

**POSTER**



**Past  
Exhibition**

**HOUSE**

# **We Tried to Warn You!**

## **Environmental Crisis Posters, 1970–2020**

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**Sep 28, 2023–Feb 25, 2024**

The posters in this exhibition were created to celebrate the natural world, to warn of the dangers facing it—and therefore humanity’s way of life—and to call people to action in a time of environmental crises and climate change. Starting in the 1970s, these types of posters became popular and prevalent in the representation of global movements for climate awareness, drawing attention to distinct issues like deforestation, acid rain, air and water pollution, renewable energy, and, ever more frequently, corporate malfeasance. Many posters were commissioned in honor of Earth Day—widely recognised as the largest secular observance in the world. Its first occurrence on April 22, 1970, was the result of bipartisan concern about pollution levels and a distrust of the ways in which government, industry, and science had coordinated their actions, ignoring long-term, detrimental issues. Earth Day inspired the establishment of both domestic U.S. legislation and regulatory bodies the same year, such as the Clean Air Act and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as well as the formation of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like Greenpeace in 1971 and such international multilateral organizations as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1972.

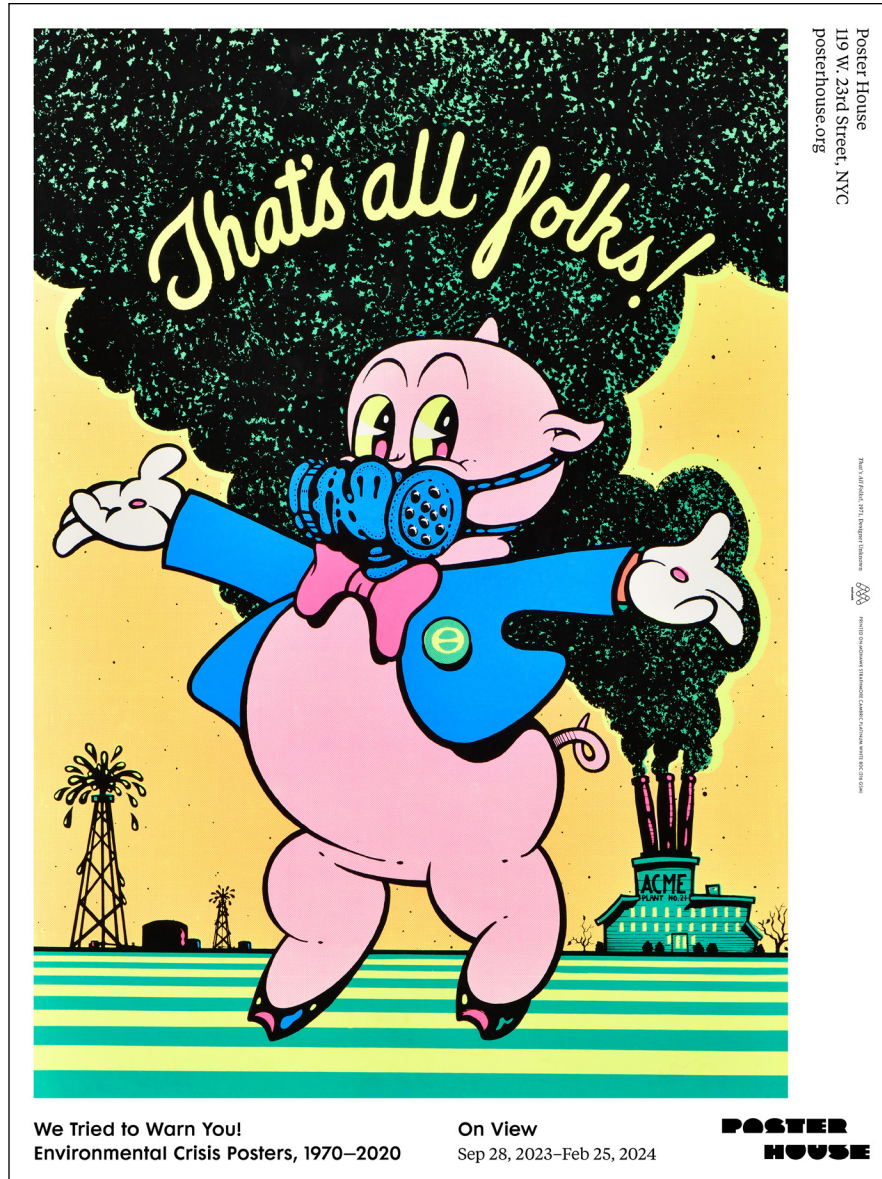
Posters thrive on clear, simple messaging. While many environmental posters have drawn attention to critical issues and shaped public debate, they often incorporate visual tropes that one critic labeled “gas masks and honeybees”—resulting in a certain graphic uniformity regardless of country or issue. It is equally significant that the long-term trend of climate change, commonly referred to as “slow violence,” means that immediate disasters capture public attention more than the insidious trajectory of global environmental breakdown. While some typical symbols do appear in this show, the exhibition also showcases designs that range from the whimsical to the apocalyptic.

Although many of the areas most affected by climate change and environmental degradation are located in the poorest communities and countries, these posters have mainly been produced in some of the wealthiest places in the world. Meanwhile, peaceful environmental activists in numerous developing countries face being treated as political prisoners under the pretext of national security. As such, posters from the places most impacted by environmental catastrophe are far and few between.

The posters here are not grouped chronologically or by country, but within the four classical elements—Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. Reverence for these environmental building blocks dates back to ancient Greece, and has clear parallels in other ancient cultures, from Aztec to Zoroastrian. These elements were understood not merely as material substances, but also venerated as powerful forces that might bring meaning and illumination to daily life. The environment has been a source of respect and awe since the dawn of civilization.

*This exhibition is supported by the Simons Foundation.*

*Wherever possible, the constructions for this exhibition have been made with Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) certified wood that will be saved for reuse. All glass will be donated to UrbanGlass.*



**Curation**

Tim Medland

**Exhibition Design**

Ola Baldych

**Special Thanks**

Preston McLane, Florida State University

Dr. Abigail Bodner, climate modeler

Catherine Bindman, editor

**Environmental Crisis Exhibition Poster**

# **EARTH**

**The earth willingly teaches  
righteousness to those who can learn;  
for the better she is treated, the more  
good she gives in return.**

—Xenophon, the Oeconomicus, c. 362 B.C



## Earth Day, 1970

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

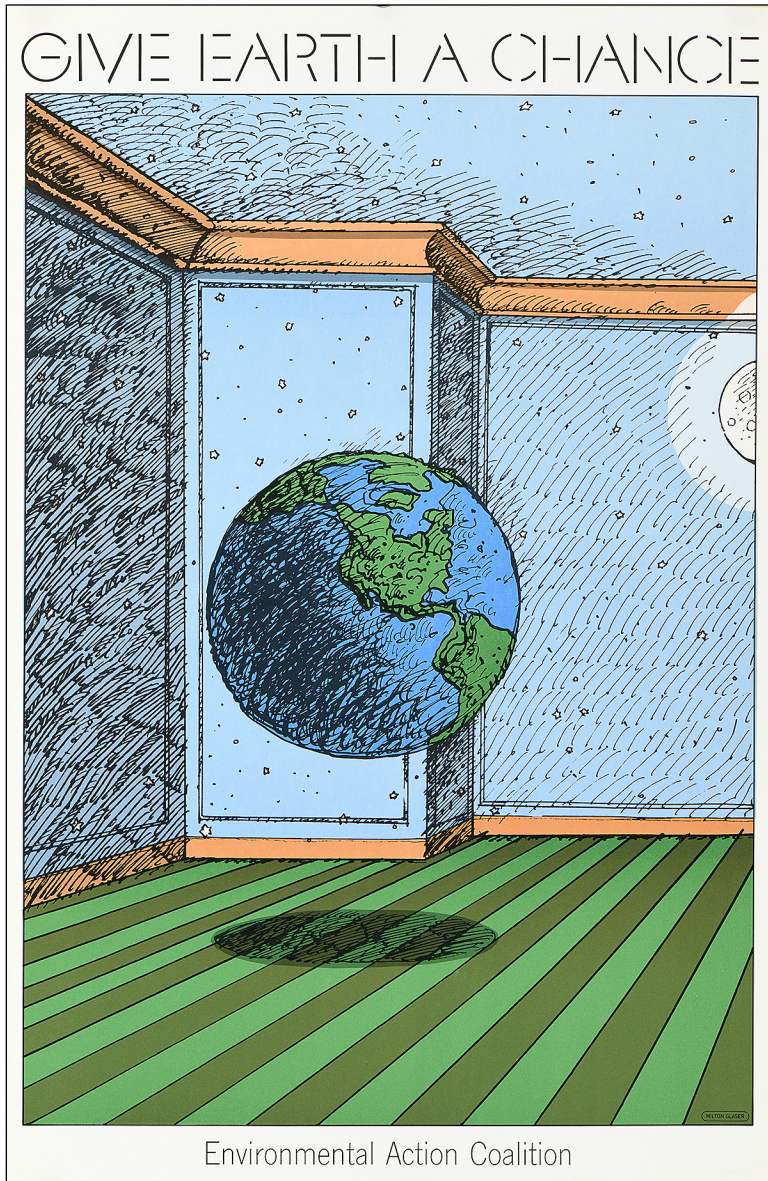
- The first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, was conceived by Senator Gaylord Nelson (D-WI) in response to the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, the most devastating in U.S. history at the time; more than three million gallons of crude oil gushed into the ocean. Nelson asked the young people of America to use the same energy they had demonstrated in opposing the Vietnam War to fight for environmental causes. An estimated 20 million people attended inaugural events at tens of thousands of sites. It is considered the watershed moment in the modern environmental movement.
- This poster for the first official Earth Day was produced to benefit the now-defunct American Environment Foundation. Additional prints were made without the date on the lower right for sale as limited, signed editions. Here, America's bald eagle stands proudly as the symbolic centerpiece, surrounded by images of pollution and devastation.
- At the time of this poster's publication, Robert Rauschenberg was the most famous artist in America. He believed in art as a catalyst for social change, donating his talents for both anti-war and environmental posters.



