

Proposed Title

Visual Artists Experiencing Nature: Examining Human-Environment Relationships

Abstract

To date, anthropologists have given little attention to how people in general, and artists in particular, experience the natural environment and how these experiences affect humans as individuals and as members of society as a whole. Identification of diverse aspects of the interdependence of environmental and social systems can inform our understanding of how people tackle ever-increasing issues of environmental concern. Managers, scientists, artists, and collaborators working at the nexus of disciplines, management needs, and ecological and social systems can facilitate this understanding through knowledge sharing. In my research I examine how two groups of visual artists process their experiences through what I term 'experiencing with' the natural environment and how their experiences with the natural environment influence them as artists.

This interdisciplinary research employs phenomenological inquiry methods and interdisciplinary analysis to address artists' sense of experiencing nature and sense of place. I collect data from sources including: interviews, written documentation, photo, map, and narrative journals, observations, and my participant observation of visual artists and artist-in-residence program activities.

Analysis of the artists' narratives and actions generates a sense of their perceptions of their experiences with nature. It makes evident six primary categories of findings: artists' sense of experiencing with the natural environment, their purpose of experiencing, their process of experiencing, their conceptual definitions of nature, their access to nature, and how they experience nature through two artist residency programs. The artists' experiences with nature are individual and have varying degrees of influence on the artists. They experience nature through experience events that are cumulative and iterative. I express this in an 'experiencing formula.' I suggest this formula may be an apt schema for describing human experience regardless of specific circumstances with potential applicability to a variety of disciplines.