility where Earth's temper appears stable?

Fig. 16. Left - Katsushika Hokusai, *Under the Great Wave off Kanagawa (Kanagawa oki namiura)*, c.1831, woodblock print.

Fig. 17. Right - Ogata Kōrin, *Rough Waves*, c. 1704-09, ink and gold leaf on paper.

[35] Christine M. E. Guth, "Hokusai's Great Waves in Nineteenth-Century Japanese Visual Culture," *Art Bulletin*, (2011): 468. https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2011.10786019.

[36] Ibid., 470.

WHEN TREES BECAME CHIMNEYS…

Romanticism rejected ideas of order and reason implemented by enlightenment-era thinking, neither of which were absolute in nature. Contrarily, the romantics favoured the irrational, the absolute, the horrific or in Burkean terms the "sublime." These features made romanticism the central aesthetic component of my work, designed to expose my intimate thoughts about nature. Burke broke the idea of the sublime down into seven aspects: Darkness, obscurity, privation, vastness, magnificence, loudness and suddenness. The future tiers from three sections of *di Soup* employs the aspects of vastness and magnificence through landscape painting (see fig. 18). In the *Climate System* section, a futuristic city emerges from an old-growth forest, idyllically without disrupting its flourishing. Its skies are clear to imply climate stability, while magnificence is found in the ice capped mountains across all three. They watch over humankind lest we devolve into old exploitative patterns. Mount Kilimanjaro overseas the *Land System* without a human civilization in sight, while *Novel Entities* returns noxious substances underground.

Fig. 18. Leighton Estick, Top – *The Climate System*, Middle – *The Land System*, Bottom – *Novel Entities*, 2023, oils on board.

Several artists of the time opposed the industrialization (aided by scientific reason) of wild spaces occurring across the world, by looking inwards for knowledge about nature's value. But empiricism according to Meyers, claims that "all knowledge of real existence must be based on the senses or self-consciousness, that is, on experience."[37] In his many paintings, John Constable (1776-1837) documented extensively the transformation of wild spaces he witnessed firsthand during the industrial revolution. Years ago, my illustration mentor Maas Robert Archer, noticed an interest in animal and land subjects growing within me. In response, Archer produced an illustrated novella of the collected drawings and writings of Constable. On recollection, the book showed his beloved subject of cottaged landscapes becoming machined into factory towns. The opening pages revealed drawings of roving English countryside, coated in pine, spruce and oak trees, clear skies, and cottages corralled by an unassuming church—the stuff of fairy tale art.

Fig. 19. John Constable, *Dedham Vale,* 1802, oil on canvas

Fig. 20. John Constable, *The Vale of Dedham,* 1828, oil on canvas

[37] Robert G. Meyers, *Understanding Empiricism* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 2.

By the novella's end, however, this countryside looked very different: those lush trees were flattened into savannah, stone buildings menaced the green hills, and the prominent spires of factory chimneys pierced the skies, stifling it with smog. That transition is also reflected in Constable's landscape paintings of the same subject from his youth compared to what he saw years later (see fig. 19 and 20). Constable's experiences are stark reminders of similar intrusions I've witnessed creeping the foothills of the Blue Mountain range of my homeland of Kingston, Jamaica. As a child the hills shown in my painting *Amidst Mountains and Sea* that served as oil painting practice for the third tier of *di Soup,* were coated in dense tropical cloud forests. As an adult those forests have been invaded by ringwormed patches of grey urban sprawl seen on the left, dishonouring both Yamayeka and Yamaye (see fig. 21).

Fig. 21. Leighton Estick, *Amidst Mountains and Sea*, 2021, oil on canvas, 48.26 cm × 60.96 cm (19 in × 24 in)

Constable famously rejected contemporary styles of landscape painting in favour of accurate depictions. At age 26, he painted his *Dedham Vale* locality during the brief hiatus between the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars, stating in that year "he considered *bravura*, an attempt to do something beyond the truth as the great vice of the day"[38] (see fig. 19). The tranquil warm aureolin glow and soft cloudy skies in this image, conceals the wider political turmoil. By 1828, amidst the cultural upheaval following the Napoleonic wars that disturbed even the countryside, and the illness and death of his beloved wife Maria, Constable's brushwork was becoming more expressive with optical effects that evoked the physical experience of nature.[39] This disruption found in Constable's technique, influenced my choice of medium for *di Soup,* from graphite, to acrylics, to oils, used to signify each of the three tiers of Earth's phases (see appendix J).

Constable sought to disengage from this turmoil by focusing on representations of a "natural" countryside, however, with the death of Maria, his work became noticeably somber (see fig. 20). With refined technique, Constable signifies the grim encroachment of urbanization into the wild—a bridge, more buildings, more people, greyer aura. One cannot be certain whether this shift was due to industry, mourning, or depression that his and contemporary J.M.W. Turner's practices were becoming obsolete. Yet, when examined relative to the wider happenings of the 19th Century world, the transition seems more valid. However, even by this early stage of industrialization, Constable's vision of "untamed nature" no longer existed. What he and his contemporaries witnessed were merely millennia-long swan songs of the wild.

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[38] Ronald Rees, "Constable, Turner, and Views of Nature in the Nineteenth Century," *Geographical Review* 72, no. 3 (1982): 255. https://doi.org/10.2307/214526.

[39] Iris Wein, "The Opaque Nature of John Constable's Naturalism," *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 41, no. 2 (2016): 44–61, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44011806.

ERDGEIST: THE DYNAMIC FORCES OF CHAOS AND CREATION

Returning home to lands straddled by the Atlantic and Pacific oceans; its magnificent backbone, pronounced dimples, nourishing waters, and boundless flesh, found their greatest expression in the Hudson River School. Widely acknowledged as the founder of the school, Thomas Cole, in his painting the *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* shows the moment in the Book of Genesis when God expels the first humans, Adam and Eve from Eden (see fig. 22). An identifying feature of the school comparable to East Asian landscape compositions, is found in the diminutive stature of humans relative to the environs depicted. Undoubtedly influenced by the apocalyptic scenes of John Martin, Cole described his world as "made up of volcanic mountains. The world in its deformity [is made up of] rugged dark stormy Broken Rocks, by

Fig. 22. Thomas Cole, *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden,* 1828, oil on canvas, 100.96 cm × 138.43 cm (39.75 in × 54.50 in)

Fig. 23. Leighton Estick, *the Ozone Layer*, 2022, digital illustration.

definition, formed by geological shifts."[40] The painting contrasts the tranquil "unspoiled" vista on the right, with a chaotic petrified wasteland on the left, because Cole realized in his travels that both themes underlie nature. His images challenge the romantic view of an endlessly placid, nurturing, idyllic planet–by showing its true character as dynamic, which interestingly, is also reflected in all systems. The *Ozone Layer* section of *di Soup* speaks to this dichotomy. The first (bottom) tier shows an arch crafted by early humans signifying a fortified ozone layer, which protects creation (the tree of life), from chaos (the universe). Its middle tier shows humanity breaking the ozone dome, releasing hell (see fig. 23, appendix K).

Why did Hudson River artists minimize the human figure in opposition to earlier traditions that held "mankind as the measure of all things"? As children, Cole and his sister Sarah (an accomplished landscape painter in her own right) wandered "through the surrounding country, in

[40] Andrew Hemingway and Alan Wallach, *Transatlantic Romanticism: British and American Art and Literature, 1790-1860*, 2015, 176.

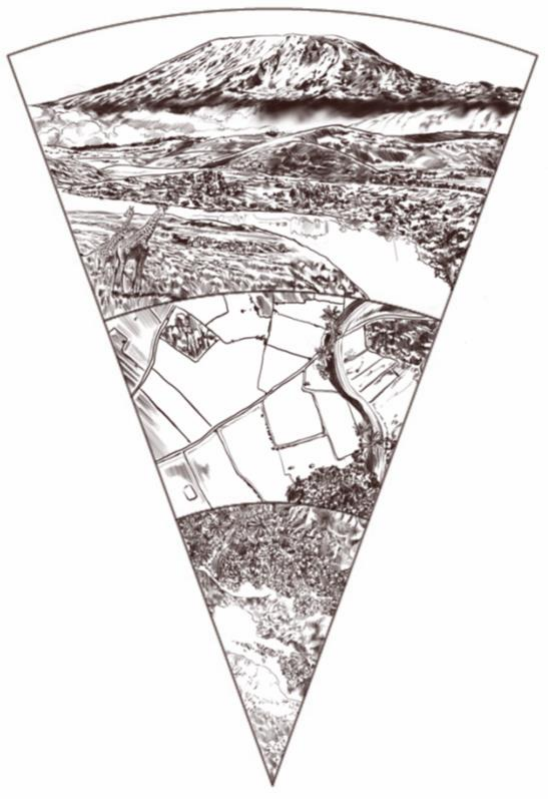

Fig. 24. Leighton Estick, *the Land System*, 2022, digital illustration

search of the picturesque, for which he had already a remarkable love."[41] Cole travelled extensively during his formative years, initially moving back and forth between Pennsylvania and Ohio where his family settled, to New York and the Hudson Valley, the Caribbean and back. These adventures resulted in compositions of geographically mythical scenes that blended temperate conifers with tropical palm trees shown in his expulsion–to the subject of *Lake with Dead Trees,* showing the badlands of Catskill Mountains that undoubtedly inspired the hellish scene on the left (see fig. 22). By studying paintings such as Cole's, I integrated his methodology of blending geographically inaccurate scenes into my work. The first tier from *the Land System* section, shows an aerial view of a regular beach framed by forest (see fig. 24, appendix L). However, like Cole's expulsion, the forest is a blend of tropical and temperate plants creating a fanciful yet hopeful vision of what pre-human 'maximal diversity' of all things looked like.

In Cole's scene, humanity (and its related concerns) is once again minimized, because continuous investigation, admiration, and impartiality towards nature, had given artists an enhanced grasp of the whole (Earth) as greater than the sum of its parts (humans). Cole's paintings reflect lessons he learned through embodied observations of the whole of nature, such

[41] Louis Legrand Course Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 4.

as the dichotomy of chaos and creation. Nature gives with one hand and takes away with the other. But rather than view the latter as sentient and intentionally malicious, the Hudson River School looked beyond that by allowing nature to teach artists to connote it as is. Not as realistic portrayals—but impressions. Purdy suggests artists and thinkers like Cole "drew on the morally educative power of nature, the harmonies among landscape, character, and society."[42] In his painting commonly called *The Oxbow*, a bend on the Connecticut River seen from Mount Holyoke, Massachusetts, is depicted and again, the dichotomy is made clear (see fig. 25). Thunderclouds drench the wild forest in rain and darkness, while moving leftwards to reveal the valley to the right with its farmlands renewed by invigorating sunshine. Ferguson alluded to "the

Fig. 25. Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, 1836, oil on canvas.

[42] Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*, 191.

artist, a tiny figure poised in the middle with his easel on a rocky outcropping, gazing directly at his fellow Americans. He seems to ask whether their new country will choose to preserve its natural grandeur or continue with industrial exploitation."[43] Owing to bonds forged between artist-and-nature, practitioners of the Hudson River School possibly sought to preserve their beloved wilderness in paint. There's a palatable urgency in this documentation—as if racing against time to save nature from industry by immortalizing remaining wilderness in paint before they vanish forever. That urgency also became evident while painting *di Soup*, a task that was conservative with time, but generous with effort, both being the crucial variables when tackling Earth system restoration.

A GREATNESS BEYOND ALL CALCULATION, MEASUREMENT OR IMITATION

Frederic Edwin Church continued the style of capturing geological dynamism laid out by his teacher Thomas Cole, but with added emphasis on its most creative and destructive forces. Whether as blazing tropical sunsets, static swamplands, buildings ruined by ancient earthquakes, auroras, or in this case *Cotopaxi*, a volcanic eruption, Church homed in on Earth's might by lulling his human gaze (see fig. 26). The image records an event perhaps best described geologically through the work of scholars like Alexander von Humboldt, whose teachings inspired some of the greatest minds of the century like Charles Darwin, John Muir, Ida Laura Pfeiffer, and Frederic Edwin Church. But Church, at a time preceding colour photography, was able to emphatically and emotionally penetrate the essence of Earth in a super-scientific manner

[43] Ian Ferguson, "Thomas Cole: A Fresh Look at the Father of American Landscape," *National Gallery of Canada*, September 19, 2018, https://www.gallery.ca/magazine/your-collection/around-the-world/thomas-cole-a-fresh-look-at-the-father-of-american.