**Ecological Seminar, 1989**  
Stasys Eidrigevičius (b. 1949)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- This poster advertises an ecology seminar in Darłowo, Poland, organized by a regional environmental-education center. Ironically, it was held at a time when the country was primarily powered through the burning of lignite, the “dirtiest” coal.
- Since the 1980s, the border area shared by Poland, (East) Germany, and Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) has been known as the Black Triangle, a region defined by its extremely high levels of pollution due to vast open strip lignite mines. As the most polluting of fossil fuels, burning lignite produces large amounts of soot, ash that contains toxic heavy metals that leach into the water table, and sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide that result in acid rain.
- While the energy generated from lignite was principally sold to foreign countries in order to obtain hard currency during the Cold War, Poland still generates as much as three-quarters of its domestic power from it today—by far the highest percentage in Europe. The country is currently the largest European consumer of coal. Under pressure from the European Union, Poland has committed to reducing electricity produced by coal to 37 percent by 2030, and 11 percent by 2040. By comparison, 20 percent of U.S. electricity and just 2 percent of that in the U.K. was powered by coal in 2022.



## Give Earth A Chance, 1970

Milton Glaser (1929–2020)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- This was Milton Glaser's first environmental poster, created for the Environmental Action Coalition, a New York City-based nonprofit that focuses on recycling and environmental education in schools.
- In December 1968, the astronauts of *Apollo 8*—the first crewed spaceflight to reach the moon—returned with the legendary *Earthrise* photograph, showing the earth peeking over the moon's horizon. Photographer Galen Rowell of *National Geographic* magazine called it “the most influential environmental photograph ever taken,” and in the Christmas Day issue of that year's *New York Times*, the poet Archibald MacLeish wrote: “To see the earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence in which it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the earth together.” Given the instantly iconic status of this image, it is possible Glaser was inspired by it when he created this poster.



*Earthrise*, 1968  
William Anders





## All the Earth Speaks Up for the Greens, 1983

Gunter Rambow (b. 1938)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Many of the artists in this exhibition are from German-speaking countries with long histories of poster design as well as of government-sponsored environmental programs.
- This poster stands out since it does not promote a specific environmental cause, but simply the German Green Party. This political party currently has 15 percent of the national vote—the third largest—and, unlike its American counterpart, is a driving force in public policy, and often wins elections.
- Gunter Rambow is one of the most important poster designers currently working in Germany and is known for political and theater work in which he combines drawing and photography.



## Man Needs Rain Forests Too, 1982

Tom Eckersley (1914–97)

*Private Collection, NYC*

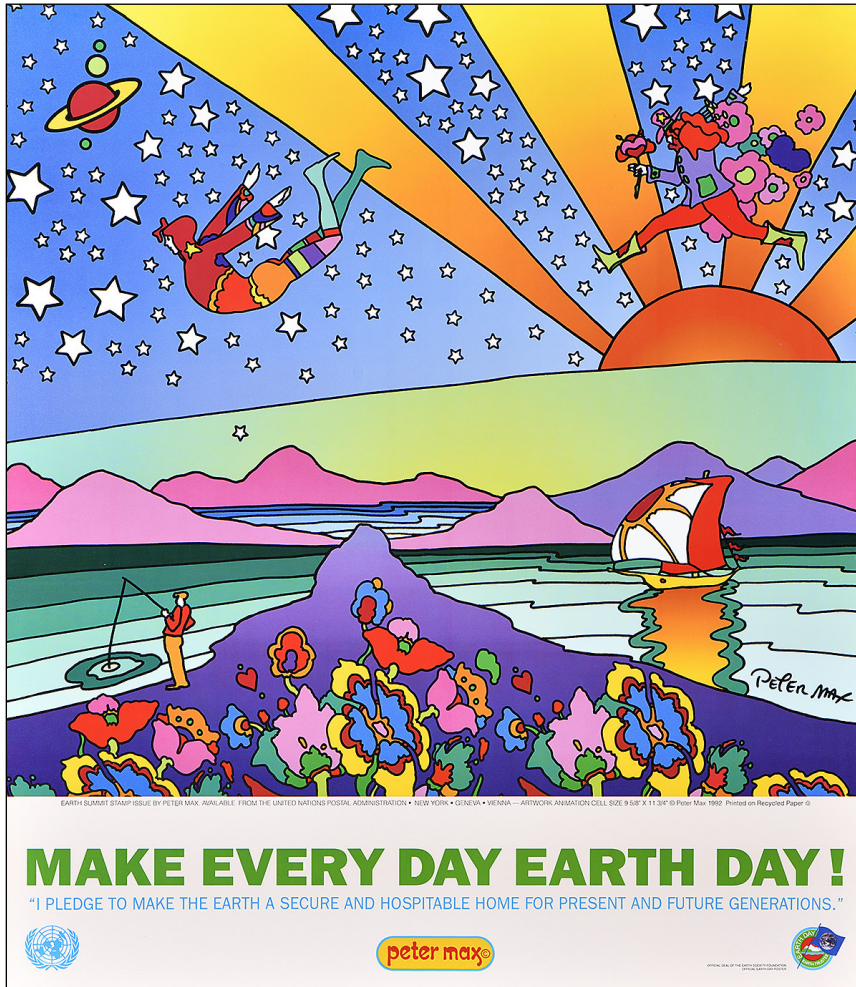
- Tom Eckersley produced a number of posters for the World Wildlife Fund, all of which feature his trademark bold graphics and flat perspective.
- During the 1980s, there was a global peak in deforestation, particularly in tropical rainforests, which lost tree cover equal to that of half the landmass of India within the decade. While these rates have since slowed, more trees are still being destroyed than planted.
- Since rainforest destruction mainly occurred in developing countries seeking to industrialize and increase arable land for agriculture and livestock, many argued that prohibiting such activities would hinder their ability to compete globally. Here, Eckersley underscores the reasons why the preservation of rainforests is also important to the survival of mankind.



**Öko Forum Luzern, 1980**  
 Celestino Piatti (1922–2007)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Switzerland has historically been at the forefront of environmental thinking. Founded in 1977, the Öko Forum was a Swiss research institute for issues in the fields of environmental protection, nature conservation, and ecology. It drew attention to data and provided practical mechanisms to governments that would enable them to mitigate environmental degradation. Today, the forum, along with similar organizations, has been superseded by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the think tank within the United Nations that helped set the 1.5 degree Celsius global-warming target.
- Celestino Piatti was a superstar in the Swiss poster world, designing more than five hundred posters, 30 of which won the Swiss Poster Award. He often donated his design skills to causes he believed in.
- Since this poster was printed, atmospheric carbon dioxide levels have risen to a point not seen since the mid-Pliocene epoch (approximately 3.6–2.2 million years ago) when global temperatures were up to 4 degrees Celsius higher than they are today. What may sound like an insignificant increase ultimately caused sea levels to rise between 15 and 75 feet. For New York City, a 15-foot rise would put the Rockaways, East New York, Flushing, and JFK Airport under water.



## Make Every Day Earth Day!, 1992

Peter Max (b. 1937)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Like Robert Rauschenberg, Peter Max is one of many famous artists who has offered his talents free of charge for environmental causes. He identifies as an environmentalist, frequently creating work in which he explores space, time, and history. Here, he uses his signature psychedelic style to celebrate an idealized environmental future.
- This poster was commissioned by the United Nations as the official artwork for Earth Day in 1992. It was also used as part of a larger composition for a series of U.S. postage stamps made for that year's Earth Summit.
- Held in Rio de Janeiro, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development—commonly referred to as the Earth Summit—was a global forum that brought together scientists, politicians, and other invested parties to discuss the interconnected and systemic issues related to biodiversity, the global water supply, air pollution, and climate change.



