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Introductory Remarks: Art and Climate Futures and the Carte Blanche Visual Artists

Global Climate Action Summit, September 27, 2019

Kendeda Building

I am pleased to be here with you today, representing the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts and the Atlanta Global Studies Center. As a consortium between Georgia Tech and Georgia State University, the Atlanta Global Studies Center empowers the region’s global agenda with a focus on the UN SDGs by enhancing advanced language language learning and international studies.

Climate change is a global issue

In his introductory remarks at the Global Climate Action Summit this morning, President Angel Cabrera made some of the following points

[President Cabrera’s remarks were being streamed/recorded and may need to be double checked]

“Tech has a global mindset. Being global is not only about being places, but rather about making a contribution to problems that affect all of us”

“At Tech, and in alignment with our motto Progress and Service, this means that we are not devoted to technology for technology’s sake, but to improve the human condition; we always need to ask how our work is going to improve the human condition “

This is where a public institution such as Georgia Institute of Technology – and the College of Liberal Arts – is showing leadership; and we can only do so in partnership with other agencies and institutions.
The partnership with the French consulate for this afternoon’s event is a stellar example of this kind of collaboration.

As a film and media studies scholar, I study climate change, especially in the Arctic, and how societal and cultural implications are represented in indigenous art, cinema, and media.

Climate Change is complex – we cannot easily perceive it and we cannot easily feel it. We know that it is happening not only because of overwhelming scientific evidence, but also because it is talked about in the public sphere and because it is represented in media.

Scholars Birgit Schneider and Thomas Nocke of the Potsdam Institute in Germany put it this way: “most phenomena studied in climate science are invisible. Climate change as a long-term process cannot be seen. It needs to be constructed on the basis of physics, chemistry, and big data: measurements, simulations, and statistics. Because climate is scientifically constructed object, there is no way to learn about it other than through media devices. We need media to learn about climate change” (“Introduction” Image Politics of Climate Change 2014: 12).

We also need the arts and creative expression not only to learn about climate change, but also to articulate and imagine alternate scenarios and alternate futures that we want to see
The young activist Greta Thunberg spoke to the United Nations Climate Action Summit earlier this week, chastising world leaders for believing in the “fairytales of eternal economic growth” and stating that they had “stolen [her] dreams and her childhood with [their] empty words (Thunberg, UN, September 23, 2019). Her media reach has been global. The speech to the United Nations had more than 3 million views on YouTube within three days. But Thunberg isn’t a fatalist – she believes that change is possible, and that it must happen on a systemic scale that brings people, political institutions, communities, countries, cultures, markets, and industries together. While it is true that individuals can and should make changes in their daily lives to mitigate climate impact, we must also think and demand bigger, globally coordinated approaches that are equitable and do not repeat the sins of colonialism and empire. Universities are key to this effort, along the lines of what President Cabrera emphasized earlier today.

Artistic creation is no less important. Art asks questions, opens up perspectives, challenges dogma, brings people together, and proposes solutions that offer alternative epistemologies, including indigenous knowledge, that challenge those of mainstream science, technology, business, or policy perspectives, alone. Since climate change is so complex, we must address it from multiple vantage points.

Art, in all its manifest forms – from dance and sculpture to video, poetry, literature, and many more – offer one of the most efficacious means of cross-cultural communication, leading to alliances otherwise not possible. Artistic and media creation open up opportunities for the representation of voices commonly excluded from news cycles, the political arena, industry, or
science communication. As we will hear momentarily, artistic and media creation convey the perspectives of those who are disenfranchised – from Guadaloupe to Taiwan to the south-eastern Atlantic coastline. We know that the global south, the Arctic, indigenous peoples, and women all over the world are disproportionately affected by climate change. Art and artists have the opportunity to convey not only local stories, but also to speculate, imagine, and posit alternate and different futures for global good; those that are equitable and inclusive, and not driven primarily by capitalism and colonialism.

So, this turned into quite the manifesto. Please allow me to conclude by stating that it is privilege for the Atlanta Global Studies Center to be cosponsor of this event and partner with the Global Change program and European consulataes in the greater Atlanta region, to help change the conversation about how we think about climate change on the Tech campus and beyond. Please allow me now to introduce the artists. They will speak for about 10-15 minutes each and we will then open up the floor for conversation.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** "Urban Wilderness + Man-Mad Nature", documentary and fine art photographer **Virginie Drugjon-Kippelen** conceptual photographer **Shannon Davis**, creative director and adjunct professor at Savannah College of Art and Design, **Carte Blanche Visual Artists**

- **Guy Gabon**, eco-artist, designer and filmmaker, whose work explores the interrelationship between the natural and urban environment and has been exhibited in Canada, Mozambique, Madagascar, France notably.
- **Gwenola Wagon**, artist and assistant professor, Department of Visual Art, University of Paris 8, has produced numerous installations in France and abroad, and Pierre Cassou-Noguès, philosopher and professor, Department of Philosophy.
of the University Paris 8, author of several books as *Les rêves cybernétiques de Norbert Wiener* (Seuil, 2014) or *Technofictions* (Cerf, 2019).

- **Erin Jane Nelson**, artist, whose work has recently been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and at Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich.