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How to Move a Landscape to MASS MoCA **Blane de St. Croix**

August 2, 2021

Dear Blane, how do you define your artistic output? What do you intend to achieve with each project and with your body of work in its entirety? What motivates you?

Each one of my monumental sculptures takes an incredible investment of time, energy, and funding, often times taking years to produce. With each new landscape project, the design, material use, fabrication, engineering, and visual narrative is totally distinctive. This approach allows me to push myself to develop the work in new ways every time in the studio, and permits me to properly (and literally) dimensionalize any given geopolitical topic I am currently immersed in.



Photo credit: Paul De Luna

With each project I wish to achieve a true connection with the observer transporting them into the visual narrative, creating a dialogue with the viewer through my landscapes. And with that, perhaps subliminal, dialogue, I hope to create a positive change. With my MASS MoCA exhibition *How to Move a Landscape*, my motivation was driven by the work's content on climate change and related issues through the landscape. Climate change is already having and it will have a further ricochet effect, magnifying all issues/crises with refugees/immigration, at-risk populations, racial justice, border issues, drought, water, food shortages – famine, economic issues and more.

My deep reverence for nature drives me to create my enormous landscape sculptures. I have been creating works on nature and human-kinds desire to conquer it for over forty years, since the early '80s. The irony is that nature will always win in the end.

How have you been affected as an artist and as a human by this horrible, once-in-a-lifetime pandemic? How have you dealt with it: have you created more art or have you used this time to reflect and consider what matters most?

It has disrupted my life in many ways, but it also has strengthened what drives my work – climate change. Most scientists believe that COVID was created because of how we negatively impact the earth. And this is not a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. Other severe viruses are predicted in the next decade.

What matters most is that we address Climate Change as that will only positively influence virtually every other issue we face. I also believe the arts have a large role to play. We have the unique power to visually connect to people, to use scale, aesthetics and experiential spaces. The arts can bring people together to heighten awareness maybe with the goal to create collaborations and motivate change and policy.

Are there any lessons you have learned as an explorer of scientific and artistic ideas that were especially useful during this difficult period?

Yes, I love being an artist. I feel deeply privileged to do what I do, to travel to astonishing isolated places meeting experts across disciplines. I also feel a huge responsibility to share my experiences and research into the inaccessible landscapes to which I have bared witness and my firsthand infinitesimal knowledge of what is happening to the earth.

I think of myself as a non-linear visual storyteller. Artists are another kind of historian, documenting the times we are living in. These times are especially dire, indeed.

Do you see your MASS MOCA exhibit – *How To Move A Landscape* – being of heightened importance given the need to connect with other people on a more fundamental level now more than ever?

My MASS MoCA exhibition has not only heightened the importance of connecting with people, precisely, it is what has motivated my efforts.

Quite seriously, every person is equally important in the equation. I say that thinking of an enthusiastic museum visitor direct messaging me on Instagram, telling me they replaced their furnace after seeing my show. Similarly, that's how it is touring a United States Senator and other notable policy makers, hoping to influence their priorities a bit more. In the last year, I think I have given more tours of the exhibition to government officials than artworld people in fact. Their response has been overwhelmingly positive and astonishing. The exhibit also focuses on the need for the arts and artists to collaborate with scientists and others to connect with larger audiences. The exhibition and its catalog intentionally give a large platform to climate scientists with interviews and authorship.



Can you tell us more about all the work that went into making *How To Move A Landscape* a reality?

Many, many years of work. Numerous collaborators. It was a mutually creative endeavor with MASS MoCA's Senior Curator and my top enabler, Denise Markonish, as well as visionary Director Joe Thompson. The project also involved countless collaborative efforts, such as with documentary director Tony Gerber and our stellar film crew, and with my friend artist Paul Amenta. Most importantly, it is because of the incredible community of climate scientists and the Inupiaq people in the high Arctic who invited me into their world to better understand Climate Change on the edge of the world.

What are your expectations after you share work with the world? Who are the critics whose opinions you take into consideration?

While there is not a clearly defined measurable outcome, I believe the subliminal effect is palpable. And certainly, anecdotally I am pleased to say that so many people have been greatly impacted by the exhibition.

I intend to consistently travel my landscape sculptures to bring these far-reaching lands and the effect of human-caused climate change to new audiences. I think the opinion of all viewers and how they approach and see my work is important. It is the strongest thing I take away from my show. I even had a prominent right-wing publication write about the show. They loved the artwork, but they still don't think climate change is caused by humans. But hey – it is a step in the right direction. Actually, if I got them to think about the topic a bit more, that is not a bad thing.

Have you made any changes to your workflow or direction of your creative energy in recent months?

I am always making preparations for future research, other collaborative partnerships, and plans for new landscape sculptures to tackle more pressing issues. There is never enough time to get to it all. I recently won a lifetime achievement award. Besides being shocked and immeasurably grateful, I thought, “*I am not through yet!*”

We have an ongoing campaign titled [#BeatTheBlues](#) on ways to prioritize mental health. What does Blane De St.

Croix do to #BeatTheBlues?

I believe in the importance of our inherent relationship to nature and the land. Nature provides us all with solace, peace, rejuvenation and a place to heal.

If we as citizens of earth were more aligned with the natural world instead of working against it, I think we would all be a lot happier.

What makes an impression on you as a keen observer of an ever-changing world?

We should heed the wisdom of young people who are angry with older generations irresponsibility with Climate Change Action. They are now driving the necessary climate change policy. Organizations like Extinction Rebellion and the Sunrise Movement are putting us older people to shame with their motivation and courage.

In addition to artistry, imagination, and perseverance, are there other essential qualities of making a mark as an artist in today's world?

Collaboration, cross-disciplinary engagement and shared responsibilities are key. I don't think artists can live in an isolated bubble anymore. In the Renaissance, artists, scientists, mathematicians etc... all hung out. I think it is time for a new version of that to save the planet and ourselves.

As far as you are concerned, what sort of works will pass the test of time when looking at today's contemporary art, or is that even relevant now?

Work that is engaged and truly reflective of our times. Art that provides awareness into what we as humans accomplished: both the good and the bad. Art that is innovative and that builds upon the past.

Today is a good today because...

We as global citizens are discussing and more engaged with all environmental, social, geopolitical issues now more than yesterday. Let's work for tomorrow to be even better.

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