## **Happy Earth Day, New York, 1995**

Paula Scher (b. 1948)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Paula Scher is one of the most well-known and prolific living graphic designers. She has created visual identities for such major organizations and institutions as Citibank, the Public Theater, and the High Line (as well as Poster House!).
- She is a founding partner of Do the Green Thing, a not-for-profit within the Pentagram design agency that encourages people to live more sustainably through its creative public-service engagements. In 2018, this included a series of “World Warning Labels” that highlight the environmental impact of various products, from Land Rovers that “whip up hurricanes” to the latest collection from a fast-fashion brand that “exterminates species.”
- This poster for Earth Day, in which Scher transforms the Empire State Building into the stem of a sunflower, reflects public views on environmentalism as they were in the 1990s—more focused on celebrating and conserving nature than on existential threats.

# **WATER**

**If climate change is a shark,  
water resources are the teeth.**

—Peter Gleick, President, Pacific Institute

Water covers over 70 percent of the earth's surface, but less than 1 percent of the planet's water can be used for drinking or agriculture. As global temperatures increase, this vital resource will become more scarce. Additionally, rising temperatures have already begun to impact ocean currents and, by extension, extreme weather events—the ocean absorbs 90 percent of the excess heat caused by climate change, altering how it transports warm water from the equator to the poles and cold water back to the tropics.



**Save the Rain, 1983**

Friedensreich Hundertwasser (1928–2000)

*Private Collection, NYC*

- Born Friedrich Stowasser, the artist and architect changed his name to mean “Peace-Realm Hundred-Water” in the early 1950s to better reflect his views on man’s relationship with the environment. He believed in living in accordance with the laws of nature and advocated for the greening of cities and for a waste-free society.
- Created for the Norwegian Nature Conservancy Association, this bilingual poster asks the viewer to “make peace with nature” by drawing attention to the negative effects of acid rain. In it, a face made of tree roots spreads across an aerial view of a town while metallic blue raindrops turn black and poison the earth.
- This design was the first winner of the Ekoplagát prize, a Czechoslovakian triennial award given to the best environmental poster of the year.



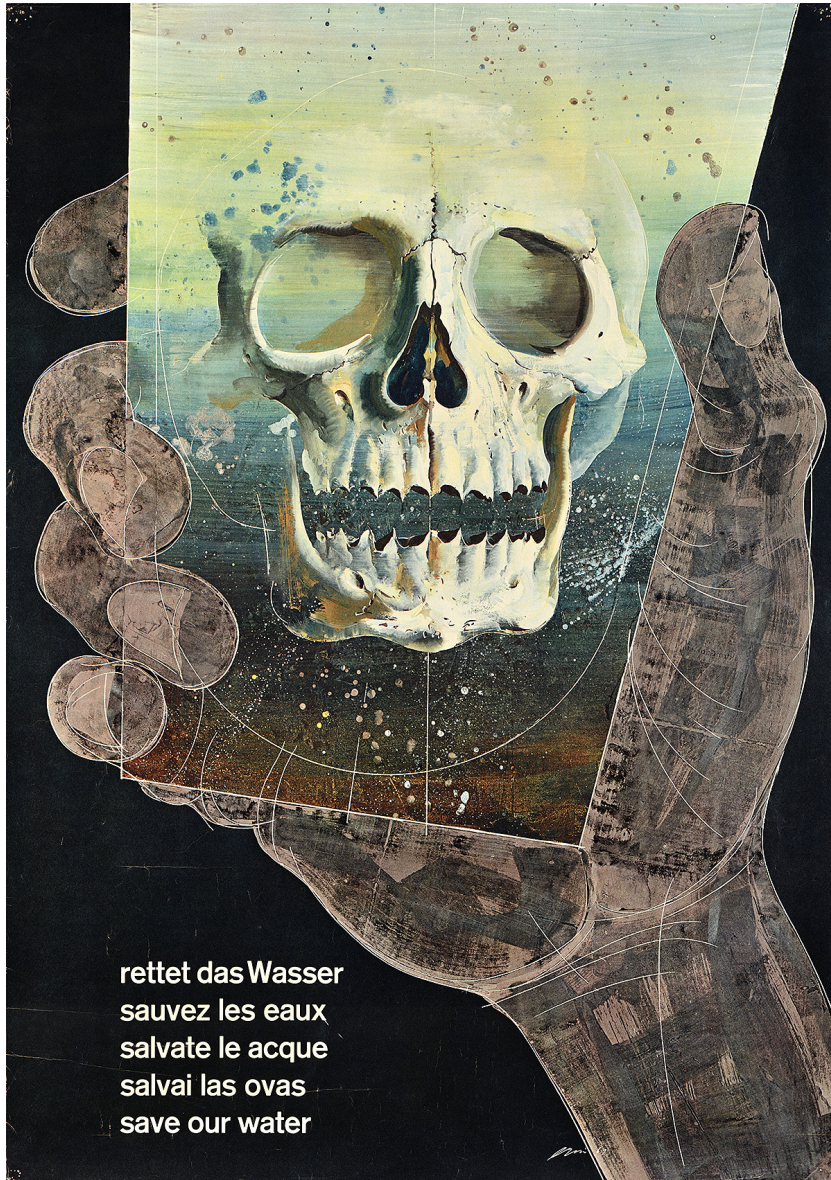
## Pollution: It's a Crying Shame, c. 1971

Designer Unknown

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- This poster is based on a still image taken from a 1971 advertising campaign for Keep America Beautiful. Based on the style of a public-service announcement, it won many prizes and is still considered one of the most memorable commercials of all time. It was so popular that, in an era of physical film, television stations asked for replacement copies because the originals had worn out.
- The campaign is one of the first and most egregious examples of corporate environmental deception, what we might now call “greenwashing.” Keep America Beautiful, founded by a group of American corporations in 1953, is a lobbying organization that actively fights environmental regulatory legislation. It tries to shift the narrative away from the critical role of industry in pollution toward individual responsibility for such actions as public littering. In its early years, it also described environmental activists as “Communists.”
- It is also an overt example of how American advertisers have used imagery of Indigenous peoples as shorthand for environmental respect and wisdom, while profiting from a history of stripping Native Americans of their land and criminalizing many of their environmental and religious practices.
- The “crying Indian,” better known as Iron Eyes Cody, was actually Espera Oscar de Corti, an Italian actor who commonly played Native Americans in film. In 2023, Keep America Beautiful announced that it was transferring the rights to the commercial to the National Congress of American Indians; the congress is now retiring it, stating that it has always been “inappropriate.”



