GEOETHICS
WORKS BY YING KIT CHAN
Do not let selfish men or greedy interests skin your
country of its beauty, its riches or its romance.

Theodore Roosevelt
# Table of Contents

1 Ying Kit Chan: Humanity in Ecology
   Evelyn Nier-Ming Ch’ien

5 Dao and Ecology

13 Urban Landscape

21 All Our Impertinent Griefs: Ying Kit Chan and Transnational Landscape After the Sublime
   Louise Siddons

39 Deep Ecology

51 Gulf Fire

59 Tar Balls

65 Humanity

71 Convenience

77 Structures

91 Red Alert

107 Detour

115 Seaweed

123 Fragments

131 Water

141 Toward an Aesthetic of Geoethics
   Ying Kit Chan

145 List of Works

147 Biography
不要
Toward an Aesthetic of Geoethics

Ying Kit Chan

The Manificent Earth

On December 7, 1972, the crew of the Apollo 17 spacecraft took a snapshot of the Earth from 29,000 kilometers. This photograph is a transformative image showcasing a breathtaking blue planet of oceans and continents partially covered by white clouds. This image is now famously known as "The Blue Marble," and has become the iconic symbol of the environmental movement.

Eighteen years later, another photograph of the Earth was taken on February 14, 1990, by the Voyager 1 space probe from a record distance of 6 billion kilometers. Carl Sagan entitled this 0.12-pixel picture of the Earth "The Pale Blue Dot" and wrote, "There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we’ve ever known." 1

Both images challenge us to feel privileged to live on such a rich and unique planet as well as inspire us to react to the current environmental crisis caused by human exploitation and negligence.

The Great Acceleration

Since industrialization, humans have made such a significant impact on the Earth that necessitated the naming of a new geologic epoch, Anthropocene. The concept of Anthropocene was anticipated as early as the 19th century and the term is now frequently used in the scientific community and in popular culture. The International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS), the organization in charge of establishing the stratigraphic chart of geologic time, is working on ratifying the adoption of Anthropocene as a new geologic epoch. A group of scientists who advises the ICS on the adoption recently published a paper proposing that the Anthropocene commenced on July 16, 1945. This determination is based on the vast acceleration of the degradation of the Earth’s geology and ecosystems attributed to the Industrial revolution and the historical Alamagordo test explosion. 2 It is alarming that in just a few decades, a blink on the geologic timeline, we have witnessed the “Great Acceleration” during which our magnificent planet has been depleted of its natural resources, pristine landscapes, and livable environments.

Geoethics and Justice

Such an accelerating environmental crisis calls for a change in our conduct. The word Geoethics denotes our responsibility to the Earth, implying the required attitudes and actions for the scrupulous treatment of the Earth and its inhabitants.

In the history of environmental ethics, earlier thinkers such as Henry David Thoreau and Aldo Leopold were inspired by the Romantics’ emotional experience of the Sublime. The Romantics admired the grandeur of the wilderness, and voiced their passion to preserve the natural features and phenomena. In the 1960s, Rachel Carson devoted her life to fighting against harmful chemical applications and called for actions to save the future of the planet. Her book *Silent Spring* inspired the modern environmental movement. Alternatively, Arne Næss suggested a deeper philosophical, intellectual, and spiritual approach to include ecocentric insights to care for the Earth and all species beyond the “shallow” anthropocentric worldview.

Geoethics provides professional standards for geoscientists to consider when interacting with Earth systems. This philosophy is also expanded to all communities invoking awareness and a sense of duty, and cultivating a compassion for the suffering of others. Environmental justice must be a priority in Geoethics. We must recognize the unequal impacts of burdens to different countries, regions, communities, and individuals. Environmental ethics must integrate ethical thinking with social justice, and cultivate a compassion for the suffering of others. Environmental justice must be a priority in Geoethics. We must recognize the unequal impacts of burdens to different countries, regions, communities, and individuals. Environmental ethics must integrate ethical thinking with social justice, and cultivate a compassion for the suffering of others.

Ethics and Aesthetics

Since the 1960s, environmental art, or eco-art, emerges as a genre of visual art and a form of environmental activism. During the early 20th Century art history, activist art is often dismissed as propaganda and has for a long time been marginalized in the mainstream art world.

In the Western philosophical tradition, ethics and aesthetics each occupy a distinct compartment. However, they need not be and must not be mutually exclusive. In his 1987 Nobel Prize lecture, Joseph Brodsky proclaimed, “every new aesthetic reality makes man’s ethical reality more precise... For aesthetics is the mother of ethics.”

