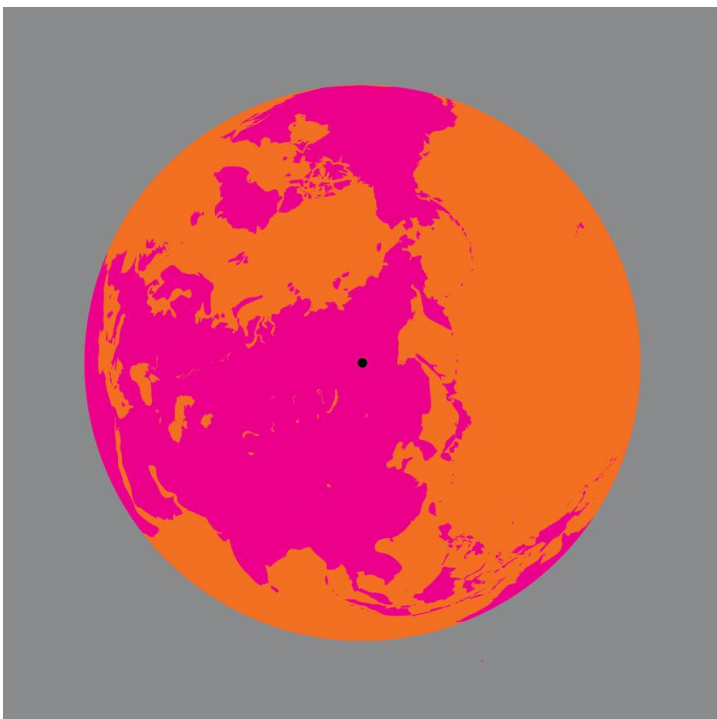
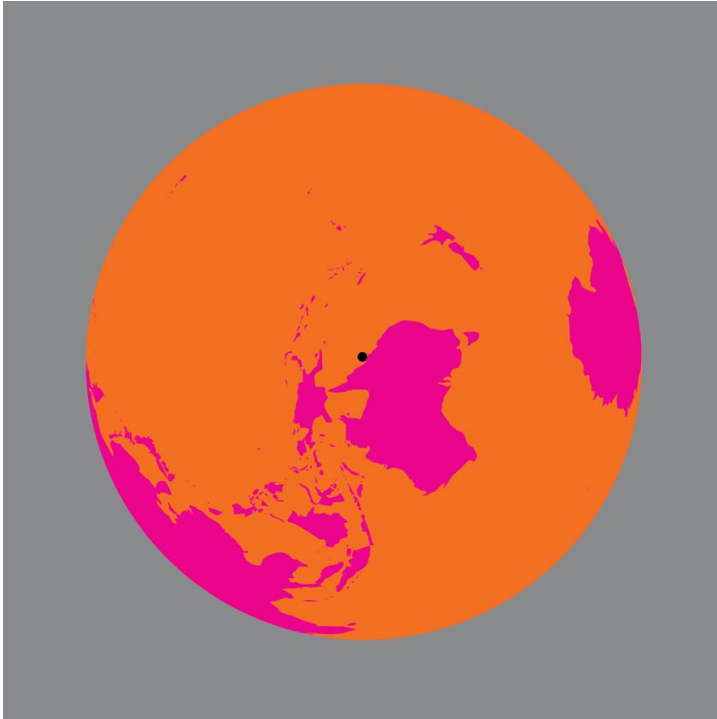


# Art + Science: GRADES 7–12

## Contemporary Artists on Climate Change



### INTRODUCTION:

The natural world has been a source of inspiration for artists since the beginning of time. Artists draw heavily from the forms, textures, and patterns found in nature. They even use natural materials to create paint and construct artworks. It's no surprise, then, that many contemporary artists are concerned with climate change and humankind's effect on our planet.

This lesson plan explores how contemporary artists have responded to the crisis of climate change through case studies of artworks and artists who are represented in the permanent collection of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Using Visual Thinking Strategies, research questions, writing prompts, and our own creativity, we will explore how artists are responding to this crisis through mediums such as drawing, sculpture, photography, video, and more.

