

Artists on Human impact on nature

Verona Odhiambo, Kenya

Humans, over the years, have developed methods and technologies that ease the burden of day to day activities such as transportation, housework, etc. Most of these methods are harmful to the environment as they produce waste products and gases that affect the environment and humans alike. These technologies and advancements have caused our world to slowly develop into a large concrete jungle and has fuelled issues such as Global warming, rapid increase of water level, loss of habitat, unusual change in temperature, declining air quality among others which are threatening to lead to the eventual doom of the human race.

Amongst the numerous issues present, I have chosen to focus on impacts on marine life and its surrounding ecosystems. Marine life is integral to human survival and plays a huge role such as the ocean providing over 50% of oxygen and corals protecting coastlines. The artists I have chosen highlight the future of our oceans and lakes and have linked their artworks to personal inspirations from their lives.

Xavier Cortada, “IXΘΥΣ (Ichthys)”
Xavier Cortada created Ichthys as a representation of his personal beliefs that he had since childhood of how the evolution of technology and the world has negatively affected what he was so fascinated about as a kid and what he

believed to be quite symbolic to the first Christians: The fish. I chose this artwork because it has a meaning which makes it captivating for me.

Cascade, Alexis Rockman

Alexis Rockman’s *cascade* is part of a project called ‘*The Great Lakes Cycle*’ that focuses on the future of the great lakes region with regards to the development of industries and technology. Cascade in particular is focused on the portrayal of how various organisms are affected and the ecosystems around them as well. His artwork is solely based on primary research done extensively and information from the locals in the region. I chose it because it is captivating both contextually and aesthetically. **Medium used:** Oil and alkyd on wood panel, 72 x 144 inches.

Formal analysis: Cascade (2015)



Figure 1: Alexis Rockman's interpretation of the fate of the great lakes of America. Part of the great lakes cycle series. Title: Cascade Artist: Alexis Rockman Medium used: Oil and alkyd on wood panel, Dimensions: 72 x 144 inches

Composition: The *proportion* of the art is *very large* and would require a spectator to step back for a better view although to get a better *understanding of detail*, a close up view is necessary. The artwork is *chaotic* and is *divided into two sections*, the underwater and terrestrial world. This allows the spectator to view the effect on both sides. It also comprises various *forms collaged* into one image.

Pictorial space: The use of oil paint and alkyd on a wood panel creates a *shiny glossy* effect on some elements, like the ice block and the deer, giving them a 3 dimensional look. Elements are spread out across the space. The natural side seems to be driven to the man-made side and this is represented by *scale* as the natural side is much larger than the man-made.

Patterns: The patterns are minor and of secondary significance. The patterns are emphasized by color to create texture and form. These are present in the trees.

Form: The artwork is dominated by *3 dimensional forms* and appears to be *volumetric*. Along with that, they are *realistically modelled*.

Light: The light source is *naturalistic* and is sourced at the top right corner. This gives emphasis on the *texture* and 3 dimensional form. The *gradation* from *light to dark* is *subtle*.

Color: The color scheme is *multichromatic* and consists of a mixture of *warm* and *cool* colors as well as *primary* and *secondary* colours, bringing an intense mood and feeling to the *spectator*. There is a *variation of hues* used and they are mostly in *subtle form*.

Scale: The size of the artwork is *life size* and a large part of the artwork is dominated by affected animals and environments, including the marine life in the lake and the deer on the land which are invaded by industries.

Line: Geometric and organic lines are present throughout. The organic lines are used for the organisms and surrounding environment, whereas the geometric lines have been used for the man-made forms.

Interpretation of Function and Purpose: Cascade

The primary purpose of 'cascade' is to educate people on the Great Lakes region destruction. Rockman depicts the harsh reality of our world today. He challenges the spectators by explicitly capturing the realities of what is happening at the lakes. *Cascade* is part of a series of paintings by Alexis Rockman titled *The Great Lakes Cycle* and each expresses an issue concerning the state of the lake.

He created this artwork with consideration to what the locals at the seven different lakes said and expressed. He also

incorporates actual events that have happened on the lake which gives it a more personalized aspect.

The artist's use of a collage, or assemblage of different scenes, and the multichromatic palette, brings a sense of urgency and chaos to the piece. This illustrates the devastating situation at the lakes, and what their inevitable future will look like if no drastic measures are taken. The contrast between shades of blue on the right and shades of orange on the left symbolizes the deteriorating state of nature within and around the lakes.

The positioning of the deer in the water shows habitat loss and melting ice blocks; the fish underwater are depicted to be suffocated by all the pollutants in the lake.

Cultural Significance: Cascade by Alexis Rockman

Audience's world

The Great Lakes, located in North America are headed towards a dead end as there are various threats it faces, such as sewage leaks and overflows, climate change, invasive species, and chemical spills. The lakes are considered very valuable as a great number of species of various kinds are found there.

Audience

The main audience that this artwork was addressed to are the people living around the Great Lakes as it addresses the matter in a whole perspective. The project was commissioned by the Grand Rapids art museum and is also on display there. As a result, the audience also includes historians, civilians, and students.

Artist

Alexis Rockman set out to investigate the Great Lakes region while taking into consideration the amount of change that happened in the surrounding due to human contact and influence. He visited 5 institutions all around the Great Lakes region and interviewed experts concerning the lakes. He talked to locals regarding the lake's state as well as the change that has occurred overtime. He later began his 5 piece art project which was later named the Great Lakes cycle.

Artists World

Alexis Rockman is an American contemporary artist that depicts issues through future landscapes. He is sometimes likened to a journalist/artist as he does extensive field research on a matter and attains information rawly before working on an artwork. He has been involved in multiple international exhibitions and he synthesizes history, science and landscape art to his works.

Formal analysis: IXΘΥΣ (Ichthys)



Figure 2: Xavier Cortada, "IXΘΥΣ (Ichthys)," digital art, 2015. Artwork to welcome Pope Francis' Climate change message and US visit. Medium: Digital art

Composition: The fish figures have been *arranged* in an *organized* manner and there is *cropping* of some fish. The form of the fish has been enhanced by *contrasting*

colors on their body which creates a *sense of motion*. The fish are also the most prevalent elements and this has been emphasized by usage of contrasting color and variation in size. The *focal point* is the big fish as they are brighter in color and bigger in *size* as compared to other fish.

Light: The *light source* is from the top right corner as there is a *lighter tone* of colors used compared to the far left which the artist has used darker, more *concentrated* colors. This factor is emphasized by the direction of the fish as they seem to be *moving* from left to right, darker tone to lighter *tone* and is representative of them leaving dirty waters.

Line: There is dominance of *organic lines* used to depict the fish and waves and their direction. The lines used are *curved*, depicting the direction of the *movement* of the fish.

Pattern: various *patterns* are observed throughout the artwork and they have been created by both *organic* lines and color. The patterns are observed in the scales of the fish, and in the water. They emphasize on the direction.

Color: A variation and combination of different color *hues* are used and the most prevalent are Blue, Magenta, Orange and Cyan and they are very *saturated* therefore implying *boldness*. The prevalence of the color blue represents the *tranquility* of the oceans and the *variation of colors* such as dirty orange and black on the fish, represent lifelessness as a result of human impact on the environment. The contrast in color creates *juxtaposition* and adds emphasis to the fish as the *focal point*.

Pictorial space: The objects are depicted as

2 dimensional as the artist only presents one side of the fish. All the fish are spread across the *pictorial space* with a *variation in size* giving a sense of *distance and space* and the artist has placed the *viewpoint* at mid range close to the objects which gives the audience more involvement with the artwork.

Form: The shapes are all *2 dimensional* with *curved form*. The artist chooses to depict the form through a mixture of both lines and color.

Scale: The *scale* of the artwork is *miniature* as the medium is digital art. The fish also vary in size and this creates a sense of depth and variety

Interpretation of Function and Purpose: IXΘΥΣ (Ichthys)

Artist's intention:

To question the audience. The artist, Xavier Cortada, has used his personal religious beliefs and journey with connection to the current crisis to express the urgency of action on the well being of Earth.

The title of this piece, IXΘΥΣ or Ichthys, is the ancient greek symbol consisting of two intersecting arc's that extend beyond the intersection point creating a figure that resembles the profile of a fish.

Purpose of creation

This artwork was created as the welcoming piece for Pope Francis' visit to the U.S and climate change address.

Xavier Cortada has used fish symbolically in this artwork as by his beliefs, fish and

fish symbols were crucial for the 'first' Christians as they used them to communicate, express emotions and build fellowship as they were persecuted, harassed and denied communal worship. According to Cortada, these Christians had a sense of urgency that drew them closer together and allowed them to push for change. Although their beliefs were disregarded, they persevered regardless. Similarly, in today's world, very often religious people or people who regard and practise their religion with deep involvement are viewed as loony.

Cortada's use of fish is also attributed to the existence of a lot of fish during the time of the first Christians and now they are rapidly declining. The fish are also seen as symbolic to the power of Jesus as he fed thousands with just 2 fish (Matthew 14:17 of the Bible).

Connection to theme: Human impact on nature

Cortada expresses his message by combining his religious background and the problem of the deteriorating plight of nature. The direction of the fish shows how they are all slowly heading to extinction and the faceless figures show the ignorance of humans in an implicit manner. The main blue color in the water represents the ocean whereas the small hints of purple, pink, white, green, represent the plastics and the pollutants in the ocean. These elements are also included in the fish implying their ingestion.

Cultural Significance: ΙΧΘΥΣ (Ichthys)

Audience's world

The year was 2015 and the current state of the earth was deteriorating drastically and many species are going extinct and soon enough the earth is predicted to be practically uninhabitable. The amount of plastic that is not recycled is at 91% and it lies in the ocean, landfills, and streets.

Audience

The main audience that this artwork was addressed to are the 'current' Christians. This is because one of Cortada's main messages is urging the Christians to replicate the actions of those who came before them and get together to fight climate change. It was presented as Pope Francis visited the U.S and addressed the climate change conference in 2015

