

## MINI GRANT PROJECT SUMMARY

Please complete the project summary and return the completed form to April Snyder, Associate Administrator for the Institute on the Environment at [april snyder@umn.edu](mailto:april snyder@umn.edu). Paper copies will not be accepted. Please also attach any photos, publications, brochures, event agendas or other materials that were a result of the mini grant summary.

<b>Date of Report Submission:</b>	10 July 2015
<b>Project PI &amp; Dept/School</b>	Jane Blocker, Art History
<b>Project Title:</b>	"Art and the Environment" Exhibition
<b>Grant Amount \$:</b>	\$1,200

### Project Context & Purpose

*Please include the original project purpose statement and revise for any changes that occurred in the project after the start date with a short explanation of the changes.*

The following is the text from the original proposal:

*I am a professor in the art history department, where I research and teach courses on contemporary art (roughly art made from 1968 to the present). In fall of 2012, I taught "Art and the Environment" for the first time. The class traces the development of land and earth art from the mid 1960s up through what is now called "environmental art" in the present day.*

*A key component of the course is a collaborative project in which students work in groups to do scientific research on an environmental problem and then utilize that research to produce or propose a work of environmental art (if the artwork is of such a scale, cost or complexity that it can't actually be executed, they can submit sketches, photographs, 3-D models, etc.). They are assigned to write a supporting paper outlining their research, describing the artwork, and situating it in relation to art historical precedents. In addition, they work individually on a paper that examines a local environmental artwork or public sculpture. The students model their groups on one of a growing number of contemporary collaborative environmental art groups that are operating in the world today such as futurefarmers, the Canary Project, and the Cape Farewell Project, all of which bring together scientists of various kinds, artists, designers, and architects to create art and outreach programs. The students choose their group mates on the basis of their disciplinary specializations and skill sets (the class enrolls students from engineering, studio art, literature, anthropology, ecology, journalism, mathematics, fisheries and wildlife, CFANS, and environmental sciences).*

*During the maiden voyage of the class in 2013, just for fun my TA and I decided to award prizes to the top three projects in the class (the prizes consisted of such things as environmentally themed candy bars and gift cards for coffee). I was surprised to discover how seriously the students took this, and how much it motivated their work. The prize-winning projects were remarkably sophisticated, thoughtful, and creative.*

*In fall 2013, when I was preparing the course to teach in spring 2014, I decided that the prizes should be more professional and prestigious, so I contacted Molly Buss to inquire about the possibility of exhibiting the work of the winners. We exchanged a few emails and I met with her in her office. She was very enthusiastic about the possibility of such a show, but we were faced with several obstacles. First, the display space in IonE is constrained by the multiple uses of the rooms dedicated for that purpose. Second, there is no security, so anything placed on display must be of little monetary value. And, third, since I had no idea at the time what kinds of artworks my students would make or propose, it was hard to estimate how much space they would require.*

*She suggested that I propose an exhibition that would take place in fall of 2014, displaying the work of the spring 2014 winners. In addition, we decided that instead of displaying actual artworks, the students would produce large photographs or posters of their works. This will allow us to control and regularize the size of the pieces, and will alleviate the security problem. The only remaining obstacle is the prohibitive cost of such large format inkjet prints (I don't have a research budget that will cover this, and my students certainly couldn't afford it on their own), and the costs associated with holding an opening for the exhibition. So I am requesting a Mini Grant in the amount of \$1,200 to produce 6 large format posters mounted to foam core and to pay for the catering of the opening event.*

## Work Completed

*Please provide a summary of the work that was completed for the mini grant project.*

At the end of spring semester 2014, four groups of students from my course were awarded prizes for the artworks they designed, each of which responded to a specific environmental problem. One group produced a series of prints inspired by the lithographs of James J. Audubon, called "Disappearing Disease." The prints represented plant species that will disappear if Colony Collapse continues unchecked among bee populations in the US. These scientific illustrations of plants included only the information labels, however, and the actual pictures of the plants were eliminated to illustrate their ultimate disappearance from the biosphere. A second project, called "Greenbridge," was a proposal for a hydroponic garden that would be constructed on the roof of the Washington Avenue pedestrian bridge, which included kits for planting microgreens to be given to the public. The kits included hand made earthenware bowls, dirt, seeds and printed directions. The third project, called "Bus Stop Oasis," was a design for a bus shelter the roof of which would be made from Plexiglas in such a way as to create a garden in which strawberries could be grown. The proposal was meant to address both urban blight and to reward bus riders for their green transportation choices with fresh fruit and flowers. The final project was a "zine" called *Kosmopolitis*, which parodied fashion magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and their support for the multi-billion dollar cosmetics industry. The zine offered alternative cosmetics recipes and contained articles on the environmental hazards of cosmetics research, manufacturing, and use.

During the summer, students from the groups worked with me to design and have printed two large format posters—one with text explaining the project and the environmental challenge it addressed; the other with an illustration of the project. In the fall of 2014, the exhibition opened in the IonE space and included, in addition to the posters, the architectural model for "Greenbridge," the matted prints for "Disappearing Disease," and copies of the *Kosmopolitis*.

We held an opening reception, which was attended by students and faculty from IonE, as well as the students whose work was on display and others involved in the original class. The exhibition was up from September through the end of fall semester in December 2014.

## **Partnerships & Collaborations**

*Please provide a summary of the project personnel, partnerships and collaborations that worked directly on the project or were started as a direct result of the mini grant project.*

Students worked collaboratively in their groups to create artworks and/or proposals for art projects. Students in the groups represented a wide range of undergraduate majors including studio art, art history, English, engineering, statistics, environmental sciences, and biological sciences.

I worked with Molly Buss in the IonE, and we brought artworks and information about a CLA course to students and faculty there. I had a chance to talk to a variety of faculty at the exhibition opening, and hope to repeat the exhibition with subsequent classes in the future.

## **Project Outcomes & Impacts**

*Please provide a summary of the outcomes and /or impacts of the mini grant project including future plans for the project.*

The exhibition served as a great incentive for the students in the course who, rather than simply submitting their final projects for a grade, were competing with each other for the honor of being included in the show. The participants worked together collaboratively to research their topics, work out ideas, create an artwork or proposal, and present their findings to the rest of the class. This increased their knowledge not only of the history of environmental art works in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also about environmental problems and solutions. By creating their artworks/proposals all the students got to experience a complex mode of addressing a problem via creativity and the visual. In addition, the winning groups got to experience the practical challenges of mounting an art exhibition.

The exhibition itself served to educate viewers (via the text posters) about the history of environmental art, as well as the particular environmental problems being addressed. Viewers were asked to consider the impact of affective labor (that is the production, through art, of emotions and political awareness) on their understanding of environmental problems. It also informed viewers about the class, and the means by which the liberal arts are approaching environmental research.