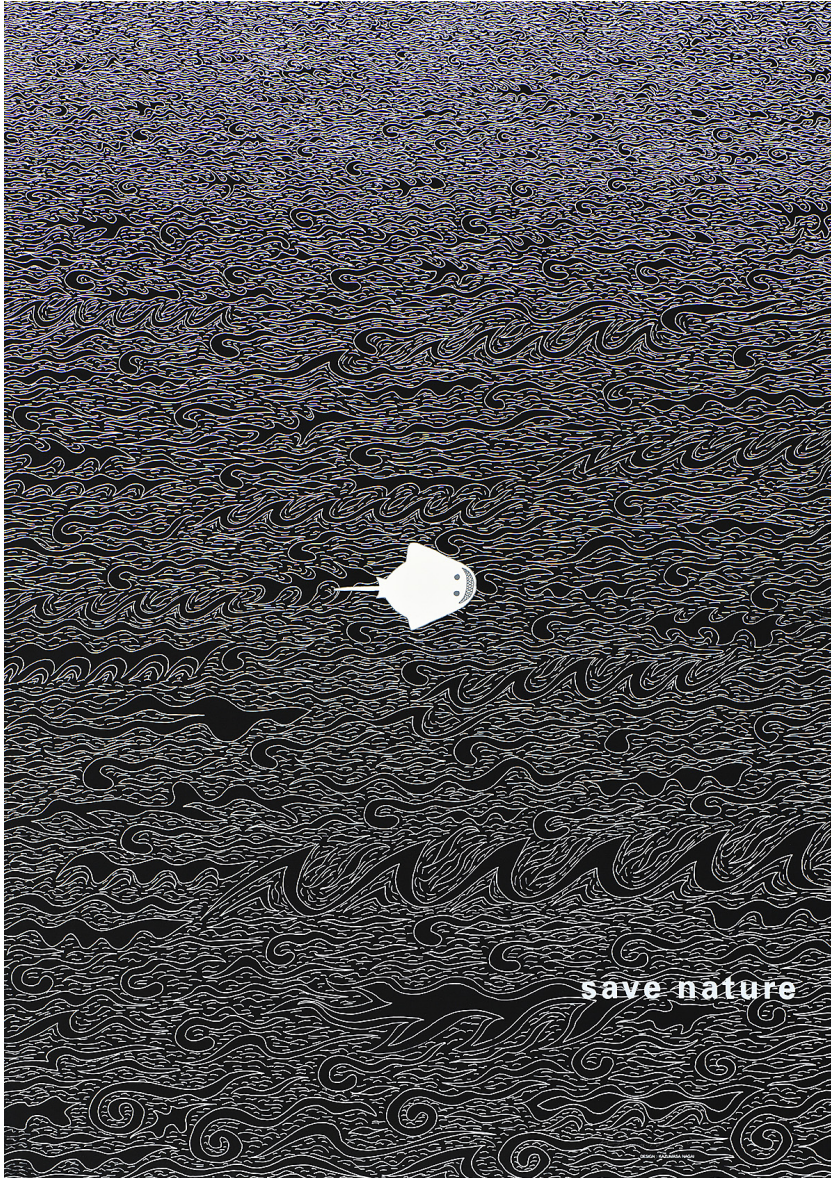


## Save Our Water, 1961

Hans Erni (1909–2015)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Hans Erni was a prolific Swiss artist and graphic designer, producing posters, murals, paintings, sculptures, stamps, and banknotes. He frequently designed posters that reflected his social, political, and environmental activism—in 2011, at the age of 101, he unveiled the 39-foot high poster *Forests Are Life* for the United Nations Year of the Forest.
- Erni created this terrifying image—popularly known as “Death in a Water Glass”—during a time of increased attention to issues of water safety in Switzerland, one of the first countries to emphasize environmental issues on a national scale. At the time, the Swiss media consistently highlighted chemical spills and general pollution as a matter of serious concern.
- Winner of the Swiss Poster Award, this is one of the first posters to symbolize the mortal dangers of pollution to humankind. It is also the only design in this exhibition to predate the formation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1970.

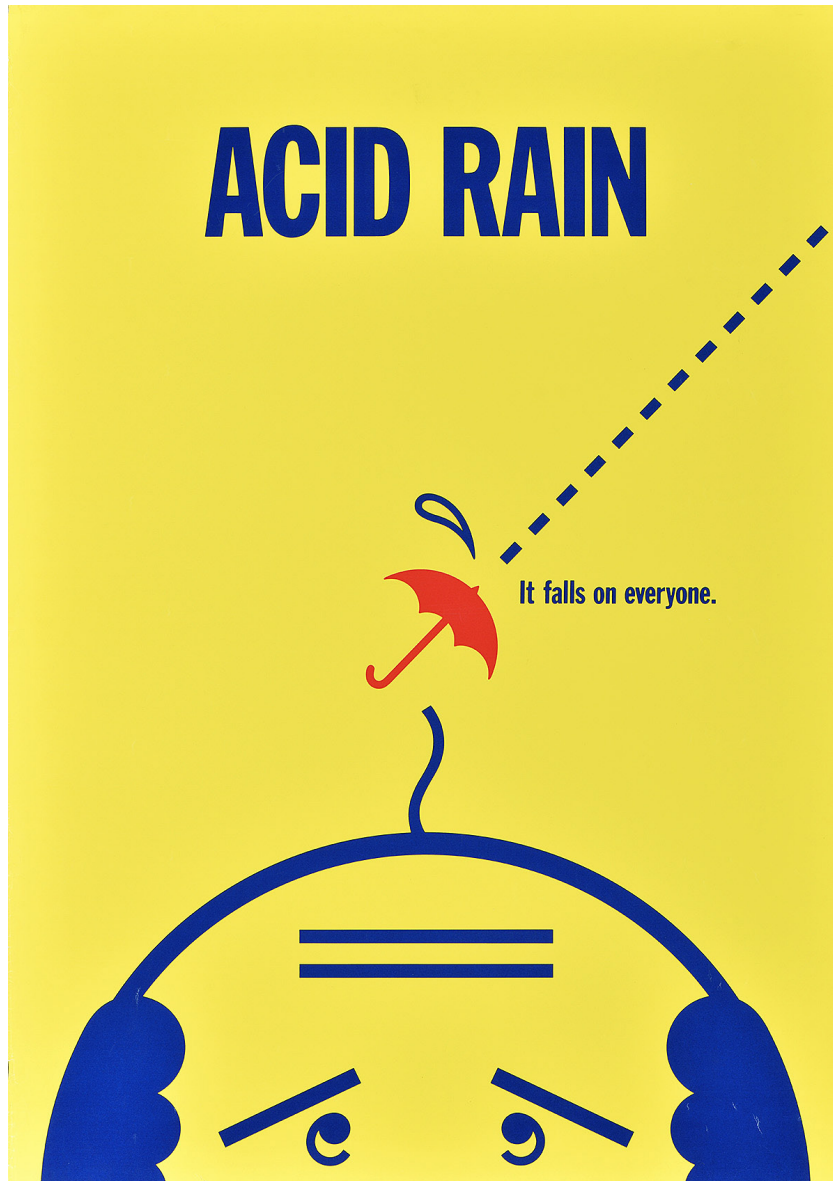


## Save Nature, 1995

Kazumasa Nagai (b. 1929)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Steeped in Japanese visual tradition, Kazumasa Nagai's work relies heavily on intricate geometric compositions that he achieves through copperplate etching. The intensity of these fine lines creates the perception of movement—in this case, that of a ray gliding through water.
- Nagai began his *LIFE* series in 1987, from which hundreds of environmental posters have been issued. Of all these compositions, he noted: "I think that when designers design something, they should find the laws that already exist in nature and give them shape."
- Like all island nations, Japan is disproportionately affected by the threat of rising sea levels. A rise of just three feet would cause the displacement of four million people, while outer islands would lose their drinking water to salt contamination.



**Acid Rain, 1989**

Chicako Ogawa (Dates Unknown)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Acid rain is created through the burning of fossil fuels, and is essentially evaporated water tainted with sulfuric and nitric acid that reenters the atmosphere and causes catastrophic damage to wildlife and plants.
- As a localized form of pollution, acid rain impacts some communities more than others. Currently, in parts of China and India where coal power is still widely prevalent, the rain has the relative pH level of grapefruit juice.
- The figure in the lower register is based on the character Namihei Isono, the patriarch of the world's longest-running animated television show, *Sazae-San*. Introduced in 1946, Isono has always been mocked for his lack of hair—here, even his final strand is at risk, as acid rain is both bad for hair and, in extreme cases, can burn one's scalp.