Olafur Eliasson, *Earth perspectives*, 2020. Top image: The Earth viewed over the Great Barrier Reef, Australia. Bottom image: The Earth viewed over Yakutia, in Siberia, Russia. © Olafur Eliasson. [Explore the project here!](#)

## CASE STUDY: DIANA THATER

### *Untitled (Butterfly video wall #1)*

To start learning about this piece, [watch a short video of a similar work](#) here.

Diana Thater, *Untitled (Butterfly video wall #1)*, 2008. 6 monitors, DVD player, synchronizer, lighting element and orange gel. SBMA, Museum purchase, the Suzette Morton Davidson Art Acquisition Endowment Fund. © Diana Thater.



## ABOUT THE ARTWORK:

Diana Thater (United States, b. 1962) emerged in the late 1980s as one of the most significant artists of her generation to use the video monitor as both a projector of images and sculptural object. She has said about her art practice: “I create sculpture with images of nature in space.”

For this project, Thater was invited by three curators in Mexico City to make an artwork drawing attention to the threats of the monarch butterfly’s winter home in Michoacán, Mexico. After researching and filming the butterfly’s migration patterns and threat to its environment, Thater created a configuration of six video screens on a gallery floor that play constantly moving images of majestic monarch butterflies after their annual migration to Mexico from the United States. Flickering with and permeated by natural and electronic energy, the monitor's placement reflects the position of the butterflies upon Thater's arrival in Mexico—thriving on the forest floor due, in part, to the increasing lack of forest foliage where they normally take refuge. This mesmerizing multi-part video raises questions about disrupted and fractured nature in the present climate-crisis era, and how modern national boundaries have been grafted onto ancient naturally-occurring migration routes.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What do you see?      Where is your eye drawn to?      What do you wonder about?
- How does the artwork make you feel?      What mood does it give off?
- What kind of story does the artwork tell?      How does its configuration provide meaning?
- How might the message of the piece be different if it were a painting or still photograph?
- How is the artist addressing climate change in this piece?

## IN THE ARTIST'S WORDS: DIANA THATER

[In this 13-minute video from Art21](#), listen to Diana Thater as she discusses her art and its relationship to the natural world. Then, reflect on how hearing from the artist changes how you might interpret her art.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS: MONARCH BUTTERFLY MIGRATION

- Research the migration patterns of the monarch butterfly. Where do they begin? Where do they end? How long does the migration take? (Tip! [The Monarch Joint Venture website](#) is a great resource to learn more.)
- What is the life cycle of a monarch butterfly? Draw a sketch of the stages.
- What nutrients and microclimates do monarch butterflies need?
- What are the environmental factors that are negatively contributing to their migration? What steps could be made to improve this?
- For Santa Barbara County-based students: Research some of the butterfly groves in the region. How have the number of monarch butterflies migrating through Santa Barbara and Goleta changed over the years? What are some of the local threats to their habitation?

## WRITING PROMPT: HAIKU

- A haiku is a poem consisting of only three lines and is made up of a five-seven-five syllable structure, totaling seventeen syllables. Punctuation and capitalization are up to the poet, and need not follow rigid rules used in structuring sentences.
- Haikus often feature an image, or a pair of images, meant to depict the essence of a specific moment in time, like a snapshot.
- Write an haiku dedicated to the monarch butterfly. It could be about the color of the butterfly, how the butterfly makes you feel, or even what it might symbolize.

## ART ACTIVITY: DRAWING CLOSE-UP

- Diana Thater chose to film the butterflies she observed in Mexico close-up, capturing detailed images of their wings fluttering in space.
- Using a sheet of paper, draw a butterfly wing up close. Focus on the lines, patterns, and colors that you see. You may choose to use oil pastels, paint, or even collaged paper. If inspired, pair your haiku poem with your drawing.



## IN THE ARTIST'S WORDS: ALEJANDRO CARTAGENA

[In this 3-minute video from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art](#), listen to Alejandro Cartagena as he discusses his art and its relationship to the built environment.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS: WILDFIRES IN CALIFORNIA

- Research the history of wildfires in California. How have wildfires changed and evolved overtime? What are the environmental factors that are negatively contributing to the increase in wildfires in California?
- Research controlled burns. What does this phrase mean and how is it being implemented? What are other ways to help prevent wildfires from occurring?
- For Santa Barbara County-based students: research a wildfire that has occurred in the region in the past 30 years. Discuss the cause and effects of the wildfire and what has been done to rehabilitate the environment afterward.