Fig. 26. Frederic Edwin Church, *Cotopaxi,* 1862, oil on canvas.

as it literally explodes beneath one's feet. Church exaggerated the slopes and lowlands of Cotopaxi, and in other works depicting this volcano, he included geologically inaccurate plants and landforms. Humboldt describes this inclusion also seen in Cole's and my own work, as the artist's pursuit of "maximal diversity of life and landscape as the *summum bonum* (highest good) of aesthetic joy and intellectual wonder."[44] For Church, his contemporaries, and myself centuries later, to describe truth meant to suppress accurate depiction in service of something greater–the diversity of the whole. This is the premise behind *di Soup's* segmentation: to capture as much about the Earth as possible while preserving its inherent connectivity. Maximal diversity inspired art-driven adventures to the Andean foothills because unlike lands that are either temperate,

[44] Stephen J. Gould, "Church, Humboldt, and Darwin: The Tension and Harmony in Art and Science," in *Frederic Edwin Church,* ed. Frances P. Smyth (Washington: National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian Institute Press, 1989), 100.

tropical, or polar, these mountainous plains facilitate the coexistence of all land systems. This wholistic view of the natural world as system, may have motivated modern environmentalists and ecological artists to conserve the greatest diversity of forms, whether it may be the air, lands, waters, minerals, or organisms, all things are safeguarded equally.

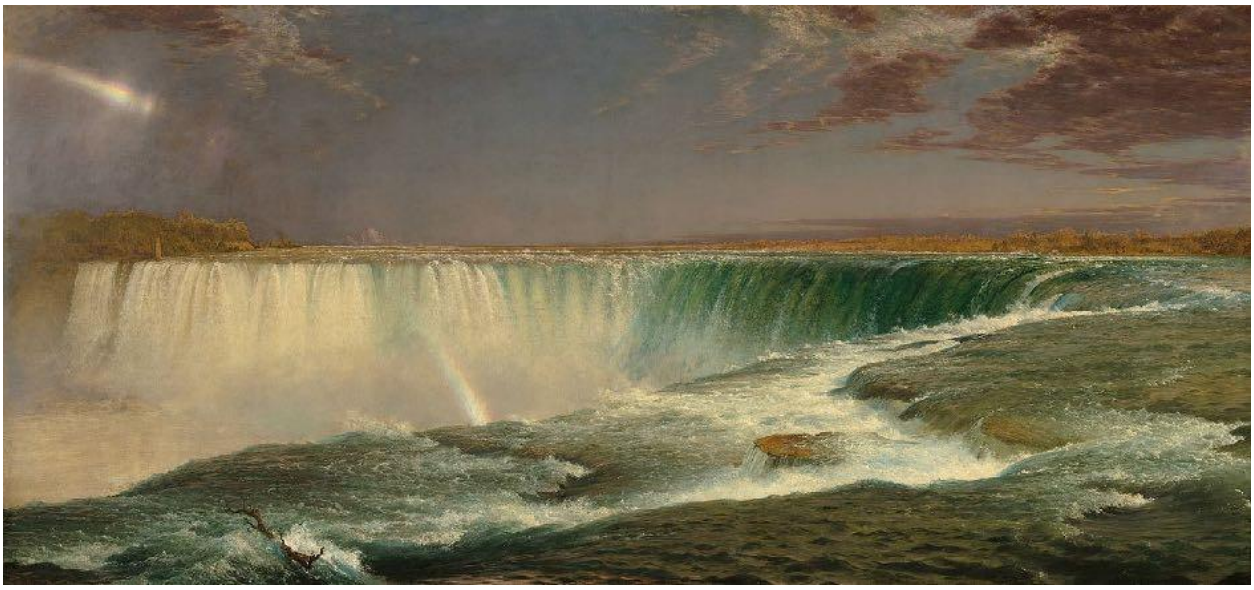

Fig. 27. Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara,* 1857, oil on canvas, 101.6 cm × 229.9 cm (40.0 in × 90.5 in)

Cascading over an arched plateau of its own design, *Niagara* is Church's masterpiece of perspective (see fig. 27). Church oriented the viewer as Gould described "at the lip of the great falls, as a contrast to an average describer who should "naturally" choose the "fuller" and more "objective" view of the cascade head on from below."[45] From this perspective, viewers can sense the immense pressure of gallons of freshwater pushing against their backs, inching them saliently towards the edge. Church could have chosen "the safe viewpoint" Gould describes, beneath the falls and away from immediate danger—after the fact. Instead, Church places the reader atop the falls, whose torrential waters seem to one gravitationally inwards, like those common nightmares

[45] Gould, "Church, Humboldt, and Darwin," 96.

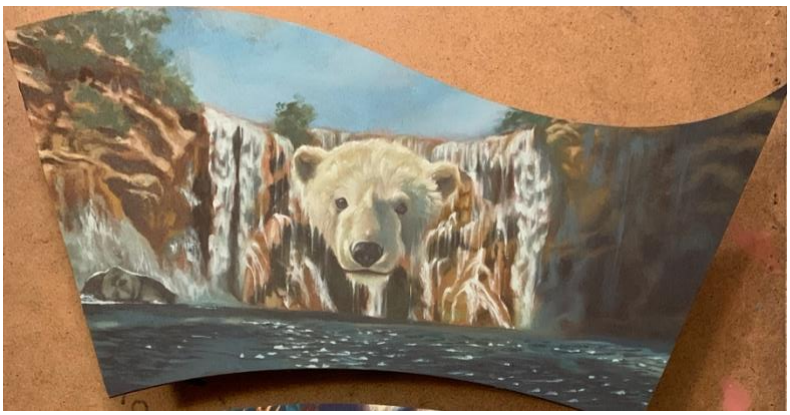

Fig. 28. Leighton Estick, *Freshwater (Cistern),* 2023, oil on board.

of falling. The obscure plunge pool augments the loss of control as if being consumed into oblivion; but this feeling of terror is strangely exhilarating. I learned that lesson when seeing these majestic falls firsthand in 2008. Hence, I contrastingly sought Gould's "safe viewpoint" for the third tier of the *Freshwater* section of *di Soup,* whose shape emulates Niagara Falls from below, given its objective of inspiring hope rather than to terrify (see fig. 28). The fall's power to overwhelm as immortalized again by *Taoism*, posits the sublime *Tao* (universe) is found at the edge of elimination—that whilst supported by the past, and remaining present, one may proceed fearlessly into the future.

Ending this chapter, Burkean philosophy views these natural phenomena as evidence of the sublime, recognized to have its greatest artistic output during the European romantic period. The sublime overwhelms with joy and exhilaration, but also horror which Burke claims is all triggered by magnificence, darkness, vastness, obscurity, privation, loudness, and suddenness.[46] These triggers can be found present within works that imitate the natural world's character authentically–it is both chaotic and creative. Taoism for one, identifies this character with the "Tao" a "metaphysical first principle that controls the operations of the universe…and generates the endlessly diverse forms of the world."[47] Therefore, the objective for us organisms, if living

[46] Burke, "Part II," *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.

[47]Ming Gu, "The Universal "One": Toward a Common Conceptual Basis for Chinese and Western Studies," *Diacritics* 32, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 89–91, https://doi.org/10.1353/dia.2004.0021.

Fig. 29. Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818, oil on canvas, 37.3 in × 29.4 in

symbiotically with the Tao, is to "learn to sense its presence and movements in order to bring one's own life and movements into harmony with it."[48]

Wanderer above the Sea of Fog is a personal favourite. Compared with Church's *Niagara*, the essence of Taoism and the sublime were packaged into this work with spectacular detail (see fig. 29). A figure appears standing over a precipice from behind so viewers may witness the world from his perspective. He seems deeply enamoured by the dynamic scene ahead. Sea stacks rise from the depths, blanketed by a mix of waves and haze. Although cloaked in the ramparts of enlightenment-era society (the tailored coat and cane), the figure acknowledges his subservience to an untameable Earth. Rather than having direct influence on my work, I situate myself as "the wanderer" in the image. Goosebumps erupt across my arms when confronted by this work while feeling the icy seawater seemingly splashing out of the frame. This reaction is none other than overwhelming love, for *the natural world as my master, whose currents I flow with, whose hazards I navigate, and whose might I respect*. These works indicate how artists had historically allowed themselves to be molded, taught, and reoriented to harmonize with nature.

[48] Tse and Legge, *The Book of Tao: Tao Te Ching - The Tao and Its Characteristics*, 17.

Discussion: Blakbud soaring through eons of planetary stewardship

Caw… Caw… Cough Cough* Lawd da air ya dutty sah. I've been orbiting this ultramarine soup for billions of years and witnessed its many spells of chaos and creation. It began as a boiling mass, then it became blue, then white, then blue with brown patches, then white again, then the patches got coated in green… all the while cooling in search of harmony. Da greenery ya strange. Mi go fass and land pan saff Eart, an wid folded wing, an piercing gol yeye, mi see di piktcha clear. Green and blue materia worked together to cleanse the air of volatile gases. Ah dat amonize di miserable klimate an mek nuff kreachah pass tru. Di whola dem move similah tu—curious, productive, recuperative, and harmonious. But wan two-legged kreachah evolve both deductive and inductive skills and became planetary stewards who worked to maintain di Earth. They did this undisturbed for millennia, replenishing the nature which provided for them. And life threaten dem yes, but dem remain* ***human****. Human, whaddat mean?*

One of the most provocative examples of Earth-focused art initiatives constitutes the genre of ecological art. Linda Weintraub, as art writer, curator and educator, whose work revolves around intersections between art and environmentalism, describes ecological or "eco art" as a "means of art-making that are capable of addressing the Earth's mounting vulnerabilities and crises."[49] Similar albeit more refined than historical examples of romanticism and impressionism, eco-arts "are as individual as they are global in implication, and often as material as they are embroiled in both cultural and scientific ideas.[50] Its 1960s timing was no coincidence, having emerged from revolutions in Earth science, initiated by: advances in space exploration which furnished the first

[49] Linda Weintraub, *To Life!: Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet* (CA: Univ of California Press, 2012), 1.

[50] Mark Cheetham, *Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature Since the '60s* (Penn State Press, 2018), 1-3.

colour photographs of our planet like *Earthrise* and the *Blue Marble* in 1968 and 1972 respectfully, Lovelock and Margulis' *Gaia Hypothesis in the* 1970s, Rachel Carlson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 on synthetic pesticide pollution, the first *Earth Day* on April 22, 1970 and countless other key events. These milestones provided increased perspectives on how the planet works as a system, rather than as individual parts which industry exploits and ruins.

Artists such as Angeles Peña, Lorenzo Quinn and Olafur Eliasson lie among the practitioners in the field this discussion is most interested. Eco-art exposes the populace to environmental issues by employing documentaries, performance, outdoor art, land art, recycling of non-biodegradable items such as plastics, or the repurposing of rejected natural substances like earth, culled lumber, rocks, and flora. Monumentalism and recycling are notable features of eco-art, allowing for direct engagement on scales mimicking the enormity of planetary crises, while also expanding the reach of traditional art institutions like galleries, schools, and museums. Although *di Soup* is firmly rooted within the contemporary eco-arts and current Earth system change, I strongly regard historical art as a critical site for immutable understandings about how one should view, experience and live within planetary boundaries today.

I have witnessed humanity seeking harmony with nature for eons through their art. This harmony was particularly evident while hovering across *Abya Yala*–whose peoples intuitively considered all things as living, analogous, and sacred. Modern technologies have enhanced the global yield of resources like food but has also undermined the planet's ability to replenish itself, thus, morphing the concept of 'human.' Several lessons in early planetary stewardship were retained among peoples who understood that all life, even humans, depend on each other to prosper. Early humans were defined by endeared origin stories of similar motif: the Creator fashioned humans out of Earth, the Creator blew an immortal spirit into their earthen husk giving

Fig. 30. John Martin, Top – *The Plains of Heaven,* 1851-1853, oil on canvas, 198.8 cm x 306.7 cm;

Middle – *The Great Day of His Wrath,* 1851-1853, oil on canvas, 196.5 cm x 303.2 cm;

Bottom– *The Last Judgement,* 1851-1853, oil on canvas, 196.8 cm x 325.7 cm.

them life, and lastly, the Creator commanded the living soul to maintain the Earth (often symbolized as a garden). This was definitionally "human" while observing them for millennia—as protectors and custodians of the planet, that modernity tarnishes through avarice, but what does "human" mean today?

Some of these featherless ones rejected modernity and shifted towards what might be called the earliest form of eco-art. During his final years, John Martin completed his 'judgement paintings' triptych that depicts the outcomes of human sins against nature (see fig. 30). The images are deservedly horrific with *The Great Day of His Wrath* being particularly disconcerting. It shows a putrefied landscape littered with decaying flesh, void of all hope–a cadaveric ruin of a place, meant "to express the sublime, apocalyptic force of nature and the helplessness of man to combat God's will."[51]

[51] Frances Fowle, "'The Great Day of His Wrath', John Martin, 1851–3," *Tate,* December 2000, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/martin-the-great-day-of-his-wrath-n05613.

Fig. 31. Leighton Estick, *Aerosols (Choke) from di Soup*, 2023, acrylics on board.

Riding argues that Martin's paintings typified "a new vision of a dynamic, prehistoric earth, constantly shifting and evolving,"[52] roused by the emerging sciences of geology and palaeontology blended with religious foreboding. Like many romantics influenced by Martin, my approach to the second tier of *di Soup* particularly in the most eerie image from the *Aerosols* section–relied on shock and awe to warn their contemporaries of divine retribution for their sins against nature as mediated through Earth's most cataclysmic forces (see fig. 31, appendix M). Today's eco-artists on similar impulses "incorporate scientific and technological evaluations of environmental concerns"[53] in their messaging. These works inspire planetary stewardship by spreading awareness and trusting the public to make eco-conscious decisions to restore and maintain the Earth system.

Ángeles Peña is such an eco-artist whose photographs "transmit growing concerns for climate change and its impacts on the biosphere."[54] Peña's locale of Patagonia, situated on the serrated edge of present-day South America, is heavily referenced in her work and lies among those ecologies that seduced landscape painters like Cole and Church. Growing up within that dynamic environment, afforded her an embodied understanding of how the planet is changing. Her studies

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[52] Christine Riding, "British Art and the Sublime," *Tate*, January 1, 2013, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/christine-riding-and-nigel-llewellyn-british-art-and-the-sublime-r1109418.

[53] Cheetham, *Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature Since the '60s*, 3.

[54] "Angeles Peña," *Saatchi Art*, n.d., https://www.saatchiart.com/angelespena.

Fig. 32. Ángeles Peña, from *Aguas de Montaña (Mountain Water),* 2016-present, photography

capture changes in the air, water and ice which together provides the clearest evidence of climate instability. In her own words, she focuses "not on the landscape, but the path: a wild and hostile environment, untamed by the hand of man; the insignificance of mankind against such infinity."[55] An image from her *Aguas de Montaña (Mountain Water)* series, shows the process of ice melting, refreezing and melting again (see fig. 32). From one direction it seems an odd yet completely natural process of non-linear change; but considering the artist's lamentation of global warming as done throughout my own work, this image carries both documentary and allegorical functions. The presence of all three states of matter in one image (including unseen vapours), implies instability–but the kind attributed to unbridled modernity that continuously pressures already strained ecological boundaries.

Another curious image of Peña's shows a large granite rock straddling an icy crevasse (see fig. 32). Peña's subject merges allegory and representation: frozen in time, it illustrates the progression of glacial melt like an inverted thermometer—as Earth warms, this rock too shall plunge deeper into melting ice. So far, the photo shows the rock approximately one thirds

[55] "Angeles Peña," *LensCulture*, n.d., https://www.lensculture.com/angeles-pena.

Fig. 33. Ángeles Peña, from *Aguas de Montaña (Mountain Water),* 2016-present, photography

Fig. 34. Leighton Estick, *The Climate System (Anthropocene) from di Soup,* 2023, acrylics on board

sunken. This descent can be viewed as a record of the amount of warming already elapsed, but crucially as *mi flap frantically,* there's a timeline embedded in the photo whereby urgent action is required before the ice vanishes. This timeline was infused into the *Anthropocene* image from *di Soup*, whose central tree visualizes the exacerbated state of global temperatures if humanity continues to burn fossil fuels and destroy forests (see fig. 34). An alternative view appears *as mi calm down…* Perhaps the climate was never stable to begin with, and future data may report that human-led warming dwarfs in comparison to that of natural cycles. As witnessed and illustrated, Earth is a living planet, having undergone multiple ice ages and mass extinction events, intermediated by several warm periods. But this fact belies the verifiable strain of human society on ecological health. Moreover, it provides useful insights into the power organisms hold over planetary stasis. Organisms may either harmonize for their collective benefit, or isolate and enact cataclysm. Rockström refers to this harmony as **planetary stewardship**, defined as "collective action to live within planetary boundaries to halt the risks of environmental collapse."[56] As one

[56] Rockström and Gaffney, "Planetary Stewardship," *Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our Planet*, 108.

boundary, the climate system merely acts as a symptom of more severe planetary maladies. Peña's art warns that society should aim to maintain that harmony or unleash chaos.

While eco-art places observers in direct contact with planetary issues through documentary films and photographs, it also facilitates allegory. Lorenzo Quinn's installation called *Support* is such an allegorical artwork (see fig. 35). Two massive hands emerge from the Grand Canal of Venice, Italy, to support the outer walls of the 14th-Century Ca 'Sagredo Hotel amidst rising sea levels. Additionally, Halcyon Art International had commissioned a 3-metre replica that was "on display at the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP25 in Madrid to raise awareness for climate change and illustrate humanity's capacity to damage the environment but also its ability to save it."[57] The monumental sculpture may be viewed as inspiring hope, by "reflecting

Fig. 35. Lorenzo Quinn, *Support*, 2017, Sculpture and public art installation

[57] "Lorenzo Quinn's Sculpture 'Support' on Display at the UN Climate Change Conference," *Halcyon Gallery*, n.d., https://www.halcyongallery.com/news/9-lorenzo-quinn-s-sculpture-support-on-display-at-the.

the two sides of humans—the creative and the destructive, that humans have the capacity to make changes and re-balance the world around them."[58] Quinn stated "the hand holds so much power – the power to love, to hate, to create, to destroy." There's a curious irony at play, where again, to stress this point, like humans, the natural world also has a propensity for creativity and destruction. The issue at hand is not that humans reflect nature; more importantly is unlike nature which leans more towards creation (often cited as "natural law"), modernity favours destruction and threatens the very proof of human existence in the process as Quinn's work warns.

Flap flap, flap… Soaring above one wonders why an organism endowed with such intellect to have deduced profound ideas like sankofa, taoism, the sublime, gaia and now stewardship, all that posit a oneness with nature, would fall prey to linear and environmentally detrimental activities. *Sumn nuh right yah…* Rockström claims "in just 500 years humanity has managed to push the planet out of a state it had been in for the previous 12,000."[59] As mentioned earlier, the Holocene is generally regarded as a period of relatively stable climate. For nearing a century David Attenborough, Jane Goodall, James Lovelock, Wangari Maathai, Winona LaDuke and so many others have warned against modernity's toying with this stability. In his many nature books, talks, films and a recent masterpiece described as his "witness statement" entitled *A Life on Our Planet* recorded at age 93, he declares himself as witness to ecosystem decline of horrific scales. With face and body visibly despondent, he muttered displeasingly that "the world is not as wild as it was. We've destroyed it, not just ruined it. That non-human world is gone. Human

[58] Rokas Laurinavičius, "Support: Giant Hands Rise From A Canal In Venice To Send A Powerful Message About Climate Change," *Bored Panda,* August 18, 2018, https://www.boredpanda.com/hands-sculpture-support-lorenzo-quinn-venice/?utm_source=google.

[59] Johan Rockström, narrator, *Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our Planet.*

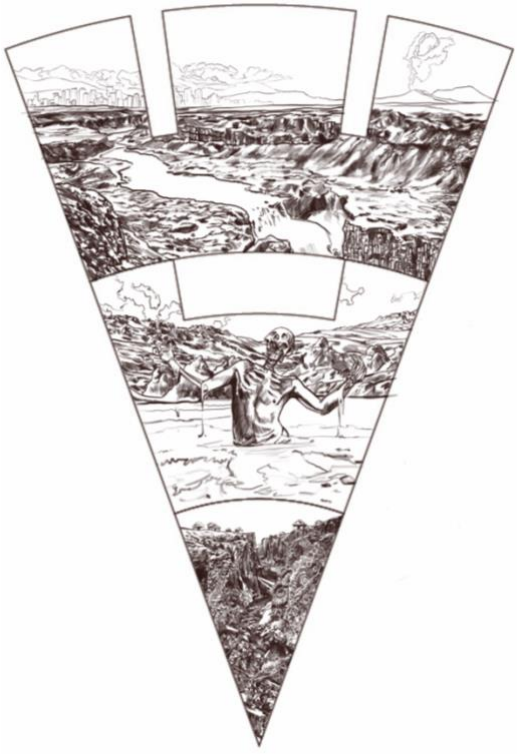

Fig. 36. Leighton Estick, *Novel Entities (Latence) from di Soup,* 2022, digital drawing

needs have overrun the world."[60] A long melancholic pause follows showing Attenborough distressingly contemplative over the coming Anthropocene (the age of humans). Was the gluttonous promise of crude oil, exotic items, and money, that seductive—this delusion of limitless materia from finite sources. **Is it worth it!?** My golden gaze detects land below stewarded by its peoples for over 50,000 years, its tropical climate fertilizes and provides warmth year-round.

The indigenous Australians are the oldest-known continuous culture on Earth and part of their collective worldview called *Jukurrpa* (mistranslated as "The Dreaming"), speaks of the "great sandstone massif of *Jukarinya*, home of *Dadbe,* the Rainbow Serpent, a mythical ancestor who it is believed that a great disaster will strike if disturbed" (see fig. 36, 37, appendix N).[61] Popular science communicator Dr. Derek Muller, identifies this serpent that inspires the *Novel Entities* section, as a metaphor for Uranium-238, a much-coveted resource that is plentiful in the soils beneath Kakadu National Park.[62] Uranium is born in the

[60] David Attenborough, narrator, *David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet,* aired 2020, on Netflix, https://www.netflix.com/watch/80216393?source=35

[61] Clyde H. Farnsworth, "Where the Sacred Serpent Rests, a Mine Intrudes," *The New York Times*, July 18, 1997, https://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/18/world/where-the-sacred-serpent-rests-a-mine-intrudes.html.

[62] Derek Muller, narrator, *Twisting the Dragon's Tail*," aired 2015, on Primevideo, https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0G0XI484BU15I7OOVBI0VK57UD/ref=atv_sr_fle_c_Tn74RA_1_1_1?sr=1-1&pageTypeIdSource=ASIN&pageTypeId=B07F3ZD6YX&qid=1679196061523.

Fig. 37. Cave painting at Rainbow Serpent Shelter, Mount Borradaile in Western Arnhem Land, Northern Australia. n.d.

heart of supernovae and can be deemed analogous to life, Earth, and the entire universe in its capacity for immeasurable creation as a source for clean energy, and when mishandled, untold carnage. Humanity learned that latter lesson the hard way on August 6 and 9, 1945, when two atomic bombs were detonated over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, instantly vaporizing the air, land, and over 200,000 of its inhabitants. Similar incidents occurred at Chernobyl and Fukushima years later, leaving those lands uninhabitable for humans. However, animals and plants once displaced by urbanization have since reclaimed these cities. The *Novel Entities* section shows the disastrous risks of attempting to tame these elementary forces of the universe, questioning throughout its tiers whether it may be more prudent that they either be respected, or left alone (see fig. 36, appendix L). Even so, while soaring over the nearby scarlet plains those disrespectful attitudes seem continuous. After being safeguarded for millennia by indigenous Australians, these lands are being torn open like massive gangrenous sores in search of yummy gold, gemstones, cobalt and uranium. Despite all warnings from its indigenous peoples, cars laden with rocks pour out of the hollowed-out Earth, bleeding the underworld dry.

Olafur O' Olafur how your art has inspired such lovely grumblings. Olafur Eliasson's public intervention entitled *Ice Watch,* was the first eco-art intervention to catch my inquisitive gaze. In a similar vein as the rock allegory of Peña's *Mountain Water* series, Eliasson fished out an 80-tonne iceberg that broke away from Greenland, carved it into 12 human-sized pieces, and arranged them in a circle at the Place du Panthéon, Paris. While Peña's work reflects the changing ice *in situ,* Eliasson transports climate change affected ice directly to the public. In his own words, "one of the reasons for transporting it directly from Greenland to Paris is it shows us what they talk about at the COP21 is actually real. It's not something abstract it's not scientific data…it's something you can touch."[63] By intervening in public spaces, Ice Watch craves direct engagement and asks observers to take a small share of the responsibility for solving climate issues symbolized by its human-sized pieces (see fig. 38).

Eliasson's project partner, geology professor Minik Rosing, invited participants to listen to the crackling ice during the installation's opening ceremony, motioning them to "put their ears towards the ice and it will tell a story from ancient times. These icebergs fell as snow 10,000 years ago and they still remember a time before humans added carbon dioxide to the air."[64] Watching numerous videos of participants navigating, listening, or delicately touching the ice as if caressing their lovers is a moving scene to behold. Their faces blush with intrigue while listening to the ice melt, a technique used by scientists that allows them to "predict exactly how

[63] Olafur Elliason and Minik Rosing, "Arctic Ice Art Displayed in Paris," *UN Climate Change,* December 4, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tpe4o9_n8AM.

[64] Ibid.

Fig. 38. Olafur Eliasson, *Ice Watch*, 2018. Ice sculpture and public art installation, Paris

quickly ice is melting and what that could mean for sea-level rise."[65] Eliasson crafted other Ice Watch interventions around London, England, to similar effect, and the message was felt, because instead of relying on political or scientific data that can be disjointed for regular folks, art was able to relate how climate change looks, feels, and sounds.

