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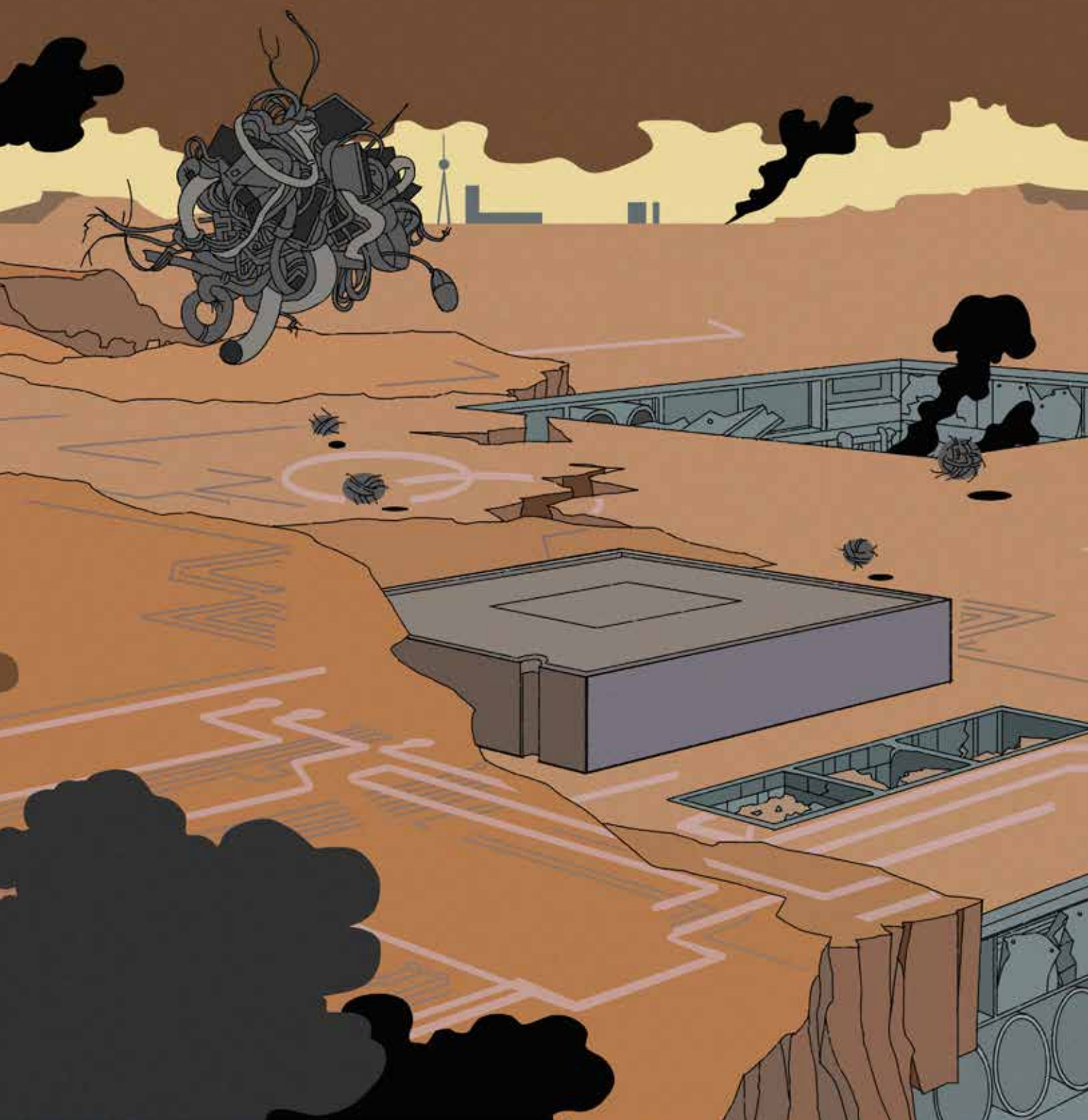
Will AI help
solve the
climate
emergency...



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COURAGEOUS CLIMATE

...or push our planet to its limits?



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Courageous climate
The double cover illustration by London-based visual artist **Manshen Lo** imagines both utopian and dystopian futures for a world that hangs in the balance. Lo's work investigates the subtle tension between humans and urban space in contemporary life; clients include *The New Yorker*, Netflix and MTV.



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Joanna Choukeir



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Climate change is the single most pressing existential crisis of our time, with its impact threatening all living things through flooding, food and water scarcity, extreme heat and wildfires, disease and economic insecurity. The 2015 Paris Agreement saw a global movement of nations collectively agree to keep warming well under 2°C. Although this pledge incentivised a proliferation of innovations worldwide, projections indicate that global warming will still rise well above 2°C by the end of the century.

Whether through the arts, technology, psychology or community action, this issue of *RSA Journal* celebrates a diverse range of ‘courageous climate’ initiatives that go beyond simply doing less harm, to doing more good, for people, places and the planet.

In this edition, David Morgan of Without Walls demonstrates how a network of cultural organisations can shift hearts and minds on the climate agenda through the support and development of outdoor interactive arts. Environmental artist Andrea Polli’s work highlights how immersive sound installations can blend the arts, technology and data science to improve public understanding of climate. The power of sound for change is explored further by Sounds Right, a groundbreaking initiative from the Museum for the United Nations – UN Live initiative by which nature can receive royalties when sounds are sampled in the music of recording artists.

Many of these innovations are enabled by advances in technology, and journalist Karina Montoya writes about the role that Big Tech-developed AI might play in addressing the climate crisis, and the importance of public awareness of the potential benefits, and costs, of the current industry push to develop such platforms. From ideas to action, we are excited to celebrate 100 years of the Student Design Awards. This year’s winners produced courageous innovations

“This issue of *RSA Journal* celebrates a diverse range of ‘courageous climate’ initiatives that go beyond simply doing less harm, to doing more good, for people, places and the planet”

that show how AI and technology can be a force for good, whether for regenerative farming, wildfire detection or circular tech.

This issue also profiles the Earth Defenders Toolkit, a collaborative digital space that combines science, tech and justice in solidarity with Indigenous and marginalised communities in the Global South, to facilitate connections and learning to protect ecosystems.

Undoubtedly, climate psychology plays a significant role in how we contribute to, process and adapt to

climate change. Chair of the Climate Psychology Alliance Judith Anderson writes passionately about the impact of climate issues on young people, the support they need, and how growing up having never known a world without the climate emergency impacts their capacity to innovate in the future.

Eighteen-year-old Kabir Kaul, our inaugural RSA NextGen Fellow, models the role that young people play by sharing his incredible work as a London-based conservationist and activist. Another young Fellow, Amy Meek, leads our ‘In conversation’ interview with Hannah Jones, CEO of The Earthshot Prize. We learn about how the prize stewards optimism and inspiration in the next generation by scouting and investing in game-changing innovations that help us repair the planet.

And, in similar spirit, we share the work the RSA is doing in this space. Playful Green Planet is an ambitious initiative aimed at growing children and young people’s connection to nature through outdoor-based play and learning.

We hope this issue is as informative as it is inspirational, demonstrating how, through the RSA’s community and beyond, a diversity of disciplines, approaches and communities are working collectively to do more good in response to climate change. ■

Joanna Choukeir is the RSA’s Director of Design and Innovation.

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Starting in 1783, the RSA published *Transactions of the Society*, which became *The Journal of the Society of Arts* in 1852 (‘Royal’ was added to the title in 1908). The publication assumed its current name, *RSA Journal*, in 1987.

RSA NEXTGEN

Conservationist *Kabir Kaul* in this edition's spotlight



Where did you grow up?
In the boroughs of Hillingdon and Harrow, the epitome of 'Metroland', commuter suburbs built in the 1930s following the expansion of the London Underground. Leafy residential streets, plenty of green space — and my local bus always arrives about 20 minutes late.

What did you want to be as a child and what are you now?
As a child, I'd spend hours reading animal encyclopedias, riveted by the sheer diversity of wildlife on those pages — I initially aspired to become a zoologist. As I became more aware of my local wildlife, my focus shifted. Since 2017, I have been writing about conservation efforts in London, and wildlife

around the UK and abroad, on my blog, Kaul of the Wild.

What is one thing the world needs to know about you?
I have an identical twin brother. He has visited RSA House only once, I promise!

What's your idea of happiness?
Walking through any city and learning about its history, culture, architecture and environment. Starting in September, I'll be studying at the University of Birmingham; I'm looking forward to a new adventure there.

What's your idea of misery?
Being mistaken for my twin brother! Although we are very different people, it happens to be his idea of misery, too.



Scan the above QR code to visit Kabir's blog, Kaul of the Wild

Photo: courtesy of Kabir Kaul

What's your favourite way to spend a Sunday morning?
At my nearest nature reserve, Ruislip Woods, primarily in an area of heathland known as Poor's Field. During the spring and autumn, I love visiting in the early mornings when the trees seem to overflow with the sound of warblers, a type of small brown migrating songbird.

What are you most passionate about and why?
Shining a light on urban wildlife and habitats and encouraging the public to value and protect them. If we are going to tackle the challenges of climate change, everyone must be made aware of urban nature.

If you had one wish to change the world, what would it be?
That politicians at any level of governance have at least a basic understanding of the natural world. Too many regard nature as a 'nice to have', not a 'need to have'. Nature's role in tackling climate change, and its benefits to society and economy, must be recognised more often in governmental decision-making.

What has been the most unexpected thing about becoming a Fellow?
As a Fellow of the RSA, I've been consistently surprised by the ways in which our various experiences — from renewable energy policy to improving people's access to theatre — overlap. I'm proud to be part of a community that is committed to creating positive change.

What is the one thing every person should be doing to help the planet?
Start by attracting wildlife to your doorstep. If you have a garden or balcony, you could install nest boxes and bird feeders to attract sparrows and finches, or plant wildflowers to attract bees and butterflies — the smallest difference can make the biggest impact. ■



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DESIGN FOR LIFE

The play's the thing

The RSA's Playful Green Planet intervention aims to create a world where every child has access to nature-based play experiences

Words: Cathy Pineo and Eirini Zormpa

The benefits of active, nature-based creative play for children are well known. Nature-immersed creative play supports children's development and wellbeing, fosters an appreciation and respect for the natural world, and grows their interests and

capabilities in climate action and social activism.

But we are in a time of crisis: children have limited access to play in natural spaces and, even when they do, they do not always feel welcome, particularly those in communities with large socioeconomic disparities.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Playful Green Planet

The crisis

Extensive research highlights this crisis — whether that is less time playing in nature or less connection to nature.

An optimistic way to address this crisis is through place- and community-based approaches. These focus on growing children's agency by co-designing with them accessible interventions that transform how they engage with nature, fostering a new generation of environmentally conscious and socially active citizens.

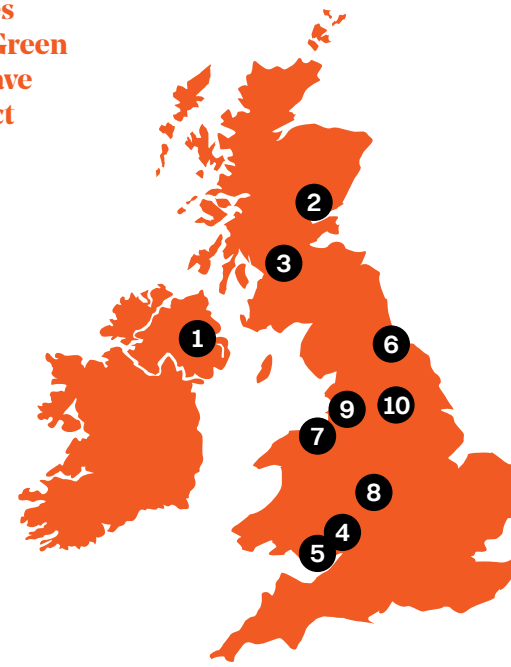
The vision

Through Playful Green Planet, the RSA wants to create a

Photos: bgwalker / iStock

The top 10 cities where Playful Green Planet could have the most impact

1. Belfast
2. Dundee
3. Glasgow
4. Newport
5. Cardiff
6. Hull
7. Liverpool
8. Birmingham
9. Blackburn
10. Bradford



world where every child has access to nature-based creative play spaces and experiences that grow their social and climate action capabilities. We are partnering with the Eden Project, Bath Spa University, the Land Trust and others to launch this ambition.

Playful Green Planet will be co-created by a movement of local citizens and coalitions (the Playful Green Planet stewards), transforming unused green spaces within walking distance of community centres, schools and early childhood settings into ecologically thriving outdoor playrooms and classrooms.

We will learn from and build on existing nature-

based learning initiatives (for example, the National Education Nature Park), presenting a unique and complementary approach.

The action

The RSA conducted data research that identified the urban places in the UK where Playful Green Planet could have the greatest impact. We looked at high levels of deprivation as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation and, where applicable, the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index, and cross-referenced the results with UK Office for National Statistics data on access to gardens and public green space in Great Britain.

Next, the RSA put out a call across our Fellowship to find potential Playful Green Planet stewards interested in creating projects in these target cities.

We have received interest from some fantastic Playful Green Planet stewards and are looking to pilot this approach from this autumn contingent on funding. Our ambition is to seed 20 Playful Green Planet sites over the next five years.

Playful Green Planet stewards need to have:

- access to green areas in deprived neighbourhoods in one of the ten cities
- strong connections with the local community
- expertise in environmental education and creative learning methodologies

24%

In the UK, only 24% (Edelman, 2016) of children spend more than one hour per day playing outside — the time outdoors recommended in the UN guidelines for prisoners.