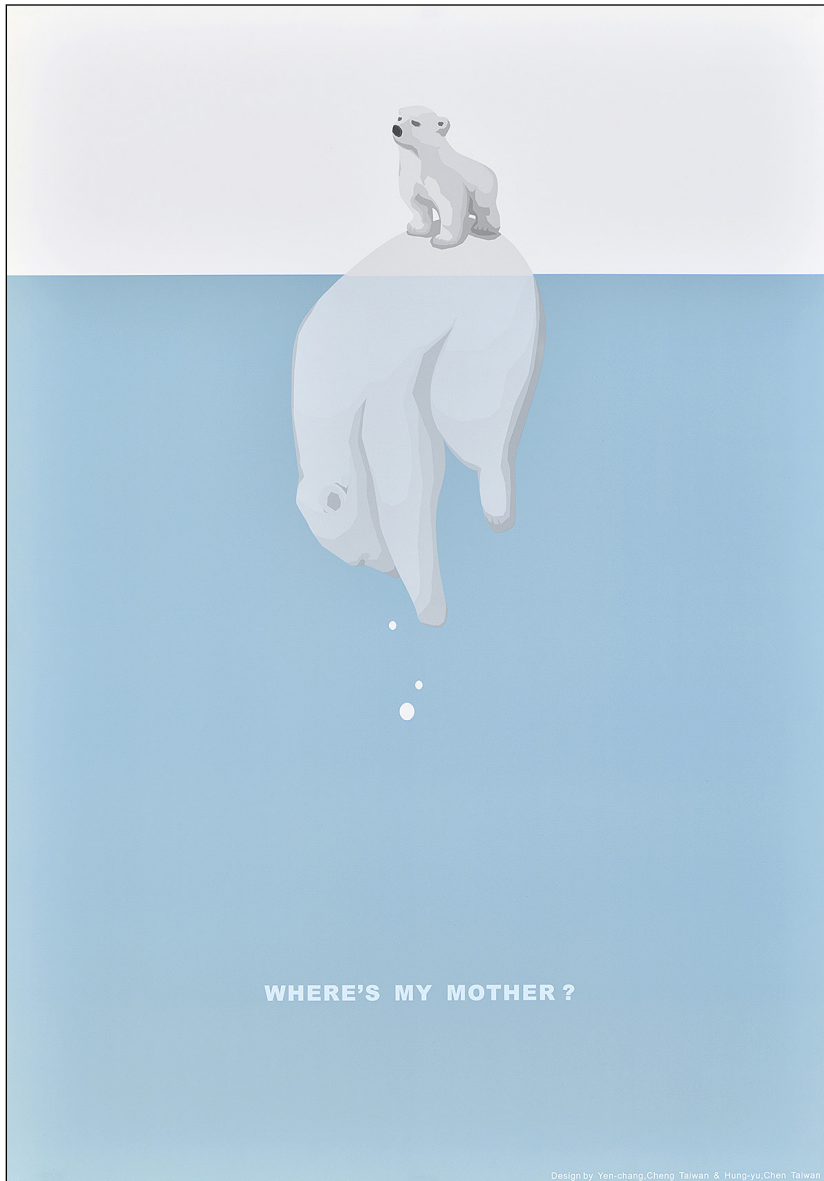


## Protect the Environment and Benefit the People, 1979

Designer Unknown

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- The publication of this poster by the Yunnan Provincial Environmental Protection Monitoring Station coincided with the establishment of the Ecological Impact Assessment (EcolA), a series of laws and implementation strategies that formed the basis of an environmental legislative framework in China. Its aim was to identify and predict how human activities impact the environment.
- The EcolA was first introduced in the major River Basin provinces. Yunnan is China's most ecologically diverse province, and the richest in freshwater, but is also heavily mined for aluminum, lead, zinc, copper, and nickel—the extraction of which relies on toxic materials that, if improperly used, can affect the water table.
- Today, the Mekong River, which flows through Yunnan, is designated as one of the World Wildlife Fund's top 20 "Priority Places" for conservation due to its vast biodiversity and high risk for destruction due to rapid development.



### **Where's My Mother?, 2008**

Yen-Chang Cheng (Dates Unknown)

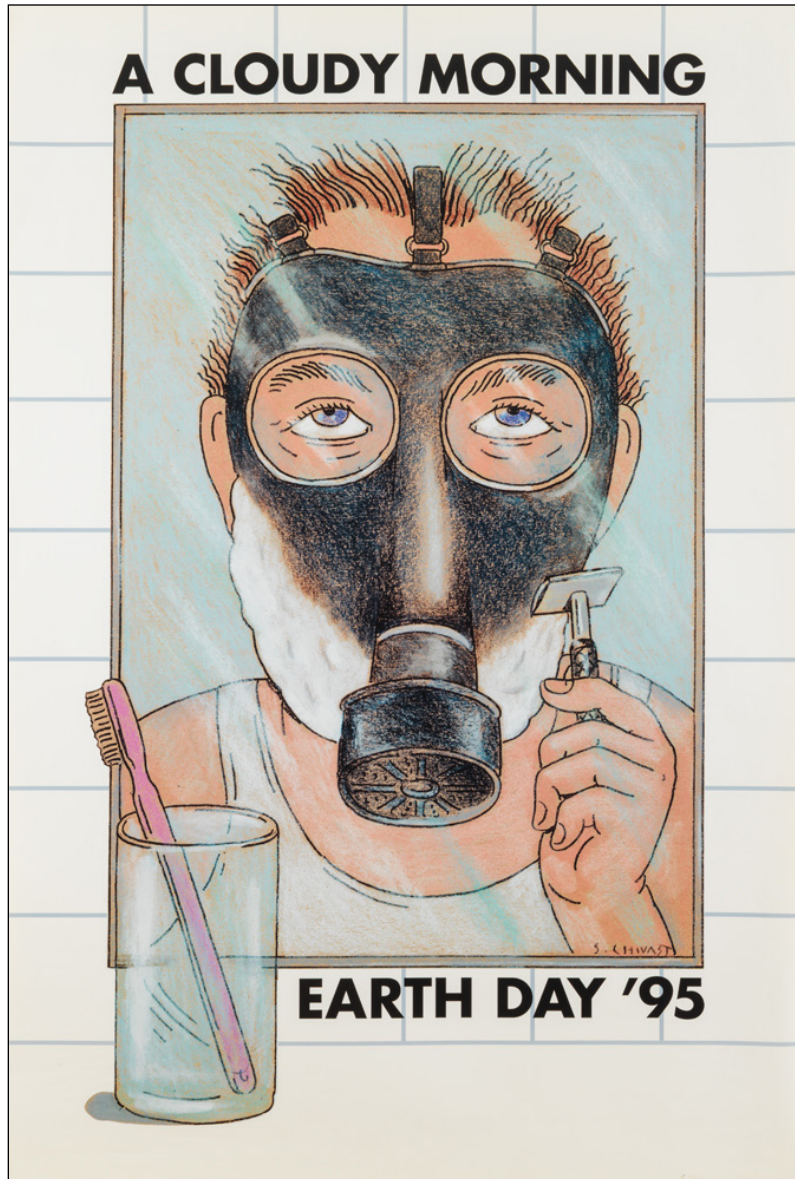
& Hung-Yu Chen (Dates Unknown)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- In March 2003, the polar bear became one of the most ubiquitous symbols of climate change after Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) held up a photograph of one against a snowy Alaskan backdrop as part of her argument against drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Surprisingly, this gesture proved successful and drilling was forestalled.
- The photograph of the polar bear was taken by Subhankar Banerjee and was originally intended to be part of a large exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Controversially, however, after the photograph had been used as a key prop in the vote against drilling, museum management relegated the exhibition to a remote corner of the museum and the wall text was significantly altered to remove much of the original context and analysis.
- This Taiwanese poster was entered into the debut category of the 21st International Poster Biennial in Warsaw, proving the enduring popularity of the polar bear as the unofficial ambassador of environmental issues.

# AIR

By the 2010s, a movement that had started in developed nations in the 1970s in the form of campaigns against urban smog had turned into battles against deforestation and for decarbonisation and renewable energy. Although it is easy to focus on the fossil fuels that produce 45 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions, some less obvious industries are significant polluters. For example, for every ten tons of cement produced, six tons of carbon dioxide enters the atmosphere. Between 2003 and 2020, the rapid expansion of Chinese urbanization and infrastructure meant that the country poured more cement every two years than the United States used during the entire 20th century.



### **A Cloudy Morning/Earth Day '95, 1995**

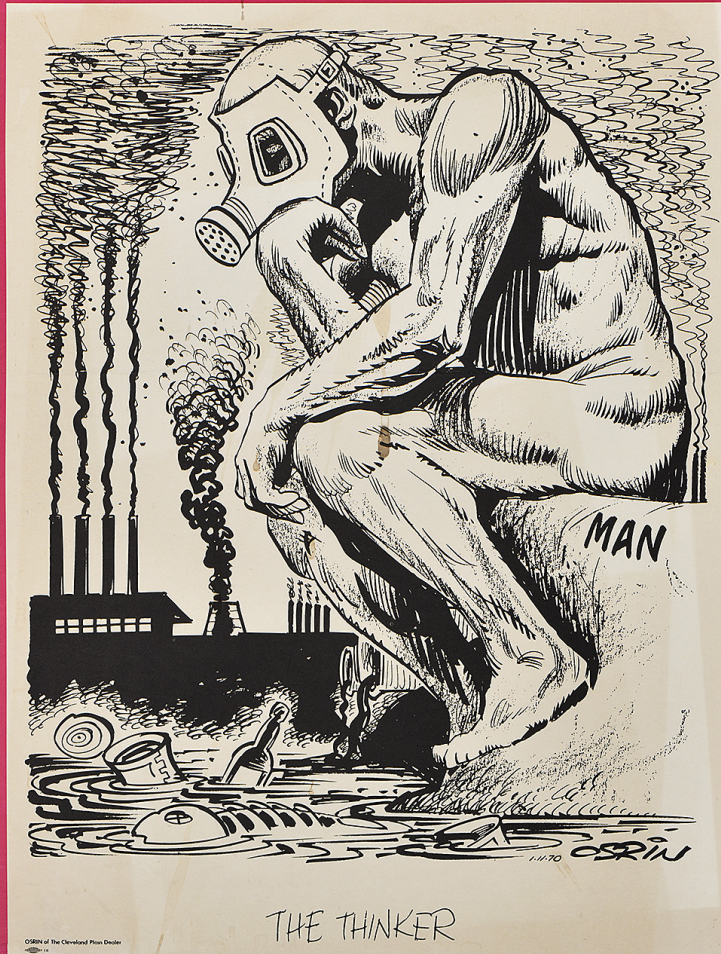
Seymour Chwast (b. 1931)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- This poster incorporates one of the most common symbols used in environmental activism: the gas mask. This iconography dates back to January 1970, when LIFE magazine featured a mother and baby both wearing gas masks while out for a walk. On the first Earth Day three months later, an Associated Press photographer captured a student smelling a flower through a gas mask—the image was published in dozens of newspapers around the world, inextricably linking the object with environmental causes.
- While the concept of a person shaving while wearing a gas mask may seem humorous if somewhat extreme, air-quality levels in many cities, including Delhi and Shanghai, are now so hazardous that schools are frequently closed and particulate masks are distributed to residents.