The work of Eliasson and other eco-artists assists in (re)building humanity's compassion towards the natural world, and as an added benefit, to each other. In his earlier ground-breaking work, *The Weather Project*, as its title suggests, weather is in focus—particularly as a human preoccupation, and meditation on deeply held insecurities regarding their relationship with their

[65] Nell Lewis, "Scientists Are Listening to Glaciers to Discover the Secrets of the Oceans," *CNN*, September 27, 2022, https://edition.cnn.com/2022/09/27/world/glaciers-listening-c2e-spc-intl-climate-scn/index.html.

surroundings (see fig. 39). As the most discernible component of the climate system, weather is just as unpredictable and fascinating a subject to explore, and its aversion to prediction caught Eliasson's attention. While reflecting on his process of wanting to "replicate all different kinds of weather, he was left with the idea of creating a sun" according to Jonze, who also stated "we used a semicircle of light, reflected in a mirror. I was thinking of the way the sun sets against the sea, or the reflections in Edvard Munch's paintings."[66] The effect achieved however, when haze, mirrors, scaffolding, a yellow mono frequency lit semi-circle and darkness were combined, shows a contemporary take on the Burkean sublime. The reflected semi-circular light created an illusion of the sun being encased within a narrow corridor. A reddish haze suffocates the space which, in theory, should have frozen visitors in contemplation of the simulated glow and blazing heat of the almighty sun. Instead, people sat, played, talked, meditated, did yoga and numerous other social activities, but why? One imagines the golden glow may have triggered memories of an inner peace associated with experiencing the bright tropical sunset after a tiresome day.

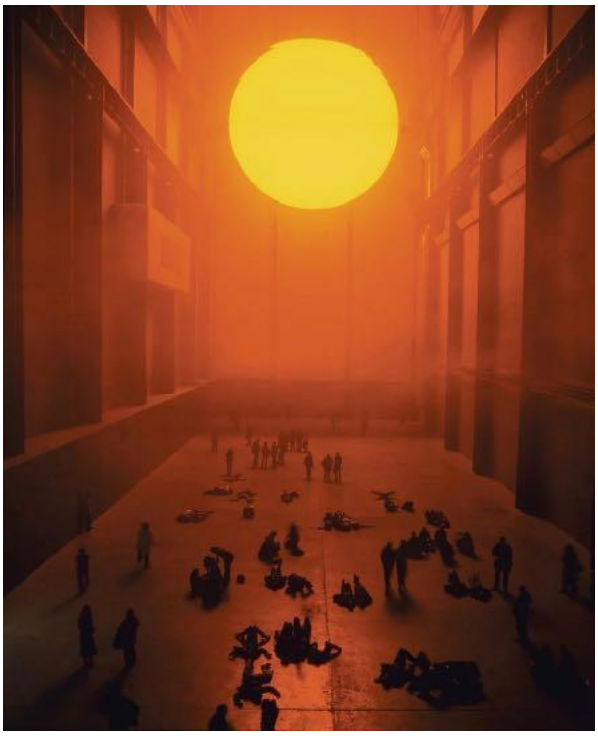

Fig. 39. Olafur Eliasson, *The weather project*, 2003, Public art installation, Turbine Hall, Tate London

[66] Tim Jonze, "How We Made Olafur Eliasson's The Weather Project," *The Guardian*, October 19, 2022, https://rb.gy/mwobze.

Persons treated *The Weather Project* less for its meteorological content, but more as a communal safe space. The installation was able to tap into the power of art to activate the audience's social impulse to work together for the common good. Rather than contemplating the 'truth' of the weather's unpredictability as conveyed through art, they transformed said artwork into a conduit for experiential 'truth.' Perhaps the truth of our oneness with the 'all,' or the comfort obtained through an illusion of predictability "by creating and controlling something that we know is ultimately forever out of our hands, we get to glimpse that detachment and make it our own again."[67] The fact remains that while innovations in science and technology may grant humanity some semblance of control weather, extraterrestrial events, disease and other cataclysms, one should respect them as ancient peoples had, as the natural world inevitably does unpredictable and incalculable things that cause untold suffering if disturbed.

I liken the Weather Project experience to similar observations when doing adjustments to the sections of *di Soup* when it started sagging during its exhibition (see fig.40). While I sawed, screwed, measured and balanced the panels; observers smiled, chattered, communed, queried and most importantly, orbited around the installation like a satellite. This navigation around the work was key to its composition. Its earlier iterations called for vertical orientations, however, I found that made some sections would lie at the bottom and be read as having lesser importance. As a bowl laid horizontal to the ground (Earth) acting as a table, all sections homologize. And as it homologizes, so does its observers while navigating around *di Soup* whose message becomes: Earth has been made to revolve around humanity for eons, its time humanity revolved around it.

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[67] "Modern Classics: Olafur Eliasson - The Weather Project, 2003," *Artlead*, n.d., https://artlead.net/journal/modern-classics-olafur-eliasson-the-weather-project-2003.

Fig. 40. Leighton Estick, *di Soup (Installation view)*, 2023, [video format], illustrative sculpture

Conclusion: An immutable harmony within all things

Landing on a branch in the wild lands of the meeting place called Tkaranto. Its freshly lain snow cloaks the earth for months of vital rest. A human meditates quietly on the banks of the great river that bisects the meeting place. Since he consorts with crows due to our shared obsession with knowing, and acknowledges my presence immediately with a smile. He meditates on his histories from before birth til' present, about his homeland of Yamayeka that began this thesis, that began his story…

Like Attenborough, for 30 years, modernity has tormented my birthplace of Jamaica. I have always considered this island a microcosm of the wider world, given that the Caribbean, like Tkaranto, has always served as a confluence for ideas. There have been many initiatives to cull the spread of urbanization into wild spaces, and although corporate and political parties have sabotaged those efforts for Earth's sake we will never surrender. I remember growing up in the foothills of those grande olde Blue Mountains, becoming preoccupied by the metaphoric barrier and bridge it forms between the seas and heaven. These musings were referenced in all 29 illustrated panels of *di Soup,* each incorporating mountains (land), skies (aerosols), and waters (oceans and freshwater) as major systems that define the state of Earth. Special care was taken to ensure my rabid impulse to inform and protect, was made clear–the illustrations share a oneness as bridges to future ways of being based on lessons from the past, but they also act as barriers to ecologically disruptive activates with their unyielding support for *Gaia,* a single living entity.

The mottled forests that once provided protection from the chaos of *Huracan,* now have patches of grey, like the ring-wormed scalp of our great elder, arrested in torturous agony. I recollect my ancestors, having journeyed freely for eons across *Abya Yala:* trading Yamayeka

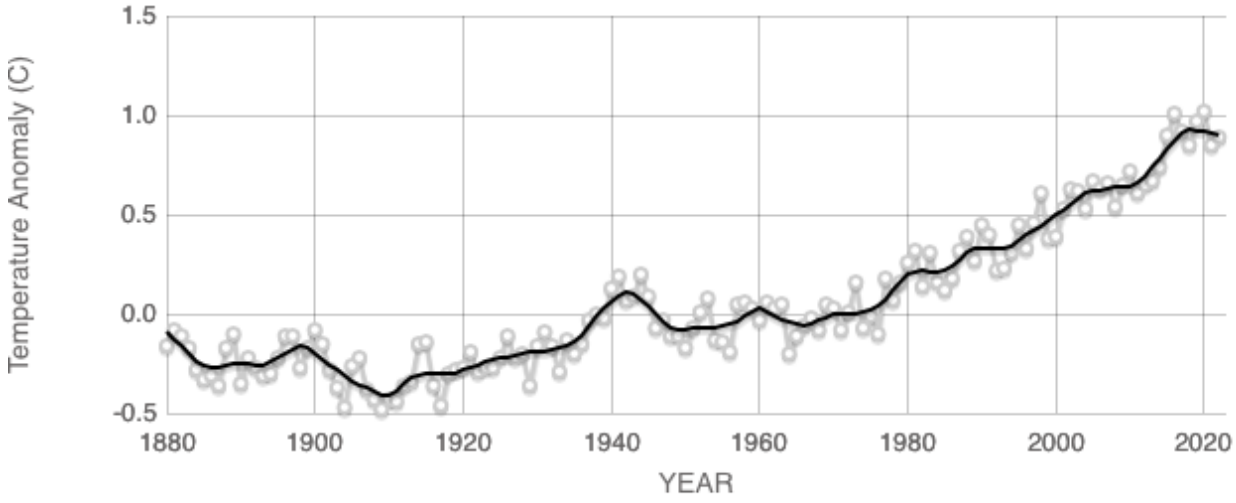
tabako for Ka-Iri cacao, cacao for Mexica cinteotl, cinteotl for Lakota waŋblí wíyaka. Harmony with nature sleeps within the collective memory of humankind and can be awakened with little effort—but unlocking that cultural door requires an appropriate key. This key was illuminated by our ancestors for eons defined as the intrinsic oneness between all things in the universe, like a soup perhaps. Today, humanity merely pretends to have lost that key.

The key resurfaces continuously while sifting through the smog of modernity, exemplified by the artworks explored and this thesis, *di Soup*. Humans, like all lifeforms, like Earth, like the many planets, galaxies and star systems that dwarves our own, are intuitively and internally–interlinked embodiments of chaos and creation. Yet, the human brain, as the most complex object in the known universe, has the depth of insight to choose. While many lifeforms lie subservient to nature, humans can choose creation over destruction. Humans can choose to intuit a future where its children, have healthy spaces to exist harmoniously with the various animals, plants, fungi, and microbes, that make Earth home. But this requires universal acknowledgement and seizure of current human activities that destroy habitability, whether ancient, modern, extant or future. The scientific data matters less in the presence of ecological keys as embedded in works such as *di Soup*, that serve as guideposts for humanity to enter Rockström's safe zone, as a method of being one with nature: We care for Earth, and it cares for us.

APPENDIX A

GLOBAL LAND-OCEAN TEMPERATURE INDEX

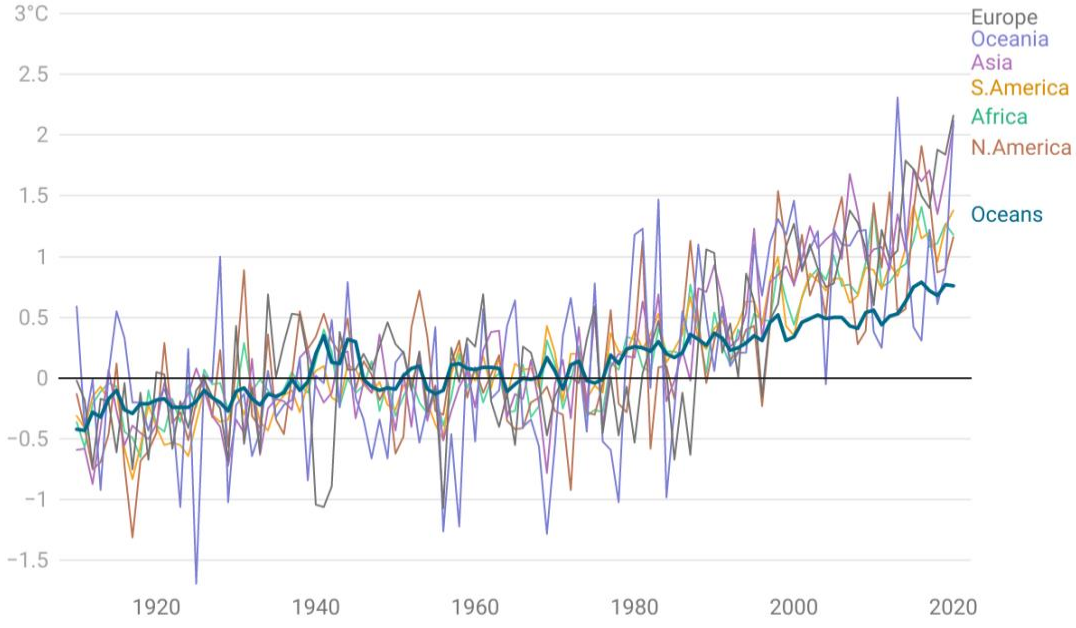
Data source: NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS). Credit: NASA/GISS



Source: climate.nasa.gov

How temperatures have risen over time around the world

Every continent has warmed over the past century, though not at the same rate. The lines show the difference between each continent's average annual temperature and the 1910-2000 average. The oceans are also warming but not as quickly.



Baseline is the 1910-2000 average.