1 in 10

Fewer than 1 in 10 UK children regularly play in wild spaces (Wainright, 2012), compared with half of children a generation ago, and 1 in 10 do not visit a natural environment even once per year (Barkham and Aldred, 2016).

56%

Just 56% (Edelman, 2016) of children in Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Portugal, South Africa, Turkey, UK, USA and Vietnam play outside for more than one hour per day.

1 in 5

Only 1 in 5 (McGrath, 2013) British children say they feel connected to nature.

Playful Green Planet's approach

- Targeted: focuses on urban places where nature-based creative play is limited or difficult to facilitate.
- Place-based: supports local people, groups and institutions to use latent green spaces.
- Co-created: playful spaces and experiences are co-designed and co-produced to meet local ambitions.
- Promoting play: focuses on nature-immersed playful learning experiences that unlock children's imaginations.
- Open to everyone: supports nature-based creative play experiences for all children, their families and communities.
- Sustainable: offers tailored support, including training and advice on fundraising and financial sustainability, and is invested in seeing initiatives flourish for many years.
- Driving nested outcomes: encourages outcomes that are good for children, communities and environmental regeneration.

If you are a Fellow interested in becoming a steward and kickstarting Playful Green Planet in your community, we would love to hear from you. We are also looking for partners who would like to support this work and strengthen their impact.

We invite you to join us in this exciting endeavour. ■

Cathy Pineo is the RSA's Head of Regenerative Learning and Design.

Eirini Zormpa is a Quantitative Researcher at the RSA.

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Performance without walls



A network of outdoor arts organisations across England is helping artists and festivals to meet their environmental and creative goals

Words: David Morgan

In 2024, the UK experienced one of its wettest summers on record and all of us felt the impact on our plans for weekends and holidays. But spare a thought for artist Tom Bailey, who spent July undertaking an 800km journey from the Outer Hebrides in Scotland to Helsingør in Denmark, travelling only by boat or on foot.

Tom's epic voyage was undertaken as part of the

international tour of his new show *Crap at Animals*, commissioned by Passage Festival in Helsingør and Without Walls in the UK. Without Walls, a network of 40 outdoor arts organisations from across England, chose to support Tom's work as part of its all-embracing commitment to addressing the climate crisis.

Crap at Animals fuses elements of live art, physical theatre and clowning to drive home the impact of mass extinction. The show succeeds in being funny, engaging, thought-provoking and moving, all at the same time.

Many artists grapple with the challenge of how to tour their work in a manner that is in keeping with their environmental goals. In Tom's case, this involved turning the

journey into a performance in and of itself. Tom followed the lines of boreal forests through Scotland and Scandinavia carrying a scroll listing 44,000 endangered and extinct species. Tom will use his documentation of the trip as the starting point for new works highlighting the importance of biodiversity.

Norfolk & Norwich Festival, where *Crap at Animals* premiered, has taken a proactive role in leading this kind of work. This has included working with Norwich City Council to install mains electricity in parks, eliminating the need for diesel generators. It has also introduced meat-free catering and plastic-free compost toilets, and promotes active travel and public transport options to its audiences.

As the largest network of outdoor arts festivals in England, Without Walls was able to share its expertise across partners and through industry networks such as Vision 2025 and the Theatre Green Book initiative.

For Without Walls, climate change isn't just of academic importance. The kind of wet summer that we have just experienced poses a genuine threat to the festivals that it represents.

That's why Without Walls works with artists like Tom: to highlight the urgency of the crisis and promote the belief that all of us have our part to play in building a sustainable society. ■

David Morgan, FRSA is Head of Programme for Without Walls.

Above: Tom Bailey performing *Crap at Animals*

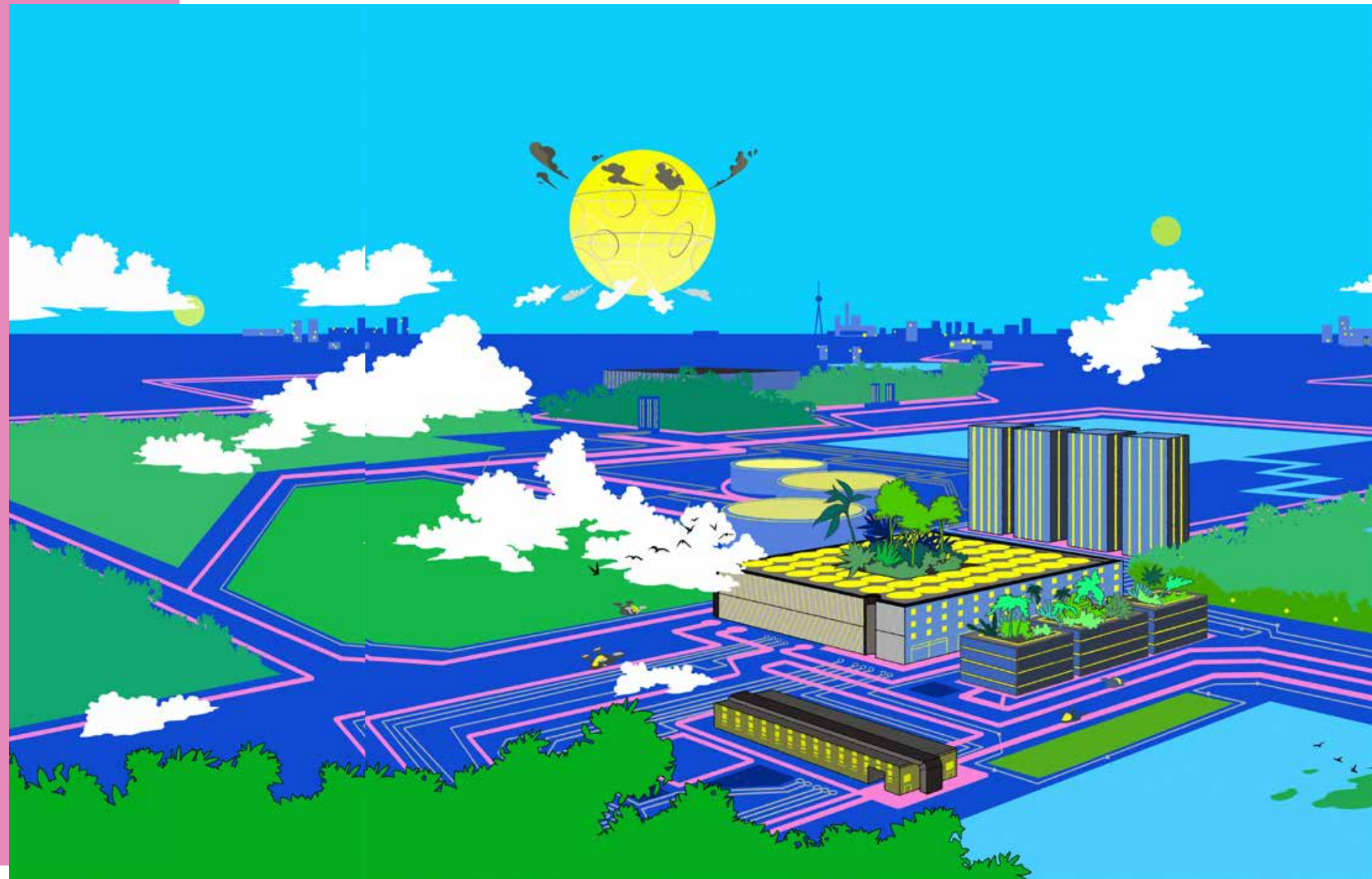
Photo: courtesy of Mechanical

Save the planet, eat the world

From deforestation detection to disaster response, AI applications developed by Big Tech show promise — but at what cost to our environment?

Words:
Karina Montoya

Illustrations:
Manshen Lo



The lives of most of today's adult generation have been shaped by access, or lack thereof, to the internet and mobile connectivity. When we consider the role of this infrastructure in our lives, we likely think about our use of services such as email, cloud storage, search engines, GPS maps, social media, video streaming and e-commerce — the tangible representations of our digitised world.

Thirty years into this digitised future, we face another watershed moment. Over the last year, a slew of popular applications have become key entry points for most people to experience artificial intelligence, or AI. ChatGPT's text-generation tools, image generators such as

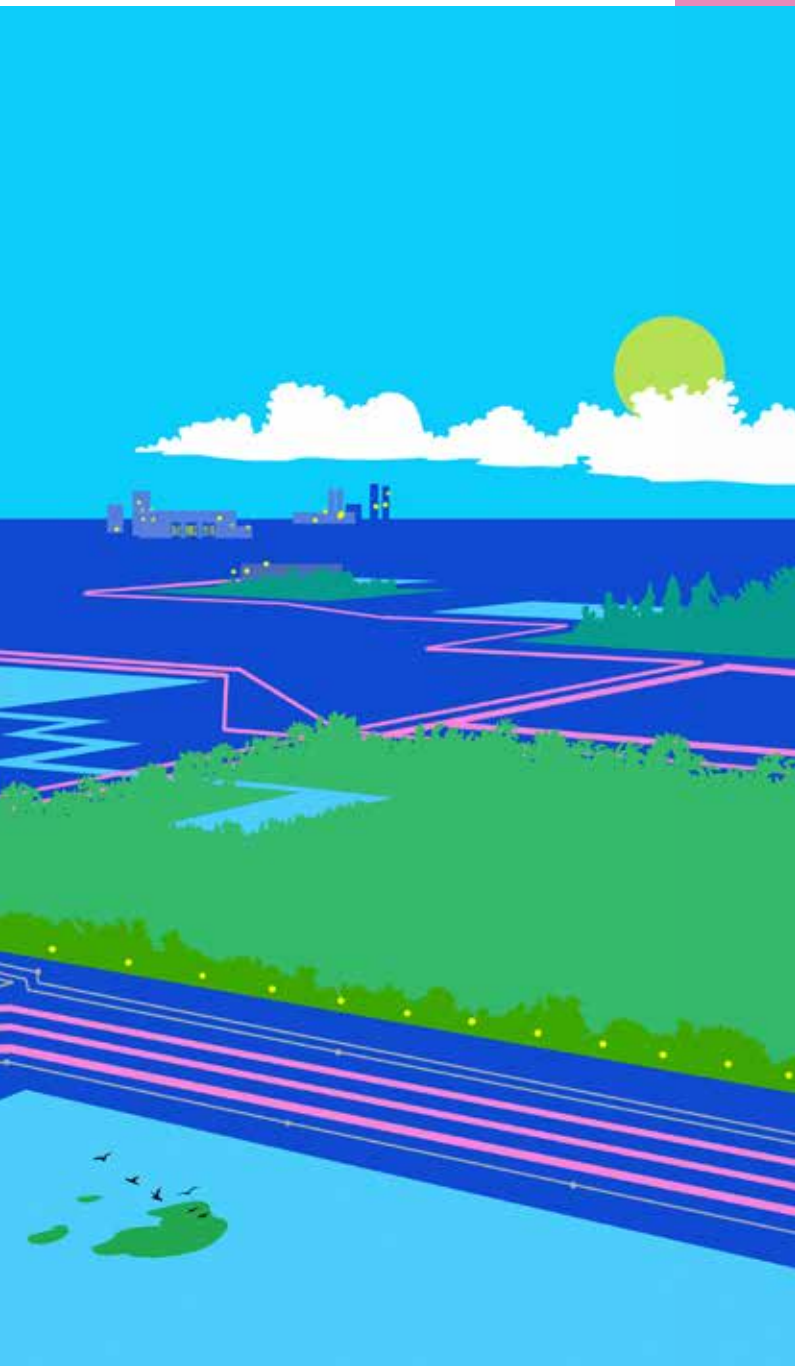
Midjourney and DALL-E, and chatbots on search engines and social media are shaping what AI is to us and beg the question: if today's 'AI' can do anything — from summarising search results or planning a vacation to content generation — with a few simple prompts, what will it be capable of in the near future?

Understanding AI

This is the question being asked across sectors. For example, lately, several reports have attempted to predict how AI can bolster environmental protection efforts and tackle climate change. To understand the possibilities and problems with using AI for this goal, we

first need to demystify and redefine AI and rid ourselves of the pernicious idea that the AI industry's trajectory is inevitable — and that we must accept the trade-offs that come with it.

AI has been transforming climate technology for years now. We hear about this less in the media because the type of AI that climate technology has been harnessing is less 'sexy' than ChatGPT and other similar products, which rely on a large-scale AI model. This type of large-scale AI (also known as a 'foundation model') is trained on massive amounts of data and requires robust computing power to support a variety of end-user applications that run on top of it. As flexible as these models are, they come with downsides: ►



“Technology only acquires meaning by how it is used, by whom, and the problems it solves”

categorise patterns of human-generated input and automate its ‘learning’ process to respond to human-generated prompts. But while it may be fun to think of how this could evolve into Terminator-like androids and ‘sentient’ machines, this is science fiction. As computer scientist and author Meredith Broussard puts it in her book *Artificial Unintelligence*, what we have today is “narrow AI”, which focuses on statistical models and augmenting data processing to solve specific tasks.

Harnessing climate technology

To redefine AI, we should remember that technology only acquires meaning by how it is used, by whom, and the problems it solves. Machine learning, a form of narrow AI, has multiple applications in climate technology. A particularly impactful one focuses on bolstering existing efforts to prevent deforestation of the Amazon rainforest by involving affected local communities.

Preserving the Amazon is a complicated task, particularly given the challenges to on-the-ground access. Forest monitoring systems such as the Global Forest Watch work with advanced sensors that rely on machine learning to detect changes in images, identify ‘hot spots’, and issue deforestation alerts, a process known as ‘remote-sensing technology’. On the ground, combating deforestation often entails shoe-leather policing by Indigenous communities, who confront and deter invaders seeking to use protected areas for logging, mining and farming. The problem has historically been, and remains, that this technology does not reach these communities at scale.

