

BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

BLANTON MUSEUM BRINGS TOGETHER AWARD-WINNING WRITERS AND ARTISTS TO EXPLORE CLIMATE CHANGE



Aaron Morse, *Cloud World (#3)*, 2014 inspired the title of the exhibition

If the Sky Were Orange: Art in the Time of Climate Change **incorporates curation and commentary by leading scientists and writers**

AUSTIN, TX— August 9, 2023—The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin will present [*If the Sky Were Orange: Art in the Time of Climate Change*](#), from September 9, 2023 through February 11, 2024. This timely exhibition explores the history and urgency of climate- and energy-related issues and is the result of a unique curatorial collaboration. Journalist and award-winning author Jeff Goodell, who has written extensively on the climate crisis, guest curated the exhibition and invited distinguished climate and energy scientists and writers to respond to contemporary artworks within the scope of their expertise.

“If the Sky Were Orange considers art through the lens of one of the world’s most pressing issues,” said Blanton Director Simone Wicha. “Having the Blanton—an art museum in the heart of Texas—lead a conversation about climate change may surprise some people. But as a cultural leader and as part of UT,

the Blanton Museum of Art is deeply committed to expanding knowledge and human understanding, a core value of the University. And the climate crisis, without a doubt, is a topic we must pay attention to and learn more about. Through the power and beauty of art, this exhibition can help foster comprehension of how we got here, where we're headed, and what can be done. I am immensely grateful to the artists whose work we are presenting and to the distinguished group of writers and scientists who help us explore the subject in our galleries. I hope this novel intersection of art and science will allow visitors to come away with a deeper understanding of the climate crisis and a heightened sense of its importance and urgency."

If the Sky Were Orange is presented in two parts: the first features works by contemporary artists that address climate change, accompanied by the responses from the climate and energy experts.

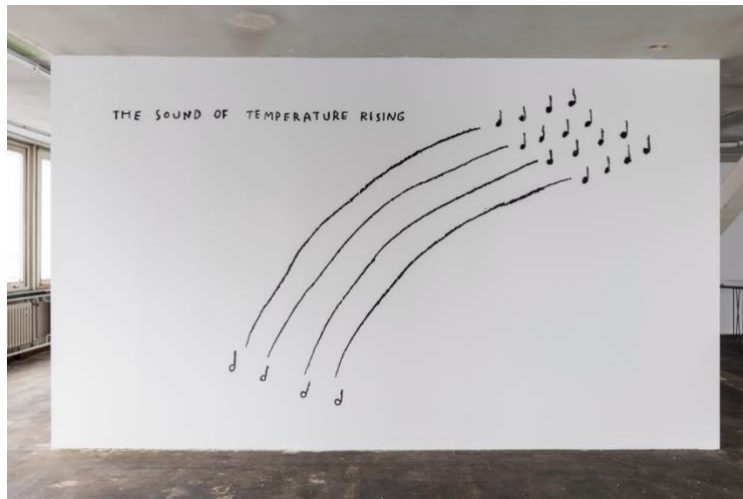
The second part incorporates art from the Blanton's collection that spans a range of genres and time periods. While most of these works were not created to address climate change, Goodell selected them to represent climate-related themes and issues, further contextualizing the conversation. For example, the title of the show, *If the Sky Were Orange*, is inspired by a large painting in the Blanton's collection by Aaron Morse. *Cloud World (#3)* (2014) features jarring, hot-orange clouds floating above a massive seascape—a striking visual metaphor, Goodell suggests, for the greenhouse gases that are causing temperatures to rise on our planet. He notes that if those gases were such a visible color, as the title proposes, we would be far more aware of their presence in our atmosphere and their impact of on our environment.

"When it comes to climate change, science and art have long existed in separate realms," said Goodell. "*If the Sky Were Orange*, which includes the voices of many of the most respected energy and climate writers in the world responding to captivating works by a range of artists, is an attempt to bridge that gap. I'm eager for the Blanton's visitors to learn from this interplay and gain a better awareness of both the challenges and opportunities we face as the climate crisis accelerates."

While heat waves and rising sea levels are two of the best-known issues around climate change, the exhibition also explores the complex interrelatedness of planetary evolution and human knowledge and culture, including such benefits as the advancement of scientific research and related solutions like renewable energy and human and environmental adaptability.