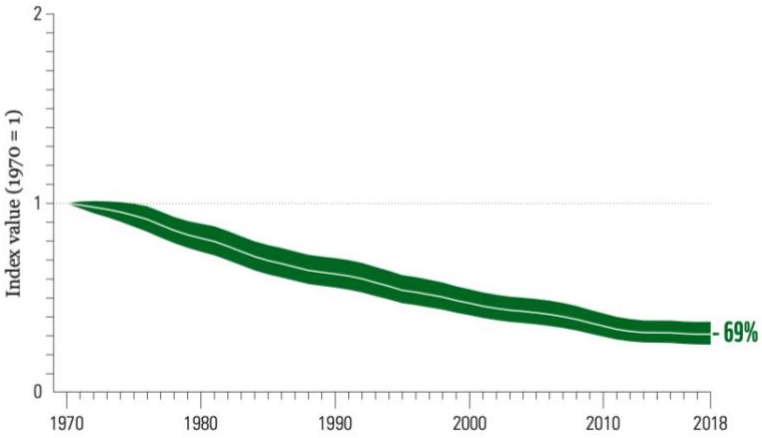
Chart: The Conversation/CC-BY-ND • Source: NOAA

Figure 3: The global Living Planet Index (1970 to 2018)
The average change in relative abundance of 31,821 populations, representing 5,230 species monitored across the globe, was a decline of 69%. The white line shows the index values and the shaded areas represent the statistical certainty surrounding the trend (95% statistical certainty, range 63% to 75%). Source: WWF/ZSL (2022)[184].

Key

Global Living Planet Index

Confidence limits



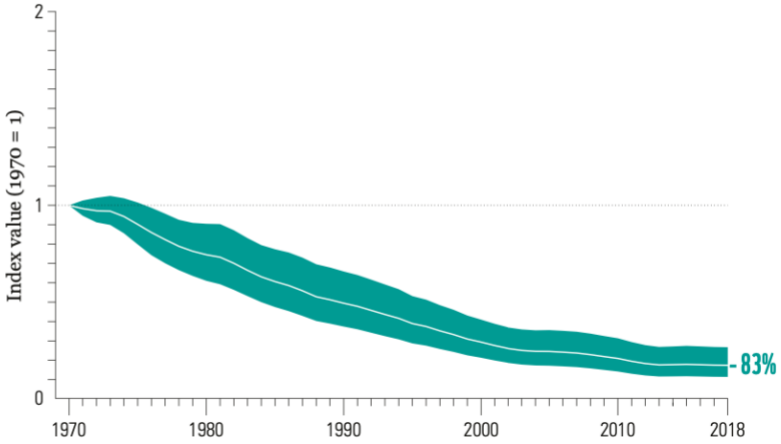
Living Planet Report.

Figure 5: The Freshwater Living Planet Index (1970 to 2018)
The average abundance of 6,617 freshwater populations across the globe, representing 1,398 species, declined by 83%. The white line shows the index values and the shaded areas represent the statistical certainty surrounding the trend (95% statistical certainty, range 74% to 89%). Source: WWF/ZSL (2022)[184].

Key

Freshwater Living Planet Index

Confidence limits



EXTINCTION RISK

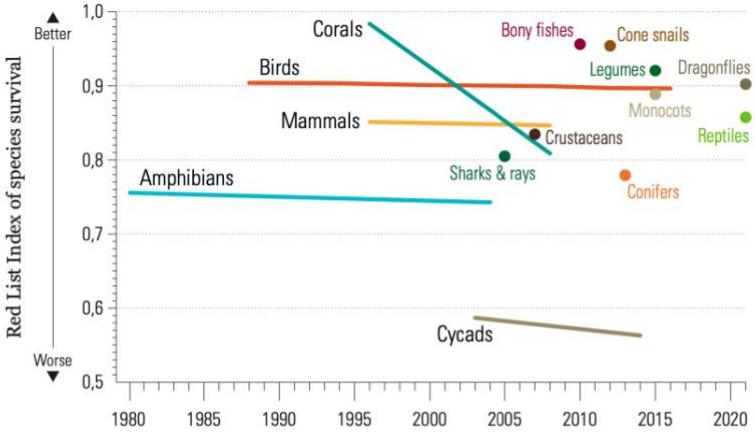
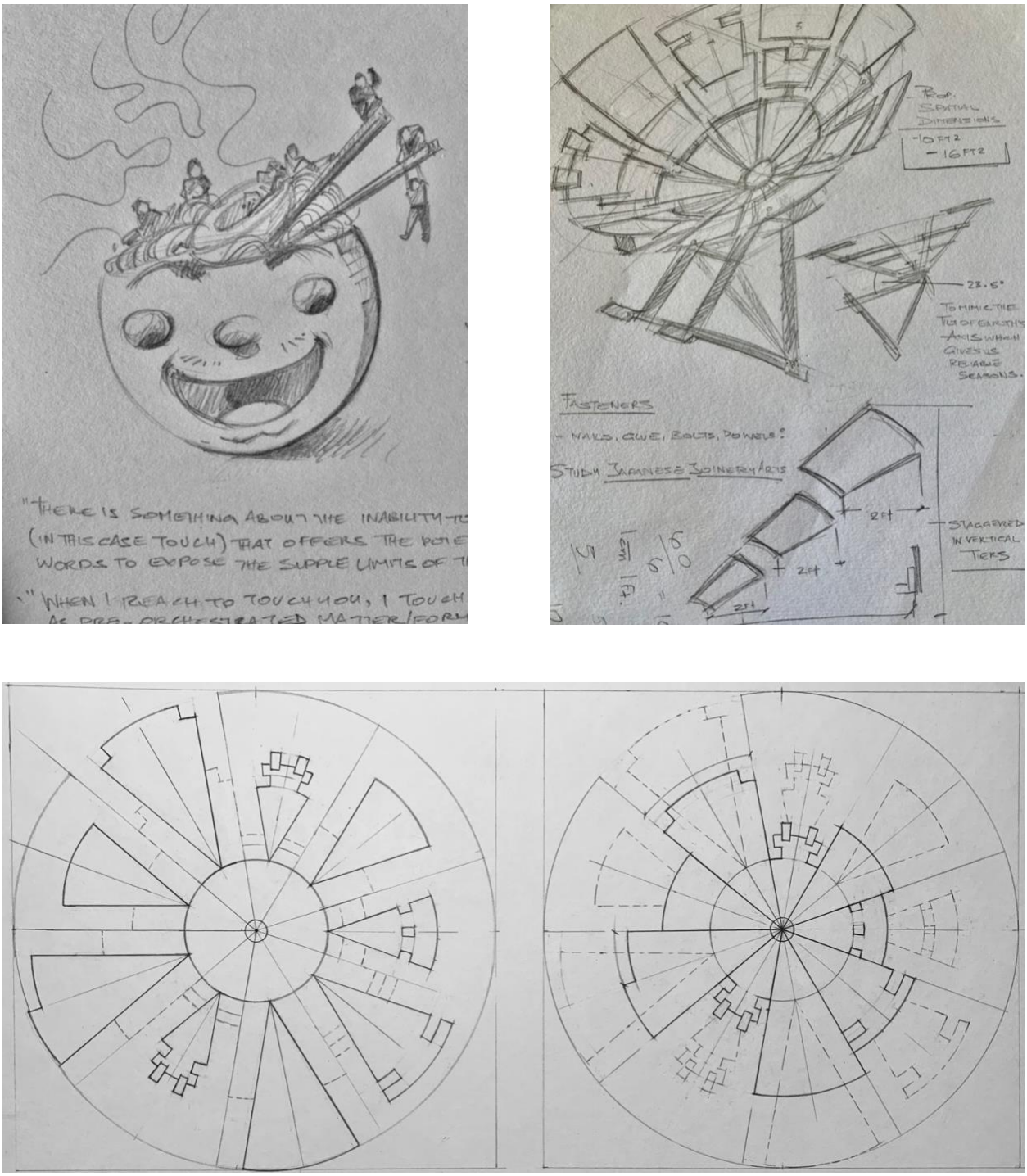


Figure 7: The Red List Index (RLI)
It shows trends in survival probability (the inverse of extinction risk) over time[61]. An RLI value of 1.0 equates to all species within a group qualifying as Least Concern (i.e. not expected to become Extinct in the near future[61]). An index value of 0 equates to all species having gone Extinct. A constant value over time indicates that the overall extinction risk for the group is unchanged. If the rate of biodiversity loss were reducing, the Index would show an upward trend. A decline in the Index means that species are being driven towards extinction at an accelerating rate. Source: IUCN (2021)[57].

APPENDIX B

In 2009, Johan Rockström and his team of scientists developed a framework for understanding the processes that regulate Earth system stability. They identified nine (9) entitled the “planetary boundaries framework”, and their findings were truly alarming. Of the nine process: three (3) (Novel entities, biochemical flows and biosphere integrity) are severely transgressed, two (2) (Climate and land system) have passed their critical thresholds, one (1) (atmospheric aerosol loading) has yet to be quantified, and three (3) (Ozone depletion, freshwater use and ocean acidification) remain within the safe operating space. However, because these processes are interlinked, any substantial shift has the potential of triggering systematic collapse, and if that happens mass extinction becomes imminent. Rockström’s team also claimed humanity was the driving force of these changes—that we are undermining Earth’s ability to support life. So sustainable change does not happen by merely curbing the release of greenhouse gas into the atmosphere to halt “climate change” (as one process)—there are other processes at work which determine Earth’s climate which also require immediate attention.

APPENDIX C



Top Left – Illustrative caricature of chicken noodle soup with people in it, Top Right – Earliest sketches of di Soup construct, Bottom – Early technical drawings of the nine sectors of di Soup (open and closed).

APPENDIX D

Screenshots from *di Soup's* exhibition guide briefly explaining what di Soup is and the basis of its conceptual framework, and ways the project was conservative.

APPENDIX E

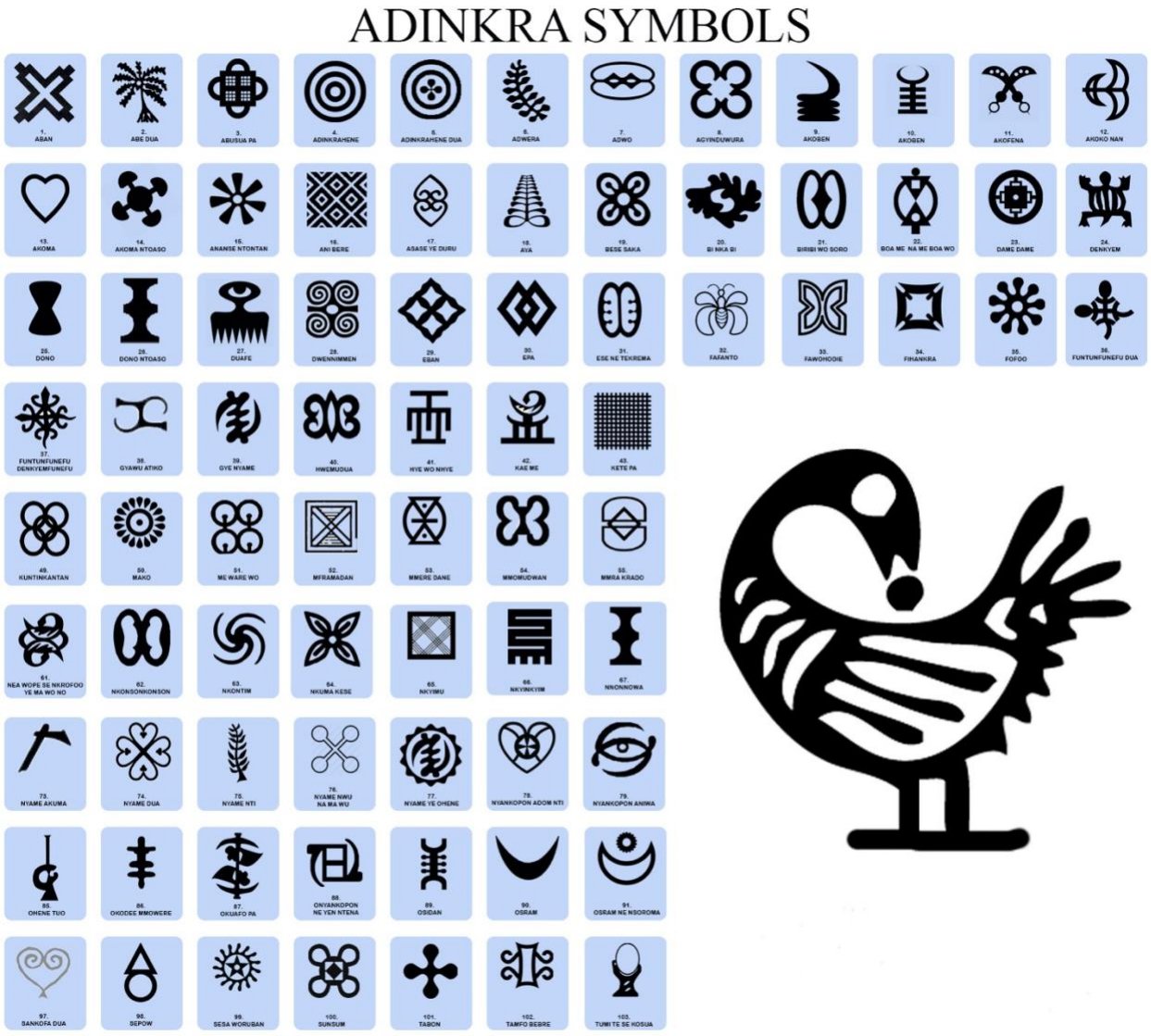
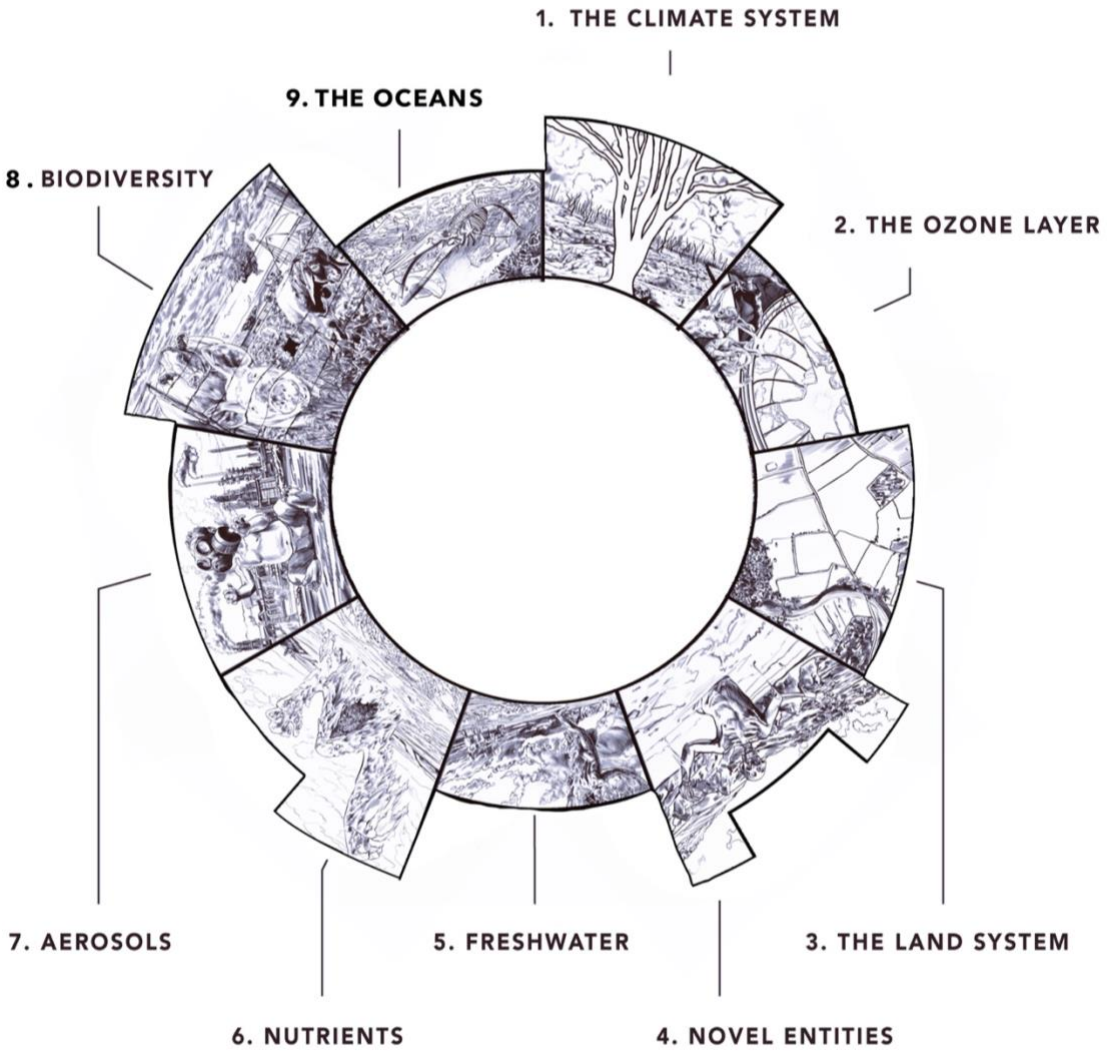


