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Abstract

In an age when reconsideration of human-nature relationships is much needed, environmental art provides a valuable tool for engaging the public. Without sufficient principles to guide it, however, it runs the risk of falling flat or upholding faulty environmental values. Environmental aesthetics, in providing guidelines for proper appreciation and moral engagement with nature, possesses such principles. By aligning artistic practices with concepts and theories within contemporary aesthetics—including cognitive, non-cognitive, and mixed-view approaches to nature—this research inquires into how environmental art can effectively 1) uphold an appropriate environmental ethic (defined as a value system that includes—to some extent—nature); and 2) motivate positive environmental behavior. These findings are paired with strategies employed in mass climate change communications—namely appeals to fear and sense of place—and are identified in select visual and performance artworks produced between the years 2003-2013. By critically evaluating representations of nature, this research provides insight into how environmental art can better motivate changes in personal values and behavior, and presents practical tools for artists and environmentalists alike.