Divided among three of the Blanton's temporary gallery spaces—the Contemporary Project gallery, the Film & Video Gallery, and the Paper Vault—*If the Sky Were Orange* is the first exhibition at the Blanton to explore one topic across multiple galleries. In envisioning and developing the project, Goodell worked closely with Wicha and Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs Carter E. Foster, who served as the exhibition's managing curator.

Part One: Contemporary Responses



The first part of the exhibition unfolds in two spaces, the Contemporary Project gallery and the Film & Video Gallery. Works by ten contemporary artists address how climate change impacts life on our planet, ranging from the creation of energy to the instability of glaciers. The Blanton team presented Goodell with a selection of works by contemporary artists who explore climate issues. Goodell chose a final group of artworks and then paired each work with one of the experts listed below, requesting they respond to the art through the lens of their specialized knowledge. Their responses provide the text for the exhibition wall labels.

- **Amitav Ghosh** is an Indian-born writer of acclaimed fiction and nonfiction, including *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*.
- **Katharine Hayhoe** is Chief Scientist for The Nature Conservancy and a distinguished professor at Texas Tech University. She is the author of numerous books, including *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World*.
- **Elizabeth Kolbert** is a staff writer at *The New Yorker* and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*.
- **Sy Montgomery** has written 34 books including *The Soul of an Octopus*, which was a National Book Award Finalist.
- **Julian Brave NoiseCat (Secwépemc/St'at'imc)** is a writer, filmmaker, and journalist. In 2021, NoiseCat was named to the TIME100 Next list of emerging leaders.
- **Olúfẹ̀mi O. Táíwò** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University and author of *Reconsidering Reparations*.
- **John Vaillant** is a Vancouver-based author and journalist. His most recent book is *Fire Weather: A True Story from A Hotter World*.
- **Dr. Michael E. Webber** holds the Josey Centennial Professorship in Energy Resources in the Department of Mechanical Engineering at The University of Texas at Austin and is the author of *Power Trip: The Story of Energy*.
- **Amy Westervelt** is an award-winning investigative journalist and executive producer of the podcast company Critical Frequency.

This section opens with a conceptual wall drawing by Christine Sun Kim, *The Sound of Temperature Rising* (2016/2023), which uses American sign language, musical scores, and graphs to ask what rising temperatures might sound like. “Musical notes soar like birds against the sky,” writes scientist Katherine Hayhoe in her response to the work. “The notes ascend as if in tandem with the mercury levels that track our planet’s temperature. There’s no good news here.”



Julian Charrière's video *Towards No Earthly Pole* (2019) anchors the contemporary artworks that follow in the exhibition. Shot at night with drones flying over and through a variety of glacial landscapes, it allows viewers to experience an environment most will never know directly, but whose dissipation will affect every part of the planet. “The Arctic remains, for most of us, at the dangerous edge of experience,” writes Pulitzer-prize winning author Elizabeth Kolbert. “It is still the place to go to lose yourself—either figuratively or literally—in nature’s inhuman beauty. But the earthly poles are changing, and changing rapidly.”

Such impacts are reflected in the depiction of large California wildfires in Jessie Homer French's painting *Mojave Burning* (2021), about which author John Valliant writes, “The world burns differently now;” and in Nyugen E. Smith’s recent *Bundlehouse* sculpture, which author Olúfẹ̀mi O. Táíwò writes embodies a “wrenching tale of displacement.” Created from found objects, the latter recalls hastily gathered belongings culled to escape oncoming hurricanes, or the ad-hoc shelters constructed by migrants. Also included are artworks related to energy production, such as John Gerrard’s simulation of Spindletop—an image that award-winning investigative journalist Amy Westervelt calls “about as perfect a symbol of the climate crisis as I can think of.”

Acclaimed author Amitav Ghosh writes that Sandra Sawatzky’s medieval-inspired tapestry depicting the history of oil reminds us “the truth is that these crises are rooted in history.” Prints from Jamey Stillings’ long-term project document the development of renewable energy and add an optimistic note: they

“capture the beauty and technological elegance of wind and solar power and illustrate a path forward,” writes The University of Texas at Austin professor Michael E. Webber.