Table of known adinkras with emphasis on Sankofa, that according to Kwarteng "is represented as a bird whose head is looking back while holding an egg in her beak, which is her future. her feet facing forward also symbolize moving into the future.

APPENDIX F

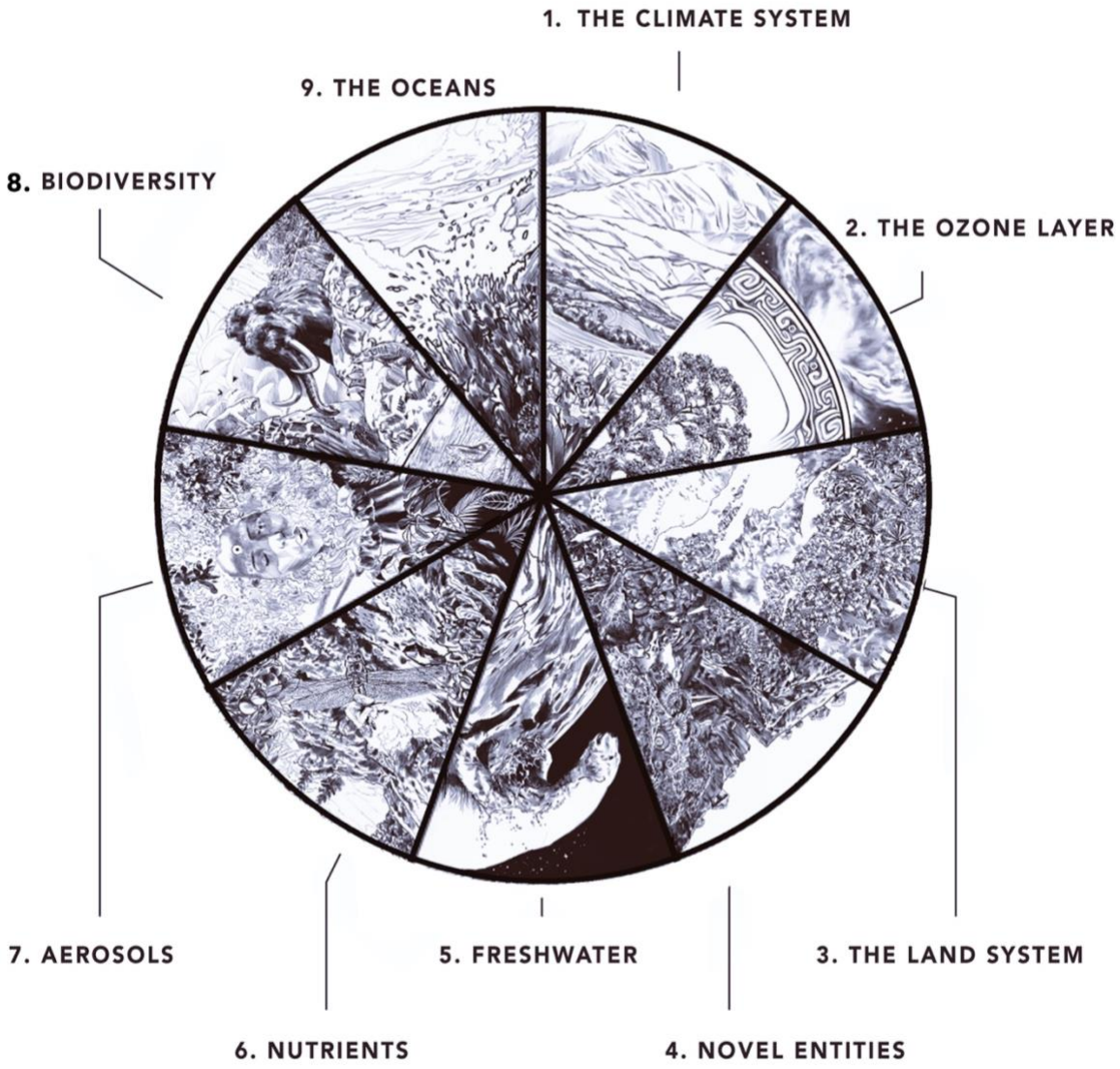
Images of the progression of di Soup's core as a supportive structure for the nine planetary boundary illustrations. Also shown is the test setup for whether the discarded wooden arms would be sturdy enough to support the illustrated panels.

APPENDIX G



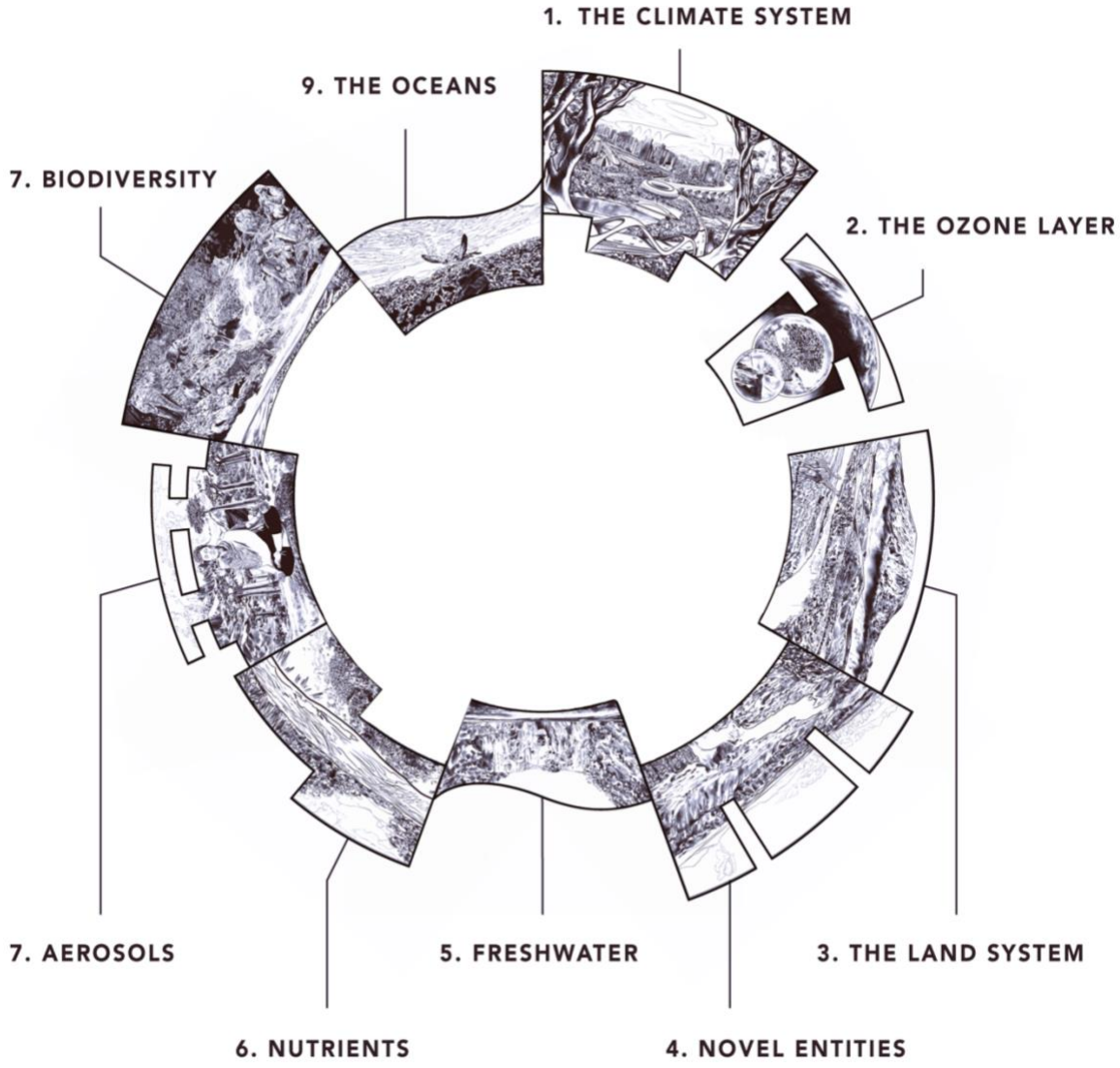
The second/middle tier of *di Soup* during the digital planning phase showing the devastating consequences of not restoring Earth system boundaries to their appropriate state.