## Environmental Action-April 22



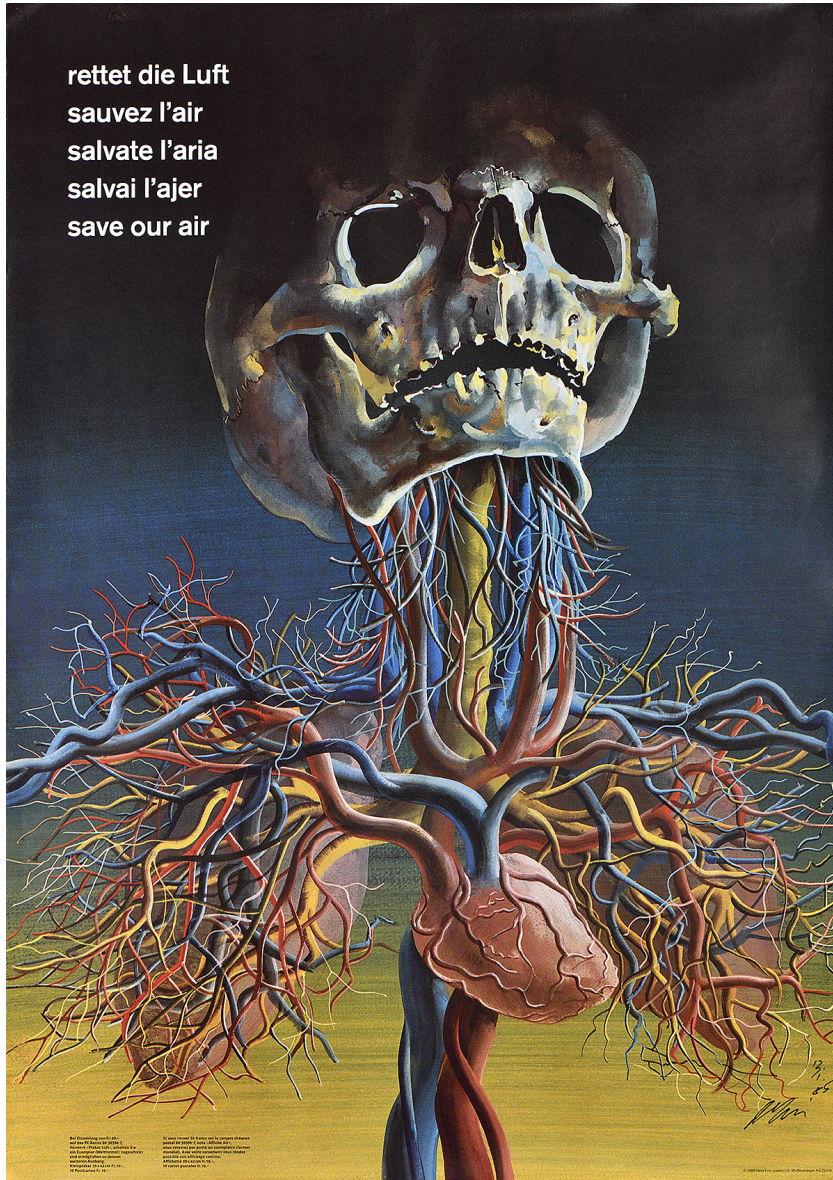
### Environmental Action, 1970

Ray Osrin (1928–2001)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- This poster was designed for Environmental Action, a national ecological organization launched on April 21, 1970—the day before the first Earth Day. The radical group combined activism with lobbying, proposing legislative language that contributed to the development of the Clean Air Act later that year.
- In operation through 1996, Environmental Action took inspiration from the grassroots social movements of the 1960s, focusing the majority of its efforts on ecological issues that, according to its founding statement, affected blue-collar workers, African Americans, and the poor. It was also responsible for publishing the “Dirty Dozen,” a list of the 12 most egregiously anti-environmental congressmen.
- Ray Osrin was the editorial cartoonist for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* for 27 years, producing 3,600 cartoons. In this image, he appropriates Auguste Rodin’s *The Thinker* in a post-apocalyptic, polluted nightmare.





## Save Our Air, 1985

Hans Erni (1909–2015)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Created 24 years after his iconic *Save Our Water* poster, Erni produced this design to draw attention to the dangers of air pollution in Switzerland. It was issued in the country's four official languages as well as in English in order to encourage broad distribution. The lower left corner indicates in both German and French that viewers could send in 20 francs for a copy of the poster or 10 francs for a miniature version or set of postcards.
- Between 1981 and 1993, Switzerland made substantial efforts to reduce the emission of sulfur dioxide, created through the burning of fossil fuels and mineral extraction. Today, 70 percent of Swiss electricity is produced by hydropower and other renewable sources.



**Save Energy, 1978**

Per Arnoldi (b. 1941)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- This poster is part of a series produced by the Danish Trade Ministry’s Energy Saving Committee. It was created in response to the global energy crisis of the 1970s, an era distinguished by widespread oil shortages and inflated pricing.
- Each of the posters shows the word “spar” (save) emerging from a potential source of wasted energy—a lightbulb, a radiator, a hot shower, and a car.
- The crisis caused Denmark to explore and invest in new energy sources. By 2022, 67 percent of the country’s electricity was produced through renewable energy.



## For Every Child A Tree, 1982

Eric Carle (1929–2021)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Eric Carle was a celebrated children’s book author and illustrator best known for *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. This poster, featuring his trademark collage style, reflects his love of nature and his intuitive understanding of, and respect for, children and their futures.
- Founded in 1972 and based in Nairobi, Kenya, the United Nations Environment Programme was created to help the U.N. respond to global environmental issues. The 1982 conference resulted in the formation of the Nairobi Declaration that broadly aimed to structure environmental strategies and sustainable development.
- This poster was designed in honor of the Kenyan conference and features the Swahili word for “environment.” It announces a large-scale program in which every child is invited to plant a tree.
- In the 1980s, South American countries received funding from the World Bank to help develop highways and agricultural settlements for the beef industry, resulting in an average annual destruction of the rainforests equal to the size of New Jersey. Media outrage inspired numerous campaigns, like the one promoted in this poster, to encourage tree planting. While there are still robust tree-planting campaigns around the world, the average annual rainforest destruction in the Amazon is now equal to the size of four New Jerseys.

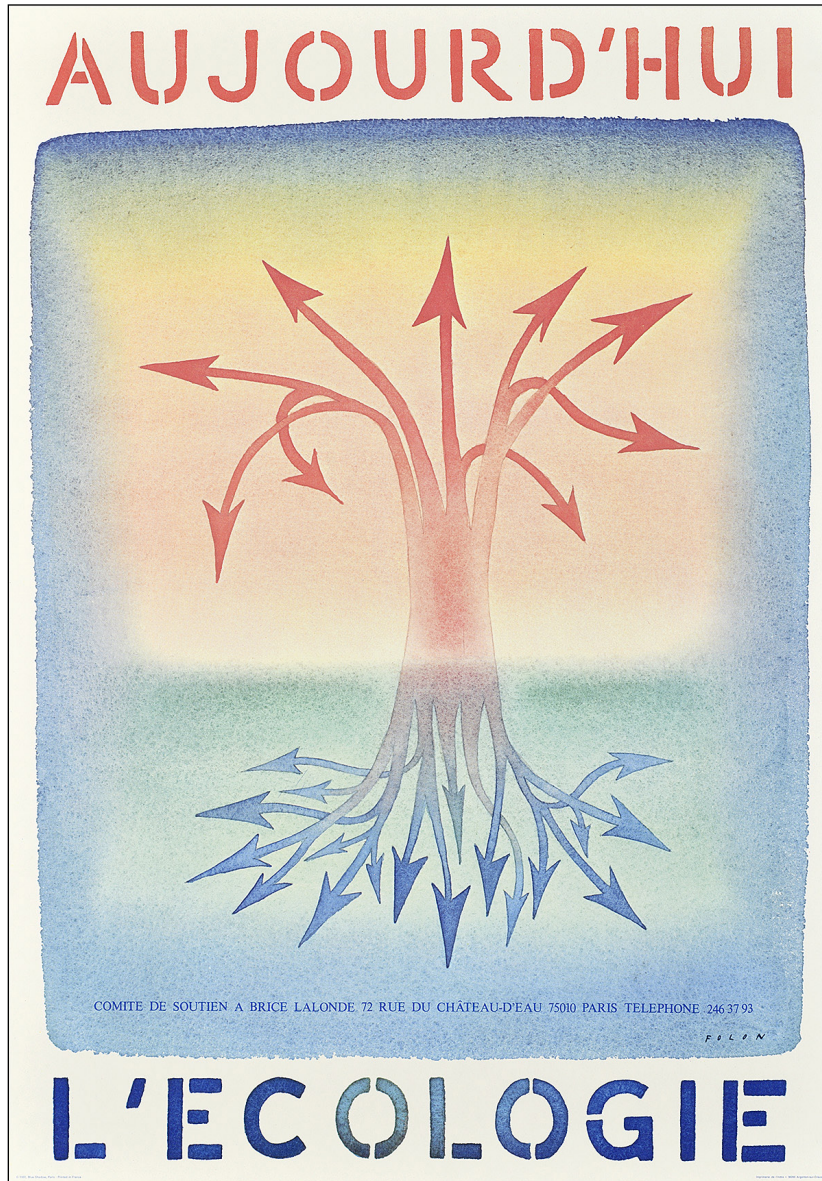


## Earth Summit '92, 1992

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008)

*Private Collection, NYC*

- The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was a one-off event focused on exploring legislation that could combat global warming. All participants were invited to sign the Earth Pledge, one line of which is reproduced at the top of this poster (with one small word change): “I pledge to make the earth a secure and hospitable place for present and future generations.”
- Robert Rauschenberg believed that individual responsibility was more important than government intervention—a fact underscored by the title of his original artwork for this design, *Last Turn–Your Turn*. Oddly, this coincided with George Bush, Sr.’s insistence at the summit that “the American way of life is not up for negotiations. Period”—indicating that the United States was not in favor of government efforts to reduce carbon emissions at the “perceived” expense of economic growth.
- At the time of the summit, the per capita carbon dioxide emissions of the United States were twice those of the United Kingdom or Japan. Today, while the total numbers have fallen for all three countries, the United States now produces per capita approximately three times the carbon dioxide emissions of the U.K. and still twice those of Japan.



### Ecology Today, 1981

Jean-Michel Folon (1934–2005)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Jean-Michel Folon was one of Belgium's most famous modern posterists, creating images for film as well as for his personal causes like Amnesty International and the environment.
- This poster promotes the Green Party candidate for the French presidency, Brice Lalonde, who went on to become Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, responsible for coordinating sustainable development.
- The graphic demonstrates how the branches of a tree take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and deposit it into the soil through its root system, while also emitting oxygen into the air.



**Tampering with the pollution control system means:**

- I'm breaking the federal law.
- I'm subject to a \$10,000 fine.
- I'm polluting your air.

**So, please don't ask me to remove your car's emission controls**  
**Your dealer**

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY WASHINGTON, D. C. 20460

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1973-161-001

## Emission Controls, 1973

Designer Unknown

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- This poster was issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a mailer sent to new car purchasers reminding them not to have catalytic converters removed from their vehicles. At the time, car manufacturers were spreading misinformation to consumers, telling them that this technology made their cars less powerful.
- The 1970 Clean Air Act established broad legislation on vehicle-exhaust emissions. In 1973, Engelhard Corporation released the modern catalytic converter that chemically removes the worst byproducts of gasoline-powered vehicles at the tailpipe, stopping them from entering the air. By 1975, the United States became the first country to legally mandate that all new cars include this technology.
- According to the EPA, present-day emission levels of new cars are 99 percent cleaner than in 1970, underscoring how effective legislation at the national level can be.

# FIRE

Fire, as manifested in carbon-based fuel for electricity, heat, transportation, and industry, is the source of both massive industrial progress and an increased standard of living. At the same time, it is also the major source of global greenhouse-gas emissions. While fuel efficiency has increased and carbon dioxide emissions per vehicle have decreased since the EPA began measuring them in 1975, the number of cars around the globe has increased from 200 million in 1970 to an estimated 1.4 billion in 2020. In 2022, 79 percent of all cars sold in Norway—the leader in the adoption of electric cars—were 100 percent battery-electric, and 98 percent of its electricity is renewable, primarily from hydroelectric sources; however, 60 percent of Norway’s exports are oil and gas. Statistics are always more complex than a single soundbite and can be easily skewed to tell desired stories. Most recently, it was revealed that the oil industry was aware of the extent of the damage caused by fossil fuels as early as 1977 and chose not to share that information with governments or the public. Instead, it deployed the invented concept of a personal carbon footprint, shifting guilt and expectation to the individual. Many of the posters in this section reflect anger at industrial corporations now that the dire consequences of their actions are more widely known and imminently threatening.

**Science and economics have no real way to value the fact that people have lived for millenia in a certain rhythm, have eaten the food and sung the songs of certain places that are now disappearing. This is a cost that only art can measure, and it makes sense that the units of that measurement are sadness and fury—and also, remarkably, hope.**

—Bill McKibben, *Falter*

**We're sorry that  
we got caught.**



**Now that we've been caught,  
we're trying to make you think  
we care about the environment.  
But we're not the only ones.  
#redlines #D12 #ClimateGames**



## **We're Sorry That We Got Caught, 2015**

**Barnbrook**

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- In the lead up to the 2015 United Nations' Climate Change Conference in Paris, the activist group Brandalism placed more than six hundred posters in bus shelters around the city, all of which aimed at calling out the ecological hypocrisy of the summit's various corporate sponsors.
- Here, Barnbrook appropriates the voice and branding of a typical Volkswagen advertisement, but references its recent emissions scandal. This resulted from the discovery that the illegal software on more than 10 million diesel-powered vehicles had allowed the cars to pass EPA and other agency inspections while in "test" mode, but that under regular driving conditions they actually emitted more nitrogen oxide than legally allowed.
- While the 2009 VW Jetta Diesel had won Green Car of the Year, the award was rescinded in 2015 when this information was leaked. As of 2020, the scandal has cost the Volkswagen Group in excess of \$33 billion, with more cases outstanding.





**We're In This Together./ExxonMobil, 2022**  
Winston Tseng (b. 1980)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- In January 2023, a group of researchers led by Harvard University revealed that Exxon had been producing “strikingly accurate” internal climate-change forecasts since 1977 while publicly disputing the emerging science. As such, they were aware of the dangers posed by fossil fuels and deliberately chose to do nothing.
- More than half of the total carbon emissions ever produced by the burning of fossil fuels have been released in the last 30 years.
- This poster depicts Rex Tillerson, the former CEO of ExxonMobil and Secretary of State in the Trump administration, against an apocalyptic backdrop approving the “ironic” message that we are all “in this together.”



## Countdown to Mass Extinction, 2022

Winston Tseng (b. 1980)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Negotiated in 2015, and entering into force in 2016, the Paris Agreement is an international treaty signed by 195 countries dedicated to mitigating the risks and damages of climate change. One of its stipulated goals is to keep global-warming temperatures well below a rise of 2 degrees Celsius, with the hope of keeping it below 1.5 degrees Celsius. In context, a 1.5 degree increase would cause sea levels to rise approximately 3 feet by the end of this century, enough to inundate some coastal cities. If a rise of 2 degrees Celsius is exceeded, numerous major ice sheets would collapse, leading to a possible 30-foot rise in sea levels.
- This poster is part of a larger series created by Winston Tseng in which he appropriates the logo and iconic characters of *Sesame Street* to produce apparently legitimate advertisements that highlight the dangers of climate change. Like many of his other protest posters, they were illegally put up in bus shelters and on walls throughout New York City.



## **Lexus/For Those With Environmental Awareness, 2017**

Ogilvy & Mather, Buenos Aires

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- This tongue-in-cheek advertisement inadvertently makes the point that green consumerism is for the affluent, showing a well-heeled couple protesting a whaling ship aboard a Riva speedboat (that, incidentally, costs half a million dollars and uses much more fuel than the Lexus). A 2023 report backed by the United Nations pointed out that the top 10 percent of individual polluters produce 50 percent of greenhouse-gas emissions.
- Lexus's parent company, Toyota, is the largest manufacturer of hybrids. Before electric vehicles became widely available, hybrids were viewed as the most environmentally friendly small cars.

