

# Cultural Interventions in Climate and Displacement

March 2026

Lessons from Eight Case Studies

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# Biographies

## Counterpoints Arts

[Counterpoints Arts](#) is a leading national organisation in the field of arts, migration and cultural change. Its mission is to support and produce art by and about migrants and refugees, seeking to ensure that their voices and experiences play a pivotal role in shaping and influencing our arts, history, and culture. It produces a range of programmes in the UK and internationally, with its work taking place at the intersection of climate, racial justice, mental health, and displacement. Central to its mission is its belief that arts can inspire social change and enhance the inclusion and cultural integration of refugees and migrants.

## The British Council

[The British Council](#) is the UK's international culture and education organisation. We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide.

By connecting the UK's expertise in arts and culture, education and the English language to our global presence and unparalleled networks, we unlock potential and transform lives. We help artists to share their distinctive voices. We provide educators with the tools to shape generations. We give young people the confidence to shine.

For almost a century, it's been our mission to build a world where people connect across borders, and where trust is the foundation for lasting change. A world where opportunities are limitless.

## The Author

[Dana Olărescu](#) is a socially engaged artist whose practice explores minority exclusion and environmental injustice. Using participatory and collaborative methodologies, she works with migrant and underserved communities to co-produce social change. Her work has been presented at institutions including Tate Modern, the National Maritime Museum (UK), Incheon Art Platform (South Korea), and supported by Arts Council England, Moomin Characters, the Royal Docks, and others. Recent publications include 'The Great Dying' in *Collaborative Incubator: An Entry Point to a Story*, '[Practising Migration](#)' in *Art, Migration, and the Production of Radical Democratic Citizenship*, and [Abundant Futures: Building Equity in a Divided World](#) in *Create News 36*.

# Introduction

The climate emergency and associated displacement are among the most urgent challenges of our time, with the number of people forced to move rising every year. Between 2008 and 2021, annual displacements resulting from floods, storms, droughts, wildfires, landslides, and extreme temperatures fluctuated between 13.9 and 38.3 million.<sup>1</sup> According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies,<sup>2</sup> in 2023, an estimated 12.6 million people were internally displaced primarily due to climate-related disasters.

<sup>1</sup> "Climate Change-Induced Migration: UK Collaboration with International Partners." House of Lords Library, 7 Sept. 2023. <http://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/climate-change-induced-migration-uk-collaboration-with-international-partners/>

<sup>2</sup> General Assembly, Third Committee. "With Conflicts, Climate Change Pushing Displacement to Record Levels, Third Committee Highlights Need to Ramp Up Refugee Funding, Address Root Causes." United Nations: Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 31 Oct. 2023. <https://press.un.org/en/2023/gashc4395.doc.htm>

While the amount of arts and cultural projects addressing the climate crisis (from reconnecting communities with nature to imagining sustainable futures) has grown in recent years, very few have focused specifically on climate-induced migration and displacement. This paper was commissioned by Counterpoints Arts and the British Council to address this gap, by exploring and presenting case studies of good practice at the intersection of the arts, culture, and heritage.

At the time of writing, conflicts, crises, and displacements are unfolding across the world. In this context of turbulence and loss, the arts occupy the unique position of humanising lived experiences, communicating across divides, and mobilising the collective imagination towards more just futures.

## Paper aims and intended readers

Climate-induced migration is often addressed through policy and science, but less frequently through the arts and culture. This paper therefore seeks to contribute a different perspective. It aims to:

- Highlight artists, creative practitioners, and organisations, and the diverse artistic approaches they are developing
- Show that artistic approaches catalyse and generate a sensorial/embodied way of creative thinking and problem solving that cognitive/textual approaches alone do not reach
- Provide a learning resource for the sector, both in the UK and internationally, to support responses to the topic, and to strengthen engagement with communities, including those with lived experience of displacement
- Begin building connections between artists and organisations, in the UK and internationally, who are engaging with these questions.

It is intended as a resource for:

- Artists, writers, filmmakers, and other creative practitioners who are beginning to explore climate and displacement, as well as those already making work who wish to connect with peers
- Arts and culture organisations seeking to inform their programming and strategy in relation to this topic
- Funders, educators, and policymakers who are open to engaging with and supporting cultural perspectives on this urgent issue.

The paper does not claim to be exhaustive, but rather serves as an invitation to co-learning; a resource to inspire collaboration and further artistic and cultural responses.

## About the case studies and methodology

A longlist of 40 artists and organisations was identified through the networks of the British Council and Counterpoints Arts. Having used the selection criteria outlined below, eight were interviewed. The case studies in this paper draw on these online conversations, conducted by the author,

which explored both artistic practice and specific projects in depth. Research took place between December 2024 and June 2025, with interviews conducted from January to May 2025.

The final case studies span music, film (including animation), photojournalism, installation, and visual art. They represent artists working in the UK, the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, the Micronesian island nation of Kiribati, Pakistan, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Somalia, and Switzerland.

In addition to individual practitioners, two organisations, Climate Spring and DISPLACEMENT, were included to provide insight into script-writing and filmmaking, and the role of art within policy areas.

Selection criteria included:

- Artistic diversity across forms and disciplines
- Attention to lived experience of displacement and climate crisis
- Geographical representation spanning different regions and contexts
- Commitment to climate justice principles, explicitly addressing intersections of climate, migration, systemic inequities, power imbalances, and environmental degradation

- Innovation in research, methods, and artistic practice
- The centrality of community engagement and collaboration to process and impact.

Draft case studies were shared with each artist and organisation for comment and revision, ensuring accuracy and integrity. The longlist can be found in the **Other Artists** section.

Despite the breadth of this research, many voices are missing, especially from the regions most affected by the climate emergency, such as parts of Asia and Africa. The reasons are twofold:

- People focused on surviving displacement or recovering from climate impacts are unlikely to be able to prioritise artistic work
- Within the limited timeframe of this paper, it was not possible to search more thoroughly for the artists and practices that no doubt exist, even if in different forms, such as the offering of care, the creation of moments of joy, or the support of communities rather than the production of formal artworks.

A more in-depth process would no doubt reveal these perspectives. Continued research is therefore essential to develop a fuller understanding of the artistic

responses emerging from the places most affected.

## Author's note – key themes

Much has changed around us since this paper was begun in September 2024. Amid numerous unthinkable crises, 2024 became the hottest year on record<sup>3</sup>, far-right parties gained seats across Europe and beyond, and we have witnessed genocides in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and Gaza.

Yet all was not lost.

During this period, I felt animated by the courageous actions of ordinary citizens, who have repeatedly shown resistance in the face of destruction. Despite governments' refusal to take lawful action, and their crackdowns on free speech and right to protest, many inspiring victories have still been won. From pro-Palestinian student encampments and the growing popularity of the [BDS movement](#), to the [ongoing nightly protests in Georgia](#) and the [demonstrations led by students](#) in over 400 cities and town across Serbia, acts of resistance continue with

<sup>3</sup> World Meteorological Organization. "WMO Confirms 2024 as Warmest Year on Record at About 1.55 °C above Pre-Industrial Level." Press release, January 10, 2025. <https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/wmo-confirms-2024-warmest-year-record-about-155degc-above-pre-industrial-level>.

extraordinary strength. These international wins are instructive for addressing climate displacement, especially at a time when border regimes are becoming increasingly authoritarian, and explicit in their racism and xenophobia. As anti-migrant discourse intensifies and strengthens far-right groups and ideologies, I look back to previous victories which allow me to hold on to the hope that we might still find an equitable way forward.

As a Romanian-born and London-based socially engaged artist, I work with migrant groups across the UK, using culture as a tool to advance social change. Currently, I am leading [Abundant Futures](#), a long-term project focused on food politics on Jersey. The project aims to challenge and transform the rights of migrant workers on a Channel Island that is increasingly vulnerable to the climate emergency, and where migrants are only allowed to enter if they already hold a contract before arrival.

Drawing on multidisciplinary artist William Kentridge's notion of 'political refusal of certainty'<sup>4</sup>, I trust that art and cultural interventions can open up alternative

<sup>4</sup> Maltz-Leca, Leora. "Not by Gods but by Metaphors." In *Ceremony: Burial of an Undead World*, edited by Anselm Franke, Elisa Giuliano, Denise Ryner, Claire Tancons, and Zairong Xiang, 82. Leipzig: Spector Books, 2022.

perspectives on these seemingly impossible realities, and advocate for other ways of being in the world. Climate and displacement is, above all, an affective issue: statistics alone cannot capture the pain, complexity, and nuance of the disruptive transformations it causes. Conversations with other creatives for this paper have allowed me to contextualise these challenges through their shared experiences.

While listening to these conversations, a number of **common threads** have emerged:

Unanimously, the interviewees create work rooted in their **commitment to justice and care**, foregrounding constructive and ethical approaches in their storytelling, participatory performance, or ecological stewardship. Matthieu Rytz, Edward Lawrenson, dhaqan collective, Climate Spring, and DISPLACEMENT all emphasise ethical representation of vulnerable communities; Emmanuela Yogolelo and Soumik Datta focus on amplifying marginalised voices; and Vivien Sansour foregrounds human and more-than-human care within ecological and cultural preservation.

They are also all actively creating the conditions for **long-term, process-oriented work** – frequently without adequate financial resources, since the

majority of art projects rely on short-term funding. This concern was shared across all interviews, and the artists have been forced to sustain their work in ways neither equitable nor sustainable: from contributing their own money to support the wellbeing of the communities they work with (dhaqan) to donating unpaid time to mentor artists from refugee backgrounds (E. Yogolelo). Such practices point to the urgent need for equitable, sustained funding. Rytz’s long-term documentary diplomacy (spanning over seven years) exemplifies practices that nurture systemic change and cultural memory over immediate or one-off outputs.

**Social injustice and loss of cultural heritage** also emerged as central themes. E. Yogolelo and Lawrenson address forced displacement in Africa and Pakistan by foregrounding the stories of those affected. Sansour highlights the loss of agricultural knowledge in the Occupied Territories of Palestine as a deliberate consequence of systemic, state-supported violence; in her art projects, displaced seeds become carriers of life and culture, sheltered in new territories. Datta reflects on the loss of a distinct sound made by sarods (19-string instruments central to North Indian classical tradition, traditionally made from Burmese teak). Deforestation means that sarods are now crafted from tun wood,

a change that has altered their acoustic quality. For Datta, this change ties the disappearance of a sonic memory to a habitat that no longer exists.

Together, the interviewees emphasise that climate impacts are inseparable from issues of identity, memory, and social equity.

Notably, all interviewees preferred **creating art outside of traditional spaces**. Their projects take place in communities, refugee settings, natural landscapes, and even on farms, connecting creative practice to lived realities, social activism, and ecological preservation. For them, meaningful impacts often extend beyond galleries, festivals, or concert halls.

These diverse case studies remind me that creative practice is most transformative when it is **ethically grounded, nurtured through long-term relationships, and responsive to the social and environmental urgencies that shape our lives**. Witnessing how these artists work beyond conventional spaces, prioritising the voices, experiences, and knowledge of the communities most affected, has reaffirmed my belief that when we put people first, we also create the conditions for more equitable gains for the planet. These initiatives show me that art can serve as an active force for cultural preservation and social change.

