

## ECOTISTICAL

Warning: Reading this article causes the death of innocent trees.

BY JOHN PHOTOS

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A few times in my life I have found myself on the wrong side of a paradigm shift. For example, I might believe I am a good person who uses shampoo on a regular basis only to learn I am actually subsidizing the cruel treatment of animals by cosmetics companies. Or what about the time I learned I could no longer wear a certain brand of running shoes because they are the product of child slaves who work 29 hours a day inside a windowless factory inside a volcano? Sometimes it feels impossible to get through the day without contributing to crimes against humanity. Fortunately, greater awareness often gives rise to alternative solutions that reflect our evolving ethics.

Faced with the specter of climate change, “going green” has become something of a mantra. It represents an attitude of greater accountability on the part of consumers and producers to consider the environmental impact of their actions, and it has led to a thorough reimagining of society with sustainability as its goal. In this

way, *Mapping a Green Future* at the Center for Contemporary Arts, part of the *Land/Art* series, feels timely.

For several months, *Land/Art* exhibitions around New Mexico have been in full bloom. For better or for worse, the series has shown the innumerable ways artists consider the environment in their practices, whether as a source or backdrop for their materials, a sacred space, or simply an aesthetic experience. Its emphasis on science and research sets *Mapping* apart. In fact, upon entry, it was not entirely clear I was viewing an art exhibition at all.

Computer stations, charts, videos and one crazy sprinkler system take up the bulk of the space, giving the impression one is attending a trade show. Much of the work on display is text-heavy or uses voice-over, providing the viewer with information and data rather than a purely visual experience. (And this makes sense—many of the participants are not strictly artists; a quick perusal of the biographies lists PhDs in other fields.) Other works employ the impact of symbolic objects as a way to deliver a message about consumption. In any case, the impetus for the works’ creation is one

of good intentions and, for the most part, avoids the schizophrenia of much activist art that backs a cause and exploits that cause for profit.

*Mapping* presents issues that are universal—such as carbon emissions, pollution and depletion of resources—but it does a good job of examining them in a way that feels specific to the viewer, either by assessing the impact at the local level or by narrowing the focus of the data to the individual level. By personalizing the data, viewer are confronted by their own culpability in this.

In their video, John Fogarty and Lea Rekow ask people where their electricity comes from. Of course, it didn’t take long to realize that I don’t know where my electricity comes from. On the floor, a pile of black rocks represents the amount of coal a person consumes every day (I don’t need to say it is more than you think). Even the venue itself is held account-

able by Catherine Harris’ charting of CCA’s water displacement.

CCA should be commended for hosting an exhibition such as this. By giving over the gallery to promote awareness of concerns that affect everyone, they make the usual issues of aesthetics and artistic rhetoric seem paltry indeed.

The problem is, creating awareness is only half the battle. Offering alternatives is the key to supplanting current systems, and here the show is sort of lacking. It is one thing to point to a problem but, without a practical solution, it can be difficult to imagine how one can avoid it in the future.

*Mapping* makes compelling arguments against many things, but it makes very few arguments for anything else.



Carbon footprints dot the landscape; this fact the CCA makes clear. What we don’t learn is how to erase them.

MAPPING A  
GREEN FUTURE  
Through Nov. 21  
Center for  
Contemporary  
Arts Muñoz  
Waxman Gallery  
1050 Old Pecos  
Trail  
982-1338