In 2018, a study led by researchers from New York University and Johns Hopkins University, involving a group of Indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon started to bridge that gap. The project, facilitated by Rainforest Foundation US, focused on training forest monitors and local communities to use a mapping app that collected alerts, helping them locate forest disturbances and intervene against offenders. The results, published in 2021, provided valuable evidence for the potential of remote-sensing technologies: deforestation in these communities dropped by 52% in the first year and 21% in the second year, compared with communities who did not participate in the project.



More recently, in Brazil, a new AI-powered project is taking remote-sensing technology a step further to produce faster and more frequent updates on high-risk areas prone to deforestation. Using satellite images from the European Space Agency, as well as historical and topographical data, an app called PrevisAI can automatically detect clandestine roads, which are a key predictor of deforestation. PrevisAI is already helping Indigenous communities in the state of Acre to deploy a proactive patrolling strategy that includes the use of drones. The project was developed by the non-profit Imazon using Microsoft’s cloud computing product Azure.

Dealing with the destruction wrought by extreme weather phenomena is also key for climate change adaptation. One challenge for first responders is how to quickly locate severely impacted areas to assess damages, including damage to infrastructure. To address this problem, in 2019 the US Department of Defense and NASA launched xView2, a program that brought together several companies and researchers to harness machine learning AI and big datasets to more quickly identify damaged buildings. With a success rate of 80% in damage assessment, algorithms developed under this program were used to assist with the 2020 California wildfires, and the 2019–2020 Australia bushfires.

because they gobble up so much data and can be used for so many different purposes, the models are prone to produce inaccurate content or they fail at the tasks they are asked to perform.

Large-scale AI has attracted attention because it teases the idea that computers are fast approaching human-like intelligence. There is no likely future scenario in which this will happen. This mistaken and widely discredited belief (despite the obsession of numerous billionaires with promoting it) obscures the fact that there are other types of AI worth harnessing, and it distracts us from thinking critically about what exactly the purpose of developing AI truly is. Yes, large-scale AI can certainly collect and



Across the board, efforts to employ AI to tackle climate change are inspiring scores of useful applications, such as improved forecasting of extreme weather events, speedier identification of melting icebergs, tracking of carbon emissions, clearing plastic pollution from the ocean and predicting the output of renewable energy sources. With the understanding that we need to tread carefully to determine where AI systems can be trusted to perform reliably, these projects can speed up responses from governments and local communities to allocate resources where they are most needed. Measuring real-life impacts of these systems could also inform and embolden

regulators to implement more effective oversight of environmental practices in critical sectors, such as agriculture, fishing, mining, electricity and the technology industry itself.

Feeding the machine

We cannot ignore another competing reality: the bulk of the AI industry is moving in the direction of large-scale AI models. Big Tech companies are in a race to make a business case for commercially deploying large-scale AI, and their push to embed these models in anything and everything demands the construction of massive data centres — and the power to run them.

The development of large-scale AI requires: infrastructure, represented by the data centres that cluster chips to support supercomputers for AI training; hardware, which is the design and fabrication of the chips that provide computing power; and software, understood as the programs that enable companies to use these chips to build foundation models that make AI end-user applications work.

Amazon, Microsoft and Google have data centres that provide two-thirds of the cloud and computing services globally, so they are specially equipped to host supercomputers. They also provide AI foundation models. This means that they sit at the intersection of infrastructure and software. Other familiar names, Meta and OpenAI, also compete in the software space with their own foundation models and end-user applications. As if this weren't complicated enough, OpenAI is financially and operationally backed by Microsoft, and in a similar way Anthropic — a competitor of OpenAI — is backed by Amazon.

Clearly, a handful of large corporations are in a key position to shape the future of AI and its role in society, affecting not only how large-scale AI will be used, but also how transformative other types of AI can be. Right now, in order to make any AI-powered initiative possible — narrow or large-scale AI, whether AI training runs on a laptop or a supercomputer, for commercial or personal purposes — it all depends on the same resources: access to infrastructure, hardware and computing power. What varies is the intensity with which we are using each of those resources.

Powering the future

This is where it gets trickier. Even when considering some of the most impactful ways in which other types of AI are driving solutions for our planet, sustaining the dominant AI model is putting enormous pressure on global energy supply. A *Bloomberg* investigation estimated that if we continue at current levels, by 2034 the global energy consumption by data centres would top 1,500 TWh, about as much as the energy used

“We are at the beginning of a collective journey to redefine AI and its purpose in society”

by India in all of 2023. News reports (including a June 2024 item in *The Washington Post*) show some US states are abandoning or delaying the shutdown of coal units to prevent further destabilisation of the power grid driven by the energy demands of Big Tech.

Tech corporations are fully aware of the environmental impacts of their operations. Google and Microsoft aim to run their data centres on green energy by 2030, and Amazon by 2025. Yet, since setting their net-zero goals between 2019 and 2020, the three tech giants have increased their carbon footprint, on average, by 37%. On a yearly basis, only Amazon, out of its peers, saw its carbon emissions slightly decrease in 2023.

Executives of these corporations assure us that, in the long run, the benefits of AI will outweigh the harms if we just “speed up the work needed”, as Brad Smith, President and Vice-Chair of Microsoft, said in a May 2024 *Bloomberg* piece. Yet the “work needed” in their view, seems to be a wish list of breakthroughs that would materialise at some point in an undetermined future, such as if clean energy from nuclear fusion or geothermal power sources became readily available and abundant. The question then becomes, considering the climate technology projects that Big Tech either directly funds or supports through partnerships, whether the footprint of their business model is already watering down the impact of such projects?

Making AI sustainable

For AI to be a powerful and effective component of a courageous approach to climate change, there first needs to be transparency and accountability. Despite the sustainability reports and climate pledges from Big Tech, there is currently a lack of standards to measure and mitigate the environmental footprint of AI. A good way to start would be with meaningful disclosure of a series of markers, such as energy consumption

Recommended reading

“*Climate Capitalism* by Akshat Rathi makes you think deeply about capitalism’s place in our transition to a greener world. Using examples from five continents, this book teaches us that the climate movement is not only already transforming capitalism, but that it must.” **Karina Montoya**

and carbon emissions incurred during the lifecycle of the AI model. Researchers Emma Strubell at Carnegie Mellon University and Sasha Luccioni at AI startup Hugging Face have provided stepping stones for a framework on how to do just that.

Luccioni’s study, for example, measured the environmental footprint of a multilingual foundation model for translations called BLOOM, which works with 175 billion parameters — variables that instruct the AI model how to turn inputs into outputs. She found that just training it, which took almost four months, consumed as much energy as 30 homes in the US per year, and that it generated 25 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide, the same as driving a car five times around the planet. By way of comparison, training a model like GPT-3, an OpenAI model with almost the same number of parameters as BLOOM, emitted 20 times more carbon dioxide and consumed almost three times more energy.

Tech companies also need to be transparent about their water consumption, both for electricity generation and cooling of data centres. Estimates show that training ChatGPT in Microsoft’s data centres can evaporate 700,000 litres of clean freshwater, according to a recent study co-authored by Shaolei Ren at the University of California, Riverside. According to the study, the global AI demand may be accountable for up to 6.6bn cubic metres of water withdrawal (water taken from surface or underground sources) in 2027 — more than the total annual withdrawal of half of the United Kingdom.

We are at the beginning of a collective journey to redefine AI and its purpose in society. This is a conversation in which we should all play a part. Advocating for a more sustainable and accountable future for the AI industry can be strengthened by raising awareness of three key dynamics. First, that no technology is developed in a void; it is more important to think about how it will be used and who it will empower. Second, it matters who holds power over the resources that others need to innovate and challenge the direction of dominant business models. Last, but not least, unlike the forces of nature that hold together this Earth we live upon, there is nothing inevitable in human-made systems that we cannot change if they are not working to make our lives sustainably better.

The future of AI is in our hands. We just need the courage to write it. ■

Karina Montoya is a business and technology journalist. She is currently Senior Reporter and Policy Analyst at the Open Markets Institute.

Manshen Lo is a London-based visual artist whose approach to drawing has its roots in East Asia.

Under the weather

As the climate emergency intensifies, young people bear the emotional brunt of a crisis they didn't create. Their anxiety and outrage demand our understanding — and urgent support

Words: Judith Anderson
Artist: Tania Yakunova

When I heard UN Secretary-General António Guterres say that the goal of holding temperature rise to 1.5°C is “on life support”, I could feel that in my body and emotions as if I were hearing about a relative in hospital. The message is more than cognitive. Those facing climate change are living with the existential threats that they know are an everyday reality for people dwelling on low-lying islands, enduring the death-trap of heatwaves or eking out an existence in the face of repeated crop failures. When those around us are not taking the climate and ecological emergency seriously, and governments are not responding to the problem, those who are ‘facing difficult truths’ and working towards mitigation and adaptation may well be undertaking emotional heavy lifting on behalf of others.

There are particular challenges for those in the first



Above: “In this piece, I wanted to show how global warming and anxiety around it ruins not only our precious ecosystem, but can harm blooming young minds”, said artist Tania Yakunova.

quarter century of their lives because they have never known a world without visible escalating climate change. There are many levels of this to disentangle. A 2021 UNICEF report refers to the climate crisis as a “children’s rights crisis” and says:

“Almost every child on earth is exposed to at least one of the major overlapping climate and environmental hazards.”

A greater proportion of children’s lives and those of the communities where they live, as well as the living fabric of the world around them, is certain to be affected by climate change. This inevitably means that they are impacted physically and emotionally by witnessing and participating in the societal disruption of climate-driven events, feeling

fear, anxiety, grief, anger and many other emotions about both present and future.

Shockingly, research tells us that when young people express their (completely justified) thoughts and feelings about this, their emotions and opinions are often not taken seriously by those close to them, leaving them to carry this load on their own. This isolation is worsened when, in an abrogation of responsibility, they are told that they are the generation that will have to sort this out! The experience of governments not acting appropriately is an experience of deep neglect, representing moral injury, and coming from what psychoanalyst Sally Weintrobe describes as a “culture of un-care”.

When, perhaps inevitably, outrage at what is happening takes the path of non-violent direct action, environmental protesters — including young people — have lost their lives. On average, over the decade ending in 2022, an environmental activist was killed every two days, according to a report by international non-governmental organisation Global Witness. Such violence is particularly prevalent in South American countries, but deaths in the Philippines are second only to those in Brazil. In Europe, there is increasing violence of various forms by the police against protesters, potentially in breach of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

No illusions

What approaches can assist? We cannot deny young people’s lived reality, nor seek to pretend to them that all is well. When the child of a parent who is seriously ill can see the evidence of their illness and overhear urgent conversations, giving them false hope leaves them feeling isolated, lied to





and uncared for. What we can offer instead is caring solidarity, validation, empathy and engagement with what troubles them most, plus ongoing support for their concerns and the actions they want to initiate. It is entirely normal for parents and teachers to find the task of staying engaged with young people's feelings too challenging: we have our own biodiversity of emotions

— rage, guilt, grief — and all of the understandable dissociative strategies we have developed to deal with them.

But we cannot walk away from this. There is support and advice available. Some schools run climate staff rooms, a version of climate cafés that can be used to support teachers feeling overwhelmed by climate change or experiencing climate change worries themselves.

These can also be used by staff when supporting children who are having similar feelings. Teaching the syllabus on climate change is not an emotion-free zone! 'Parent circles' run by the Climate Psychology Alliance on a regular basis offer a non-judgemental space for parents, grandparents and carers to share their feelings and dilemmas. Jo McAndrews' Truth

without Trauma programme offers practical, creative steps to help those in any parenting role stay alongside children and young people facing the climate and ecological emergency.

In addition to appropriate support, the agency of young people in relation to their futures requires the robust inclusion of youth voices and creativity in decision-making at every level.

State of emergency

We are in an emergency, but it is a long emergency, which means that, whatever age we are, we have to approach it with attitudes and skills that will build and sustain resilience for the long haul. Having clear boundaries is vital, and this includes knowing what our own capacities are and saying 'no' if the situation or a request exceeds these and 'yes' to necessary self-care. We need organisational environments where such boundaries and self-care are encouraged.

We need to discover, through interior inquiry and discussion with others, what our individual skill is, be it speaking to politicians, initiating imaginative activist actions, providing spaces where the bruised and exhausted can find respite, or building local community in more general ways. We also need to make time for mutual support; some activists feel guilty about this, but it is vital to prevent burnout.

We need to build a generation of psychological professionals who are educated about the psychological impacts of climate change and trained in how to work with these both inside and outside the consulting room, in part through understanding their own reactions. The Western paradigm of therapy can be very individualistic, but it is as communities that we face

“Whatever our calling, we have to keep on until there is a global social tipping point and then work to grow it and maintain it”



Above: Artist Tania Yakunova at work. Commenting on creating the artwork to accompany this article, Tania said: “Ceramic is a very special media and a perfect match for the project. It's unpredictable. You can only control so much, and even putting all the work into the piece, you still pray to the powers of nature for things to work out right. It's both very fragile and very strong, just like our brains — and our planet.”

the challenges of climate change.

And we must not forget to find joy as we navigate these times. We might find it in the simplest of places: growing tomatoes on a windowsill, cooking, listening to or creating music, or playing football.

Radical hope

I am sometimes asked about hope. People say to me, “We must give young people hope.” All too often that means suggesting that we tell an incomplete narrative, or invoke the certainty that science will solve the problem, or promote the idea that individual actions are an adequate solution. I am not interested in the kind of hope that denies the reality of what we are facing; this is false hope verging on denial. Ideas that nourish and challenge come from those who grasp what it is to hope under very difficult circumstances.