## Disclaimer

While this insight paper offers a glimpse of artistic and cultural practices engaging with climate change and displacement, many valuable initiatives will not be reflected here.

In this paper:

- The analysis and framing are those of the author, while the voices within the case studies belong to the interviewees
- Accessible artistic and cultural language has intentionally been used, rather than legal or technical terminology
- Interpretations offered are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the British Council or Counterpoints Arts, their officers, or those individuals who contributed to the research.

With gratitude to the artists and organisations who contributed their insights and time.

# dhaqan collective



**dhaqan collective**, led by Bristol-based Fozia Ismail and Ayan Cilmi, is a feminist Somali women’s art collective that centres womxn<sup>1</sup> and elders through co-creation and collaboration. Using everyday materials like cassette tapes, food, and textiles, they create spaces of community, joy, and healing, imagining futures that protect Somali cultural heritage in the UK and East Africa. They received the WEVAA fellowship (2023), have been selected for Columbia University’s Digital Dozen (2024), and have been showcased by UK institutions including Watershed, the British Library, Serpentine Gallery, and Moderna Musee (Sweden), the Venice Architecture Biennale (Italy), and the Weltmuseum Vienna (Austria).

## The House of Weaving Songs

*The House of Weaving Songs* is an immersive installation housed within a domed steel structure inspired by the aqal, a traditional Somali dwelling. Inside, visitors encounter 360-degree audio of weaving songs sung by Somali women, played through nomadic tapestries that share stories of tradition and belonging. The installation creates a shared space for reflection and dialogue, inviting visitors to contribute their own hopes while engaging with collective climate anxieties and experiences of displacement. In this modern reimagining of the aqal, sound, fabric, and memory come together to create a calming environment shaped by communal storytelling and intergenerational knowledge.

The installation premiered in 2023 as part of Playable City, commissioned by Watershed and funded by MyWorld, and has since been exhibited in the UK at b-side Festival (Portland), Platforma Festival (Leicester), Southbank Centre (London), Shambala Festival

<sup>1</sup> This chosen spelling of the word ‘woman’ is used by dhaqan collective on their website to include transgender women and nonbinary people.

Case Study Title	Medium	Geographical Areas	Notes
Grassroots approaches in cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Textiles</li> <li>◇ Sound</li> <li>◇ New Technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ UK</li> <li>◇ Somalia</li> </ul>	Quotes by dhaqan collective

dhaqan collective at Play Testing Week, Bristol. Credit: Omar Sultan

(Northamptonshire), the British Textile Biennial (Blackburn) as well as at Playable City (Osaka, Japan), marking its growing presence across arts, cultural, and community-facing institutions.

The concept emerged from the collective's spiritual workshops with Somali communities, where knowledge is shared between elders, families, and young people. One elder, a skilled weaver, became a key inspiration when she "read" her tapestry like sheet music, singing the songs encoded within the pattern of the fabric. This moment prompted the collective to explore Somali weaving more deeply, learning from a nomadic weaver in Melbourne, Australia, and through online sessions. Their experimentation led to an "audible tapestry": a small textile embedded with copper wiring that plays fragments of songs when touched, developed with support from the Watershed and MyWorld in Bristol. This prototype helped shape the final installation and presented weaving as both heritage practice and technological interface.

Initially conceived as a rage room, the installation invited visitors to vocalise frustrations about climate injustice faced by communities in the so-called Global South,<sup>2</sup> as well as the collective's own encounters with racism and condescension in arts institutions.



**The UK has become a hostile environment for anyone who isn't white. This has meant our communities are dealing with a lot of hate. Patronisation. We are struggling and seek to create a space that could be a space for healing, a kind of protective mechanism, a safe space, a place for reprieve.**



A microphone encouraged people to shout or speak out. Over time, however, the atmosphere softened. Workshop participants gravitated toward comfort and healing: mothers sang ancestral weaving songs even if they could not weave, while children played with the microphone's echo. Ancient nomadic songs transformed the space, shifting it from a place of rage to a site of communal healing.

<sup>2</sup> Author's note: Drawing on Valeria Ruiz Perez's article, 'The 'Global South' Is a Concept Well past Its Sell-By Date', which highlights concerns about the term's "geographic inaccuracy, the ways it overlooks significant differences among extremely diverse contexts, its colonial legacy, and, more generally, its undeniable imprecision and inaccuracy", the term "Global South" here is preceded by 'so-called' to ack

## Art-making as community resource

This evolution reflects dhaqan collective's wider practice. Their work is grounded in long-term engagement with Somali communities, building trust through workshops that nurture cultural memory and create spaces for shared reflection. One session led to a school programme where children learn weaving and Somali heritage, an initiative that quickly became popular despite initial concerns about missing classes. Children often bring their learning home, recording videos of their mothers weaving and sending them back to the collective, strengthening intergenerational ties.



**Before we even begin workshops, sharing food - Somali food - is a vital part of the process. It creates a relaxed, familiar space, much like weaving itself, where we can start engaging with the weaving.**



The collective also prioritises work with grassroots organisations that offer essential services, such as breakfast clubs and immigration support, but often lack access to arts resources. Using funds from their own arts grants, they run workshops,



House of Weaving Songs at Playable City Bristol. Credit: Luke O'Donovan



HWS at Journeys Festival International, Leicester. Credit: Pete Morton



HWS at Play Testing Week, Bristol. Credit: Omar Sultan



family days, and provide food, embodying a practice rooted in mutual care and solidarity rather than extractive community engagement.

The cultural and emotional stakes of this work are deeply tied to climate collapse. Many Somali communities face both the legacies of civil war and the accelerating impacts of drought, resource scarcity, and environmental degradation. Migration and displacement disrupt ancestral practices connected to the land, leading some elders (like Fozia's mother) to question the relevance of weaving in new contexts. These ruptures reveal how the climate emergency also affects cultural continuity and intergenerational memory.

❗  
**We began to envision a space surrounded by beautiful nomadic tapestries, a place where people, especially people of colour, could find a moment of respite from the issues they face. As Somali people are on the frontline of climate collapse, we are also grappling with the sense of losing a beautiful legacy: ancestral practices deeply connected to the land.**



Reclaiming weaving and related traditions helps mend these fractures. Community enthusiasm, such as requests for more workshops and stories of weaving supporting elders with dementia, shows a profound need for reconnection. For dhaqan collective, these workshops create spiritual, communal spaces that nourish the public-facing work of their art.

### **dhaqan collective on the wider impact of their work**

dhaqan collective's broader work challenges negative stereotypes of Somali people in the UK and counters mainstream narratives that often overlook Somali women's cultural contributions. Through storytelling, craft, and sound, the collective highlights the artistry and resilience of Somali women, whose poems, songs, and everyday acts of resourcefulness and solidarity often challenge gender norms. Many diaspora members working low-paid jobs send money home to families facing drought and livestock loss, quietly sustaining communities affected by the climate emergency. *The House of Weaving Songs* brings these often-unseen stories into public view, centring everyday acts of care and ensuring that displaced and marginalised voices are heard within wider conversations about climate justice and cultural heritage.

### **Learnings to share with the sector**

dhaqan collective's practice provides:

- **Inspiration for artists**

Their work shows how storytelling, weaving, and music can foster intergenerational connection, cultural continuity, and create spaces of collective healing, making climate and displacement issues tangible and participatory.

- **Examples of change**

*The House of Weaving Songs* has helped pass down traditional skills, supported elders (including those with dementia), engaged Somali youth through schools, and shifted narratives to centre the resilience and voices of displaced communities.

- **Lessons for future programming**

Programming should recognise the expertise of marginalised and diaspora communities, combining traditional knowledge with experimental, innovative forms. Creating spaces for reflection, care, and wellbeing, and grounding projects in community-led approaches ensures that cultural practices shape climate storytelling and strengthen collective resilience.

**Learn more about dhaqan collective**

[www.dhaqan.org](http://www.dhaqan.org)

Follow: [@dhaqancollective](https://twitter.com/dhaqancollective)

# Matthieu Rytz



Matthieu Rytz is a Swiss-Canadian visual anthropologist, photographer, curator, and award-winning filmmaker whose documentaries address subjects of environmental concern. His first documentary, *Anote's Ark* (2018), premiered at Sundance Film Festival (USA) despite pressure from the Kiribati government, which had deported him and prevented a local screening for the community he worked with.

In 2023, Rytz returned to Sundance with *Deep Rising*, an exposé of deep-sea mining dissecting humanity's ecological impact.

## Anote's Ark

This documentary delves into the existential threat faced by the Pacific island nation of Kiribati due to rising sea levels. The film intertwines the efforts of former President Anote Tong, who lobbied internationally to secure a future for his people, with the personal journey of Tiemeri Tiare, a mother of six who emigrates to New Zealand in search of safety. Through compelling storytelling and striking cinematography, the film captures the resilience of a community confronting the loss of their homeland and culture.

The film has collected multiple awards, including the Making an Impact Award at Doc Edge (New Zealand) and the Special Jury Award at Jackson Wild Media Awards (USA), and has been screened at numerous film and human rights festivals.

Case Study Title	Medium	Geographical Area	Notes
Policy change through artful encounters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Documentary Film</li> <li>◇ Photojournalism</li> </ul>	◇ Kiribati	Quotes by Matthieu Rytz

## From photojournalism to filmmaking: a journey into climate diplomacy

Rytz began his career in photojournalism, documenting vulnerable communities, including the Kuna Yala islands in Panama, threatened by rising seas. This led him to Kiribati, where a chance meeting with former President Tong inspired *Anote's Ark*. Drawing on his background in anthropology, Rytz followed former President Tong from 2013 to 2017. This pivotal period in global climate politics saw growing calls for climate justice and included the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement at COP21: the first universal, legally binding global climate accord, where Tong played a key role.

Through the film, Rytz gained access to diplomatic spaces, engaging directly with world leaders and climate negotiators. Though not an official diplomat, he has at times been invited as a delegate and continues to attend high-level meetings, such as UN conferences.

### Honouring relationships with documentary subjects

Initially, former President Tong saw Rytz as a potential platform for amplifying critical messages, particularly around 'migration with dignity', a policy that helps Kiribati

citizens move overseas by improving their job skills and education, and by building support networks in countries like Australia and New Zealand. The goal is to make migration a safe, respectful choice for the future. Tong had worked on its development for 20 years, making it the focal point of his climate advocacy.

Rytz approaches storytelling through the ethical lens of anthropology, prioritising respect, patience, and clearly defined boundaries – an approach that contrasts with filmmakers who stage or manipulate scenes. While this method can be slower and more demanding (especially in communities with strict cultural protocols), it aligns closely with his values. The openness of the I-Kiribati people made the process feel natural and joyful, unlike other regions where, in Rytz's experience, earning trust can be far more complex.

“**I've always adhered to the methodology, ethics, and ontology of anthropology, which, in many ways, are very strict. When I observe some of my fellow filmmakers and the way they approach people, I'm genuinely shocked, based on the principles my teachers taught me never to violate.**”



Behind the scenes of *Anote's Ark*. Used with permission.