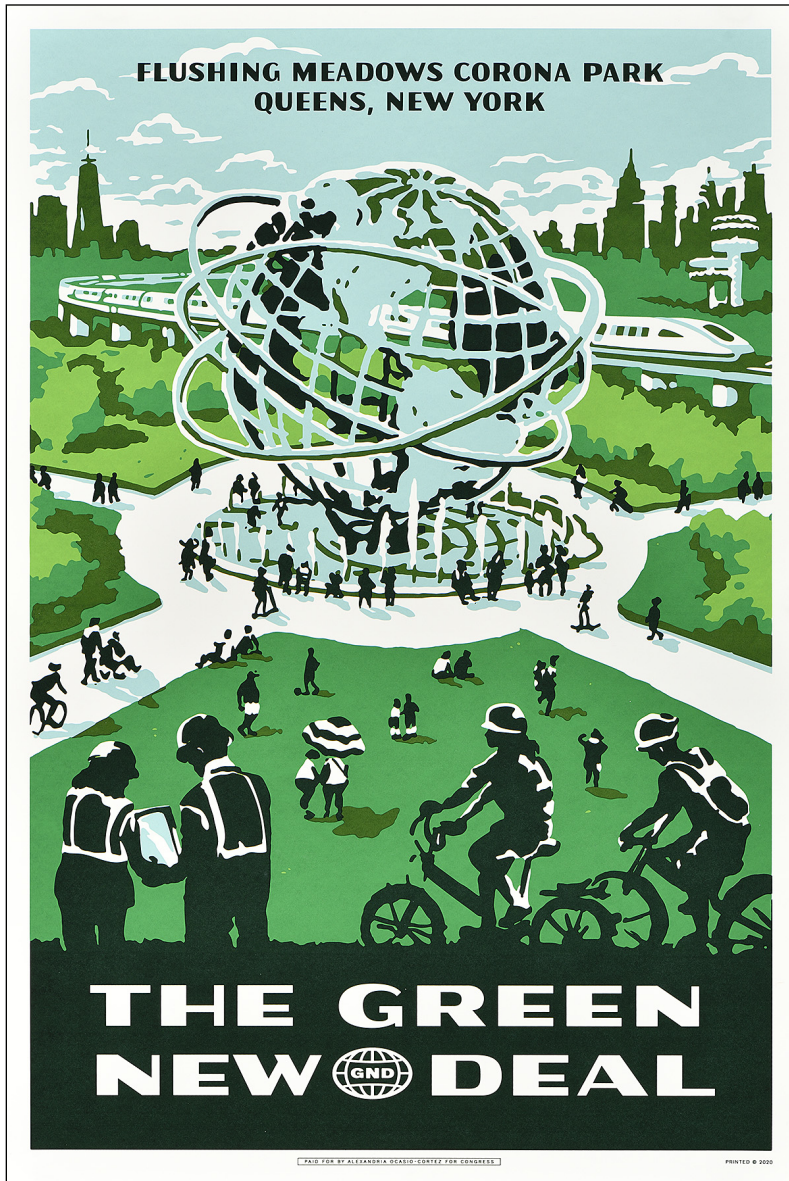


## Wall Street Funds Climate Disaster, 2023

Jan Martijn Burger (b. 1972)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- This poster is part of a series produced by the Stop the Money Pipeline coalition, a grassroots organization that aims to hold the financial sector accountable for its support of corporations that damage the planet. Like the poster for the Green New Deal, this design references the style most commonly associated with WPA posters.
- Banking on Climate Chaos—an organization that tracks the financing of fossil-fuel companies—estimates that U.S. banks have loaned \$4.6 trillion dollars to that sector since the Paris Climate Agreement went into force in November 2016. RBC of Canada was the largest lender to the global fossil-fuel industry in 2022, with JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Bank of America, and Citibank also among the top five lenders.
- Climate activist groups such as Third Act (which focuses on people over the age of 60) are encouraging consumers to move bank and credit-card accounts from large fossil-fuel lenders to other financial institutions that either do not lend to this sector or are moving quickly to withdraw their support from those industries. As more than 70 percent of the wealth in the United States is held by people over 60, this form of peaceful protest is well designed to have a dramatic impact on the domestic banking system.



### The Green New Deal, 2019

Illustrator: Gavin Snider (b. 1985)

Art Director: Scott Starrett (b. 1983)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- The original New Deal was a series of programs and projects initiated by the federal government under President Franklin D. Roosevelt to stabilize the economy and create jobs during the Great Depression of the 1930s.
- This composition, in the style of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) posters of that era, shows an idealized view of Corona Park in Queens, NY.
- While variations on the Green New Deal were proposed as early as the 1970s, this poster promotes the much-publicized 2019 version introduced by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Senator Edward Markey (D-MA) that aimed to stop the use of fossil fuels in the United States while guaranteeing new high-paying jobs in clean-energy industries.
- When a resolution on the Green New Deal was introduced to the Senate in March 2019, it received no votes in favor from any party (many abstained in protest). More recently, however, the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 contained landmark legislation offering a series of tax incentives to help transition the country toward renewable energy. The *Financial Times* called it “the most important climate action in American history.”



### **Rise for Climate, Jobs and Justice, 2018**

Amos Kennedy (b. 1948)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- The People's Climate Movement mobilizes action for causes related to climate change, as well as economic and social justice. In 2014, it organized the People's Climate March in New York City, and, in 2018, the organization led the global Rise for Climate, Jobs and Justice marches, motivated by the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement.
- These marches highlighted the evidence that the poorest regions are those most likely to be affected by climate change. In a period of rising economic inequality, green consumerism caters to the affluent, while low-income communities are exposed to higher levels of environmental risk.
- In March 2023, the *Guardian* published an article based on a model developed by researchers at the University of Washington that demonstrated how neighborhoods in the United States most burdened by pollution are overwhelmingly Black and Hispanic.
- Amos Kennedy is a letterpress printer known for his iconoclastic, typographically driven designs. As printing shops close around the country, many have given him their old inks rather than disposing of them according to expensive and time-consuming EPA regulations.



**Everyone’s Participation is Necessary  
for the Earth to Win, 2016**

Rafael Enríquez Vega (b. 1947)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- This poster was produced by the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), a group that advocated for anti-imperialist and revolutionary movements in the Global South. While OSPAAAL was based in Cuba, its posters were distributed around the world, and were designed by a large roster of international artists.
- OSPAAAL’s motto was “this great humanity said: enough”—a relatively peaceful and benign slogan until partnered with its graphic logo of a gun and a globe. Many of its posters promote what the organization viewed as necessary violence.
- In this composition, the earth is pitted against various obstacles in a game of tic-tac-toe—climate change, pollution, overexploitation, shifting habitats, and the destruction of species. Although it is implied that the planet wins, the number of dangers filling the other squares indicates that the rules were not followed.



## Save Our Planet/Save Our People, 1971

Ernest Trova (1927–2009)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- In 1971, the Italian company Olivetti sponsored a series of six anti-pollution posters by internationally renowned artists gathered by Jean Herzberg Lipman, the editor of *Art in America*. This famous group included Georgia O’Keefe, Alexander Calder, Edward Steichen, Buckminster Fuller, and Roy Lichtenstein—as well as the American pop artist, Ernest Trova. The campaign was promoted by UNESCO and used to finance projects led by the United Nations in the developing world. The posters were also given to U.N. ambassadors to help raise ecological awareness.
- Each composition combined the phrase “Save Our Planet” with a secondary message highlighting a specific area of concern—in this case, humankind itself.
- Trova was most famous for his “Falling Man” sculptures and paintings, symbolizing imperfect humanity hurtling into the future.





**That's All Folks!, 1971**

Designer Unknown

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Published by Gemini Rising, this headshop poster is based on the popular image of Porky Pig from *Looney Tunes*. He would often end each cartoon segment with his signature line, “That’s all folks!”
- Here, Porky wears the iconic gas mask, as well as an ecology logo pin on his lapel, as he boldly gestures to a heavily polluted planet. This toxic atmosphere is even more eerie when seen under blacklight, when the poster glows as if radioactive.

# EPILOGUE

Many of the posters from 30 years ago still feel contemporary today due to a lack of decisive progress on climate change. More importantly, so much of the messaging puts an undue burden on the individual rather than on the governments and corporations that have been the main agents of environmental degradation over the past half century.

Disasters can accelerate innovation. As the climate crisis was ultimately caused by the Industrial Revolution and its legacy, government regulation can drive industry to produce solutions, while also providing incentives at all levels to encourage use and adaptation. It is only recently that scalable, cost-efficient technologies have enabled manufacturers to produce electric vehicles and renewable energy at affordable prices. For many, solar power is now the cheapest and most convenient form of energy. In April 2023, the EPA proposed tough, new emissions limits that would force car manufacturers to make 67 percent of their U.S. models electric by 2032—a dramatic jump from the current 7 percent. Furthermore, nonprofit organizations like Rewiring America help consumers understand the available options and how sustainability can be economically achieved at the individual level.

The targets that must be met to avert disaster are actually achievable, but they demand continued large-scale commitment and legislation, not political tribalism or attempts to encourage individual ethical consumption. Ancient cultures venerated nature, understanding that each generation is a trustee for those that come after—in that spirit, and only through determined global effort, will contemporary civilization preserve the environment on which it depends.





## Press Reviews

**HYPERALLERGIC** *eye* **BROOKLYN RAIL** **AP**  
**Gothamist** *Le Monde* **FASTCOMPANY**  
*The New York Times* **wnyc** *TimeOut*  
**METROPOLIS** *The Telegraph* **Forbes** **CREATIVE REVIEW**

**POSTER**

**HOUSE**