

RED CROSS / RED CRESCENT CLIMATE CENTRE AND BALANCE-UNBALANCE: THE ART! ∞ CLIMATE PROJECT

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Abstract

The *art! ∞ climate* contest used art as a catalyst in helping to build bridges between sound artists and specific humanitarian actions related to climate change, with the intent of engendering a deeper awareness and creating lasting working partnerships in addressing our global environmental crisis. Both the process and the outcomes of this initiative highlight the value of integrating creative approaches into humanitarian work for complex risk management issues. *Keywords:* art; climate; humanitarian; games; mosquitoes.

The global climate is changing, and vulnerable communities around the world are suffering the consequences, leading to a greatly increased workload for humanitarian organizations. Traditional disaster management approaches are not enough to deal with rising risks, and new forms of collaboration are needed to inspire people and organizations to link knowledge with action [1].

The Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Centre and the Electronic Arts Research Centre (CEIArtE) of the National University of Tres de Febrero, Argentina have joined forces to develop the *art! ∞ climate* contest for the creation of sound-based art miniatures on the global environmental crisis and climate change [2]. This project was created as part of the Balance-Unbalance initiatives to use art as a catalyst not only to explore intersections between nature, science, technology and society, but also to provide a platform for reflection and debate so ideas become actions.

As a direct consequence of the second Balance-Unbalance conference, held in Montreal, 2011, the *art! ∞ climate* initiative was launched in 2012. In its first stage, this project consisted of a global contest for the creation of sound miniatures that the Climate Centre can use in its activities around the world. The results of this first contest were announced [3] during the third Balance-Unbalance conference [4] in June 2013, and selected submissions are starting to be used by the Climate Centre at the time of this writing. As the next phase of *art! ∞ climate* is being shaped, this paper shares key aspects of this collaboration and

explores innovative ways to link artists and humanitarian workers.

Objectives

The Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Centre's mission is to help address the humanitarian consequences of climate change and extreme weather events. In its efforts to engage people at risk, government agencies, academic institutions, donors and other stakeholders, it has become clear that information is rarely sufficient to trigger behavior change. As a result, the Climate Centre is designing and facilitating methods for learning and dialogue that involve not only brainpower but also the emotions of participants (such as collaborative workshops, participatory games and short educational films, linking information, decisions and consequences on disaster management [5]). How to harness the talents of creative artists to support these efforts?

The *art! ∞ climate* contest had two main objectives: a) Provide the Climate Centre with sound-based art material that can support their actions; and b) Improve knowledge about the human dimensions of the environmental crisis and promote awareness about the effects of climate change, both among creative artists and among those exposed to their work.

The Contest

The first *art! ∞ climate* contest was co-sponsored by Hexagram, the Research-Creation Centre in Media Arts and Technology of Concordia University, Canada, Central Queensland University, the Noosa Biosphere Reserve, Australia, and Leonardo/ISAST.

For this contest, sound art miniatures implied short creations of sound art/music realized using new technologies, encompassing what is known as soundscapes, electroacoustic/acousmatic music, sonorizations, and sonifications. In the original call, we requested those wishing to participate to read the "Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Guide" [6] and other reference materials to support participants becoming familiar with the issue.

The categories available for the contest were 'Mosquitoes' and 'Open Theme'. The 'Mosquitoes' category aimed to support initiatives to raise awareness and better manage the growing risk of malaria, dengue and other mosquito-borne diseases that are showing new regional and seasonal patterns due to changes in rainfall and temperature - an issue highlighted in several Red

Cross projects in Africa, Asia and the Americas that will include games and short films. The 'Open Theme' category invited submissions about other dimensions of changing environmental conditions.

The works were selected by a jury of internationally recognized composers and new media artists, and members of the Climate Centre as well, finding that it was possible to have good works of art that could also fulfill the specific needs of a humanitarian organization for its daily field actions.

The international jury selected 37 works for the 'Open Theme' and 2 for the 'Mosquitoes' category, and the Climate Centre selected from among those the final works they will use.

Innovative contributions included a piece that turned into sound over 400 years of scientific data from atmospheric conditions (creating an evocative soundscape that illustrates how our carbon emissions correlate with global warming) as well as a composition that conveys the pervasive buzz of mosquitoes changing in space and time, disrupting and even threatening the listeners. Composing sound art miniatures proved to be a great way for musicians to stop being spectators and start to contribute actively to humanitarian goals.

Next Steps

In addition to using selected sound art miniatures in ongoing humanitarian initiatives, CEIArtE and the Climate Centre are establishing stage 2 of the *art! ∞ climate* project, opening the collaboration to other partners and other areas of the new media arts that could support the humanitarian mission of the Red Cross / Red Crescent [7]. Options range from crowdsourcing music/soundtrack creations for short training videos, to the establishment of web-based platforms for offering humanitarian stories as inspiration for purely artistic creations.

References and Notes

* This article is based on a paper presented at the 3rd Balance-Unbalance International Conference, 31 May-2 June 2013, Noosa, Queensland, Australia.

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