### Thoughtful collaborations and partnerships

Rytz sees a growing tension between artistic vision and the expectations of NGOs and funders' focus upon measurable impact. He cautions that films risk becoming tools for campaigns rather than works of art. While feature documentaries rarely shift mass public consciousness on their own, targeted screenings for decision-makers, like politicians and funders, can prompt real systemic change. Building on lessons from *Anote's Ark*, Rytz's second film, *Deep Rising*, led one

investment fund to ban their involvement in deep-sea mining after a screening at a major finance conference.

For reaching wider audiences, shorter formats have become essential. Brief, compelling clips (sometimes as short as 30 seconds) distributed strategically on social media platforms can generate significant engagement. This approach often requires collaboration with social media experts who can maximise visibility and resonance.

His near-burnout after the film highlights another lesson: high-stakes work can

pull filmmakers away from their creative practice. For long-term sustainability, he argues, directors should set clear boundaries and work with NGOs or partners who can carry impact efforts forward, allowing filmmakers to focus on what they do best: telling stories. Strong partnerships ensure audiences are guided toward credible grassroots organisations, without burdening filmmakers with roles beyond their artistic scope.



**When there's momentum, and a lot of people are paying attention, this is how a successful film works. Suddenly, everyone is talking about the story, asking, 'Have you seen that film? Have you heard about it?' And that's when you can start planting seeds of change.**



### **Rytz on the wider impact of Anote's Ark**

Rytz's firsthand experience with global politics revealed its complexity, which he aims to reflect in his films. Rather than traditional activism, he highlights individuals driving change, using hopeful storytelling to engage audiences during key political moments.

While *Anote's Ark* continues to be screened internationally, its impact has already been wide-ranging. Its influence extended to global policy spaces, with screenings at major climate conferences including COP26 (Glasgow) and COP28 (Dubai), where it was used to spark dialogue among negotiators, politicians, and financiers. Within Kiribati, the film provoked both support and controversy, prompting public debate about climate migration and media ethics, further underscoring its role in elevating the country's voice on the world stage.



**When I returned to Kiribati to show the film to the community, they [the government] saw my work as political propaganda. In a way, I was considered dangerous to them. They came to a remote island with a police boat and immigration officials. They confiscated all my equipment, put me under arrest, and deported me from the country. The government is still in place, so it's been really sad because I haven't been able to return to Kiribati for almost nine years.**



### **Learnings to share with the sector**

Rytz's practice provides:

- **Inspiration for artists**  
Rytz demonstrates that ethically-driven, human-centred storytelling can illuminate the lived realities of climate displacement, encouraging artists to approach complex global issues with sensitivity and rigour.
- **Examples of change**  
His films illustrate how cultural projects can influence decision-making, provoke public debate, and generate tangible policy shifts, including investment and migration practices.
- **Lessons for future programming**  
The case study highlights the importance of supporting artists working with vulnerable communities, balancing creative freedom with impact goals, and providing structures for sustainable engagement with sensitive topics.

**Learn more about Matthieu Rytz**

[www.anotesark.com](http://www.anotesark.com)



Behind the scenes of *Anote's Ark*. Used with permission.

# Vivien Sansour



An artist, storyteller, researcher, and conservationist, **Vivien Sansour** works with image, sketches, film, soil, seeds, and plants to breathe new life into ancestral narratives and to advocate for the protection of biodiversity as a cultural and political act.

Her work has been presented at international institutions including the Victoria and Albert Museum and Somerset House (UK), Dutch Design Week (the Netherlands), the Berlin International Film Festival (Germany), and the Chicago Architecture Biennale (USA). Her performance *Autonomia* was selected for the closing programme of the 2019 Venice Art Biennale (Italy).

## Seeds as a symbol for survival

Deeply connected to her homeland, Sansour spent her formative years in Beit Jala in the West Bank, surrounded by crops that had nourished Palestinian communities for generations. Witnessing the decline of these heirloom varieties due to agribusiness, monocropping, and particularly, the violence imposed by the Oslo Accords and the Israeli military and settlers, led her to launch the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library (PHSL) in 2014. Located in the village of Battir, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Occupied Territories of Palestine, this initiative aims to help preserve agricultural biodiversity, protect cultural heritage, and share the stories embedded in these ancient seeds.

In collaboration with local farmers, Sansour began collecting heirloom seeds and archiving them at the library. Farmers borrow seeds, grow them without pesticides, and return an equal amount at the end of the season. The project emerged from a personal sense of urgency, care, and love for both the

Case Study Title	Medium	Geographical Areas	Notes
Seeds as a continuity of memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Moving Image</li> <li>◇ Visual Art</li> <li>◇ Heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ The Occupied Palestinian Territories</li> <li>◇ USA</li> </ul>	Quotes by Vivien Sansour

Vivien Sansour inside the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library in Battir, West Bank.

human and the more-than-human. Witnessing their loss and continuous destruction, she has attempted not only to conserve and save the seeds, but use them as a mechanism for survival that continues the lineage of the Palestinian people. As their stories are inextricably linked to the stories of the soil and seeds, the library's archive functions as a reminder of the population's selfhood.

Over the last 11 years, the seed library has also become a hub for collaboration, providing a platform for artists, poets, writers, journalists, and others to share and promote their work. Stories gathered from Palestinian farmers accompany the seeds wherever they go, offering a foundation for imagining alternative futures. Since the start of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, the urgency and significance of this work has only deepened.



**These seeds are our kin and they hold within them the story - the cultural, the spiritual, and the ancestral story - of who we are. And who we are is under attack.**



## The Seed Protectors Project

A US-based extension of the seed library, the Seed Protectors Project partners with trusted farmers to grow and propagate endangered Palestinian seed varieties. These farmers cultivate the seeds, and share their cultural histories with the communities they serve. In the context of climate fluctuations, the seeds' natural resilience - particularly in drought-prone conditions - makes them vital to future food security. The seed library aims to show that safeguarding valuable biodiversity, in partnership with humans, can support mutual adaptation in a changing world.

At Truelove Seeds Farm in Pennsylvania, more than five Palestinian varieties have been grown in 2024, with *mulukhiyah* (a type of jute plant) being the most successful. Elsewhere in the USA, more than 35 species have been propagated, including *fakous* (a variety of melon treated like a cucumber), *yakteen* gourds, tomato, okra, parsley, coriander, and watermelon. The renowned Jadu'i watermelon, now a global symbol of Palestinian resistance, embodies vital genetic hardiness in the face of a changing climate, while the tomato seeds' 90% germination rate is a testament to their own strength.



Palestine Heirloom Seed Library. Credit: North Carolina Environmental Justice Network



In a powerful act of solidarity, Indigenous Mohawk communities granted sanctuary for a tomato seed harvest in 2024, symbolising a shared understanding of displacement and cultural durability. Today, Palestinian seeds are being cultivated from California to Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and even the mountains of the Maroon people in Jamaica (a group descended from Indigenous Caribbean Arawakan peoples, mixed with Africans who freed themselves from slavery): proof of the project's sprawling impact.

❗  
**Our seed library is being threatened with more and more settler incursions onto the lands of the village of Battir, where our center is. This is how dangerous seeds are. They represent life. They represent the future. A future we are committed to.**

## The People of the Soil

The philosophy of PHSL is captured in *People of the Soil*, or *ahl al thara*, a short film by Sansour presented at the 2025 Somerset House exhibition, *Soil: The World at Our Feet*, in London, UK. The film highlights the way in which Palestinian

people perceive soil as an essential part of their humanity, one that nurtures a culture of rootedness, interdependence and connection standing in contrast to dominant extractive or materialist worldviews.

Mourning ceremonies have also been crucial to Sansour's work since 2024. Held in Colombia, Jamaica, the UK, and the USA, these have held space and created a portal of grief, and all concluding with planting activities in the names of Palestinians murdered since the start of the genocide. In this way, seeds become "helpers and teachers" which mediate collective grief. And by acting as a stark reminder that their endangerment threatens an entire ecosystem, they become vessels which highlight the need for freedom.

While plans for the PHSL's expansion in the Occupied Territories of Palestine are on hold indefinitely, due to internationally illegal but approved settler expansion in Battir, Sansour speaks with deep intentionality about the need to uphold joy and a love of life. Without this, she fears, the Palestinian culture, way of being, and intrinsic bond with nature may vanish.

She envisions creating tender, nurturing spaces for future generations, places where life can continue to take root and grow. Like trees which, she explains, sense community-centred action. From and

wildfire and signal to others to produce more seeds, Sansour believes in preparing the ground for survival. Survival that is regenerative, rooted in care, continuity, and resistance.

❗  
**We may not be able to change the whole world, but what we can do is create more tender spaces wherever we are.**

## Learnings to share with the sector

Sansour's practice provides:

### • Inspiration for artists

Her work shows how creative practice can entwine ecological conservation, cultural heritage, and storytelling, transforming seeds into symbols of survival, resistance, and collective memory. By weaving together human and more-than-human narratives, she models a way for artists to address climate, displacement, and social justice with care, nuance, and imagination.

### • Examples of change

The PHSL and the Seed Protectors Project illustrate how artistic initiatives can extend beyond traditional exhibition spaces into tangible, ecological, and

community-centred action. From local Palestinian farms to Indigenous communities in the USA and Jamaica, her projects demonstrate that creative work can cultivate global networks of solidarity and cultural exchange.

### • Lessons for future programming

Platforms should support long-term, process-driven initiatives that connect audiences with the ecological, cultural, and political contexts of the work, ensuring that artists whose practices are acts of resistance and survival are not sidelined. Her practice underscores the importance of amplifying work that is brave, rooted in community, and oriented toward legacy; projects that safeguard cultural memory and environmental stewardship for future generations, rather than only delivering short-term impact.

### Learn more about Vivien Sansour

[www.viviensansour.com](http://www.viviensansour.com)

[www.palestineheirloomseedlibrary.com](http://www.palestineheirloomseedlibrary.com)

Follow: [@paliheirloomseedlibrary](https://www.instagram.com/paliheirloomseedlibrary)

# Climate Spring



**Climate Spring** is a global organisation transforming how the climate crisis is represented in film, television, and popular culture. It champions powerful storytelling that shifts narratives, sparks imagination, and inspires action. It also supports the screen industries with development funding for scripted and unscripted projects; editorial consulting on climate narratives in film and TV projects; training and world-building workshops; writers' development opportunities; and bespoke advice to help projects move from idea to distribution.

To date, Climate Spring has funded, co-financed, and consulted on more than 70 film and TV projects, spanning genres from crime and thriller to romantic comedy. Climate Spring is also home to the [Climate Fiction Prize](#) - the first literary award of its kind, celebrating novels tackling the climate crisis - and is a campaign partner of [Green Rider](#), an actor-led movement dedicated to making the screen industries greener, cleaner, and fairer.

## Inspiration for writers and filmmakers

At the heart of Climate Spring's work is a commitment to compelling justice-centred storytelling. The organisation urges creatives to move away from disaster tropes or narratives of victimhood, and instead foreground resilience, leadership, and innovation. Migration, for example, should not only be framed as disastrous but as a long-standing adaptive human response, containing possibilities for renewal and transformation.