APPENDIX H



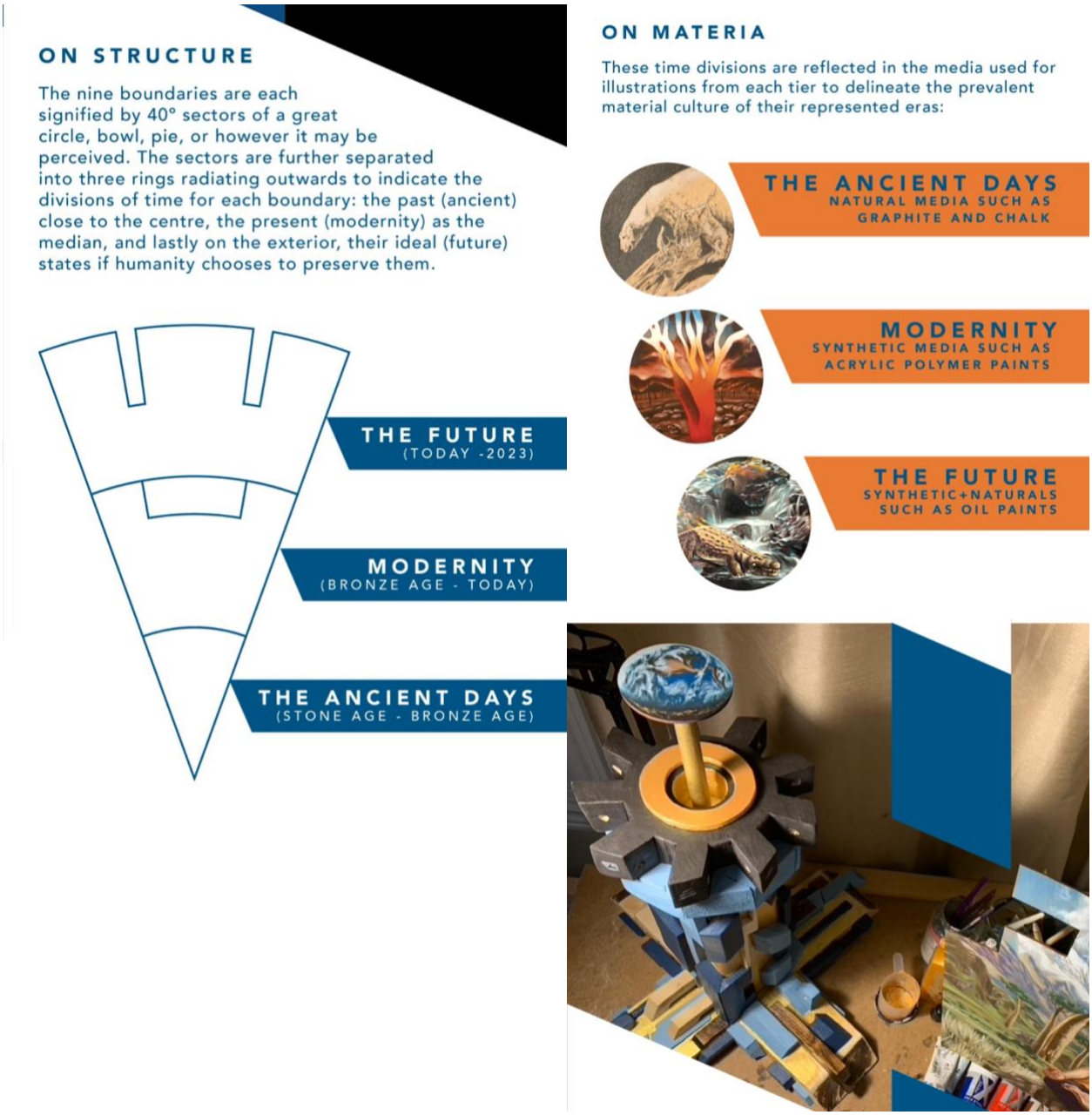
The first/inner tier of *di Soup* during the digital planning phase showing the speculative future if ancient philosophies of harmony with nature are adapted into the present-day.

APPENDIX I



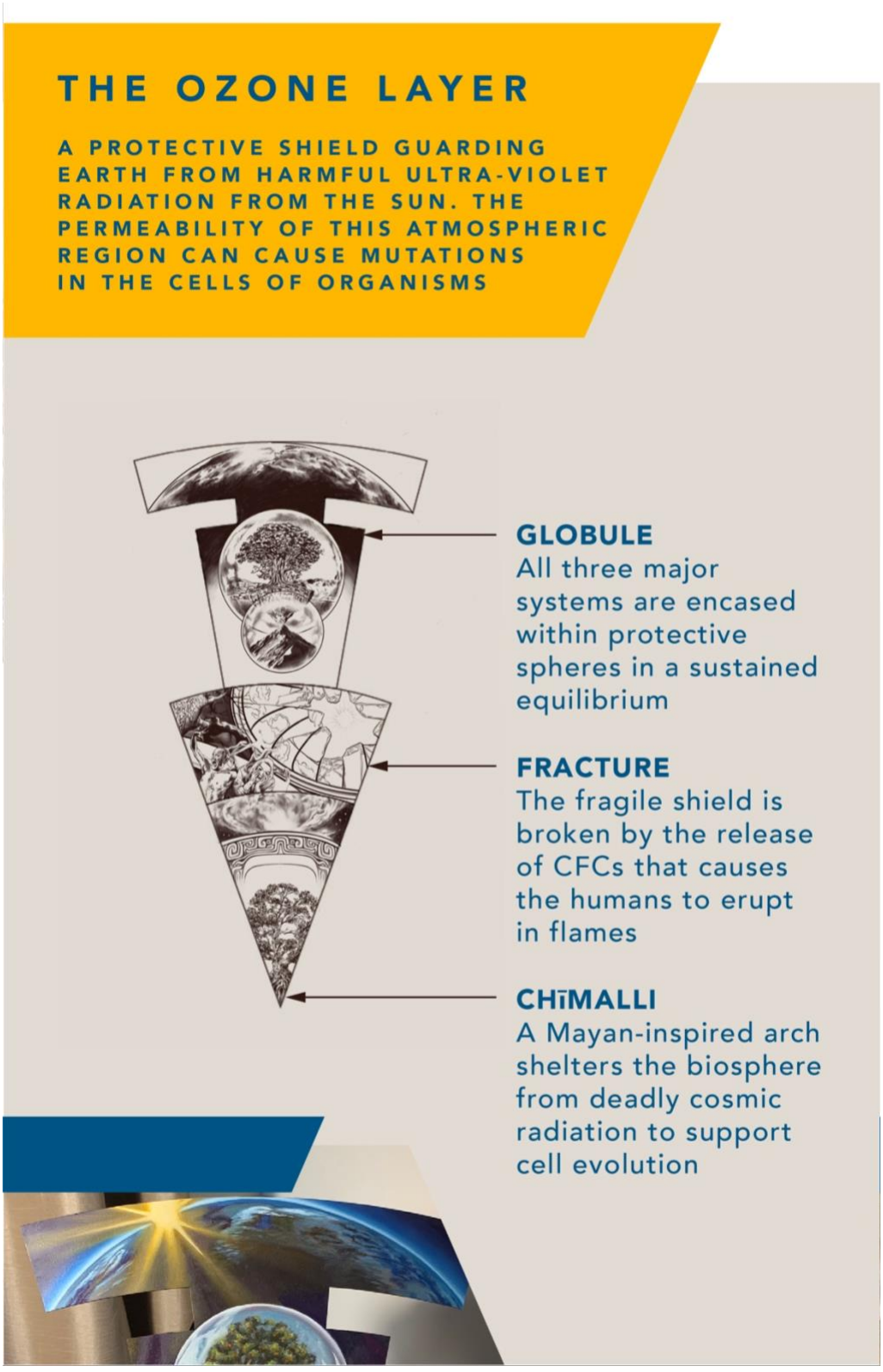
The third/outer tier of *di Soup* during the digital planning phase showing the speculative future if ancient philosophies of harmony with nature are adapted into the present-day.

APPENDIX J



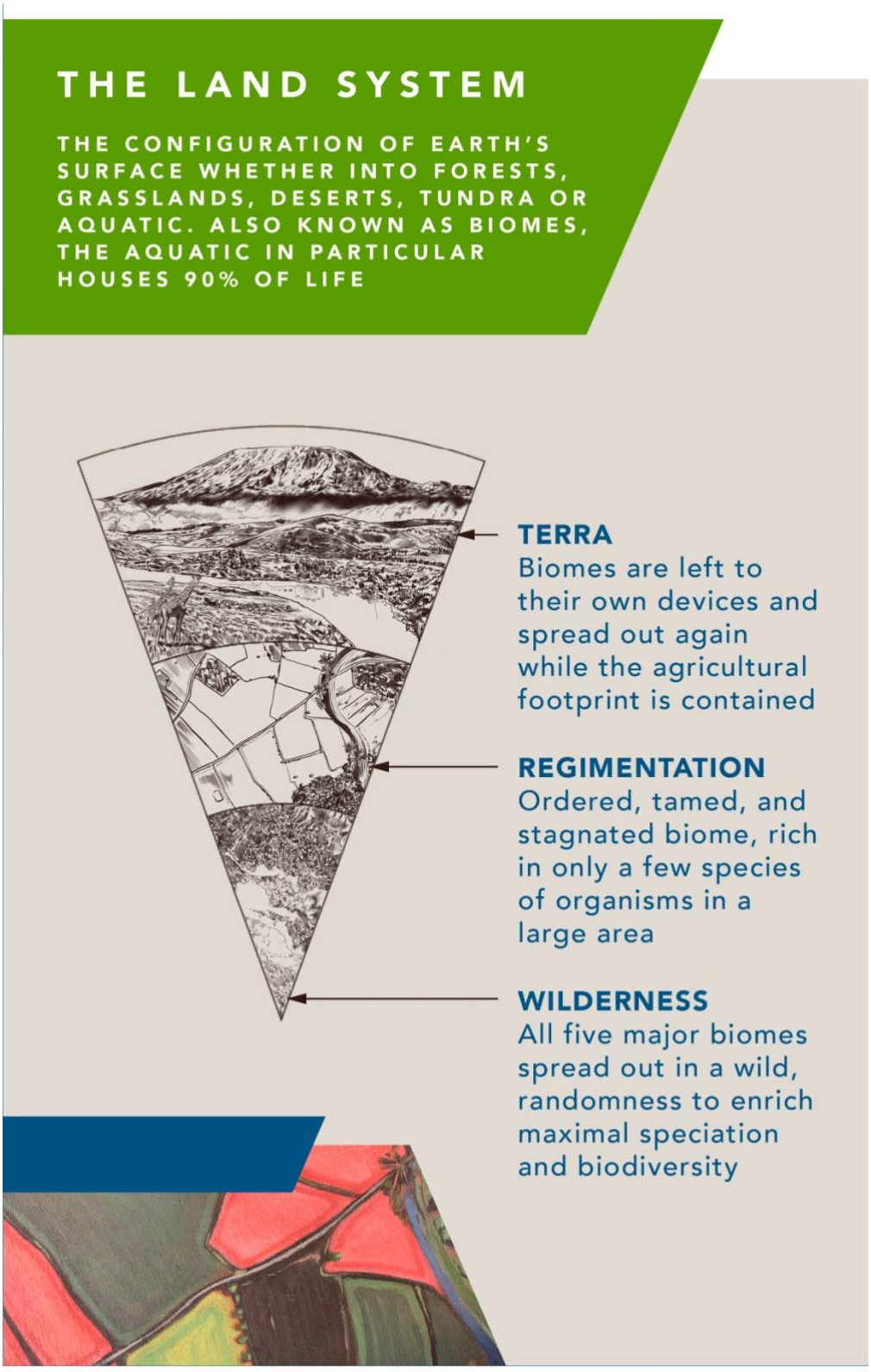
Screenshots from *di Soup's* exhibition guide showing the conceptual framework for the structural components of di Soup, and illustration media chosen to identify with the respective periods shown.