When Immanuel Kant introduced the concept of disinterestedness in his *The Critique of Judgment*, he initiated an art theory that is self-reflexive, existing only for its own sake, and that strips art of its instrumental value. In the name of autonomy of art, modern art history has witnessed successive movements of formalism rejecting the instrumentality of art, sterilizing art of its social function, while surrendering its autonomy to the neoliberal economy.

On the bright side, Carol Becker observes in recent developments that the pendulum has swung toward an art practice of social concern and commitment. Becker identified the aesthetic project of Hebert Marcuse as a viable model for its subversive potential of art. Herbert Marcuse understood that didactic art may lose its efficacy to inspire for social change and emancipation. In his last book, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Marcuse rightfully articulated that aesthetic form is essential to its social function, and only through the integration of form and function, art can retake possession of the agency for resistance, and offer hope for a brighter future.

---

List of works

Works are listed by page number

Cover Red Alert Series, enamel paint on discarded plastic, 2018. Table of Contents Bird 2020, digital print. Originally this was part of an installation-entitled Birds, made of discarded grocery bags. The title is inspired by the plastic bags that are entangled in the trees in American cities. Birds was presented in the exhibition Equilibrium hosted by ArtScience Exhibit of Berlin. It was installed in the courtyard of Palazzo Albrizzi-Capello, Venice, Italy, and was taken down after a thunderstorm. The materials were used to create this digital print in 2020.