Josh Cockcroft's guidance for storytellers includes:

- ∞ Frame displacement as adaptive rather than catastrophic; audiences engage more with stories of growth and regeneration
- ∞ Make climate integral to story-worlds, shaping character, setting, or plot, regardless of genre
- ∞ Prioritise story first; climate issues are most powerful when embedded in emotionally compelling narratives, not explained in the form of lecture

Case Study Title	Medium	Geographical Areas	Notes
Guidance for writers and filmmakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Film and TV Consultancy</li> <li>◇ Climate Storytelling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ UK</li> <li>◇ International</li> </ul>	Quotes by Josh Cockcroft

Climate Spring hosts World Building Workshop for San Sebastian Film Festival, 2024.



*There Will Come Soft Rains*, Climate Spring's The Hot House winning project, 2023. Credit: Ella Dowling Gubb

∞ Be specific: just as no single story can fully tackle an issue such as racism, no single narrative can encompass the climate crisis. Stories set in specific communities, and geographies, will illustrate what feels like an insurmountable issue and make it accessible, and will connect with audiences in a more targeted way.



If it's positioned as an insurmountable problem, the best human defence is to not think about it.



## Examples of change

You don't have to look far to see how cultural narratives shift public opinion. While few onscreen projects tackle climate displacement directly, Climate Spring points to immigration stories in films like *The Swimmers* (2022) or series including *Ramy* (2019–) and *Mo* (2022–2025). These examples show how much audiences can connect emotionally when stories are grounded in lived experience.

In its World Building programme, Climate Spring brings together writers, creatives, world-building experts, futurists, and climate specialists to co-create stories set in the near future. The programme imagines how starting to transition to a regenerative future might look and feel.

The organisation hosts regular world-building workshops for their community (climate-aware storytellers, screen-industry creatives, and experts collaborating to shape compelling climate narratives), and at festivals and industry markets around the world, providing practical frameworks, translating science, technology, and solutions into creative inspiration, and creating collaborative spaces for storytelling innovation.

Climate Spring also works to lower barriers for underrepresented writers. Initiatives like the Hot House writers' development lab, which supports emerging writers from marginalised backgrounds, and provides retreats for diverse voices, illustrating how industry access can be widened. These efforts remind creatives that their voices and the communities they represent are vital to reshaping the cultural response to climate change.



In order to be able to fully engage with the climate crisis and work through the solutions, we need to have some ideas of what we're heading towards and be able to empower people to tackle it rather than be stuck in paralysis in the face of this kind of invincible challenge.



## Lessons for storytellers

- **Challenge dominant myths**  
Fossil fuel companies have long shaped cultural imagination. Use storytelling to disrupt extractive narratives and propose new ones.
- **Anchor stories in lived experience**  
Work with experts and communities to ground stories in authenticity, especially when exploring climate displacement or migration.
- **Blend creativity with commerciality**  
Climate stories don't need to be niche; they can drive mainstream entertainment across all genres.
- **Seek community**  
Tackle complex themes with the support of peers and networks like Climate Spring, which offer guidance and solidarity.

• **Recognise your influence**

Every story shapes how audiences see the world, whether or not this is intended. Be conscious of the cultural impact that narratives carry and use that power.

Writers and filmmakers hold cultural power. By reframing climate narratives with nuance, specificity, empathy, and agency, creatives can play a crucial role in shifting public understanding and helping to open space for political and systemic change. This work is not about competition, but collaboration, recognising that even if storytellers take different approaches, they are all contributing to a shared cultural shift. The most important lesson is to remain open, enterprising, and intentional, understanding that every story has an impact, whether or not it is consciously designed to.



You're living in a world where the narrative has been constructed for you, by people with vested interests.



Learn more about Climate Spring

[www.climate-spring.org](http://www.climate-spring.org)

Follow: [@climate\\_spring](https://twitter.com/climate_spring)

Join Climate Spring's [community newsletter](#)



*More Flames*, short film still written and directed by Jack Cooper Stimpson, 2024.  
Co-executive produced by Climate Spring and Adam McKay's Yellow Dot Studios.

# Soumik Datta



**Soumik Datta** is a British Indian musician and composer whose practice bridges classical Indian music with contemporary global concerns. A master of the sarod, a 19-string instrument central to North Indian classical tradition, Datta trained in India under the legendary Buddhadev Das Gupta, and is an Honorary Fellow at Trinity Laban Conservatoire, London (UK), and a recipient of the prestigious Aga Khan Music Award.

His work has included a studio residency at the Southbank Centre and performances at iconic events and venues such as the BBC Proms, Glastonbury Festival, and St Paul's Cathedral. While rooted in musical heritage, his recent work navigates more urgent terrain: climate change, migration, and cultural loss.

## Songs of the Earth

Datta traces his climate focus to moments of cultural resilience he has witnessed amid ecological loss, from displaced communities in the Sundarbans to the fading sound of the sarod, traditionally made from Burmese teak now disappearing due to deforestation. These experiences informed *Songs of the Earth*, a short animated film commissioned in 2021 by the British Council's Creative Commissions for Climate Action programme, and created in India with illustrators Sachin Bhatt and Anjali Kamat. An eight-track album was developed alongside the film as a musical response to the climate crisis.

The idea for the film emerged from Datta's conversations with the Earth Day Network in India, which shared reports of children orphaned or displaced by climate-related disasters, particularly flooding in Eastern India. Datta noted the impact these accounts made on him, as did the absence of official recognition for the term 'climate refugee'. This prompted deeper research, including interviews with experts in climate

Case Study Title	Medium	Geographical Areas	Notes
Weaving climate, memory, and music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Music</li> <li>◇ Animation</li> <li>◇ Film</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ India</li> <li>◇ UK</li> </ul>	Quotes by Soumik Datta

Soumik Datta performing at the *Notes on Compassion* event, Refugee Week, Southbank Centre, 2023. Credit: Paul Gilbey

law, ethics, agriculture, and hydrology. From these conversations he developed a fictional narrative based on Asha (meaning 'hope' in Hindi and Bengali), a young climate-displaced girl from Bengal. Her journey to find her father became a way to explore the emotional dimensions of the climate crisis through a child's perspective.

The film drew significant attention, with preview screenings at 10 Downing Street, the Royal Albert Hall, and the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, before premiering at COP26 in Glasgow. In India, it was widely shown in schools, where Datta recalls children expressing strong identification with Asha's story, either through their own experiences or those of their friends. To extend engagement, an interactive companion book, *Fields of Hope*, was distributed through school networks, offering background on the film's themes, from soil erosion to Inuit community experiences, alongside digital tools for further exploration.

## Art, privilege, and gentle disruption

Datta speaks openly about the arts operating within privileged and centralised spaces. In his view, raising questions about privilege, consumption, and ethical responsibility can alienate audiences or institutions who prefer art to remain apolitical, and may even feel like a

"bad business decision". Yet he argues that meaningful change requires confronting this discomfort: "Once we sit at peace with that, then we can move forward." His climate-focused practice, developed in collaboration with dramaturg Zoë Svendsen, aims to encourage critical reflection without accusation, using lived experience to gently shift perspectives.



**My sarods have always been made of tun [Indian mahogany or red cedar]. Later I realised that, in the past, they used to be made out of teak. And the teak used to come from Burma [aka Myanmar]. I wondered what a teak instrument would sound like... but the forests that they used to come from don't exist anymore. And I found that fascinating because not only is that about the clearing of fertile land, but there's also a sound that a teak sarod made, which is different from the mahogany sarod. And that sound has disappeared.**



## Recommendations for organisations supporting artists from displaced backgrounds

Soumik Datta Arts, the charity co-founded by Datta, produces collaborative work across music, film, theatre, and



digital media while platforming emerging artists from South Asian and migrant communities. One recent initiative, the Green Room Collective, brought together seven migrant and refugee-background artists to explore themes of home and displacement, and inspire a better-informed and more empathetic society.

Reflecting on the programme, Datta acknowledged the limits of what can be provided under current conditions, particularly constrained funding, infrastructure, and staffing. He emphasised that initiatives of this type require more than space or resources alone; they also demand empathy, individualised support, and an understanding of the specific needs of displaced artists. In his view, such

projects cannot be treated as typical artistic collaborations. Organisations must consider what it truly means to work with a community, and shape their support systems accordingly. As he advises:



**Any organisation that has any kind of space (a foyer, a meeting room, a small hall), please invite artists from these communities to use it, to talk and hold space for each other... None of the usual studio or rehearsal spaces offer a place for communal healing.**



## Practising hope, not perfection

Datta frames hope as a form of creative resilience. For artists working within overwhelming global crises, he describes hope as the ability to keep creating even when it feels futile. He encourages artists to rethink conventional standards of beauty, arguing for work that engages directly with the “ugliness” of real-world issues. Even if such work does not receive the same acclaim as previous projects, he urges courage in confronting the climate crisis through art. As he puts it:



As human beings, we can't really process the ice caps melting unless it's affecting you... It's too large, too abstract. Lived experience is key to saying anything through art.



## Learnings to share with the sector

Datta's practice provides:

### • Inspiration for artists

His work shows how lived experience and cultural memory can translate overwhelming climate statistics into tangible, emotional narratives. By framing climate loss as cultural loss (such as the disappearance of sounds from vanished

forests), he inspires artists to draw on their own heritage and personal stories to engage audiences with climate issues.

### • Examples of change

Projects like *Songs of the Earth* have reached policymakers, schools, and international audiences, demonstrating how creative storytelling can open dialogue across sectors. Screenings at COP26 and workshops in Indian schools reveal the potential for arts projects to both influence policy spaces and resonate deeply with the communities most affected by climate displacement.

### • Lessons for future programming

His work highlights the importance of providing displaced and migrant artists with more than short-term commissions, offering instead sustained support, empathetic spaces for dialogue, and opportunities for collective healing. Datta also shows that gentle disruption is a powerful approach: art can challenge privilege and prompt reflection without alienating audiences, helping institutions navigate sensitive conversations around climate and displacement.

### Learn more about Soumik Datta

[www.soumikdatta.com](http://www.soumikdatta.com)

Follow [@soumikdatta](https://twitter.com/soumikdatta)



*Songs of the Earth* film still

# Edward Lawrenson



**Edward Lawrenson** is a Scottish filmmaker and writer based in London. His film, *Abandoned Goods* (2015), co-directed with Pia Borg, won the Golden Leopard for Best International Short at the Locarno Film Festival (Switzerland), and was also selected for the Sundance Film Festival (USA), among others. *Uppland* (2018) premiered at Cinéma du réel, (France), and was subsequently shown at several international festivals, including Open City Documentary Festival (UK). *A Safer Place* (2021) was screened at a special Refugee Tales event and at the Second International Conference on the Rohingya Crisis at University College London (UCL; UK).

## **A Safer Place: Exploring the moral and emotional dimensions of depicting human vulnerability**

Lawrenson's short documentary, *A Safer Place*, examines the complex and urgent humanitarian crisis of climate-induced displacement among the Rohingya people. Focusing on the vast Kutupalong Refugee Camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, the world's largest refugee settlement, the film explores the search for safety in a world where home is no longer an option and the future is increasingly shaped by environmental collapse.