I am inspired by the kind of hope that Rebecca Solnit advocates in her book *Hope in the Dark*, based on evidence from social justice movements. She reminds us that, “What we do now matters tremendously, because the difference between the best and worst case scenarios is vast, and the future is not yet written.” She focuses relentlessly on the gains, not the losses, and the possibilities

if we act now and keep the faith. Jonathan Lear's wonderful treatise *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* is also relevant, citing the experience of an Indigenous tribe in America whose entire way of life was destroyed when the buffalo was slaughtered to almost complete extinction, and yet they found a way of maintaining their identity under these most impossible of circumstances.

Václav Havel's notion of ethical hope sustains me: “Hope is an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. The more unpropitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper that hope is.” This seems particularly apt given that science tells us every tenth of a degree that we hold global temperature down makes a difference to the escalating tipping points, and to the vicious circle of effects in the wonderfully rich complex systems that create global climate.

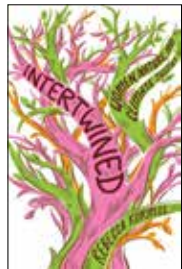
So we must not give up. Whatever our calling, we have to keep on until there is a global social tipping point and then work to grow it and maintain it in the same way that democracies and their ideas must always be defended and never taken for granted. ■ ***I'm grateful to many colleagues within the Climate Psychology Alliance whose thinking and companionship has enriched my ideas, especially those working and researching the impact of climate change on children and youth.***

Judith Anderson is a psychotherapist and retired psychiatrist, Chair of the Climate Psychology Alliance and co-editor of *Being a Therapist in a Time of Climate Breakdown*.

Tania Yakunova is an award-winning Ukrainian illustrator, ceramicist and educator currently based in London.

BOOKS

What RSA Fellows and staff are reading



Intertwined: Women, Nature and Climate Justice

Rebecca Kormos

Reviewed by **Rebecca Purton**

This debut book is a research-rich and genuinely global exploration of the relationship between gender inclusion and environmental challenges. Through stats interlaced with oral retellings from women working in key roles in community and sustainability, Kormos explores not only pervading climate issues, but also successful programmes and initiatives, allowing her to demonstrate the crucial role women have played in caring for the climate throughout history.

The data Kormos shares demonstrates how inequalities and polycrises intersect, with the relationship between climate issues and gender exclusion and violence being complex and interwoven. Women are disproportionately affected by climate change and simultaneously excluded from and underrepresented in decision-making about the future of the planet. Kormos argues that the global empowerment of women is the single most significant factor that could positively impact climate change.

Kormos doesn't shy away from the seriousness of climate crises, but still concludes with authentic hope and optimism rooted in her firm belief in women's resilience, determination and community-focused work towards enabling a flourishing planet for the benefit of all.

Rebecca Purton is Evaluation Manager at the RSA.



Filterworld: How Algorithms Flattened Culture

Kyle Chayka

Reviewed by **Victoria Kinkaid, FRSA**

This book offers a fascinating insight into the algorithms shaping our culture. 'Filterworld' is Chayka's term for the "vast, interlocking and yet diffuse network of algorithms that influence our lives today" and how these impact what we buy, listen to and watch.

Chayka provides fascinating insight into the development of algorithms and their knock-on effect. His reader-friendly language and descriptions engrossed me; I was shocked to realise how much I have internalised and accepted algorithmic culture. The author gives examples of how we make choices based on algorithms and how creators shape content and products around them, concluding that, "the algorithm always wins". Sadly, I can also see the impact on our culture. This book is an eye-opening glimpse into the "Frankenstein-esque power" algorithms have and how they have infiltrated every aspect of our lives, whether we know it or not. It was a stark reminder to me to aspire to be a more responsible consumer the next time I pick up a device.

If you are curious to know more about 'algorithmic anxiety', 'BookTok' and 'Instagrammy aesthetics', then this book is for you!

Victoria Kinkaid is an army doctor and co-founder of The FGM Education Project.



Many of the books featured are available to borrow at the RSA Library. As a Fellow, you can check out up to five books for a three-week loan period.



Tickling Sharks

John Elkington, FRSA

Reviewed by **Phillip Ward, FRSA**

I have tickled trout and swum with sharks but, unlike the author, I have resisted combining the two activities.

This book offers an autobiographical account of Elkington's journey through some of the landmarks of sustainable development. It will appeal particularly to readers like me who have been around sustainability for a long time and enjoy discovering the personal and intellectual connections that have driven the movement.

The heart of the book is a statement of the author's continuing commitment to challenging businesses to face up to the growing crises of climate change. He segments businesses into four groups according to the risk they pose and their potential as partners: sea lions, dolphins and orcas are potential partners, and low risk to the environment. Sharks — such as the fossil fuel industry — are high risk and very difficult to work with, needing to be approached with great care and "tickled" if they are to be engaged.

The book comes with substantial forewords from The Earthshot Prize CEO Hannah Jones and Volans CEO Louise Kjellerup Roper, an afterword from Eden Project founder Tim Smit and, most valuably for me, a coda from the author summarising the 10 key lessons he has learned and his manifesto for his continuing pursuit of the sharks.

Phillip Ward is leader of the RSA Sustainability Network.



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IN CONVERSATION

“Saving the planet is an innovation challenge. We need more bright, young creators who are focused on fixing the climate, one scalable solution at a time.”

Sustainability trailblazer and Earthshot Prize CEO **Hannah Jones** talks with environmental campaigner and young Fellow **Amy Meek** about the urgent need for a global innovation movement and an optimistic attitude

—
Photos: Urszula Soltys

Amy Meek: Hannah, I'm so excited to have this conversation with you and find out more about The Earthshot Prize and your views on the intersection between environmental action and business. I'd like to start with your time working in the business sector. What were your greatest successes and frustrations from your time as Chief Sustainability Officer at Nike?

Hannah Jones: I joined Nike in 1998, when there was almost no talk of sustainability. It was a very difficult time for the company, which was facing significant accusations of labour rights issues in its supply chain.

I came in very clear that I wanted to be a part of change and to solve the issue of labour rights. For the next six years, I found myself literally crawling through factories, talking to workers and management, and beginning to see that, beneath this globalised supply chain, we had fundamentally externalised social and environmental impacts from business. It was all about the bottom line and nobody was talking about the environment or people.

Fast-forward to 2005. There were droughts in Bangladesh and India which meant that rice supplies were fundamentally diminished. Very quickly, India and Bangladesh began to put in tariffs and quotas. The price of rice went up, and the women workers in our supply chain couldn't afford rice, which was their staple food. That was the wake-up call to realise labour rights are incredibly important, climate change will define all our futures, and the most vulnerable people will be the ones impacted first.

We realised that we needed to look at our footprint environmentally and to try to get out of being an emitter of carbon, having waste through our supply chain, thinking about chemistry and clean water. We had to build a new set of capabilities. And when I became Chief Sustainability Officer — I think we made the title up, there was no job description — it was the most incredible experience. It's shaped how I think about the world today.

Meek: Looking back on your time at Nike and at where business is today, do you think the corporate sector is where it needs to be in terms of its sustainability transition?

Jones: If you look back to when I began, we're way ahead. That's the good news. The bad news is we're not nearly where we need to be. Despite significant leadership and courage among some corporations, not all are thinking about how to become net zero in the right timeline.

Fundamentally, what's not serving corporations is the business model and the financial incentives. As long as financial systems incentivise the short term and profit over everything and unlimited growth — there's a fallacy of unlimited growth — it makes it very hard for corporations to go beyond making today a little bit less bad instead of actually building businesses that are all good.

We see purpose-driven companies that are thoughtful about what they're doing, and yet they all face those financial incentives that make it incredibly hard to do the right thing. I see so many people so passionate about this and so knowledgeable about sustainability. I see boards waking up. I see regulators starting to regulate.

Interviewer Amy Meek (L) and sustainability pioneer Hannah Jones (R)



Meek: Sometimes when we talk about climate change it can feel a bit doom and gloom and like we're so far away from being where we need to be. But the innovation side of it is the really exciting bit. How do you think we can support agency and create spaces within society and in business to encourage people to be innovators?

Jones: I live in a place of urgent optimism, and I have done for a long time. At Nike, for the first 10 years or so, we looked at the world through the lens of risk. When we flipped and said, 'let's think about this as an innovation opportunity', that reframe opened up a new mindset and suddenly it became exciting, and designers, creators and innovators began to compete and share with each other.

“Right now, we collectively hold the pen of history”

The spark of changing people's mindsets to view this as an opportunity is the unlock that we all need. This is the future because, right now, we collectively hold the pen of history. We are writing history. Maybe it's the first draft, but ultimately we're making history happen. If you go back in time to these huge waves of transformation, it is the people that dare to think differently that became the leaders of that future movement.

My challenge is do you want to have FOMO and have missed the boat because you

weren't busy trying to think about how to be entrepreneurial and creative about fixing the planet and aligning your sense of purpose to something that you could do with your life? Or do you want to be a part of the greatest transformative movement in the world that's going to be all about that sort of creativity, unleashed?

Meek: How do we demonstrate to young people that business could be a way for them to actually pursue something that's innovative and change-making when even these most forward-thinking businesses still have their own problems to contend with?

Jones: I'm interested in how you give young people a sense of agency. I am so tired of the narrative that your generation is doomed. I have a deep anger with older people for daring to put out a narrative that basically drives youth anxiety, youth anger and youth apathy. Because it's not true.

Every generation has to rebel and to challenge the generation before. And we need this young generation to do that on steroids and to be completely irreverent about what has come before. This generation, and every generation, has choices and agency.

Meek: As someone who works with young people and a young person myself who's only just been able to vote for the first time, it's encouraging to hear that perspective. Many young people feel unable to influence politics or business. If there were one thing that you'd recommend to a young person who wanted to shape the future of business, for example, to be more sustainable and to be more ethical, what would that be?

Jones: It's all about your consumer choices because those are the choices you take on a daily basis without thinking. When you walk into a coffee shop, are you choosing plant-based milk or are you choosing dairy? It's as micro a decision as that.

What we know is that if the world moved to more plant-based food and less meat and dairy, the impact on carbon is huge, which means the impact also on biodiversity is huge. If you say I'm going to go to a second-hand store instead of a new store, you're making a choice. So, how you live your life every day adds up.

Meek: What drew you away from working within business with Nike towards The Earthshot Prize?

Jones: I'd really fallen in love with innovation. Through the course of my journey with Nike I began to see that saving the planet is an



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innovation challenge. We need more bright, young creators who are focused on fixing the climate, one scalable solution at a time.

Then Covid hit. It made me realise that climate change would make Covid look like a walk in the park, and that now was the time to look for a role where I could be helping turbocharge the innovation ecosystem around sustainability.

I saw this job advert in *The Economist*, and it said, ‘CEO of The Earthshot Prize’ and I thought, huh, that’s interesting, I’ve never heard of that. And then I read a bit more and found out that it was a new idea. In all the conversations, what became clear was the ambition for The Earthshot Prize was huge, starting with our founder, the Prince of Wales, and so I signed up.

Meek: Something I find amazing about The Earthshot Prize is how diverse it is in terms of the people who win the awards. It looks at sustainability as something that intersects with workers’ rights, inclusion, building ethical businesses — and that’s so encouraging to see in an age where we still sometimes get stuck in viewing sustainability as its own problem. How can we translate that from The Earthshot Prize to more widely in society?



Profile: Amy Meek

Young Fellow Amy Meek started youth-led charity Kids Against Plastic at age 12 along with her sister Ella Meek. Amy recently completed her second year at the University of Nottingham and, since 2022, has served as Youth Action Lead for Common Seas and as a youth ambassador for #Break Free From Plastic. She was recently chosen as one of 25 inaugural recipients of the Clinton Global Initiative Fellowship in the category Climate Resilience Fellow.

Jones: It’s a good observation and we very much have designed The Earthshot Prize to be something that will spark the world’s imagination, wherever you are and whatever seat you sit in. Diversity and representation are absolutely critical to how we search, how we select and how we celebrate.

In terms of our selection process, we have official nominators around the world who are tasked with going out and finding diverse solutions. We make sure to not give the impression that sustainability is something that only these experts over here can do, but that it will come from everywhere and every kind of person, and that goes all the way through the selection process to that final cohort of 15 finalists and ultimately the five winners.

We wrap a lot of storytelling around it deliberately, because we think that people in the mainstream narrative about the environment are being overwhelmed with stories of doom and gloom and despair and defeat and denial, whereas we see thousands of stories of possibility and opportunity and hope and optimism and determination and grit and human ingenuity at its best.

Meek: It must be so hard to decide between all the amazing things that people are doing. What would you say it is that makes a winner of The Earthshot Prize really a winner?

Jones: First, the solution that they’ve built needs to be proven. We need clear evidence that it works. We do a lot of due diligence on that. We need to make sure that they’re legal, that they’ve got the IP, all those boring things that are really important. So, does the solution work, is it proven, is it out and about, and is it showing traction?

Second, if this solution were scaled or replicated, would it be transformative? If it passes those two hurdles, then we start to get really interested and then we narrow it down. We have interviews, we have experts, we’re comparing them to a portfolio of similar projects.

Then you start to look at the team. If a team is going to come on and be a finalist, they need to be ready to be on the global platform talking to potential investors and funders and scaling their work. It is a leadership challenge. It is a communications opportunity. We have to have an indication that the team is solid, that the leadership is ready for this journey.

