

About the Cover

A Beautiful Death

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Every Spring I watch the magnolia flowers decay so quickly to a dull, dirty brown. They seem to lose their dignity even as they fall.

Aram L. Kim, featured artist

In “Spring has Gone,” Aram Kim, this issue’s featured artist and winner of the 2010 Biennial EcoHealth Art Competition, uses striking imagery to explore the correlated dynamics of humans and nature. In a sort of alternative still life, she grasps the beauty of magnolia flowers frozen in mid-air, before they light on the ground and begin their inexorable journey to dust. A commentary on the harsh reality of life, this image reminds us that from the moment the buds first swell, they start to die—a beautiful death, but death nonetheless.

“Spring has Gone” lets us glimpse a private moment in nature, and also in emotion, as the central character weeps and hides her face. What saddens this mystery figure? Is it grief at the loss of a friend, a relative, a lover? Is it *ennuie* over the passing of the seasons? Or is it the return of sad memories from last year’s spring? The subject of Aram Kim’s etching weeps for all of the above, and more. She weeps over the loss of spring itself. In this autobiographical piece, the artist invites us into her own perception of the impact of climate change as it seems to shorten the transition between seasons. Just like the magnolia petals, as spring fades, it seems to lose its dignity.

Capturing these long-term dynamic changes in a static image is hard for an artist, and likewise we have our own difficulties in seeing them. Aram Kim lives in New York

where winter is long, and as the snow falls it is hard to even remember what summer is like, let alone how the seasons’ dynamics have changed during the past few decades. As a species, it is to our advantage to focus on the next few days, or this season, or next year. We seem to have evolved a poor skill set for interpreting environmental changes on intergenerational scales. Anthropogenic environmental changes, such as habitat loss and climate change, seem to be just beyond the cusp of our perception. We are always caught up in the moment, absorbed in our own immediate environment and community. We marvel at the brevity of an ant’s life or the passing of a storm, just as we sail magnificently toward our own demise.

The irony is that it is only as we each approach our own demise that we start to see some of the more subtle, longer-scale changes that are happening on our planet. We revisit our childhood haunts and find that the frog pond we used to wade through is now an apartment complex, or that the willow tree we climbed is now paved over. We look around and realize that each generation is born into a smaller space, with nature squeezed between our expanding reach—a thin layer of cement between the cold bricks of our cities and farms. We think back to our youth and remember the great Appalachian storm of 1950, the big freeze of 1963 in Europe, the Midwestern U.S. snowdrifts of 1975, the 100-year floods of Queensland in 2011. We think about how much more rain falls each spring, or how we don’t get the same amount of snow that we used to. With their historical memory, it’s the older generations that can see this change, but mobilizing action needs the attention of all.

This is the mission upon which Aram Kim and her colleagues have launched their art: to use simple but striking imagery that captures the juxtaposition of our love of nature and our gradual destruction of it. In some of Kim's art, we see perhaps a deeper, more personal meaning of loss, one attached to the uprooting of her own national identity and cultural context. But all of these meanings are hidden behind images that are superficially attractive enough to draw in the unwitting aesthete, ready to be amused or shocked with the darker side. In her own words: "My art pieces are pleasant scenes to look at, something to attract people's eyes so that they're captivated, while they gradually come to realized the darker meaning behind the pleasant scene."

A mirror, perhaps, of our own youthful exuberance, exploring the world and seeing only its beauty, while the darker reality of a shrinking planet and changing environment emerges only to those who peer behind.

ART COMPETITION AT THE ECOHEALTH 2010 CONFERENCE

In addition to fantastic presentations and panel discussions, the International Association for Ecology and Health was proud to host an artwork competition at its third biennial conference in August. Artwork was judged upon its relevance to the IAEH and its mission: To strive for sustainable health of people, wildlife, and ecosystems by promoting discovery, understanding, and transdisciplinarity.

Students and visual artists submitted their works, and the top ten nominees were presented at the biennial conference held at the London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, August 18–20, 2010. Monetary awards were given to the top three pieces, and prizes also included a 1-year subscription to the print-version of this journal.

Another art contest will take place during EcoHealth 2012, the fourth biennial conference of the IAEH. The conference will be held in Kunming, China. Updates, including the call for art submissions, will be posted regularly on our association website, www.ecohealth.net. In the meantime, learn more about our 2010 featured artists and their work!

FIRST PLACE: COVER ART

"Spring has Gone" (2009) by Aram L. Kim, etching with aquatint and color pencils, 6 × 11 in

Aram L. Kim was born in Ohio, grew up in South Korea, and moved to New York City to attend the School of Visual Arts. After graduating, Kim developed a career in freelance illustration. Her work consists of both subtle etchings and colorful paintings, but no matter the medium, Kim's art is whimsical. Objects often are placed in unusual or unexpected settings to draw attention to the contrasts of human activity and nature. In 2010, her "Whale in the Forest" was awarded the Norman Rockwell Museum award, and her art is exhibited in a growing number of galleries. Kim's work has been published in magazines, accompanying pieces that range from economics articles to children's stories. Kim is currently working on an illustrated children's book.

On "Spring has Gone," Kim writes, "When I was attending elementary school as a kid, I used to learn that Korea has four distinctive seasons: spring, summer, fall, and winter. It is the same in New York, too, where I live right now. [...] However, transitional seasons like spring and fall have been getting shorter and shorter. When I ask people around me, they seem to prefer spring and fall for their gentleness, calm, and beauty. For me, especially spring, when everything is back to life again after a long, cold winter is just amazing. However, I began to feel that it is very hard to say when spring is any more. Winter lasts longer and longer, and finally when I do not need a winter coat, all of a sudden it is summer, which lasts until winter starts again. Unusual weather phenomena have been happening for years now all over the world, and this summer I see people getting sick because of the extreme temperature differences, but still we use our air conditioning excessively. It all makes me very concerned that weather is actually changing and people still act according to their own comfort. I made 'Spring has Gone' wishing that we do not need to tell our children that we only have two distinctive seasons."

SECOND PLACE

"Billboards" (2009) by Weston Woolley, mixed media print, 48 × 60 in

Weston Woolley, 31, was born in Jacksonville, North Carolina. Woolley discovered his passion for visual art while living in the urban environments of New York City and Los Angeles. Although Weston favors oil painting, he has experimented with various types of media. The mixed media piece featured as our second place award is one part

of a larger installation, “Billboards.” A series of eco-friendly panels depicting scenes of nature, the installation was exhibited in 2009 in Transmitter Park, a public space on the East River waterfront in Brooklyn, NY. Until August 2010, when the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation began renovations to Transmitter Park, the park was little more than an open lot with neither trees nor grass. When asked what drives him to continue to pursue a life in art he responds, “We all live in a creative universe. I truly believe when we tap into that source, our lives become enriched and aligned. Simply, it makes me happy.”

THIRD PLACE

“Need Oxygen” (2010) by Neeraj Riddlan, watercolor and digital print, 8.5 × 6 in.

Neeraj Riddlan obtained a BFA from Delhi College in 2002. He currently works as the Senior Digital Illustrator of the Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in Delhi, India. TERI produces research and publications that focus on global sustainable development. Most recently, Neeraj contributed to a comic book called *Tronomega to Earth*, part of the Soldiers of the Earth series, a collaborative project that was designed to teach children about environmental issues. Neeraj uses various styles in his artwork, ranging from polished digital images, to caricatures, to comics.

Information on the artists and their work was contributed by Sara E. Howard.