Lawrenson's involvement with *A Safer Place* began while teaching at UCL, where proximity to the Department of Risk and Disaster Reduction led him to Dr. Bayes Ahmed, who was researching disaster perceptions in Rohingya refugee camps. Invited to join a field trip to Cox's Bazar, Lawrenson witnessed the realities of the camps firsthand, deepening his understanding of the humanitarian and environmental challenges.

Case Study Title	Medium	Geographical	Notes
The stillness within displacement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Film</li> <li>◇ Moving Image</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Scotland</li> <li>◇ UK</li> <li>◇ Bangladesh</li> </ul>	Quotes by Edward Lawrenson

Edward Lawrenson. Used with permission.

Dr. Ahmed's voice, captured in the short film, explains the team's efforts to introduce an early warning system in the camps, designed to help people from refugee backgrounds prepare for the severe impacts of the monsoon season. However, the fact that residents are not allowed to leave the camp further complicates matters of safety, protection, and survival.

Reflecting on the ethics of interviewing people in difficult and vulnerable situations, Lawrenson emphasises that his role in the film was to document a conversation that was already taking place as part of an established and carefully managed research process. There was no predetermined script or impact agenda. The survey he documented had undergone several stages, including ethical vetting and securing informed consent from participants. This meant that those involved had a clear understanding of what was happening, and the surveyor was able to explain Lawrenson's presence and role to the participants. This gave him confidence that his involvement was respectful and appropriately integrated into the ongoing work.

The film moves between images of tourists at a nearby beach, children in the camp singing and playing together, and views of the camp itself, but does not include adults' faces. The choice not to show

them in the film emerged from discussions within the wider team. Lawrenson expressed concern that leaving them out might "efface their experiences", but also felt that depicting people in states of "abject vulnerability" could be inappropriate.



**There isn't a developed image of the future for many people in the camp. One of the few that does exist is the idea that a monsoon might come. That's a pretty grim way to live, caught between a traumatic immediate past and this looming disaster of the future. And then not going anywhere physically, but also not going anywhere in terms of one's sense of time. It's a very difficult place to be.**



### Time, displacement, and stasis

A poignant thread running through the conversation with Lawrenson is the concept of people being "stuck", not just physically, but temporally. Lawrenson notes that, for many Rohingya refugees, time itself feels frozen. The future is imagined only as a monsoon or other looming threat, while the past remains a traumatic anchor. This temporal stasis problematises narratives of progress and



A Safer Place film stills



resolution, inviting creative practitioners to portray displacement as both a physical reality and an existential experience.



**[A Safer Place] is about migration, but it's also about being stuck.**



### Screenings for change

Projects like *A Safer Place*, which sit at the intersection of art, anthropology, migration, and climate, don't necessarily 'fit' into traditional film festivals. Like the communities it represents, the work itself is dislocated. Reflecting on the most appropriate screening venues and relevant audiences for this film, Lawrenson stepped outside of a filmmaker's traditional role. He sought out conferences where he felt the film needed to be present, including the Refugee Tales special screening and the Second International Conference on the Rohingya Crisis at UCL.

This perhaps points to the urgent need for new infrastructures: community-led screenings, artist-organised networks, and hybrid artistic/academic platforms, where work like this can live and be contextualised meaningfully.

As Lawrenson states:



**We don't need permission to make a film... we don't need permission to go out and show it.**



This is both a liberating and challenging idea, especially for artists navigating systems shaped by institutional gatekeeping. Lawrenson understands impact in broader terms: alongside commercial markers like festival awards or audience reach, he values the process and the relationships built with participants, specialists, and audiences. These interactions, he suggests, are a form of meaningful impact in themselves, independent of policy or statistics. The film doesn't claim to fix anything. Instead, it offers a glimpse, a moment of witnessing.

### Learnings to share with the sector

Lawrenson's practice provides:

#### • Inspiration for artists

His work goes beyond showing the physical realities of climate displacement; it offers an insight into its existential dimensions, such as the feeling of being "stuck in time". By engaging respectfully with participants and resisting simplified narratives of progress or resolution, he models an ethical and deeply human approach.

#### • Examples of change

*A Safer Place* expanded the role of creative practice beyond traditional film festival circuits, challenging conventional expectations of where and how films should be shown. Reaching academic, activist, and policy-focused audiences at events such as the Refugee Tales programme and the International Conference on the Rohingya Crisis shows how artistic work can stimulate dialogue across disciplines and bring refugee voices into spaces of research and policymaking.

#### • Lessons for future programming

His practice highlights the need for new infrastructures (community-led screenings

hybrid artistic/academic platforms, and artist-organised networks) to ensure that work dealing with climate displacement can be contextualised and shared meaningfully. He also underscores the importance of ethical integrity: ensuring informed consent, embedding creative work within trusted research processes, and recognising that building relationships and bearing witness can be as valuable as conventional measures of impact.

**Learn more about Edward Lawrenson**

[www.edwardlawrenson.com](http://www.edwardlawrenson.com)



# Emmanuela Yogolelo



**Emmanuela Yogolelo** is a singer, storyteller, and performer committed to preservation, using music and multidisciplinary arts to address the climate emergency and environmental destruction through a lens of justice. Originally from eastern Congo and based in Manchester since 2003, she co-founded Amani Creatives in 2015, a collective supporting African artists (many from refugee backgrounds) and promoting African arts in all their forms.

Alongside her performances, E. Yogolelo leads community arts initiatives for migrants and refugees, mentoring the next generation of artists. She has appeared at major UK festivals and venues, including the Southbank Centre’s Women of the World Festival, Manchester International Festival, and Manchester Jazz Festival, and has toured internationally.

## Music and climate

E. Yogolelo’s work explores the profound impact of mineral extraction in Africa, on both the land and the people who depend upon it - particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). During the COVID-19 pandemic, she began to formally connect social and environmental justice, explaining that, “as a so-called Global South citizen”, she has “no other choice”.

From the outset, she noticed that key perspectives (especially from the so-called Global South) were missing from climate conversations. Her practice seeks to amplify these voices through a justice-based framing of the crisis, recognising its deep links to inequality, democracy, freedom, and the rights of nature.



**Although climate change is a global crisis, it is experienced differently based on where you live in the world, or based on who you are.**



Case Study Title	Medium	Geographical Areas	Notes
Small is all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Music</li> <li>◇ Moving Image</li> <li>◇ Storytelling</li> <li>◇ Heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ UK</li> <li>◇ Democratic Republic of Congo</li> </ul>	Quotes by Emmanuela Yogolelo

Emmanuela Yogolelo speaking at Manchester Histories event. Credit: Manchester Histories



E. Yogolelo at the Southbank Centre, Refugee Week, London, 2023. Credit: Counterpoints Arts

In the DRC, the connection between climate change and displacement extends beyond visible environmental impacts like the droughts, floods, and wildfires that threaten farmland and homes. Less acknowledged drivers include environmental destruction from mining, land expropriation, and the enduring legacy of exploitative global politics.

Toxic chemicals used in mineral extraction poison ecosystems and endanger human health. Multinational corporations, often operating with little accountability, have been linked to fuelling armed conflict and displacing communities without compensation. This leads not only to the loss of homes, but also of culture, language, identity, and livelihoods. Women and marginalised groups are particularly affected.

The DRC has among the world's highest numbers of internally displaced people,<sup>1</sup> yet media narratives often reduce this to migration into Europe. E. Yogolelo highlights the need for refugee and asylum frameworks to recognise climate-induced displacement if responses are to be just.

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR. "DR Congo Emergency." UNHCR, accessed July 1, 2025. <https://www.unhcr.org/europe/emergencies/dr-congo-emergency>

<sup>2</sup> "Small is all" is a phrase coined by adrienne maree brown in *Emergent Strategy*, which emphasises that profound change begins with small, intentional actions. brown, adrienne maree. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. AK Press, 2017

## Tales from the Congo Basin: call and response in live performance

Through her performance *Tales from the Congo Basin* (commissioned by HOME Manchester, Community Arts North West, and Counterpoints in 2021), E. Yogolelo creates live spaces for dialogue, empathy, and reflection. Combining music, storytelling, sound, and improvisation, the piece draws on the African practice of call and response, inviting audiences to contribute through body percussion, singing, or spontaneous words that reflect their own understanding of climate issues.

This participatory approach allows audiences to consider perspectives different from their own. Many leave with a deeper awareness of how climate intersects with human rights, conflict, and identity, often sparking personal change. Some audience members have been inspired to use their own artistic practice to engage with climate, echoing adrienne maree brown's idea that "small is all"<sup>2</sup>: small shifts ripple outward.

The Congo Basin stretches across six countries and holds the second largest rainforest on the planet, as well as the world's deepest river. Struck by how little media attention fires in Africa received compared to those in Australia or the Amazon, E. Yogolelo felt compelled to raise awareness about this imbalance.

She also recalls childhood moments spent under a tree, listening to elders share stories, with the community joining in through music, rhythm, improvisation, and dance. Now, she looks forward to hearing others' perspectives on climate via this piece.



**The musician can become a voice for the voiceless. There are people who don't have the platform you do. If they did, they would denounce many injustices – but they can't even access that space. As a musician, you have access to a wider population, so it's easier to inform and raise awareness.**



## Climate, conflict and resources in Africa: depicting hidden narratives

E. Yogolelo extends her impact beyond live performance. In *Climate, Conflict and Resources in Africa*, a short social media film commissioned by Crossing Footprints, she narrates how minerals from the DRC (cobalt, copper, coltan, diamonds, and gold) are extracted for Western use, only to return in toxic form. The piece draws attention to concealed drivers of displacement and the global systems that perpetuate them, making complex issues accessible to wider audiences.

Participating in the film marked a turning point in E. Yogolelo's artistic journey. The project enabled her to develop new skills in filmmaking and storytelling, while also expanding her songwriting practice into the climate justice space. By creating and performing music for the film, she collaborated with musicians in the UK and connected with civil society organisations in the DRC campaigning on environmental issues. This not only raised her profile internationally but also deepened her role as both an artist and advocate within the climate movement.



**During apartheid, people used music to stand up against it. When fighting for women's rights or advocating for human rights, they also turned to music."**



E. Yogolelo stresses that the cultural sector must recognise the vital role of refugee and global-majority artists. Rooted in multicultural societies like the UK, these artists are often closest to the realities of climate displacement, whether through lived experience or inherited stories from families and homelands. Their perspectives are essential to shaping an inclusive climate justice movement.

## Learnings to share with the sector

E. Yogolelo's practice provides:

- **Inspiration for artists**

Her work shows how music and storytelling can open difficult conversations about climate and displacement in ways that are participatory and empathetic.

- **Examples of change**

Her performances spark audience awareness and inspire other artists to explore climate themes. She has paved the way for African artists such as Amani Collective in Manchester to gain access to professional scenes.

- **Lessons for future programming**

She highlights the need for the UK cultural sector to recognise the contributions of refugee and global-majority artists, whose perspectives are essential to climate justice. Even when not directly experiencing climate impacts, these artists often carry community stories that enrich climate discourse and policymaking.

