

## Locomotion against overpopulation

By Katharina Meister

The title of the picture is “Locomotion against overpopulation”. The title of the picture is very important to me as it is a way I can communicate with the audience and guide them into a direction. So, before I say something about that picture I will say something about the series this piece of work is part of. Currently I am working on a series titled “Winged Seeds”. In this, I try to compare nature’s way of life and reproduction with the principals of human life and population growth. As the title of the series already lets you know, I am not looking at all of nature but particularly on how seeded plants reproduce and disperse themselves. As plants are sessile, they need help from the environment to disperse their pollen and seeds. Some rely on animals such as insects or birds, other rely on wind or water currents. Locomotion per definition is the act of moving from one place to the other but is also quite often used to describe a form of movement, that doesn’t rely on any internal force but solely depends on outside forces such as wind and water. So, within the plant world I found very fascinating how many plants on the wind for seed dispersion, lots of the pollen is transported by the wind. To make wind dispersion work many plants have so called winged seeds, who then can be picked up by the wind and land far away from the mother plant. Now it is not guaranteed that there will be a new plant growing where the seed landed. Because it is not only the seed that is needed for that new tree to grow but also the environment needs to be correct. Their needs to be fertile soil, enough sun, enough water, and the right temperature of the atmosphere. If these conditions are not correct, no plant will grow. If we compare this way a species growth and spreads out with the way the human species growth, we can see quite some differences. We do not have to rely on any outside forces on where we go and reproduce, and we also don’t focus if the environment delivers enough resources at the place of our choice for reproduction. We go anywhere and spread out and grow without any relation or connection to the resources available. Human population growth exponentially and every one of us in their own lifetime uses up way more than our one earth can sustainably supply. Online you can find webpages that can calculate your personal ecological footprint and it tells you how many earths you are personally using up with your way of living. I don’t want to blame any individual here. This is more a societal thing. We grew up in a world where we are so detached from anything, that we can never learn or gain a feel of how much is actually too much. There is very little direct feedback for an individual to be able to gain a sort of feeling for how much would be the right amount to use. I mean again, if you compare yourself with a seed that fall on infertile ground, there is direct feedback.

However, with so many environmental issues and climate changes knocking on our door right now, we need to learn and gain a feeling for, how much we should actually be using. It is a pressing thing we need to learn, but it seems to be a little bit of a secret language this

knowledge is communicated in, as we are not directly and consciously connected to the natural world anymore. To give this point significance I have used morse code to put the title of the picture into the actual work. Morse code, because to most of us, it is something like a secret language and because it was used in times with less technological improvement and it was used when information was really urgent and needed to be delivered faster, than for example a letter would take. We need to learn to decipher that secret language of our plant and we need to learn it fast. In the middle here you can see an abstract winged seed. In the middle were there would usually be the seed you see some more information, you can see nature, you can see wind charts and you can see an old-fashioned wooden A-frame house, which is a symbol for the human beings, but a symbol for human beings living more sustainably alongside nature. A-frame house are generally smaller living spaces, which fit better in the environment and which were built for the environmental conditions in which they were build, mostly in very cold areas, with heavy snow fall in winter.

The mountains you can see in the background, I have used to show, that there are places where no plants can grow, and that ok, at least no large plants. The environment defines what can live in it. We human beings however have started to define the environment, but in a way that it won't be able to support us much longer.

So, this is it what I wanted to say about the picture. Now I also would like to take the time to talk about art in a more general way. As I guess every artist does every now and then, I ask myself, why do I do art. If I want to see a difference in the way we treat our world, should I not be doing something different, like work in science, but not in art? Again, and again I ask myself, what is it, that art can bring to the world, to the life of us human beings. One day I find an answer to this question, that I find very satisfying, another day I am disillusioned and disappointed with all the answers I could find to this question. This is why I just recently have started a podcast. In this podcast I am interviewing artists, who are doing environmental art to give me their answer to this question. But I am also interviewing scientists, as maybe you have noticed yourself, science in recent times is more and more interested in arts and quite often artists are given fellowship at scientific institutions. Why? Why are they doing it? And especially doing it in the field of climate change. So now I would like to share with you two answers to my question I have recently been given to my question. One by a scientist and one by an artist.

I will start with the answer the scientist has given me. The scientist I am talking about is Jessica Meeuwig. She is a marine biologist and professor at UWA. When I asked her the question, why is art becoming more and more important in the field of science, she said this is because art can show, what science cannot. And she gave an example. She said, I am collecting data of fish, which means I am dropping under water cameras into the ocean to count fish. When I watch the footage of the underwater film, I can accurately count the number of fish and get the data I needed, but what is missing in the data is the following. When I watch the data there is not just fish A swim by, then fish B and fish C and so on and so forth, but there are marine families swimming by. There is life that wants to live

swimming by. And they are not just swimming by. They are curious, they come up to the camera and especially the children-fish start playing with the camera, they are curious and so full of life, just like our kids are. They have an urge to life and are full of excitement, one can see it in these recordings. But what we are doing, we are destroying these oceans, without feeling anything. And why are we not feeling anything? Not because we are cold and have lost compassion and empathy, NO the only reason is, because we don't see what is happening under the surface, if we would, if we would see what is happening there, if we could see these fish children play, we would maybe be acting different. And this is why she recons art is so important, because artists can show these images, they can transport not only information, but also emotion. So, the answer she gave me and my question is art can help us to connect, it is the piece that can link the sides together, the knowledge and data with the emotions.

Another interview where I got a beautiful answer to my question was in the interview with local performance artist Sky River. She was saying that the ancient Greeks still new about the importance of art. They said, we can perceive the world from two angles: with the help of our logos and with the help of the mythos. So, to translate this into a more modern language, we can use our cognition to try to understand the world, and this is what let us to develop science and objective reasoning, but the other way to pensive the world is through our senses, and this will give us a sensual image of the world, that is filled with emotions. So, the ancient Greeks said, we need both to be able to have a holistic 360-degree view of the world. In recent times it seems that there is a lot of focus on logos, on science and cognition, but mythos, emotions and the sensual perception of the world and its importance got somehow lost. However, it is left in the arts, and this it is why the art is so important, because it is not before we have looked at the world from these two poles that we have seen the world fully.

So, I keep on doing art and hope I can contribute to a 360 degree view of the world!

Kathi