APPENDIX K



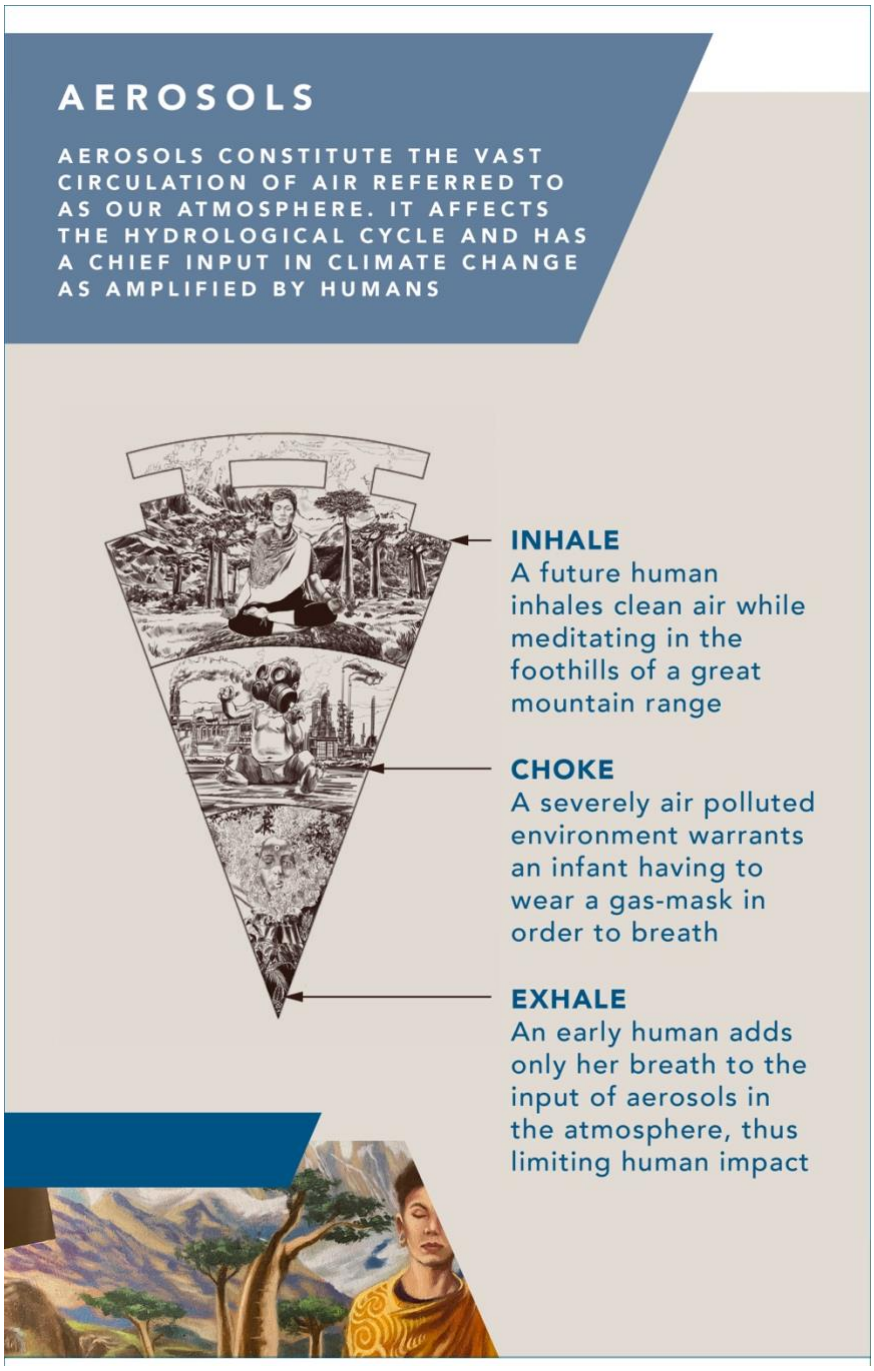
The Ozone Layer [with a brief summary of embedded meanings]

APPENDIX L



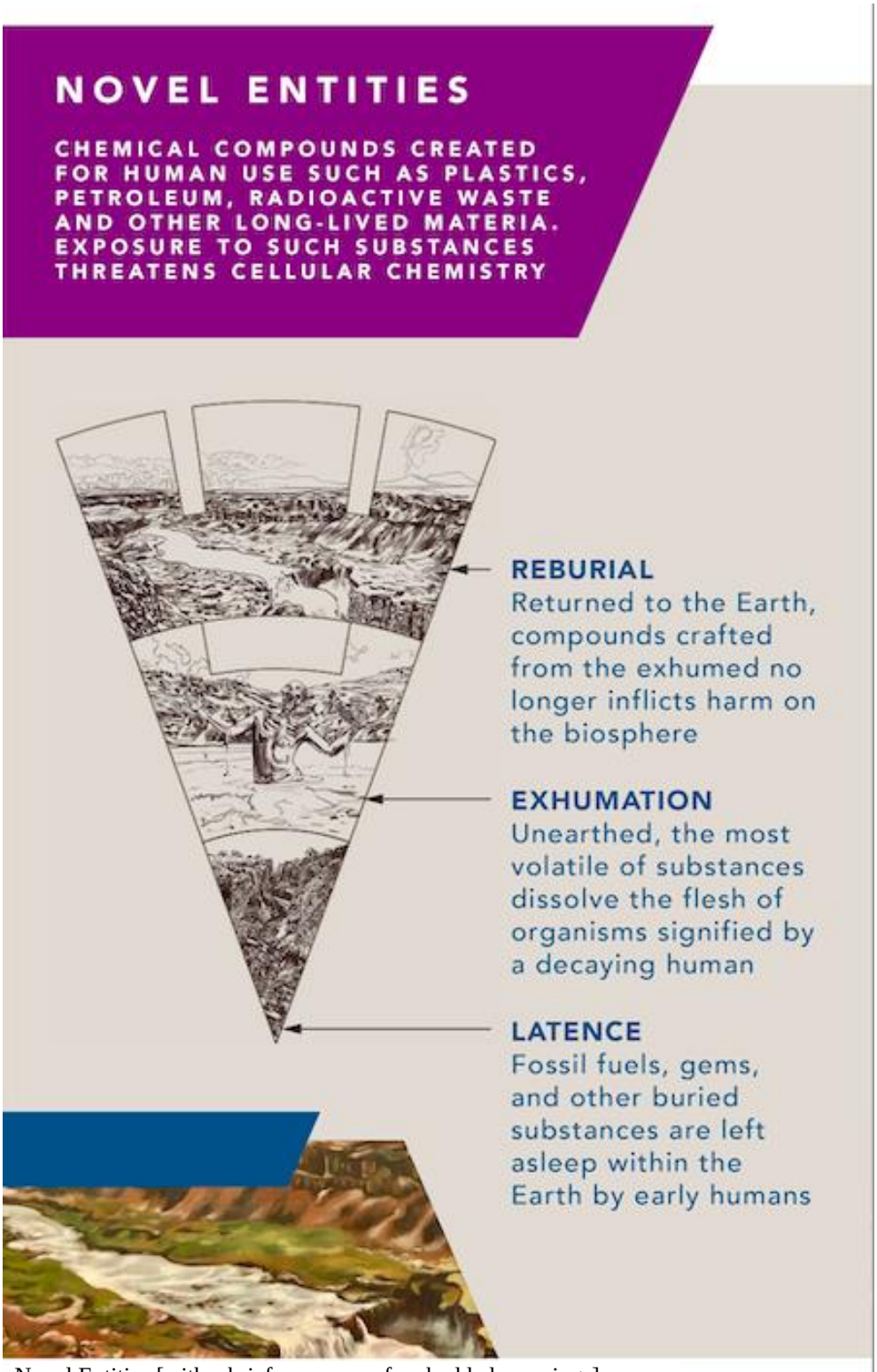
The Land System [with a brief summary of embedded meanings]

APPENDIX M



Aerosols [with a brief summary of embedded meanings]

APPENDIX N



Novel Entities [with a brief summary of embedded meanings]

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ANCESTRAL SOURCES

Ancestral sources are immutable, experiential and personal. Unlike academic sources that are inscribed into books and other written records, ancestral knowledge is embodied. It is interior to researchers, having been implanted through the spoken word, art, song, dance, stories, mantras, cultural worldviews, and other things considered intrinsic to their being. This "intrinsic value" is older than any writing systems and lives within the collective memory of humanity. This research depends greatly on ancestral knowledge given that art is hypothetical and combines both the academic and the inherent.

Yameyeka. The land of springs “Yameyeka” (known today as Jamaica), is the rock on which this researcher was materialized. It directs this research from the perspective of an island nation looking outwards cautiously and contemplative at the wide blue yonder. Ideas, language, expressions, passion and other cultural characteristics embolden by that land, has fertilized this study with its foundation.

Tkaranto. The meeting place (known today as Toronto), the rock on which this work was made. Nothing is created, everything is recycled is a lesson taught by this land on the sites of the Iroquois Confederacy, and A Dish with One Spoon treaty. The dish with one spoon is a principle governing all the various people, animals, and plants one has experienced thus-far on this journey. There are no preconditions, only permutations for the sake of sharing..

di blakbud. The crow which summoned this researcher to undergo this work. It landed on a makeshift feeder while producing my BFA thesis on the commonalities between scientific and religious cosmology. This crow would visit daily and watch fastidiously as I drew and painted. Its commanding presence sheds away arrogance in favour of clear-minded logic.

mom. The creator which this researcher owes his existence. A spirited individual who does acknowledge terms like “can’t” but instead questions “how”—my mom. During moments of doubt about the efficacy of my actions, and while riddled with worrisome thoughts about what next, she offers hope and willpower. She powers through rationality like a force of nature, confident in her wherewithal to inflict change calling others forth to do the same.

dad. The creator for which this researcher owes his existence. An individual tasked with the molding of morality, and a logician who determines practicality. Dad is a conduit for knowledge and avid believer in the merits of historical knowledge having been passed down through generations of Estick and Clarke, from colonial times to the great beyond. He embedded in me a hunger for understanding, history, and continuity.

Uncle Carl and *Aunty Candy.* My aunt and uncle, who for the past two years have provided me with a warm home, meals, and familiarity necessary to conduct this work. Aunty much like her brother my dad, offered logical insights and the most genuine smile anyone has ever seen. As a master jeweller and all-rounder, he was a driving force in di Soup’s creation.

di ancestors. An assortment of elders, from grandparents to uncles and aunts, sisters, brothers, cousins and teachers who were molded and indigenized by these lands called Abya Yala and Turtle Island for eons. This work would not have been possible if not for the foundations they lain, ensuring that ancestral knowledge continues to perpetuate into the distance. Their collective knowledge both said, and unsaid, provides this work's drive.

Archer, Maas Robert. Another supreme elder responsible for garnering an interest in illustration, but specifically the precise observation and visualization of nature. He managed to encourage an innate love of the natural world, by providing direction to historical artists of similar thematic interest such as John James Audubon, and John Constable.

Dr. Winston Campbell. A wizard responsible for engendering a love and respect for the power of words. Campbell, as he is affectionately called, tore apart some of the wrappings that limited my perspective of seeing things as isolated rather than connected. He taught that art encases knowledge/meaning in a manner as close to metaphysical truth as possible.

Additional Notes

1. According to *Artsper Magazine* in a 2021 article, “Art and nature have always found ways to intersect with one another, the latter being a huge source of inspiration for artists”. Although this seems self-evident considering genres like landscape art, or portraiture that juxtaposes nature as accessory to human form. This can also be viewed as an acknowledged respect of nature based on real threats imposed by an untamed world. The romantics clarified this dichotomy with its identification of humans as timid and subservient to Earth’s might as exemplified by the work of John Martin, Wang Hui et al.

2. Nature has been described in a broad sense as the totality of everything, the “all or almighty”, the “environment”, or the substance of physical reality. In its adjective form “natural”, it has been used to invalidate the works of ancestral peoples as “unnatural” due to pre-packaged stereotypes associated with those groups. The use of anything definitionally “modern” is deemed “unnatural” and hence, unauthentic. This is but a deluded ploy to itemize culture like groceries to be sold. Given both these terms are problematic, this study borrows Earth’s power to rework materia and reclaim the word “nature” and its parts of speech to refer to: that which is non-human, or untamed regardless of its modernist usage.

3. What is land? A simple definition would posit land as the ground on which organisms inhabit. But it is also the complex diversity of organisms that make lands inhabitable. Those organisms in tandem with Earth’s other major systems such as land configuration, weather, freshwater sources and air, exert pressures on other organisms to evolve. This finely tuned system is the reason why humans emerged in Africa, a land toiling with abundance but also severe threats. The Sub-Saharan savannahs afforded ancient humans the ability to develop adaptations in super-intelligence where other regions were too harsh. Lands are major systems that mold inhabitants both physically and behaviourally to aid the collective.

4. What does progress mean? According to Harari, progress in the “modern sense” was once identified by enhanced intellect, technology, and a net gain in reproductive success. He disagrees vehemently, so much so the discussion warranted an entire chapter. Harari argues that while agriculture created a surplus of available food for humankind, it did so under false pretences. He cites several downsides, including: a plethora of ailments like slipped discs, arthritis and hernias; the promised surplus had not ended world hunger, humanity is in fact more malnourished than ever; there is no evidence of intellectual enhancement because foragers knew the secrets of nature long before the agricultural revolution; and lead to the most ominous of all “ownership of property”. What one can take away from Harari’s argument is the main staple of agriculture, grasses such as maize, barley, and rice ought to share some of the blame with humans for all its benefits and downsides. That in its need to proliferate the land, grass domesticated man—and man sought to domesticate the planet.

5. What is the nature of the relationship between humanity and its family members. All lifeforms depend on and are defined by the distribution of land, waterways, nutrients, air and other organisms to live. That distribution also scrambles organisms into maximally diverse species and populations. Introduce large amounts of freshwater to a salt flat by rain and given enough time it will become an oasis for many species of birds, fish, mollusks, and microbes. Take water away, and only the most resilient and hard-bodied scorpions and lizards would thrive. Crucially, organisms depend entirely on each other, its biodiversity to survive. The pelican would not visit the oasis if not for the prevalence of scrumptious fish, and equally the fish would vanish if not for crustaceans or sea-grass.

   Over-time organisms harmonize with major planetary systems and are therein evolved by them. Speaking of how humans integrate into this system whilst becoming increasingly alienated from nature during the agricultural age, Harari highlights that food abundance bred ownership, and ownership of materia bred war and murder over the “right of ownership”. The worst atrocities in history were inspired by this concept of ownership, whether of land, air, water or energy. The concept of civilization is predicated on ownership—but in a strange twist it isn’t people who owns lands, it is lands that own people. Land is defined as a community of lifeforms inhabiting a specified area, if allowed manifests people as instruments for maintaining a properly balanced ecosystem