**Learn more about E. Yogolelo**

[E. Yogolelo's YouTube channel](#)



Tales of the Congo Basin at HOME Manchester, 2021. Credit: Kooj Chahun



E. Yogolelo at the Southbank Centre, Refugee Week, London, 2023. Credit: Counterpoints Arts



E. Yogoelo performing at the Southbank Centre, Refugee Week, 2023. Credit: Counterpoints Arts

# DISPLACEMENT: Uncertain Journeys



**DISPLACEMENT**, the cultural partner of the **Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD)**, was co-founded and curated by the late **Chris Wainwright** with lawyer and curator **Hannah Entwisle Chapuisat**. After a decade of working within the UN and humanitarian systems, Entwisle Chapuisat saw how policy debates on disaster displacement often became abstract, technical, and disconnected from lived experience. Her response was to bring artists into these spaces as collaborators and experts, capable of translating complexity into tangible, emotional encounters.

Because access to policy spaces is limited, artists must engage constructively with governments and intergovernmental bodies. **DISPLACEMENT** avoids overly confrontational work that could close doors, instead supporting artists committed to dialogue and contributing to solutions on disaster displacement. For artists, their work shows the possibility of engaging directly with international policy, and shapes the way decision-makers think and feel.

## Examples of change

Through partnerships like the COAL Prize and the Norwegian Refugee Council, **DISPLACEMENT** has supported artists to refine their work in dialogue with global experts, and to present projects at key events from the UN to COP climate conferences.

- *You Never Know, One Day You Too May Become a Refugee* by Lena Dobrowolska and Teo Ormond-Skeaping is a film set in 2043 that follows a family displaced from a fictional European island to a refugee detention centre. The project won the 2019 COAL Prize and was developed through support by **DISPLACEMENT** and PDD through extensive conversations with delegates at the 2019 COP25 in Madrid, where policymakers engaged directly with the artists, linking the film's personal narrative of displacement to ongoing policy discussions. The script was further developed with refugee law and other disaster displacement specialists in PDD's Advisory Committee, with the final film presented to experts and policymakers, most recently in a

Case Study	Medium	Geographical Areas	Notes
Art as a catalyst in policy conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Visual Art</li> <li>◇ Film</li> <li>◇ Installation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Switzerland</li> <li>◇ Multiple geographies</li> </ul>	Quotes by Hannah Entwisle Chapuisat

June 2025 [screening](#) in Geneva hosted by the Governments of Kenya and PDD.

- Visual artist Marie Velardi and anthropologist Rhino Ariefiansyah created the speculative film *Aléa (Hazard)* using real displacement scenarios shared by DISPLACEMENT. Set four years after Storm Xynthia devastated Vendée (France) in 2010, the silent film pairs imagery with subtitles drawn from interviews with residents who were displaced and those who stayed. Shown as part of the DISPLACEMENT exhibition at the 2022 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GP 2022) in Bali (Indonesia), the work helped spark ideas that might not surface around a conference table. The project also proposed potential policy responses to climate displacement, including a School for Natural Hazards to help coastal communities relearn traditional ways of “reading the sea”, drawing inspiration from Indonesia’s 1980s farmer field schools.
- Also at GP 2022, other artists, like Gustaff H. Iskandar, have spoken directly alongside policy experts about their work with Indigenous communities and its role in preserving local knowledge and imagination, making the case for art as a form of research and knowledge production. His non-profit, *Common Room Networks Foundation (Common*

*Room)*, in Bandung, Indonesia, applies artistic strategies to disaster risk-reduction in the Cipatagelar Indigenous community in rural West Java, Indonesia. *Common Room* encompasses projects like:

- ◇ *Sawen Lembur*, in which Arum Dayu and Yoyo Yogasmana document protection rituals performed to safeguard homes and villages
- ◇ *The School of Community Networks*, which supports the creation of community-run internet infrastructure across remote areas in nine provinces
- ◇ *Mangrove Hacklab*, a programme that works with local leaders and authorities to develop early-warning systems using Internet of Things (IoT) sensors and smartphones, and to strengthen mangrove conservation through ecotourism and sustainable aquaculture.

In these spaces, strategic framing has been essential. At COP25 in Madrid, for instance, the French climate ambassador introduced the COAL Prize-winning artists to the audience, signalling that the work was integral to the conference rather than peripheral. When presented in this way, artworks are remembered not as meaningful contributions to global debates. Policymakers often recall these encounters more vividly than policy papers or speeches.



Artist Søren Dahlggaard speaking about his artwork, *The Inflatable Island*, at the UN Disaster Risk Reduction Office, Geneva, Switzerland, 2019. Credit: DISPLACEMENT

## Lessons for future programming

The experience of DISPLACEMENT offers clear advice for those wanting to bring creative work into policy arenas:

- ∞ Curate strategically: match the form of the work to the constraints of policy events, and seek support from high-level figures to legitimise its presence.
- ∞ Position artists as experts: advocate for artistic practice as research in its own right, and encourage funders to support art-led knowledge-production alongside traditional studies.
- ∞ Aim beyond awareness: policy audiences are already well-informed. The most effective works create empathy, challenge assumptions, and shift perspectives in ways that statistics cannot.
- ∞ Explore unusual venues: policy engagement does not need to happen only in formal institutions and processes. Non-traditional sites, from shopping malls to national pavilions, can open up informal dialogue between publics and policymakers in unexpected ways.
- ∞ Build mutual learning: artists gain by grounding their practice in policy realities, while policymakers benefit from the imagination, humanity, and new perspectives art brings.



**It's a long haul; change is gradual. When I started working on disasters and displacement 20 years ago, after the [2004] tsunami, people said you couldn't be internally displaced by disasters, only by conflict. I've seen an evolution where we acknowledge that displacement can happen in the context of disasters and climate change. So it takes time for ideas to evolve, and even longer for them to be reflected in law and policy.**



By embedding creative practice within the machinery of policymaking, DISPLACEMENT shows how art can help connect lived experience to more abstract debates. It suggests a pathway for artists and cultural organisations to engage meaningfully in policy spaces, bringing depth, empathy, and fresh thinking.

**Learn more about DISPLACEMENT**

[www.displacementjourneys.org](http://www.displacementjourneys.org)



**Top left:** Delegates to Civil Society Days of GFMD carry Søren Dahlgaard's *The Inflatable Island*, Marrakesh, Morocco, 2018. Credit: Gorm Ashurst

**Top right:** Artist Lucy Orta hands an Antarctica World Passport to the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, H.E. Shahidul Haque at the GFMD. Credit: Gorm Ashurst

**Bottom left:** Delegate interviewed about *The Inflatable Island* at GFMD. Credit: DISPLACEMENT



**Middle right:** Artists Lena Dobrowolska and Teo Ormond-Skeaping discuss the film *You Never Know, One Day You Too May Become a Refugee* with COP25 delegates at the French Pavilion, 2019. Credit: DISPLACEMENT

**Bottom right:** Gustaff Hriman Iskandar and Reina Wulansari from *Common Room* speak with Global Platform delegates about their work at the Innovation Platform booth, 2022. Credit: DISPLACEMENT

# Thematic Analysis



Across the case studies, a set of recurring themes emerges that spotlight how artists and culture organisations are grappling with the pressing challenges of the climate emergency and its associated displacement.

While each artist's practice is unique, together they map out a landscape of cultural strategies that can help societies confront and reimagine their future.

## **Storytelling as knowledge and resistance**

A central theme is the role of storytelling in preserving memory and shaping collective understanding. For Rytz, film becomes a tool to humanise policy debates at climate summits; while *DISPLACEMENT* frames artistic practice as research in its own right, capable of producing knowledge that conventional studies overlook; and Sansour highlights narrative as a means of protecting cultural memory under threat, integrating oral histories and intergenerational knowledge as a form of resistance.

These case studies demonstrate that storytelling is a vehicle for authority, dignity, and survival.

## Collaboration and trust-building

Another strong thread is the importance of long-term, embedded collaborations. dhaqan collective emphasises working alongside grassroots groups and elders, especially women, cultivating trust over time to ensure cultural continuity. Similarly, Lawrenson underscores the value of slow storytelling that privileges presence over outputs.

In both cases, the call is for cultural organisations to move away from extractive models and towards deeper, sustained partnerships that prioritise care, reciprocity, and mutual respect.

## Art as healing and resilience

Several case studies highlight how art provides space for healing, grief, and regeneration. Datta positions creativity as a tool of survival, encouraging artists to practise hope as resilience even when confronting systemic injustice. Sansour expands this further by curating land-based rituals and spaces for mourning, recognising grief as a generative and political force. dhaqan collective's focus on weaving and song also shows how ancestral practices can nurture solidarity and continuity in the face of displacement.

Collectively, these examples affirm art's capacity to hold both pain and possibility, offering communities restoration.

## Challenging dominant narratives

Many artists actively contest prevailing narratives of climate and displacement. E. Yogolelo challenges Eurocentric climate discourses by centring migrant voices and highlighting the interconnected injustices of conflict, capitalism, and colonialism. Climate Spring works to counter doom-laden climate narratives, reframing them as stories of agency and regeneration. Datta cautions against mistaking applause for impact, reminding us that storytelling must disrupt comfort and challenge privilege if it is to create real change.

## Art as a bridge to policy and systemic change

Finally, these case studies demonstrate how the arts provide perspectives that are essential to understanding structural challenges. Rytz's film *Anote's Ark* brings human context into high-level negotiations; Lawrenson highlights the need for policymakers to acknowledge the temporal dimensions of displacement, not only its logistical aspects, and E. Yogolelo and dhaqan collective underscore the importance of integrating lived experience and cultural knowledge into education systems.

# Recommendations

The practices highlighted offer rich insights into how the cultural sector can contribute meaningfully to justice, care, and resilience in the face of crisis. The recommendations below synthesise lessons drawn from across the case studies, translating them into actionable guidance for three groups of stakeholders: arts and cultural organisations, artists and creatives, and policymakers and educators. While their roles differ, each holds responsibility in shaping narratives, infrastructures, and systems that can either perpetuate harm or open space for more just and hopeful futures.

## For artists and creatives

- **Cultivate ethical, community-rooted artistic practice**

Engage with communities through non-extractive, relationship-centred methods that prioritise mutual care, respect, and clearly defined boundaries. Work in collaboration with grassroots organisations, honour cultural protocols, and allow time for trust-building processes. Uphold ethical storytelling by avoiding manipulation, embracing patience, and valuing local knowledge as an equal partner in the creative process.

- **Draw from heritage and land-based knowledge**

Reinterpret ancestral practices, collaborate with growers, elders, and non-artists, and treat creative practice as stewardship of ecosystems and memory.

- **Craft place-rooted narratives to clarify the climate emergency**

Create stories grounded in specific communities, geographies, and lived experiences, recognising that no single narrative can encompass the full scale of

the climate crisis. By working with local contexts and particularity, complex issues can become more tangible, emotionally resonant, and accessible to diverse audiences.