And then the final magic twist is we absolutely look at diversity and representation. We make sure that our cohorts are representative. We look specifically for female-led solutions. We look for Indigenous-led solutions and we look for Global South-led solutions.



“We have designed The Earthshot Prize to be something that will spark the world’s imagination”

Meek: As everyday people in somewhere like the UK, where we feel a predominantly small consequence of climate change compared with the impact we have, how can we engage with the ethos of The Earthshot Prize and help to drive that innovation in everyday life?

Jones: Number one is vote. Number two is to make every action you take a decision you’ve made about the environment. Number three is to decide how to spend your working life and what you’re going to focus on. Number four is to be a part of using market forces to pull excitement and energy and capital towards the innovations that you see coming out of The Earthshot Prize.

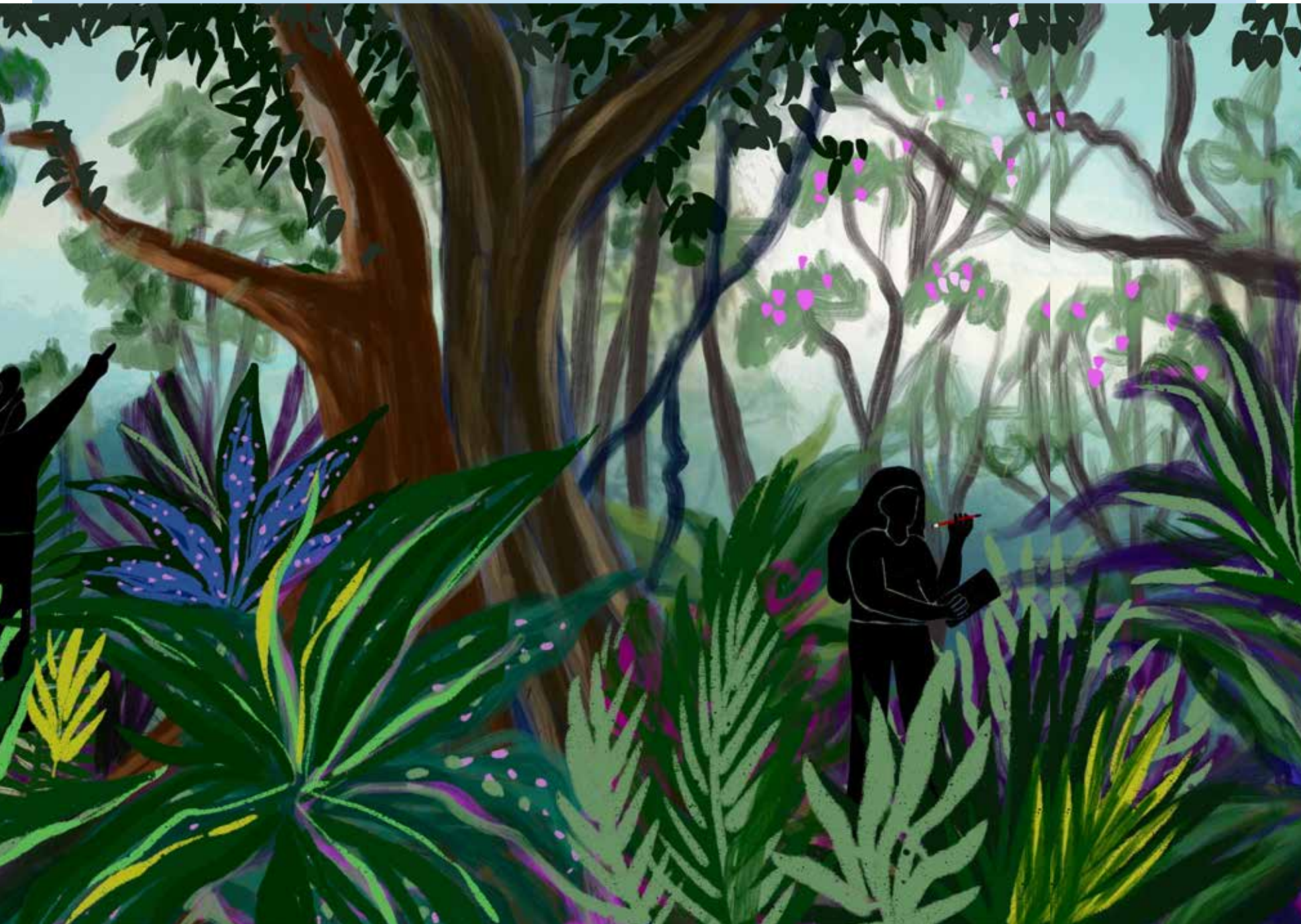
Optimism is a duty. Adopt a mindset of optimism and urgency and a ‘can do’ attitude. Don’t let the denialism and the defeatism seep in and turn into anxiety or apathy or anger. Anger sometimes can be healthy, but apathy and anxiety are not healthy. That narrative of denialism and defeatism is deliberately orchestrated to push you towards apathy. Do not let that force win.

Put yourself on the side of urgent optimism. Take action. Know that you have agency. Champion Earthshot finalists and dream of becoming, not an astronaut, but an Earthshot winner. ■

Hannah Jones was appointed CEO of The Earthshot Prize, an initiative founded by Prince William’s Royal Foundation, in May 2021, following a 22-year stint at Nike, where she served as Chief Sustainability Officer, Senior Director of Corporate Social Responsibility EMEA and, ultimately, President of Nike Innovation Labs.

Urszula Soltys is a Polish-born, London-based portrait photographer.

Preserve and protect



The Earth Defenders Toolkit empowers Indigenous communities at the frontlines of the climate crisis with digital tools to help preserve territory, culture and language

Words: Liz Hansen

Whether massive flooding, uncontrollable fires or extreme temperatures, every day it seems like another catastrophic weather event is disrupting the planet. Every day I worry about the climate crisis and every day I feel helpless, yet shamefully paralysed.

I know actionable ways to lower my carbon footprint — reduce meat and dairy intake, drive less, fly less, consume less — but my contemporary consumerism sometimes feels like an addiction and, even worse, I make excuses for not doing what I know would be impactful. Why am I still eating cheeseburgers and researching cheap flights to Hawaii? Because I tell myself a convenient little story that you might recognise. I tell myself, that because I endured, nay survived, a global pandemic, that means I deserve to do whatever I want for, you know, just a little while longer.

I'm not proud of this behaviour and I'm sharing this shame because I know I'm not alone. But I also know that it is this, this *carpe diem* attitude,



Above: Ben Tairea, Community Steward of the Earth Defenders Toolkit

Below right: Leah Kintai, one of the Ogiek community mappers demonstrates Mapeo on Mount Elgon, Kenya Reserve

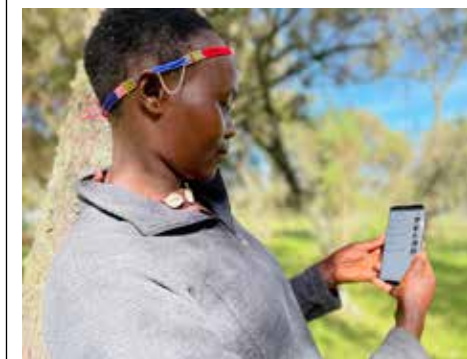
that will leave us with not many more temperate *diems* to *carpe*, and I'm scared. I am truly scared. And when I'm scared, change feels impossible.

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people that are helping.’”

That quote is by beloved US children's TV host Fred Rogers. I love this piece of advice, and I still follow it. As a little kid, I took his message to mean that, if I felt scared, I should look for a helpful adult to secure my safety. As an adult, I think it means something different. It means, get out of your self-sabotaging brain and look for examples of how to be helpful and become a helper yourself.

Meet the helpers

But, guess what, there are climate crisis helpers! Really innovative and courageous ones, too. Allow me to introduce you to the Earth Defenders Toolkit (EDT). Launched in June 2021 to provide free resources for communities facing threats to human and environmental rights, the EDT is a project of Awana Digital (formerly known as Digital Democracy). Awana Digital's mission is to work in solidarity with frontline communities to defend their environmental and human rights. They partner with environmental defenders to co-design and co-develop tools used ▶



Illustrator: Vidushi Yadav / courtesy of EDT. Photo: Awana Digital

to defend critical ecosystems and Indigenous cultures.

I recently spoke with Ben Tairea, the EDT Community Steward, who contributes to the development of the EDT community and resources. Tairea is of Cook Island Māori heritage from the small Polynesian island of Mauke and the people of Ngati Nurau. In 2018, he co-founded Āhau, a tribal management and cultural archiving platform which is one of the tools listed in the EDT.

I asked Tairea why the EDT is impactful in addressing environmental concerns and he explained the significance of empowering Indigenous people to protect their lands. They guard 80% of the Earth's biodiversity yet have some of the fewest legal protections of any population. The more we can do to empower Indigenous people, the more we can do to support the environmental protection of the planet.

Technology for justice

Tairea pointed me to a case study of the Waorani in Ecuador that shares how the Waorani people collaborated with Awana Digital to use the Mapeo mapping tool to map their ancestral territory. After four years of gathering map data, the Waorani made history when they won a legal case against the Ecuadorian government and saved 0.5m acres of Amazonian rainforest from oil drilling.

This is a project that uses science and technology to create justice, and not only that, the technology is built in solidarity, consultation and co-creation with Indigenous and marginalised communities in Latin America, Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Communities find out about the EDT project through NGOs on the ground or from other Indigenous organisations. Anyone can go to the EDT

Right: A Mapeo training workshop for Ogiek communities on Mount Elgon, Kenya



website and use the toolfinder, which helps a user pinpoint the right tool for their use case.

Tools that work

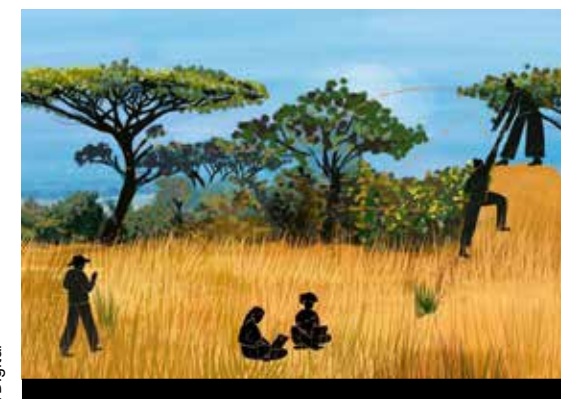
EDT is committed to putting the tools into the hands of communities as opposed to having outsiders implement and use tools on their behalf. Tools have been built to work with bespoke needs, such as only having one computer, not having access to the internet or data security concerns.

Tairea says it is a dream of the EDT team to enable more tool developers. For example, when communities recognise that a tool isn't supporting their needs, some have gone on to figure out the technology to

build it or adapt an existing tool for themselves.

At the root of this work is giving people tools to help defend their homes by preserving territory, culture and language. The more they can defend their land, the better it is for Earth, the better it is for all of us.

A case study of the ECA Amarakaeri partnership in Peru shares how the Harakmbut, Matsigenka and Yine peoples are collaborating with the Peruvian National Service of Natural Areas Protected by the State and other Indigenous organisations to monitor and protect their ancestral territories, using tools like drones and Mapeo.



Artwork: courtesy of EDT, Photo: Awana Digital

Recommended reading

We Will Not Be Saved is Nemonte Nenquimo's newest book and the first-ever published memoir of an Amazonian Indigenous woman. According to the EDT team, this book is a must-read from one of the most important and powerful voices in climate change activism.

“The more we can do to support Indigenous people, the more we can do to support the environmental protection of the planet”

Control rights

Data sovereignty is a key protection that EDT likes to highlight and encourage among community members. For example, Mapeo collects data that stays within a community, living only on devices used by the community, meaning what they end up with is basically a mini data cloud within their community.

Awana Digital may offer to work with the community to come up with a governance structure of that data, but it doesn't have access to the data. In contrast, Google Earth is a very powerful tool but Google has its own position on what data they collect and how they use it; EDT, however, helps educate community members about potential threats of data mining, even using the example of the actual threat of natural resource mining to explain the potential dangers of data mining on the community.

Story power

Tairea sees storytelling as one of the main values of the work EDT has facilitated. When a community is facing a threat like resource extraction, learning the stories of how others have used one of the tools, Mapeo, to defend their land in court is energising. He says technical manuals aren't as helpful as you would expect and having people pore over technical documentation is not nearly as useful as storytelling, particularly since literacy is one of the challenges some of these communities face in navigating the technology. For those

who can't read or write, EDT is currently trying to secure funding to provide a user interface that is more focused on graphics and icons instead of words. ■

Liz Hansen is a writer and artist who works with ideas of belonging, loss and shame.

Feeling inspired by the EDT project? Here are ways you can help:

- All the digital tools are built with open-source code. If you are a savvy coder or want to become one for a good cause, that knowledge is welcome.
- Language translations for the website.
- Computer donations.
- Open collective is a great place to contribute funds — all donations go directly to the Earth defender communities: opencollective.com/earth-defenders-toolkit.
- Most importantly, says Tairea, share the story about the Earth Defenders Toolkit! The more people who know how impactful it is and support the efforts of Indigenous people, the better our chances of safeguarding the health of the planet.

1774–2024

250 years of RSA House

RSA House first opened its doors in 1774. Since then, the site has seen carousing, consciousness-raising and the desertion of confidence by some of history's most renowned orators. Today, it remains a source of inspiration and refreshment

Words: Richard Hale

From its foundation in Rawthmell's Coffee House in 1754, the impact of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce accelerated at a phenomenal rate. Outgrowing its coffee house origins and rented rooms, in 1770 the Society appealed for proposals for purpose-built premises. A response was received from the renowned architects Robert and James Adam, who offered to include a suitable headquarters for the Society in the design of their visionary neoclassical Adelphi development.