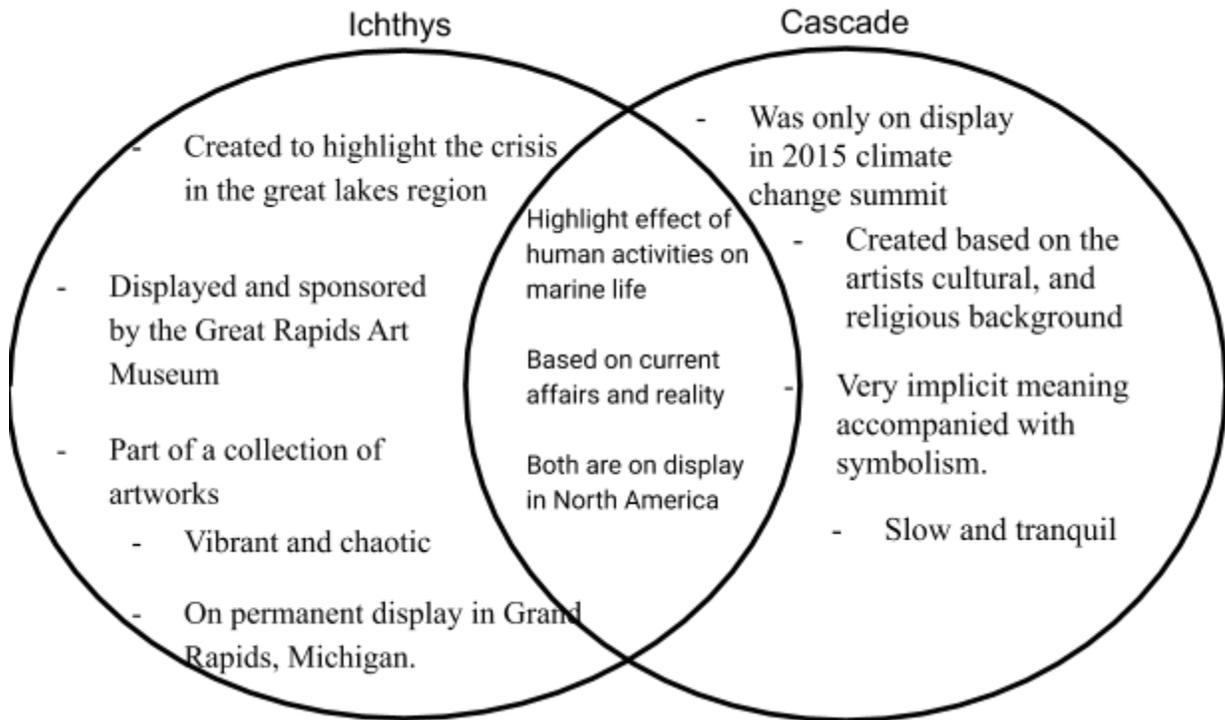
Artist

Xavier Cortada is Professor of Practice Artist at the University of Miami. He relates his artwork to science, and it's mostly oriented towards social engagement and environmental concern. The artist is not associated with a specific type of artform but practises multimedia

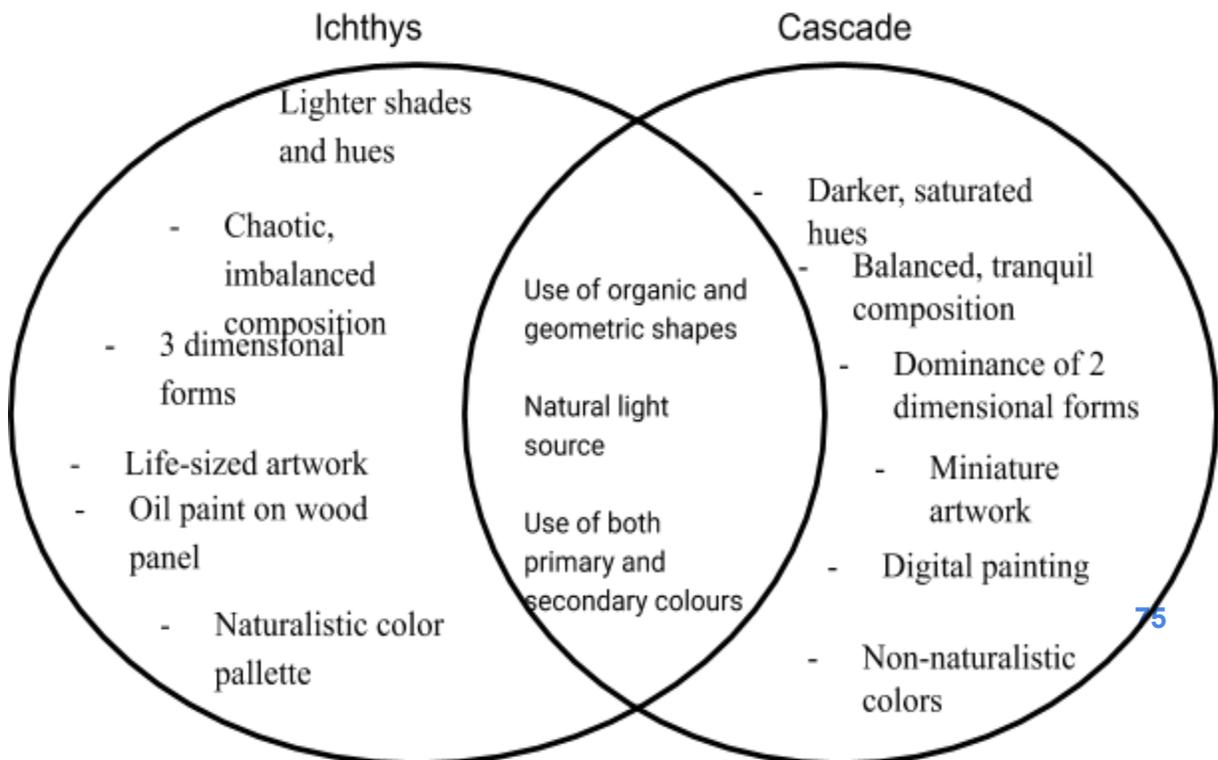
Artists world

The artist was asked to create ichthys as the opening artwork for when Pope Francis addressed the climate change summit in 2015. The artist was inspired by The first Christians and their utilisation of fish drawings to communicate. The first Christians were discriminated against by the community around them and they believed the fish represent hope.

Compare and contrast: Function, Purpose, Cultural significance of *ichthys* and *cascade*



Compare and contrast: Formal Analysis of *ichthys* and *cascade*



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