- **Be bold and participatory**

Challenge privilege and linear narratives of recovery, and experiment with interactive forms that break down the performer-audience divide. Be cautious about interpreting acclaim or applause as a measure of success; audiences' positive reactions may not correspond to meaningful behavioural change.

- **Preserve cultural memory through intergenerational creative practice**

Reclaim traditional activities to support elders, strengthen intergenerational connection, and create communal spaces where climate and displacement stories can be shared. Ensure cultural practices remain central to climate storytelling and collective resilience.

- **Enable impacts where permission isn't necessary**

Use alternative venues and grassroots

networks to share your work. This can include cultivating global networks of solidarity and cultural exchange outside of traditional exhibition spaces. Instead, even without institutional validation, it is possible to build your own routes of dissemination with the communities and stakeholders who matter most.

- **Stay a learner and think beyond awareness**

Engage actively with experts and policymakers to ground work in the practical realities of complex issues of climate displacement. Create work that challenges assumptions, provokes emotional connection, and shifts perspective, rather than simply providing audiences with factual information about these topics. This can be done by using gentle disruption as a tool to challenge privilege and prompt reflection without alienating audiences.

- **Reframe what impact might look like**

Maintain awareness that the process of making work, and the relationships built during this process are a form of meaningful impact in themselves, as much as commercial markers like festival awards, audience reach, policy, or statistics.

## For arts and cultural organisations

- **Centre community leadership**  
Build long-term, trust-based collaborations with displaced, diasporic, and frontline communities, creating agile funding models to run arts initiatives that resonate with local needs. Prioritise grassroots initiatives, non-traditional venues, and formats that meet people where they are. Provide communities with platforms which do not exploit them or extract knowledge or information.
- **Champion underrepresented voices**  
Broaden industry access for refugee, migrant, Indigenous, and global-majority artists, recognising their foundational contributions to cultural life and their lived ties to climate and displacement. Drawing on these voices means that these complex global issues can be illuminated with sensitivity and rigour, showing the lived realities of climate displacement via an ethical, human-centred approach.
- **Reframe narratives**  
Challenge and disrupt fossil fuel companies' stranglehold on the cultural imagination by proposing alternative narratives.
- **Recognise interconnected injustices**  
Approach climate work through an

intersectional lens that acknowledges the complex interconnectedness of conflict, capitalism, colonial legacies, displacement, and environmental degradation.

- **Champion artists as experts**  
Advocate for recognising artistic practice as research and knowledge production, encouraging funders to support art-led research alongside traditional studies.
- **Support slow, ethical storytelling**  
Invest in embedded practices, peer exchange, and structural support, rather than delivering one-off commissions with short-term impact. Establish ethical guidelines for representation and narrative responsibility.
- **Support cross-sector collaborations**  
Collaborate with environmental NGOs, human rights organisations, and educational institutions to integrate creative works into advocacy, education, and diplomacy. Use the support and solidarity of appropriate networks when tackling complex themes; working with partners who can guide audiences toward credible organisations will allow artists the freedom to make work.
- **Build safe, creative spaces**  
See your spaces with fresh eyes. Offer whatever space you have (foyers, meeting rooms) to your local creative communities to provide more space for collaboration and sharing.

Think beyond rehearsal rooms; safe spaces must also be emotional, cultural, and political.

- **Balance creativity and commerciality**  
Integrate compelling climate narratives into projects that are commercially viable and engaging, helping to demonstrate that audiences are ready for such stories.

## For funders, policymakers, and educators

- **Value artists as knowledge-holders**  
Recognise artists as knowledgeable contributors and partners in interdisciplinary policy discussions, not as solely cultural commentators. Value the arts' capacity to operate as a form of research, and include artists in interdisciplinary policy processes.
  - **Inform climate policy by elevating artistic perspectives on displacement**  
Support artists whose work illuminates the impacts of environmental degradation and systemic inequities, ensuring their insights help shape asylum, migration, and climate policies.
  - **Support cultural continuity and education**  
Integrate practices around land-based, heritage, and the arts into educational programmes that allow young people to connect with their roots, even if it means stepping away from standard curricula. Partner with artists to bring
- lived experience into environmental education.
- **Leverage storytelling as a tool for policy change**  
Invite filmmakers and artists to present their work at policy forums, UN summits, or institutional briefings; these stories can bring human context to abstract data and shift perspectives among decision-makers.
  - **Enable systemic change by elevating transformative artistic narratives**  
Support creators whose work challenges harmful models and imagines regenerative futures by commissioning, showcasing, and funding their projects within policy spaces. This opens pathways for artists to influence structural change while receiving the institutional backing needed to sustain their practice.
  - **Support ethical media practices**  
Fund training and development for artists working in humanitarian settings, with a focus on ethical engagement, consent, and narrative responsibility.
  - **Create spaces for healing and dialogue**  
Protect and fund spaces where grief, ceremony, and cultural regeneration can unfold. Encourage forums and cultural spaces for public dialogue across communities and decision-makers.

# Conclusion

As a small-scale research project, this paper focuses on eight case studies and cannot claim to represent the full spectrum of artistic practice at the intersections of climate and displacement.

Across the case studies, a consistent message emerges: **long-term, sustained funding and support are essential.** Without exception, artists stressed that meaningful engagement with displaced or frontline communities cannot be built on one-off commissions or short-term projects. Instead, ethical practice requires continuity, trust, and collaboration over time.

Returning to William Kentridge's notion of a 'political refusal of certainty', this emphasis on duration also calls for a structural reorientation within funding bodies and cultural institutions. Brief project cycles, one-off commissions, and outcome-driven reporting frameworks rarely allow relationships to deepen or historic inequities to shift. Structural change, by contrast, depends on continuity: multi-year commitments, flexible funding models, and institutional accountability over time. Only by rethinking temporality itself can

institutions begin to nourish a culture grounded in solidarity, support, and genuine change.

Participants also underlined the importance of recognising artists as knowledge-holders in their own right, with contributions that extend beyond awareness-raising in policy, education, and community-led resilience. Through sustained, close relationships with communities of place, artists develop embodied, affective, and contextual forms of knowledge that sit alongside academic and policy-based expertise, enabling them to notice patterns, tensions, and forms of resilience often overlooked by short-term research or policy cycles.

In *Art on My Mind*, bell hooks argues that "constructive critical interrogation can enhance and illuminate our work".<sup>1</sup> In this light, artistic practice becomes a critical methodology, capable of generating new ways of seeing. These can make complex realities legible to the wider public, and enable policymakers to encounter their own areas of expertise from a different perspective – often a more humane one.

<sup>1</sup> hooks, bell. *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*. Penguin Books Ltd, 2025.

Another critical theme is **care**. Working with urgent and traumatic issues – from forced migration to ecological destruction – can take a toll on artists' own wellbeing. Case studies show that creating networks of solidarity, spaces for grief, and communities of care is as important as the artworks themselves. Artists frequently extend care into their subject matter, to those most affected by it, and into the communities they work alongside, often at significant emotional cost to themselves.

In a sector increasingly shaped by short-term, high-impact projects, this creates conditions in which artists are expected to absorb trauma without adequate time, resources, or support to sustain their own wellbeing. Such pressures are ultimately counterproductive, limiting artists' capacity to work ethically, collaboratively, and on a long-term basis. Arts organisations must therefore prioritise care by embedding meaningful support structures and training for both staff and the artists they commission.

This raises a critical question for funders and commissioners alike: how might care look if it were embedded in funding structures and commissioning processes?

Finally, the case studies collectively demonstrate that **art can reframe how climate displacement is understood.** Whether through musical collaborations, seed archives, documentaries, or industry interventions, these works challenge dominant narratives of catastrophe and passivity, offering instead stories of community continuity and agency. For arts organisations, funders, and policymakers, the lesson is clear: investing in this field is about enabling more just, inclusive, and imaginative cultural responses to one of the most pressing issues of our time.

This paper is offered as a starting point for further research, dialogue, and collaboration between artists, cultural organisations, and policymakers; a foundation to help build the resources, networks, and long-term structures that allow climate and displacement stories to be created, shared, and sustained.

**Now is the moment to act.**

# Other Artists

[32° East](#)

Uganda

[Alan McFetridge](#)

Australia / United Kingdom

[Alejandro Loayza Grisi](#)

Bolivia

32° East takes climate justice as its priority subject, and supports relevant artists by providing resources, a vibrant community, and space to develop their craft. Located in Kabalagala, Kampala, its award-winning ecological centre features studios, a contemporary art library, co-working spaces, shared computers, meeting areas, and a lush garden.

A visual artist and researcher, McFetridge’s work examines the global impact of landscape fires, Indigenous knowledge, and ecological resilience. In 2016, he was granted the Environmental Awareness Bursary, which helped deepen his awareness of the global fire crisis after documenting the aftermath of the Fort McMurray wildfire in Canada that year. This experience laid the foundation for his critically acclaimed book *On the Line*, which was nominated five times for the prestigious Prix Pictet award for photography and sustainability. *On the Line* explores the trauma of mass evacuation and displacement caused by fire, capturing the emotional and physical upheaval of those affected.

Known for his debut feature film *Utama*, which won the Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury Prize in 2022, Grisi is a Bolivian filmmaker born in 1985. He began his career in still photography and as a director of photography before transitioning into screenwriting and directing, with his work often exploring themes of identity, belonging, and the impact of climate change in Bolivia.

[Andrea Ixchíu](#)

Mexico / Guatemala

[Artist Circle of Climate Displacement](#)

USA

[Asmita Shrish](#)

Nepal / United Kingdom

Ixchíu, a Maya K’iche’ journalist, filmmaker, and land protector, is also coordinator at Hackeo Cultural: an initiative and community communication methodology for the construction of collective narratives for the defense of Indigenous territory. By serving as an Indigenous community government authority in Totonicapán, Guatemala, Ixchíu took on responsibilities to better her community. A 2014 Nobel Women’s Fellow, 2016 Sakharov Fellow, and 2020 Bertha Fellow, Ixchíu develops communication strategies, narratives and technologies for the defense of life and territory with Indigenous communities throughout Latin America.

Launched in 2021 by the Othering & Belonging Institute, the Artist Circle convened six socially engaged artists to explore the complexities of climate-induced displacement through art. Over six months of collaborative dialogue, creative experimentation, and critique, the group generated dynamic “public offerings” and Catalyst Projects ranging from poetry and film to healing events and multimedia art, all aimed at reframing narratives around migration, belonging, and environmental justice.

Based between London and Kathmandu, Shrish is an independent filmmaker whose filmmaking practice oscillates from documentaries to moving images and dramas, anchoring real issues and narratives to navigate and represent identity within physical and metaphysical space. Shrish is an alumni of Berlinale Talents (2020), BFI Network/BAFTA crew (2019/2020), Berwick LUX project bootcamp (2019), and the Asian Film Academy (2014), and is fellow of IDFA Academy (2011). She is also endorsed by the British Council and is a beneficiary of the Sinchi Fund 2019/2020, as an emerging Indigenous filmmaker, to devise a workshop among Indigenous filmmakers in Nepal.