7 Ten Thousand Things 善, three of the three panels, digital print, each panel 42 by 42 inches, 2014.
8 The Way 想, digital print, 42 x 42 inches, 1977. This work is inspired by the text and philosophy of Dao De Jīng (Chapter 4), original text 乘世而行之, Collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.
9 Live Deep, dip, ink and pigment, 46 by 44 inches, 2014. This work is inspired by a quote from Henry David Thoreau’s Walden, “I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.”
10 Deep Ecology, Installation View, Cressman Center for Visual Art, at the site where Henry David Thoreau built his Walden Pond.
11 London Plane Trees, charcoal on paper, 42 x 84 inches, 1996.
12 Ten Thousand Things 善, 49 x 86 inches, three panels, each panel 42 by 42 inches, 2014.
14 Coal Train, West Virginia, charcoal on paper, 42 x 84 inches, 1983.
15 Industrial Land, charcoal on paper, 42 x 58 inches, 1994.
16 Industrial Structure, charcoal on paper, 42 x 84 inches, 1996.
18 Industrial Site, acrylic on Tyvek, 96 by 120 inches, 2014.
19 Waldo Pond, at the site where Henry David Thoreau built his cabin, digital photography, 2008.
21 London Plane Trees, digital photography, Nanjing, 2014. During the 1980s, thousands of London Plane Trees, locally known as wakangs (梧桐), were planted around the areas and streets leading to the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum in Nanjing (1925-31). The London plane trees, which were originally created for making bows (https://louisvillezoo.org).
22 Industrial Structure, charcoal on paper, 42 x 84 inches, 1991.
23 Live Deep, dip, ink and pigment, 46 by 44 inches, 2014. This work is inspired by a quote from President Theodore Roosevelt, “Do not let men or men of greedy interests know your country by its beauty, its riches or its renown.”
24 Gulf Fire #83, monoprint, 14 x 14 inches, 2012.
25 Gulf Fire #87, monoprint, 14 x 14 inches, 2012.
26 Gulf Fire #82, monoprint, 14 x 14 inches, 2012.
27 Gulf Fire, installation view of 120 prints, Cressman Center, 2014
28 Tar Balls, 44 x 4 inches.
29 Tar Ball, 2014.
30 DuHale installation of tar balls, Art Space at Untitled, Oklahoma City, 2016.
31 Humanism Is An Ocean, acrylic on discarded fabrics, 92 x 140 inches, 2016.
32 Geodesics exhibition, Installation view, Art Space at Untitled, Oklahoma City, 2016.
33 Convenience 善, acrylic on discarded textile, 96 x 202 inches, 2016.
35 Warehouse, charcoal on paper, 42 x 84 inches, 1996.
38 Oil Refinery, charcoal on paper, 44 x 84 inches, 1995.
39 Oil Rig at Grand Isle, digital photography, 2018.
40 Oil Refinery, Louisiana, digital photography, 2018.
41 Oil Rig, Grand Isle, digital photography, 2018.
42 Installation view, University of Louisville Bellamy Gallery, 2013.
46 Datal, Convenience, acrylic on discarded plastic, 2016.
48 Osage Orange Trees, Joe Creason Park, Louisville, Kentucky, digital photography, 2016. The name Osage Orange is a combination of a Native American name, the Osage, and the smell and appearance of the large fruit it produces. The wood of the Osage Orange was highly valued by Plains Indians for making their bows (https://louisvillezoo.org).
49 Do Not, Dip, Dip, digital print, 42 x 84 inches, 2014. The work “Do Not” is inspired by a quote from President Theodore Roosevelt, “Do not let men or men of greedy interests know your country by its beauty, its riches or its renown.”
50 Oil Rigs, Louisiana, digital photography, 2018.
51 Oil Rigs, Grand Isle, digital photography, 2018.
52 Oil Refinery, Louisiana, digital photography, 2018.
53 Oil Refinery, charcoal on paper, 44 x 84 inches, 1995.
54 Oil Rig at Grand Isle, digital photography, 2018.
55 Oil Refinery, Louisiana, digital photography, 2018.
56 Red Alert, acrylic on discarded plastic, 4 x 4 inches, 2018.
57 Datal, Red Alert, acrylic on discarded plastic, 10 x 10 inches, 2018.
58 Red Alert, acrylic on discarded plastic, 8 x 8 inches, 2018.
59 Bitterness, 69, acrylic on discarded plastic, 80 x 60 inches, 2018.
60 Datal, Red Alert, acrylic on discarded plastic, 6 x 10 inches, 2018.
61 Karma, acrylic on discarded plastic, 40 x 20 inches, 2019. This work is constructed in the form of the Chinese character 炎 (Karma) which is an important Buddhist concept of the law of cause and effect. Karma was originally created for a 2018 exhibition at the Berghem Gallery of the Louisville Free Public Library to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s novel Frankenstein or: The Modern Prometheus (1818). This work reflects on Shelley’s prophetic vision of the unprincipled consequences of scientific inventions and serves as an alarm to the catastrophic state of plastic contamination and pollution in our environment.
63, 64 Detour series, digital prints and charcoal drawings, 2014.
68 Seaweed, digital photography, seaweed drying in the fishing village of Po Toi O, Hong Kong, 2014.
69 Seaweed, acrylic on discarded plastic, 120 by 120 inches, 2018.
70 Seaweed, close-up, 2019.
71 Seaweed, close-up, 2019.
72 Seaweed, Science Library, Humboldt University of Berlin, Berlin, Germany, 5 by 80 feet, installation for the Berlin Science Week, December 2018. Photo by mp Warming.
73 Seaweed, acrylic on discarded plastic, 100 x 220 inches, 2019.
74 Red Alert, enamel on discarded plastic, 4 x 4 inches, 2018.
75 Detail, Red Alert, enamel on discarded plastic, 10 x 10 inches, 2018.
77 Red Alert, acrylic on discarded plastic, 8 x 8 inches, 2018.
78 Bitterness, 69, enamel on discarded plastic, 80 x 60 inches, 2018.
79 Datal, Red Alert, enamel on discarded plastic, 6 x 10 inches, 2018.
80 Karma, acrylic on discarded plastic, 40 x 20 inches, 2019. This work is constructed in the form of the Chinese character 炎 (Karma) which is an important Buddhist concept of the law of cause and effect. Karma was originally created for a 2018 exhibition at the Berghem Gallery of the Louisville Free Public Library to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s novel Frankenstein or: The Modern Prometheus (1818). This work reflects on Shelley’s prophetic vision of the unprincipled consequences of scientific inventions and serves as an alarm to the catastrophic state of plastic contamination and pollution in our environment.
81, 82 Detour, Southern Louisiana, digital photography, 2016.
83, 84 Detour series, digital prints and charcoal drawings, 2014.
86 New Jersey, digital photography, 2015.
88 Seaweed, digital photography, seaweed drying in the fishing village of Po Toi O, Hong Kong, 2014.
89 Seaweed, acrylic on discarded plastic, 120 by 120 inches, 2018.
90 Seaweed, close-up, 2019.
91 Seaweed, close-up, 2019.
92 Seaweed, Science Library, Humboldt University of Berlin, Berlin, Germany, 5 by 80 feet, installation for the Berlin Science Week, December 2018. Photo by mp Warming.
93, 94 Convenience, acrylic on discarded plastic, 100 x 220 inches, 2019.
95 Red Alert, enamel on discarded plastic, 4 x 4 inches, 2018.
96 Detail, Red Alert, enamel on discarded plastic, 10 x 10 inches, 2018.
97, 98 Convenience, acrylic on discarded plastic, 100 x 220 inches, 2019.
99 Red Alert, enamel on discarded plastic, 8 x 8 inches, 2018.