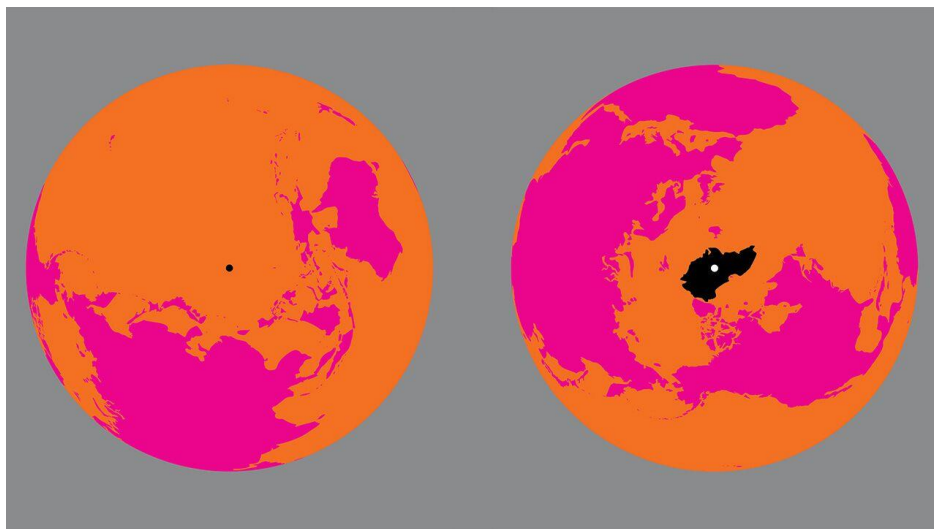
## ART ACTIVITY & WRITING PROJECT: PAIRING PHOTOGRAPHS

- Alejandro Cartagena's project pairs two images together to create deeper meaning, while also exploring issues that impact a local community.
- Walk around your neighborhood and take photographs of different things that you see. Be sure to photograph both natural and unnatural items and phenomena. Aim to take a total of 40–50 photographs.
- Afterward, look through the photographs you took. You are welcome to edit the photographs by cropping or converting to black and white.
- Then, choose 2 images to pair together. One should be of something natural, while the other should be man made. Consider the idea of comparing and contrasting. Think about how the images provide deeper meaning when paired together.
- Print the photographs and pair them side-by-side on a sheet of paper. (You can also stitch the images together digitally, if you prefer.)
- Choose a title for your artwork.
- Then, write a short paragraph describing the final artwork. Consider questions such as: What do the photographs represent? How does their meaning change when viewed independently vs. together? How does the title impact the meaning of the images? What does the artwork say about your neighborhood, city, or region?

## ONLINE RESOURCES ON CONTEMPORARY ART + CLIMATE CHANGE:

### Websites to Explore:

- [Art21: Artists on the Climate Crisis](#)  
Watch videos of artists in their studios as they create work addressing climate change and environmental activism. Artists include: Olafur Eliasson, Maya Lin, Mary Mattingly, Mark Dion, Mel Chin, and more.
- [Serpentine Gallery: Back to Earth Project](#)  
Watch videos and listen to a podcast that includes interviews with over 60 artists, poets, scientists, filmmakers, and architects as they talk about the creative ways to address climate change today.
- [Dear Climate](#)  
An artist-run initiative that creates resources related to the planet, Dear Climate provides downloadable posters and audio meditation to use at home or in school. The artists also invite members of the public to write a letter to the climate and submit it to be reposted on their website.
- [Ice Watch](#)  
A 2015 artwork in which artists Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing installed 12 large blocks of ice outside of the building where the United Nations Conference on Climate Change was being held in Paris. The website includes photo documentation, along with facts and resources about climate change.



Olafur Eliasson, *Earth perspectives*, 2020. © Olafur Eliasson.