The museum's Film & Video Gallery will present continuous screenings of short pieces by three artists exploring humankind's relationship to nature. These include Amy Globus' *Electric Sheep* (2001-2), starring rescued octopuses navigating a series of small plexiglass boxes and tubes. Sy Montgomery, author of the bestseller *The Soul of an Octopus*, references the impact of warming seas and describes the octopus on screen and the intentionally distorted voice on the video soundtrack: “in both, their wildness and wonder are diminished.” In his response to pioneering performance artist Joan Jonas' 1968 short film *Wind*, Goodell writes, “in those six minutes you feel the entirety of humankind's struggle with nature.” And finally, Cannupa Hanska Luger's *Future Ancestral Technologies: New Myth* (2021) imagines intricately garbed “monster slayers” of the future seeking to repair our relationship to water. Indigenous author and filmmaker Julian Brave NoiseCat (Secwépemc/St'at'imc) writes about our need to “slay monsters again” to restore the natural balance on earth.

Part Two: Contextualizing Climate Change

The second part of the show is set in the museum's Paper Vault, galleries dedicated to displaying art from the more than 15,000 works on paper in the Blanton's renowned prints and drawings collection. Goodell worked with the museum team to select art—ranging from historical works to works by living artists like Cildo Meireles and Donald Moffett—that, while not created in response to climate change, reflect humans' relationship with nature, technology, energy, and political power. In Goodell's writings throughout, he interprets what the artworks tell us about the story of climate change—and the future we're creating.

The first section looks at how artists have long addressed how humans both harmonize with nature and grapple with its unpredictable and monumental forces, as in the earliest work on view by Claude Lorrain (ca. 1630), a leading landscape painter who idealized nature and human's relationship to it.

Subsequent sections explore energy as both an economic and cultural force, as in the visitor favorite *Oil Field Girls* (1940) by Jerry Bywaters, as well as what has been gained and lost by technological progress. Finally, the last two sections focus on the consequences of climate change and what's at stake in the future.



Visitors can dive deeper into climate-related topics in special resource areas located outside the three gallery spaces; among these resources are a timeline that provides broad historical perspective on the subject and a presentation that more specifically conveys the history of energy in Texas. Written by Webber, currently the Josey Centennial Professor in Energy Resources and Professor of Mechanical Engineering at UT Austin, the presentation describes the state's long and complex relationship with energy, from the early 20th-century oil and gas boom to Texas' current leadership in renewable energy and clean fuels.

Copies of several books on climate and energy authored by the exhibition's guest writers are also available as resources. A panel discussion with Goodell in conversation with several of the guest writers is planned for later in the year, with date and details forthcoming.

Press Preview: Friday, September 8, at 2 p.m. with Jeff Goodell and Director Simone Wicha
Press images are available [here](#).

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About the Blanton Museum of Art

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with more than 21,000 objects. Recognized as the home of Ellsworth Kelly's *Austin*, its major collecting areas are modern and contemporary U.S. and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and Baroque paintings, and prints and drawings. The Blanton offers thought-provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

About guest curator Jeff Goodell

Jeff Goodell's latest book, *The Heat Will Kill You First: Life and Death on a Scorched Planet*, was published by Little, Brown in July 2023 and was an instant *New York Times* bestseller. He is the author of six previous books, including *The Water Will Come: Rising Seas, Sinking Cities*, and the *Remaking of the Civilized World*, which was a *New York Times* Critics Top Book of 2017. He has covered climate change for more than two decades at *Rolling Stone* and discussed climate and energy issues on NPR, MSNBC, CNN, CNBC, ABC, NBC, Fox News, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. He is a Senior Fellow at the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center and a 2020 Guggenheim Fellow.

Image captions:

Aaron Morse, *Cloud World (#3)*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 29 x 118 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Portia Hein and Philip Martin, 2015

Christine Sun Kim, *The Sound of Temperature Rising*, acrylic on wall adapted from charcoal paper drawing, Courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly

Julian Charrière, *Towards No Earthly Pole*, 2019, 4k color film, 104:30 min, Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery

Jerry Bywaters, *Oil Field Girls*, 1940, oil on board, 29 5/8 x 24 1/2 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Michener Acquisitions Fund, 1984