On 28 March 1772, Lord Romney, the Society's President, duly laid the foundation stone. As the minutes report, the attendees proceeded to dine at the Adelphi Tavern where "the Remainder of the Day was spent with that Harmony and Good Humour

Photo: arbaz bagwan / iStock



which a Consciousness of promoting the Good of Mankind and of Society will never fail to inspire". Just two years later, the Society opened its doors and it is the 250th anniversary of this that we commemorate with the RSA Open House Festival on 15 September.

Art and progress

From the outset, the Society's ambition to celebrate its prestige complemented that of its architects, as it determined that RSA House's Great Room should be spectacularly decorated with "proper historical or allegorical pictures". The result, eventually, was James Barry's audacious 'The Progress of Human Culture', a series of six murals, created between 1777 and 1783 and described by the critic Andrew Graham-Dixon as Britain's "answer to the Sistine Chapel".

The Great Room has since staged many momentous events, including: William Fothergill Cooke's demonstration of his two-needle electric telegraph; Francis Whishaw's exploration of the properties of gutta percha, which led to the development of insulated underwater cables; Alexander Graham Bell's early telephone demonstration; and the first public exhibition in England of the incandescent light bulb.

The aura of the organisation and the presence of its members could silence even seasoned speakers. Samuel Johnson, London's foremost literary figure, confided that when endeavouring to speak, "All my flowers of oratory forsook me." Oliver Goldsmith, poet, novelist, playwright and member of Johnson's Literary Club, fared even worse, standing up only to be "obliged to sit down in confusion".

Culture and conviviality

On paper, Goldsmith vividly captured the RSA's values in his prescient poem 'The Deserted Village', which focuses on the devastating depopulation of Auburn, an idyllic rural village. It examines the forces behind this eviction at a time when poetry was a legitimate medium for

economic analysis, soon to change decisively with the publication of *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith, Goldsmith's successor as a member of both the Society and Johnson's Club.

Goldsmith's Auburn may give an idealised depiction of rural life, but George Crabbe's riposte, 'The Village', paints the tavern as an arena for drunkenness and brutality. Crabbe's verse deprives the reader of any hope of improvement, whereas implicit in Goldsmith's account is an aspiration that it might be reached through regeneration. This was proved possible 160 years later, when the RSA purchased the village of West Wycombe to save it from dereliction, then in 1953 restored the picturesque cottages and Castle Inn in Chiddingstone, Kent.

Full circle

Goldsmith died in 1774, the year the House opened, but his presence persists thanks to Barry's portrait of him in the Elysium panel of the mural. Decades later, Crabbe would visit Wiltshire's Bowood House, whose interiors were designed by Robert Adam. When its east wing was demolished in 1955–56, the RSA acquired its carved chimneypieces and doorways. These now feature around RSA House, notably in the Tavern Room, which incorporates part of the former Adelphi Tavern to which the founders of the House retired for refreshments on that momentous day back in 1772.

Indeed, in a circular act of regeneration and renewal attuned to the RSA's Design for Life mission, RSA House will soon once again boast a bar for the refreshment of Fellows, guests and members of the public. So, in Goldsmith's words, we will no longer need: "Imagination fondly stoop to trace/The parlour splendours of that festive place". ■

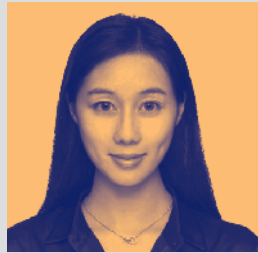
The bar opens this autumn.

Richard Hale is the RSA's Internal Communications Manager.



Scan the QR code to view original plan drawings of RSA House's Great Room and facade

NEW FELLOWS



Alice Ho

Alice Ho currently serves as the Chief Youth Officer at the Global Alliance of Universities on Climate and is also a member of the Beijing Youth Federation. She is passionately committed to supporting climate change initiatives and public welfare. Over the past two years, she has led the Alliance's flagship initiatives: the Climate x global action campaign and leadership training programme. Additionally, she is dedicated to organising a series of events at the national, regional, and global levels to continuously advance the smooth convening of the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP) and the global climate governance process.



Gil de Gálvez

Dr Gil de Gálvez has been the First Violin and Leader of Concerto Málaga since 1996. He made his conducting debut at the Teatro Nacional de El Salvador and has conducted the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Venezuela. He is a conservatory professor in Andalusia, a professor in the music department at the University of Cadiz and teaches at the faculty of music at Alfonso X University 'El Sabio' in Madrid. He is a member of the New York chapter of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (presenter of the Grammy awards). He approaches music from the perspectives of performance, education, outreach, management and research.



Victoria Vaughan

Victoria Vaughan is a director, screenwriter and award-winning film-maker with a passion for science fiction and women-led narratives, preferably both at the same time. She has directed a wide range of operas, and her research interests include pedagogical methods for young opera performers. In 2024, she co-founded The People's Music Fund, which supports talented classical musicians from all backgrounds to access performing arts higher education. She is especially keen to help redress the cultural and socioeconomic homogeneity within classical music in the UK. Proudly a South Londoner, Vic now lives in France with her family and too many pets.



Tim Hollingsworth OBE

Tim Hollingsworth is Chief Executive of Sport England, the government agency responsible for grassroots and community sport and getting more people active across England. He has held the role since November 2018. Prior to that he was CEO of the British Paralympic Association for seven years, including during the London 2012 Paralympic Games. He has also worked in communications and public affairs roles in sport and media, as well as in consultancy. A graduate in English and drama, with a Master's degree in drama from the University of Exeter, he is a trustee of the Football Foundation and council member of Bath University.



Jojo Mehta

Jojo Mehta co-founded Stop Ecocide in 2017 to support the establishment of ecocide as a crime at the International Criminal Court. As CEO and key spokesperson, she has overseen the growth of the movement while coordinating between legal developments, diplomatic traction and public narrative. She is Chair of the Stop Ecocide Foundation and convenor of the Independent Expert Panel for the Legal Definition of Ecocide, chaired by Philippe Sands QC and Dior Fall Sow. The resulting definition, launched in June 2021, has catalysed legislative developments, recommendations and resolutions at national, regional and international levels.



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A century of innovation

From its 'Industrial Designs' competition in 1924 to the Student Design Awards of 2024, the RSA has long celebrated innovative solutions to social and environmental challenges. Now enter RSA Spark

Words: Joanna Choukeir

My journey with the RSA's Student Design Awards (SDAs) goes back a long way. Not quite the 100 years that the awards have been in existence, but a significant period of my working life.

I judged the awards in 2008, taught students the SDA briefs as a lecturer between 2010 and 2020, and was a partner of the SDAs, offering an internship as a prize at the design agency I led, in 2016. Now, I work on the awards from within the RSA, and had the pleasure of announcing the 100-year anniversary winners in the Great Room of RSA House this past July.

The SDAs mean a lot to me, and they certainly mean a lot to the students recognised each year, many of whom go on to enjoy incredible careers in design and shape our society for the better. More than 110,000 students

have collaborated on 2,000 briefs over the century. Past winners include Richard Howarth, Vice President of Design at Apple; fashion designer Betty Jackson; and David Carter, the industrial designer responsible for the Stanley knife and LeShuttle trains.

This year's SDA celebration was special in many ways. Hosting a once-in-a-lifetime event is, of course, an honour in itself. But the latest ceremony also included inspirational speeches from renowned landscape architect Andrew Grant and past finalist Nathan Addai, plus a personal story from Jonathan Carter (David Carter's son).

Designers of the future

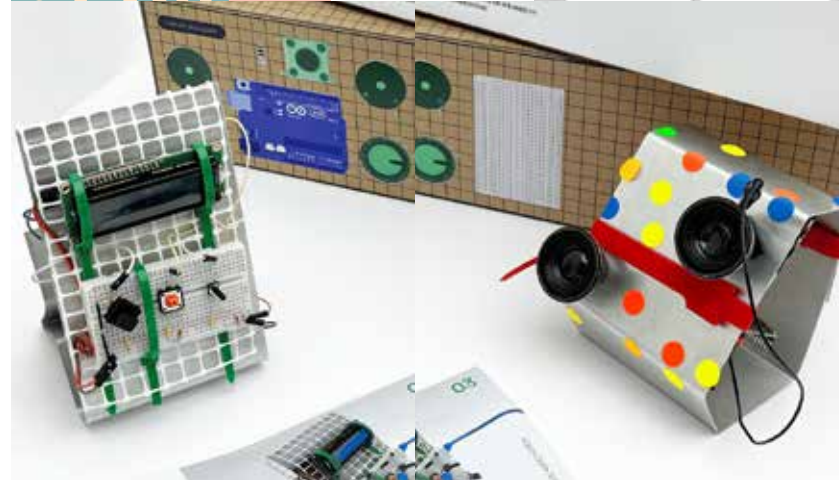
And we must not forget this year's crop of winners. A summary of the award-winning projects shows the range of the successful entries across the six briefs:



■ **Apply AI: Betha Suwarso (3)**, University of the Arts London. Betha's Beta Electronics solution offers a holistic approach to electronic recycling and education. (In partnership with Google DeepMind)

■ **Flourishing Places: Dougal Cusack Brown (2)**, Kingston University. Dougal's Chatham Mussel project involves a community-driven mussel farm. (In partnership with Arup)

■ **In Your Skin: Ailsa Smith (1)**, Arts University Bournemouth. Ailsa's XPOSURE skincare brand targets young men in construction careers. (In partnership with Skin Health Alliance and Bond & Coyne)



Photos: Maja Smiejikowska, Nadezda_Grapes / iStock



■ **Caring Culture: Abhipsha Ray**, Royal College of Art. Abhipsha's Balance platform provides families with the tools to share care-giving insights. (In partnership with the Rayne Foundation)

■ **Made Natural: Karina Gunadi, Richard Alexandre, Blake Goodwyn and Tanghao Yu**, Royal College of Art. The team's Pyri project is a wildfire detection system made from nature-based materials. (In partnership with Kew with support from Natracare)

■ **Centenary Celebrations: Teo Hennessy**, Limerick School of Art and Design. Teo's Through the Centuries animation shows the SDA journey using graphic shapes, distinctive colour and striking form. (In partnership with the Marketing Trust)

For the 100th year of the competition, we also partnered with the Anjool



Maldé Memorial Trust on two awards:

■ **Young Innovator of the Year: Tess Taylor**, Arts University Bournemouth. Tess's Terra Hex project involves an AI soil sensor that promotes regenerative agriculture. Part of the Apply AI brief. (In partnership with Google DeepMind)

■ **Centenary Design Award: Rachel Cartledge**, Edinburgh Napier University. Rachel's From the Ground Up animation showcases the innovation of previous SDA winners. Part of the Centenary Celebrations brief. (In partnership with the Marketing Trust)

This year's SDAs garnered 375 submissions from 81 colleges and universities around the world. We sought to make this the most inclusive competition to date, as well as encouraging entries from non-design disciplines.

The next 100 years

The secret to creating impact is to not stand still — and that is certainly the case with the SDAs. Starting life in 1924 as Industrial Designs, they have had various names over the years, including the Industrial Art Bursaries Competition, Design Bursaries and Design Directions.

For some time we have been reimagining what the world needs from the next 100 years of RSA awards. The result is a decision to bring the SDAs together with the RSA's Pupil Design Awards and Catalyst Enterprise Grants for greater impact, to form RSA Spark: a global programme offering inspiring real-world experiences to create, connect, grow and make a difference.

RSA Spark will welcome pupils from across the globe aged 11–17, students 18+ and entrepreneurs of all ages and their educators — the only requirement is having a passion for doing more good for people, places and the planet.

It will build on all we have learned over the past 100 years, and go even further, continuing to encourage creativity to change tomorrow and igniting ideas for action towards a positive world. Please join us as this journey starts its second century. ■

Dr Joanna Choukeir is the RSA's Director of Design and Innovation.



Scan the QR code to watch the July 2024 SDA awards ceremony

Before data space existed, humans looked at, listened to, felt and smelled the environment with the goal of prediction. Today, a vast amount of energy and resources are given to the creation and maintenance of computer forecasting models. I wondered, if sonic experience of space is embodied, how can modelled and predictive spaces that are scaled much larger or smaller or of durations much shorter or longer than those we can experience with our bodies, be communicated? Qualities of air, wind, light and humidity have emotional effects on people immersed in atmospheric events. I wondered, can the sound that interprets atmospheric data also have an emotional effect?

A US National Science Foundation Artist's Residency in Antarctica in 2007/08 gave me a chance to explore this question deeply. I was able to record the Antarctic soundscape, the sounds of wind travelling through glacial ice or of the machines used by research groups to survive in the harsh terrain, and to sonify the data being collected. Many of the scientists I worked alongside and learned from



Above: Participants on a Soundwalk led by Polli at McMurdo Station, Antarctica

Below: Particle Falls during a high pollution moment in Charlotte, North Carolina, 2021



Scan the QR code to hear an Adelle penguin rookery at Cape Royds, Antarctica



To see a video of Particle Falls in action, scan the QR code above

“Environmentally responsive public artworks can empower communities and encourage dialogue”

in Antarctica expressed concern about increasingly rapid changes in climate and ecosystems across the continent. Unfortunately, their work had become highly politicised.

As a response, I created an album called *Sonic Antarctica*, which included a mixture of recordings of the scientists' words and expressions of concern and the soundscape and sonifications of the data they were collecting. The goal was, in a small way, to give their research a broader reach.