<a href="#">Doris Salcedo</a>	Colombia	<a href="#">Dr Ros Gray, Harun Morrison, Dr Jacqueline Hannam, and the Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network</a>	United Kingdom	<a href="#">Dustin Curtis Murphy</a>	United Kingdom
<p>Rooted in her experiences of life in Colombia, visual artist and sculptor Salcedo commonly employs everyday materials, including wooden furniture, clothing, concrete, grass, and rose petals. Her work gives form to pain, trauma, and loss, while creating space for individual and collective mourning. These themes stem from her own personal history: members of her own family were among the many who have been disappeared in politically troubled Colombia. Much of her work deals with the fact that, while the death of a loved one can be mourned, their disappearance leaves an unbearable emptiness.</p>		<p>By combining art, science, and community gardening, collaborative project <a href="#">Sensing Soil</a> explored the cultural, ecological, and sensory dimensions of soil. Through workshops with refugees and migrants, it connected climate change, belonging, and care for the land.</p>		<p>Originally from Los Angeles, Murphy, an award-winning writer/director with over two decades of experience in the film industry, now resides in London. <i>Samaritan</i>, his latest short film, depicts an immigrant doctor, fearing deportation and living off grid, who stumbles upon the unconscious body of a racist politician who has been kidnapped and left for dead.</p>	
<a href="#">Emilia Beatriz</a>	Puerto Rico / Scotland	<a href="#">Fehinti Balogun</a>	United Kingdom	<a href="#">Firoz Mahmud</a>	Bangladesh
<p>An artist, access-worker, and beekeeper-in-study, Beatriz makes films which weave together historical and speculative narratives, centering sensorial/poetic storytelling, grounded in conversation, oral history, and community archiving. They use film, photography, text, sound, and performance to witness and build embodied stories of dreaming, action, and resistance. They are a co-founder of CollectiveText, a collaborative working process committed to practicing disability justice and supporting accessibility in art and film through creative captioning, audio description, and interpretation.</p>		<p>As a distinguished multimedia creative, Balogun uses his platform and artistry to drive conversations on climate justice and equality. An acclaimed actor, he has starred in major projects across HBO, Netflix, ITV, BBC, and Paramount+, addressing critical societal issues through compelling performances.</p>		<p>Born in Bangladesh, Mahmud currently lives in the United States of America. His practice includes large-scale and long-term research-affiliated projects achieved through mediums such as painting, installation, drawing, and photography. <i>Soaked Dream</i> features drawings, sculptures, videos, and photos portraying the symbolic dream of colonial people, cross-border refugee families, immigrants, diasporas, deprived people, and ethnic minorities who look for prosperity when arriving in their new location. Mahmud arranges families of those communities, makes sculptures of metaphoric eyeglasses with the help of those families, and creates photographs.</p>	

<a href="#">Forensic Architecture</a>	United Kingdom	<a href="#">Gabriela De Matos</a>	Brazil	<a href="#">Gideon Mendel</a>	South Africa / United Kingdom
<p>Based at Goldsmiths, University of London, interdisciplinary research agency Forensic Architecture uses open-source investigation, digital modelling, and spatial analysis to create visual and evidence-based reports of human rights and state violence violations. <i>Chemical Fire at Marathon Refinery</i> – a year-long investigation conducted in partnership with The Guardian, Earthjustice, Louisiana Bucket Brigade, and other community organisations – reconstructs a major chemical fire at Marathon Petroleum’s Garyville refinery. The investigation exposes systemic failures in emergency response and environmental oversight, and builds a compelling, data-rich case for environmental justice and accountability.</p>		<p>An architect, urban planner, researcher, professor, and curator, De Matos’ background is in Sustainability and Management of the Built Environment. A former co-president of the Brazilian Institute of Architects, she founded the Arqitetas Negras Project, which maps the production of black Brazilian women architects, and is the publisher of the book <i>Arqitetas Negras Vol. 1</i>, which won the IABsp award for Best Architecture Publication. She co-curated the Brazilian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture (2023), and won the Golden Lion for Best National Participation.</p>		<p>Widely regarded as one of the world’s leading contemporary photographers, Mendel began photographing in the 1980s, during the final years of apartheid. Since 2020, he has travelled to Australia to embark on a series titled <i>Burning World</i>: a record of the devastation of extreme wildfires connected to global warming. As in his <i>Drowning World</i> series, begun in 2007, Mendel chooses not to document the events but their impact: the destruction and loss, and portraits of the people affected.</p>	
<a href="#">Henna Asekainen</a>	United Kingdom	<a href="#">Imani Jacqueline Brown</a>	USA / United Kingdom	<a href="#">Isabel Lima</a>	United Kingdom
<p>A multi-disciplinary artist of Finnish heritage with a participatory, and socially engaged practice, Asekainen’s work explores the intimate and entangled relationships between humans and the natural world, intersecting with themes of migratory movement, climate change, heritage, and belonging. Her recent projects have been created in collaboration with people who have lived experience of forced displacement and of seeking refuge. These co-creative projects have explored ecological and social issues through communal experiences within rural landscapes and examined issues such the importance of access to nature and green spaces, and how a sense of homelessness – of not belonging – is produced through exclusion.</p>		<p>Brown is an artist, activist, and architectural researcher from New Orleans, based in London. Her work investigates the ‘continuum of extractivism’ which spans from settler-colonial genocide and slavery to fossil fuel production and climate change. In exposing the layers of violence and resistance that form the foundations of US society, she opens up space to imagine paths to ecological reparations.</p>		<p>Based in the UK, Lima’s practice as an artist/researcher addresses the overarching themes of identity, culture, and place. Her own family history of displacement is the catalyst for her research interests; she develops artist-led projects in collaboration with groups of people who have systematically suffered injustice and/or oppression caused by capitalism and colonialism.</p>	

<a href="#">Jumana Manna</a>	the Occupied Territories of Palestine, Germany	<a href="#">Kaajal Modi</a>	United Kingdom	<a href="#">Katie Basile</a>	Alaska, United States of America
<p>The work of Manna, a Jerusalem/Berlin-based visual artist and filmmaker, explores how power is articulated, focusing on the body, land, and materiality in relation to colonial inheritances and histories of place. Her film, <i>Foragers</i>, explores how elderly Palestinians are caught between their right to forage their own land and the harsh restrictions imposed by their occupiers on the basis of preservation.</p>		<p>Modi is a multidisciplinary artist interested in the spiritual, technological, ecological, medicinal and cultural dimensions of more-than-human life, and the unexpected places where these emerge, diverge, and collide.</p>		<p>As a documentary photographer and filmmaker, Basile’s work explores adaptation and resilience in Southwest Alaska. She is a Rasmuson Foundation Individual Artist Awardee and the co-recipient of an Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Video with KYUK Public Media, and recently directed the award-winning short film <i>To Keep as One</i>, which premiered at the 2020 Big Sky Film Festival, in collaboration with the Newtok Village Council.</p>	
<a href="#">Land in Our Names (LION)</a>	United Kingdom	<a href="#">Lena Dobrowolska and Teo Ormond-Skeaping</a>	United Kingdom	<a href="#">Marina Tabassum Architects</a>	Bangladesh
<p>LION is a grassroots collective of Black people and people of colour working towards collective ownership of land through reparations. Reparations are for Black people and people of colour (BPOC) who experience intergenerational, colonial-rooted violence that has dispossessed and separated them from ancestral lands and land practices.</p>		<p>An artist collaboration working with photography, artist film, virtual reality, installation, and research, since 2012, Dobrowolska and Ormond-Skeaping have been working on extensive projects related to political ecology, climate change, climate justice, loss and damage, slow violence, and the Anthropocene - which they prefer to call the Capitalocene. Their film, <i>You Never Know, One Day, You Too May Become A Refugee</i>, won the 2019 COAL prize dedicated to the themes of Climate, Disaster and Displacement.</p>		<p>Based in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Marina Tabassum Architects is an internationally recognized, leading architecture practice. The firm was founded by Marina Tabassum in 2005 after a 10-year partnership with URBANA. Khudi Bari is a modular structure that was developed during the lockdown of the pandemic in 2020 as a potential shelter for the marginalized landless population living in the sand beds of the Meghna River.</p>	

<a href="#">Other Cinemas</a>	United Kingdom	<a href="#">Richard Mosse</a>	Ireland, United States of America	<a href="#">Shezad Dawood</a>	United Kingdom
<p>In their own filmmaking practice, Arwa Aburawa and Turab Shah are committed to exploring race, migration, and environmental legacies of colonialism. Their films span documentary, fiction, and artist film, with a focus on collective and collaborative filmmaking practices and intuitive, responsive modes of working. The London-based filmmaking duo have exhibited their work at LUX London, Humber Street Gallery, Wellcome Trust, Brent Biennial '22, and the National Gallery of Art in the USA.</p>		<p>As an artist, Mosse seeks to heighten and extend the language of documentary photography to draw attention to overlooked yet urgent stories. He has documented environmental devastation in remote regions of the Amazon; the mass migration of people from refugee backgrounds across Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa; bitter conflict over rare earth minerals in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo; the US military's occupation of Saddam Hussein's palace complexes in occupied Iraq; illegal immigration along the US-Mexican border; the missing persons crisis in post-war Balkan nations; and other subjects.</p>		<p>Dawood is a multidisciplinary artist who interweaves stories, realities and symbolism to create richly layered artworks, spanning painting, textiles, sculpture, film, and digital media. Fascinated by ecologies and architecture, his work takes a philosophical approach, asking questions and exploring alternative futures through what he describes as world-building. His practice is animated by research, working with multiple audiences and communities to delve into narrative, history, and embodiment.</p>	
<a href="#">Tenzin Phuntsog</a>	United States of America	<a href="#">Yinka Shonibare</a>	United Kingdom	<a href="#">Zahra Malkani</a>	Pakistan
<p>Known for his work in film, installation, and performance, Tibetan-American artist and filmmaker Tenzin Phuntsog often explores themes of presence, belonging, landscape, and language. His works have been presented at notable cinema and fine art spaces internationally. His recent works include the two-channel video <i>Pala Amala (Father Mother)</i> and the single-channel video <i>Dreams</i>, which feature his parents and explore themes of family, diaspora, and the impact of displacement.</p>		<p>British-Nigerian artist Shonibare, CBE RA, is internationally renowned for his work exploring colonialism, race, class, and identity within the contemporary context of globalisation. His works comment on the tangled interrelationship between Africa and Europe, and their respective economic and political histories. His piece, <i>Refugee Astronaut</i>, part of Wellcome Collections' Being Human exhibition, is a life-size figure in a spacesuit and breathing apparatus, carrying a chaotic bundle of belongings, an urgent visual allegory for climate-driven displacement and environmental catastrophe.</p>		<p>Malkani, a multidisciplinary artist from Pakistan, is interested in sounding and storytelling dissent and devotion against the ongoing militarism and infrastructural violence in the watery places that she loves. Working across multiple media, she explores the politics of development and dispossession through the lens of dissident ecological knowledges and traditions of environmental resistance. She is a co-founder, with Shahana Rajani, of Karachi LaJamia: experimental and ecstatic ecopedagogies in collaboration with ongoing movements in defense of land and water in the city.</p>	

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