Particle Falls

Along with my sonification projects, I began creating animated visualisations of the data with which I was interacting. I soon found that these environmentally responsive public artworks can empower communities and encourage dialogue about local issues. In 2009, I created *Particle Falls*, a real-time, environmentally reactive public artwork that allows viewers to see current levels of fine particulates as a digitally generated waterfall cascading down the facade of selected buildings (such as theatres, college campus centres and factories). Fine particulate matter is a form of air pollution, the smallest measuring

Photos: Jared Rendon-Trompak

4.6 billion years ago a star was born. Now NATURE is officially an artist



Our planet's staggering biodiversity is in crisis. Wildlife populations have declined by an average 69% in the past 50 years, and an estimated 1.2 million plant and animal species are at risk of extinction. Over two-thirds of Earth's land and marine environments have significantly deteriorated as a result of human activity.

So far, we've failed to address the root cause of the biodiversity crisis. Our economic model doesn't value nature adequately, instead treating it as a resource to be exploited or a place to dump waste. How might we prompt millions of people to re-evaluate

nature's contribution? At the Museum for the United Nations - UN Live, we think this requires meeting people where they are — in this case, via their phones and the music they love.

On 18 April 2024, the Sounds Right partnership launched NATURE as an official artist on all major streaming platforms. By listening, fans will direct royalties to conservation and restoration projects. It's an action that we hope will instil a sense of agency in our collective efforts to protect the planet, helping ignite a new era of environmental stewardship.

We launched with 15 tracks that feature sounds from the natural world. Ellie Goulding's 'Brightest Blue - Nature Remix' uses sounds from the lush rainforests of Colombia, from speckled chachalacas in Caquetá to the birdsong of Amazonian oropendolas. Brian Eno brings a visceral aspect to his David Bowie collaboration 'Get Real', with the harsh cries of hyenas, rooks and wild pigs, while Cosmo Sheldrake's 'Soil' is a homage to subterranean ecosystems. Participating artists are not only ensuring at least



50% of recording royalties go to conservation projects, but also shining a light on the beauty and vulnerability of critical ecosystems.

NATURE now also has over 80 ambient nature tracks — her solo music, if you will — ranging from a Queensland rainstorm to sounds of Patagonian sea swells. These soundscapes will help listeners unwind and connect to the natural world.

We've been blown away by NATURE's reception. Her tracks have been streamed over 40 million times, a significant step towards generating a projected \$40m in royalties for conservation over the next four years, and she's reached six million listeners around the world. The Sounds Right launch was picked up in more than 450 news outlets, globally with a potential audience of 3.6 billion people, while global Wikipedia searches for 'nature' increased eightfold in the week after launch.

Looking ahead, our aim is to make NATURE one of the highest-streaming artists in the world. We'll be releasing new tracks featuring NATURE, as well as supporting her live performances at festivals and global environmental forums. In doing so we hope to demonstrate how the environment can be better valued in our society and set a course for other industries to follow. ■

Search for NATURE on any major music streaming platform to listen to her music and take action. Follow along for updates on Instagram @soundsright.earth

Gabriel Smales is Global Programme Director for Sounds Right at the Museum for the United Nations - UN Live.



To learn more about Sounds Right, visit soundsright.earth or scan the QR code above



“Air has been a metaphor for the soul and spirit throughout human history”

US cities and at sites across North Carolina, Utah, Germany and France.

Power projects

While communicating data about climate change and environmental issues can help to encourage public understanding and action, I also wanted to create work with a direct impact. I had a longstanding desire to find ways to actually decrease emissions through public artworks and to use renewable energy to enhance urban aesthetics. Could clean energy not only improve our air, but increase our enjoyment of our cities? In 2016, I was given the opportunity to create a wind-powered artwork on the Rachel Carson Bridge in Pittsburgh to celebrate the city’s bicentennial. A local wind energy provider, WindStax, designed 16 custom vertical axis wind turbines that generated power efficiently and were also safer for wildlife. The power generated by the wind lit 27,000 LED lights outlining the bridge, and allowed me to add animated visualisations communicating wind energy potential in real time.

In the weeks before *Energy Flow* was to open, I presented *Particle*

Falls in Paris in conjunction with COP21 and returned home overjoyed by the historic Paris agreement. Not so the US administration at the time. Soon after I completed *Energy Flow*, the then President tweeted “...I was elected by Pittsburgh not Paris.” Almost immediately, the Pittsburgh mayor’s office asked if I could help the city show support for the climate agreement. *Energy Flow* was designed so that I could instantly update the animations from wherever I was, and I was able to send a special design within 24 hours. That experience helped me see a thread that connects people in Paris, Pittsburgh and across the world through public art and shared concerns about climate change and environmental justice.

Translucent medium

Air has been a metaphor for the soul and spirit throughout human history. A translucent medium of exchange between breathing bodies, air carries complex sounds and smells, holds living genes and atomic histories. It contains essences of place and feels and tastes distinctly differently in various geographies, and can have a major impact on human and ecological health.

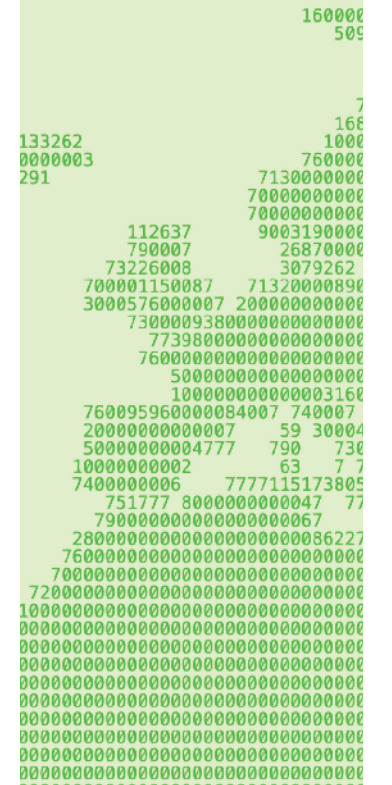
In the years I have been working with air, technologies able to sense the complex chemistries and movements of air have evolved dramatically. We now have the ability to monitor precisely what is in our air and how it travels, and we can use that information to protect ourselves and our environment. This high-level monitoring and analysis could provide us with a clearer way forward for reducing pollutants including greenhouse gases, and for mitigating negative effects of climate change — for example, better controlling wildfires by closely tracking the movement of wind or designing traffic control signals that can respond in real time to changes in air quality. My current work combines contemporary computation and chemistry in sculptures that give tactile, physical form to the seemingly formless particles and vibrations of air. ■

Professor Andrea Polli holds appointments in the College of Fine Arts and School of Engineering at the University of New Mexico, where she holds the Mesa Del Sol Endowed Chair of Digital Media. Her artwork and research have received major support from the US National Endowment for the Arts, US National Science Foundation and the Fulbright programme, among others.



To keep up with the work of Andrea Polli and other projects at the intersection of arts, science and technology, scan the QR code

Below:
N-point presents a timelapse of webcam images from the Arctic combined with a four-channel sonification of weather at the North Pole



2.5 microns or less in diameter — just 1/30th the width of a human hair — and called PM 2.5.

Sources of particulate pollution include cars, trucks, diesel buses and construction equipment, agriculture, industry and biomass. There is no safe level of PM 2.5. These particles are so small that lungs cannot cough them out; they contribute to a long list of serious health problems including asthma, heart and lung disease, cancer, adverse birth outcomes and even premature death.

Particle Falls responds to this threat by translating real-time PM 2.5 from the surrounding air into imagery. Fewer bright particles over the waterfall mean fewer particles in the air. The more dots of colour, the more particles there are in the air you’re breathing until, at dangerous levels, the waterfall transforms into a fireball. For example, *Particle Falls* responds dramatically when a diesel-powered vehicle idles nearby. So far, *Particle Falls* has been shown in four

Above:
Energy Flow, 2016–2018

Below:
The GLOW (Growing Life on Other Worlds) Pod public light artwork was created by University of New Mexico students overseen by Polli



To watch a clip of *Energy Flow*, scan the above QR code



Photos: Andrea Polli



■ RSA Spark is designed to help everyone, everywhere, find their creativity, igniting ideas into action for a positive impact. Participants will grow life skills and develop lifelong connections through real-world missions that matter.

Together, we can change tomorrow for everyone.

After 100 years of the Student Design Awards, 10 years of the Pupil Design Awards, and 15 years of the Catalyst Awards, a new chapter begins as we transform all three into RSA Spark.

Place your organisation at the heart of this diverse movement of learners and

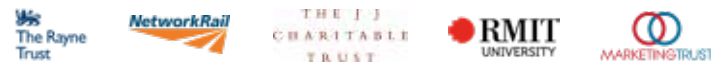
entrepreneurs doing more good for people, places and the planet.

Partner with RSA Spark today to platform your brand and align with other purpose-driven organisations seeking to contribute to a more regenerative world.

Email our partnership team today to ensure your organisation is at the heart of change.

Quote 'RSA Journal 3' when you email: partnerships@rsa.org.uk

Join Network Rail, RMIT University, the Marketing Trust, The Rayne Trust and The JJ Charitable Trust, and platform your organisation today.



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meaningfully via mentoring, workshops and learning sessions.



Platform
your brand and align your organisation with other

purpose-driven organisations seeking to contribute to a more regenerative world.

Photo: andresr / Getty Images

Fellowship



PRESIDENT'S LECTURE

Panellists push for nature restoration and rewilding

RSA House welcomed HRH The Princess Royal on 13 June for the annual President's Lecture and Dinner, which this year involved an expert panel discussing 'nature stewardship'.

The Princess Royal, who has been RSA President since 2011, introduced events in the Great Room, along with outgoing RSA Chairman Tim Eyles. More than 80 guests attended the dinner, with RSA Director of Design and Innovation Dr Joanna Choukeir chairing the panel.

The Princess Royal told attendees: "I would very much like to thank all the current members of staff and Fellows for the incredible amount of work that they

do to continue and to grow the RSA's impact and its value to society in this country and, more importantly, around the world."

She said that the RSA's Design for Life mission fitted well with a discussion on nature stewardship and also with environmental sustainability — an issue that her father, the Duke of Edinburgh, had championed throughout his more than five decades as RSA President.

Panellists then explored what can be done to address rewilding, bringing urban spaces back to life and making them vital hubs for local communities.

Kabir Kaul, a conservationist,

wildlife writer and RSA young Fellow, spoke passionately about reversing biodiversity loss in London.

"Most people live in cities, and it is important that we make nature and biodiversity relevant to most people," he said. "But often nature and cities are at a juxtaposition. We need to remove that concept and make sure that nature is accessible to everyone."

Caitlin Turner, marine biologist and policy officer at the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust, spoke about the need to raise awareness of the effects of pollution and over-exploitation on our oceans. She highlighted the work of the Youth Ocean Network and Young Sea Changers Scotland.

"Young people are currently due to inherit a future that they are having very little say in. But they have a vision for a more sustainable, equitable and just future for us all. We can achieve that future, but only if youth voices are included," she said.

Chief Executive of Rewilding Britain, Rebecca Wrigley, highlighted why rewilding is a key solution both environmentally and economically. "Nature's restoration and rewilding across 30% of Britain is not just the right thing to do, it's the most productive use of the land and sea," she said.

Sir Partha Dasgupta, Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Cambridge, suggested that to make environmental progress we must "alter our language" with regard to economics as we have become "programmed" to think of wellbeing only in GDP terms.

"I would like to see governments, particularly treasuries, hire ecologists," he said. "Natural capital is an asset, but treasuries don't have any representation of that kind of asset." ■

Photo: Laura Aziz



Tim Eyles (R) chats with Andy Haldane

GOVERNANCE

“Debt of gratitude” owed to RSA Chair

Tim Eyles OBE has been thanked for his “outstanding leadership” as he prepares to step down after completing his second term as Chair of the RSA’s Board of Trustees.

RSA Chief Executive Andy Haldane said: “I would like to thank Tim Eyles for his outstanding leadership and wise stewardship of the RSA and its international Fellowship since 2018.

“We at the RSA owe Tim an enormous debt of gratitude for all he has done to transform the organisation for the better over the last six years, not least throughout the pandemic and the immense challenges it presented.”

The appointment of the new RSA chair will be confirmed at the AGM on 10 October, and there will be an extended interview in the next issue of the *Journal*. ■

DESIGN FOR LIFE

Unlocking potential through Prosperous Places

The RSA has launched Prosperous Places, a Design for Life initiative that addresses the different ambitions and challenges of places across the UK and beyond.

Prosperous Places includes a series of interventions that bring together economic, social and natural perspectives on local growth opportunities. Working with local leaders and residents, the goal is to unlock the potential of places.

Tom Stratton, RSA Chief of Staff, said: “Everyone deserves to live in a vibrant community, with opportunities to thrive in a flourishing natural environment. However, many do not.

“We are therefore delighted to announce Prosperous Places to help respond to the unique ambitions and challenges of places, at a time when regional growth is at the top of the agenda.”

The interventions comprising Prosperous Places are: Local Prosperity Plans; Innovation Corridors; Playful Green Planet; RSA Spark; Regions of Learning; and Connected Places. They build on the RSA’s previous work on Creative Corridors, Cities of Learning and the UK Urban Futures Commission. ■

Find out more on the RSA’s website



RSA SCHEME

Pay Fellowship Forward to launch in October

We are pleased to announce plans for a scheme that will allow anyone to apply for RSA Fellowship regardless of their financial circumstances.

The Pay Fellowship Forward scheme is due to be launched in October and will be funded by donations from Fellows. Applicants to the scheme will complete

an application form which will then be reviewed by a Fellow-led panel.

Our Fellowship is at its best when a range of different voices, talents and lived experiences are represented. Someone’s financial circumstances should not be a barrier to joining, but we know that not everyone is currently able to afford to pay.

To help us achieve our mission and enrich our community, we want to increase the socioeconomic diversity of the Fellowship. This links closely to

our Social Connections intervention, which is underpinned by research suggesting cross-class connections can improve social mobility.

To support or donate to this exciting new initiative before our official launch, please email fellowship@rsa.org.uk. Donations of all sizes are welcome.

The launch of Pay Fellowship Forward will coincide with the 250th anniversary celebration of RSA House. ■ **Alex Newton is Head of Fellowship Development at the RSA.**

Photos: Piranha Photography 2022, miakiev / iStock



Dr Aakeen Parikh of Minazi Consulting

IMPACT

Catalyst Award winner’s quest to end period poverty

Over 500 million women cannot afford or do not have access to period products. Even fewer live where waste management systems can process the traditional plastic-based period products that dominate the sanitary product space, resulting in plastic waste entering and irreparably damaging local ecology.

Seeing these crises, Dr Aakeen Parikh and her partners set out to develop a period product that could be made with local materials, by local women, and that did no harm to the local environment.

Their solution was a reusable period pad made with banana fibre.

In spring 2023, Aakeen was awarded an RSA Catalyst Award for the work of her organisation, Minazi Consulting, in producing menstrual pads made with upcycled agricultural waste from banana plantations. The award enabled the construction of a production facility at a banana plantation in Nyanza, Rwanda to scale small-batch production.

Working with their implementation partner, Dufatanye Organization, the project empowers local communities by distributing low-cost, locally produced and ecologically friendly period products to women and girls, while raising awareness about menstrual hygiene.

According to one of the first users of the pads: “Some of us had to choose between buying pads from the market or buying other needs for home. Now, with the money we used to [spend on] pads at the market, we can buy necessities for home.”

Since being awarded the funding, Aakeen’s team have produced the first iteration of reusable pads and, in May 2024, Minazi and Dufatanye launched a local menstrual health awareness campaign. Volunteers distributed over 500 pads to women and girls in need. Awareness seminars were held at schools and community centres, and more than 1,000 people attended a campaign event.

Aakeen, an RSA Fellow, said: “We are deeply proud of the progress we have made, which would not have been

possible without the Catalyst funding, but there is a lot more to do.”

In the next phase, they will install fabric production facilities, increase capacity and conduct further outreach. The project has the potential to overcome period poverty in a sustainable and regenerative way that allows production in the places with greatest need.

By partnering with local enterprising women and growing global period product availability, their work will empower millions of women and girls around the world. ■

Devlyn Lalonde is Senior Global Manager at the RSA.

HOUSE NEWS

RSA House bar to open

Once home to the Adelphi Tavern, RSA House will launch Muse this autumn, a stylish new bar with a contemporary twist. Located on the ground floor, the bar is a collaborative project between the RSA, hospitality partner Company of Cooks and rewilding specialist Idyll Drinks. The bar will have the feel of a private members’ club, while being open and accessible to all. Look out for more details soon. ■

FELLOWSHIP COUNCIL

New additions to Fellowship Council

Three Fellows — Julie Samuels, Michael Dunlop and Jordan Meade — have been appointed to the Fellowship Council following resignations due to relocation and work commitments.

Julie is now a Fellowship councillor for the Central area, Jordan for the South East and Michael for Ireland and Northern Ireland. They succeed Matthias Hilner, Claire Doran and Tony Sheehan.

The recruitment process was conducted in partnership with existing Fellowship councillors and approved by the Nominations and Governance Panel.

The new Fellowship councillors began their duties in June and attended their first meeting of the Fellowship Council later that month. ■



Women in Rwanda assembling pads



OBITUARY

Derek Birdsall: guru of graphic design and typography

The larger-than-life graphic designer, typographer and Royal Designer for Industry (RDI), who has died aged 89, was one of the pioneers of British graphic design. Famous for his exquisite typography and book and magazine designs, Derek Birdsall designed the Church of England's Common Worship prayer book in 2000 and the Royal Mail stamps celebrating the RSA's 250th anniversary in 2004.

He was born in 1934 in Knottingley, near Pontefract in Yorkshire, where his appetite for art and calligraphy developed. His creative path was formed at Wakefield College of Art and later, in 1952, at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London. Here, he began developing his typography and book design skills.

Following national service, in 1957, Derek took up the offer of a part-time job at printer Balding and Mansell. This appealed because it allowed him to build up freelance work on his days off — and he quickly had a regular flow of work from various sources.

He took up teaching one evening a week at the London School of Printing

(LSP) and more part-time lecturing at Maidstone College of Art. A little later, Tom Eckersley, RDI, Head of Design, suggested Derek apply for a three-day-a-week lectureship at LSP. He got the job, and many students fell under the spell of his exacting approach to typography and printing.

Below: Derek's Royal Mail stamps celebrating the RSA's 250th anniversary. They typify his love of type and image



Photo: Mike Dempsey

Derek went from strength to strength and set up BDMW Associates in 1960 with a 'supergroup' of designers (George Daulby, George Mayhew and Peter Wildbur). Their output reflected a fusion of the precision of Swiss graphics and American wit. The group eventually disbanded, and Derek set up his own practice in Covent Garden. In 1967, he joined forces with Derek Forsyth, who had been the Advertising Director of Pirelli, to start Omnific, a hybrid design consultancy that also handled advertising.

But Derek missed the hands-on involvement of the creative process and, after two years, he and Forsyth parted company. Alan Fletcher and Colin Forbes approached Derek with a view to him joining their consultancy, but he was determined to plough his own furrow. Derek continued working in Covent Garden under the Omnific banner, where he was a master of book design, typography, magazine design and book covers.

Those who worked for him will recall Derek's routine of always being with a roll-up, drinking at the local at lunchtime, and napping in the afternoon. I last saw Derek in 2018 at his home overlooking the sea in Broadstairs in Kent, where he'd gone to live after his unexpected retirement. He told me he'd had enough of solving other people's problems.

Derek leaves a wealth of wonderful work, including his timeless book *Notes on Book Design*, demonstrating his exacting view of graphic design. He was a no-nonsense figure with a gruff, tobacco-laden voice that retained its Yorkshire accent until the end.

We will miss him. RIP. ■

Mike Dempsey, RDI

GLOBAL DESIGN

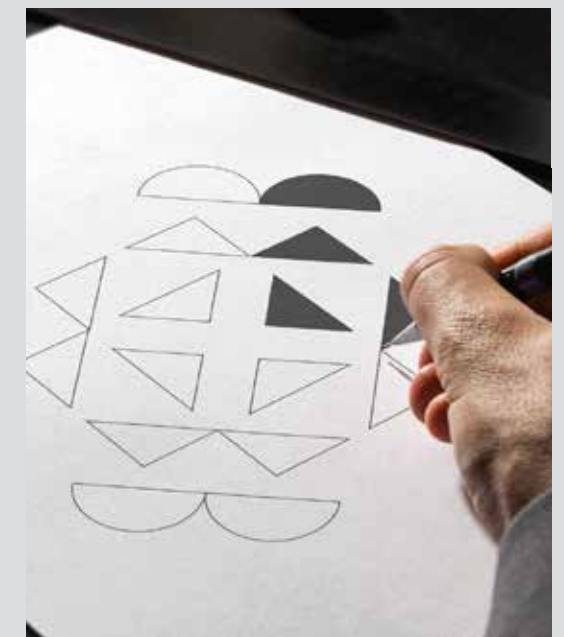
“Eureka moment” sees Fellow’s design selected as World Games logo

A design created by RSA Fellow John Fairley has been selected from more than 3,500 submissions to be the logo of the World Games 2025 in Chengdu, China.

John's design is a symmetrical geometric image that includes iconic Chinese symbols representing the giant panda, the hibiscus flower and the Chinese knot. Chengdu, part of Sichuan province, is famous for its giant pandas, and the hibiscus is the flower of the city.

“I am truly honoured that my design will represent the World Games 2025, promoting unity, inclusiveness and diversity on a global stage,” John told the *Journal*.

He explained how he began the design process by experimenting with circles and triangles to create the facial features of a giant panda. “It was a real Eureka moment. I took that panda shape and then repeated it in a circle for the final design. I love shapes that repeat.”



Left: John drawing his winning logo and the final result

The World Games take place every four years and include sports not contested in the Olympic Games, such as squash, lacrosse and karate. Five thousand participants from more than 100 countries are expected to take part from 7 to 17 August next year.

John's design was one of 3,562 logo ideas received following a request for submissions. His was selected as one of five final contenders, which were then subject to a public vote.

“My design came out victorious with 55,000 clicks. I was completely flabbergasted considering how many entries there had been, and excited to see my emblem on the global sporting stage.” ■

John has been a Fellow for almost two decades and is currently based in Australia.

FELLOWSHIP CONNECT

Explore opportunities to connect online:

- @thersaorg
- @theRSAorg
- @thersaorg
- Fellows' LinkedIn group [linkedin.com/groups/3391](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/3391)

■ Email the Fellowship Services team at fellowship@rsa.org.uk or call +44 (0)207 451 6939

CIRCLE OF FELLOWSHIP

Join Circle today and get your conversation started:

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To get started, scan the QR code or visit thersa.org/fellowship/community-platform

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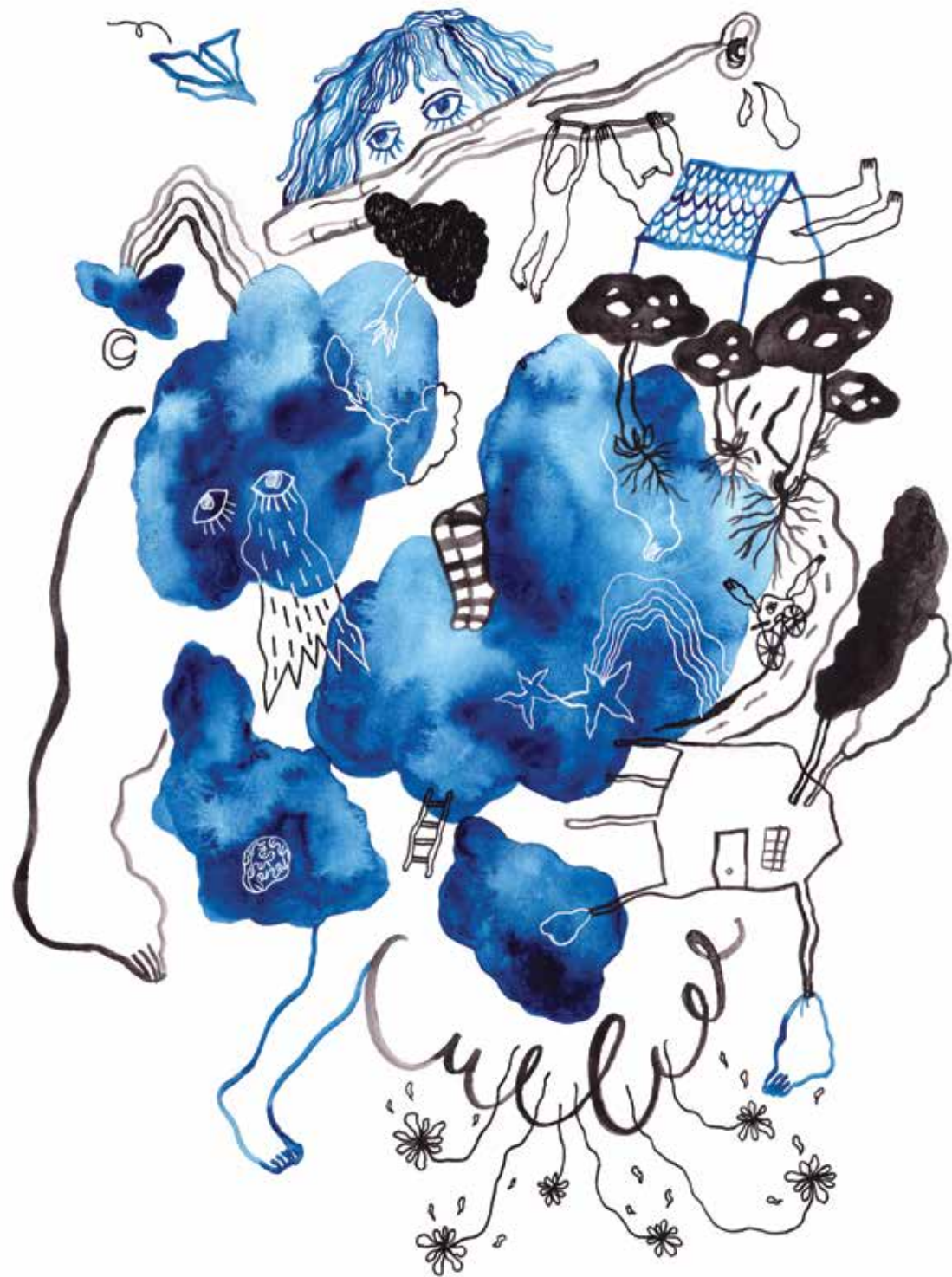
There are 11 co-working locations available across the UK where non-London-based Fellows can work for free — and we regularly add new venues.



For the latest information, please scan the QR code

LAST WORD

Adaptation



Artwork by Lala Bohang for the RSA. Lala is a writer and visual artist born in Makassar, Indonesia. She currently lives in Jakarta, parts of which are sinking at a rate of 1–15cm per year; almost half the city now sits below sea level. Lala's work tends to explore identity, memory and possibility. She published the best-selling trilogy *The Book of Siblings* and has participated in exhibitions in Indonesia and abroad.

CREATIVITY TAKES COURAGE



Photo: Joel Knight Photography

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