Climate Change Through the Artist's Eyes with Alonzo King

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Greg Dalton: This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. On today's program - connecting with the natural world through art.

Alonzo King: I think that human beings, we are out of rhythm when we live in cities and we see skyscrapers instead of the sky...It's curious that people who are farmers, agrarian or they're in nature all the time, that is art. That is the great work of the Divine Mother. [:20]

Greg Dalton: In the right hands, art can help us understand our own feelings about climate disruption. But that doesn't always change hearts and minds.

Nora Lawrence: One thing that can go wrong with climate art is I think sometimes if it really hits people over the head it doesn't mean it's affecting people. It doesn't mean it's really moving them or bringing them along with the artist or anything. [:13

Greg Dalton: Climate change through the artist's eyes. Up next on Climate One.

Greg Dalton: Can art help us process our changing climate? Climate One conversations feature energy executives and environmentalists, Republicans and Democrats, the exciting and the scary aspects of the climate challenge. Today's program is generously underwritten by The Sydney E Frank Foundation. I'm Greg Dalton.

The story of climate change is typically told in the language of facts and figures, graphs and charts. But through dance, music, sculpture and other media, artists can reach people on a deeper and more emotional level, designing cultural moments that can bring us together - and bring us to tears.

Nora Lawrence: If I'm writing a study about climate change I'm going to ...give you some data and some graphs and it's gonna be rather dry. I'm not going to cry, but I might if I'm giving you a work of art about climate change. I might show more of myself; I might do something different that inspires something else in you besides a certain part of your brain. [:20]

Greg Dalton: Nora Lawrence is Senior Curator for the Storm King Art Center in the Hudson Valley outside of New York City. She curated Storm King's 2018 exhibition titled Indicators: Artists on Climate Change, which was among the first major museum exhibitions about climate disruption.

Alonzo King is a visionary choreographer and founder of Alonzo King LINES Ballet, a contemporary dance company that tours the world, often collaborating with artists from other realms. King doesn't think of art and science as mutually exclusive - in fact, he says, they're the perfect balancing act.

Alonzo King: ...a balancing act between logic and feeling. In their highest realms, the union, the marriage of those two is met through intuition. There is nothing that exists that you can create that does not have science, it's impossible. There's nothing that doesn't have music, it's impossible. [:19]

Greg Dalton: Growing up in Georgia, Alonzo King's parents were active in the civil rights movement and worked with Dr. Martin Luther King. After Alonzo's step mother experienced a violent episode at the hands of police, a young John Lewis invoked that incident as a call to action during the March on Washington in 1963.

John Lewis: "What did the federal government do when local police officials kicked and assaulted the pregnant wife of Slater King and she lost her baby? To those that have said, "Be patient and wait," we must say that we cannot be patient. We do not want our freedom gradually, but we want to be free now." [:20]

I asked Alonzo King to tell us what happened to his step mother.

PROGRAM PART 1

Alonzo King: My father was going to jail quite a bit and my mother went to visit him one day and she had my sister in her arms little baby at the time and my mother was seven months pregnant and the police kicked her in her stomach and beat her and she lost the baby. Because of that tragedy there was a huge uproar and Martin Luther King said please no retaliation because the community really wanted to riot. And my mother spoke to the community from her bed and said, "Please, peace is the answer let's not retaliate." And that was an important lesson for me and life forming the way that they live their lives taught me everything.

Greg Dalton: And you say commonly that you grew up around people who were willing to die for their cause.

Alonzo King: It's true. When you're in an environment where people first, there was such a strong feeling of community that being out of that is a strange thing when they go places and don't feel the embrace and the focus that was a part of my beginnings because the community was so locked together and the idealism and the belief in an idea was so powerful that tons of people were willing to go every day and be beat up repeatedly to be jailed, to lose their jobs because most of them did. If they worked for government or anything in the city they lost all their jobs and they were ready to keep doing that. And so the succor came from those mass meetings where people got together. So it was a rich, fertile and strengthening time for me to be around people who are willing to die for what they believed in. So it wasn't just talk it was a reality, that they stepped into the streets, knowing that inevitably they might die and they were there for the cause.

Greg Dalton: You also grew up near woods and had an early connection to nature, you say that they were sacred spaces whispering information. So tell us about that early connection to nature.

Alonzo King: I think that human beings we are out of rhythm when we live in cities and we see skyscrapers instead of the sky. One thing about a landscape when they're so few anymore where there's not electric lights and the stars become dominant at night and that carpet of sky is so humbling you feel minuscule and that is an important thing to feel. To feel that you are a grain of sand. And when you're in nature a lot there's a presence that slowly becomes apparent. At first, for most city dwellers when you get to nature you resist it takes a while you don't even know you're resisting. And then once you begin to let go and really surrender there is a presence that is felt, you step into a clock pattern, sunset and sunrise you can feel it before they even happen. And so there's a tuning in that tunes you into the cosmic clock. And that is really curing healing and informative.

Greg Dalton: Nora Lawrence, Storm King occupies about 500 acres of rolling hills and woods an hour outside New York City. How did you approach curating an exhibition that conveys the climate emergency through sculpture?

Nora Lawrence: I really felt like it was important to have the experience of climate being embodied experience for Storm King visitors to use our beautiful site and our incredible site as a reminder of the stakes at play. We have all different types of natural environments at Storm King we have two ponds, we have woods, we have great meadows, we have lots and lots of acres of native grasses. And so to really allow people to have what Alonzo I think was just describing that experience of letting yourself go into nature while also thinking about the climate crisis was something that we didn't want to lose. That it wasn't about an indoor exhibition entirely that just had photographs of other places but really using our landscape and our environment as a way to let the climate crisis really hit home that it is here as well as elsewhere as well as in the Arctic, etc.

Greg Dalton: And Allison Janae Hamilton from Northern Florida was one artist looked back on her black experience in nature. So tell us about her and her work of art

Nora Lawrence: Sure. Allison created with us I believe her first ever outdoor sculpture which is really exciting and she called it "the people cried mercy in the storm." And it was named after a line from the song Florida Storm that was written and performed by a singer named Judge Jackson in 1928 two years after the great Miami Hurricane and just before another hurricane in 1928 that actually the recovery from which was the backdrop for Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God. And Allison is somebody who grew up in the Florida Panhandle grew up near the coast and grew up as a member of a family of black farmers who was hearing at the dinner table from her relatives from different people who she was eating with just all of these local effects of the climate crisis. And all of these things that the farming community was needing to do that had to do with this. But she wasn't seeing these voices at all represented in the news on TV, things like that. It wasn't matching what she was sort of seeing in the mainstream news broadcast. And she wanted to focus on these two hurricanes in 1926 and 1928 that hit Florida and Alabama because of for one, the way that we can think of this almost as not a new story and really something cyclical and the ways in which people who have had less access to power to money, etc. have also been historically people who have been the deepest affected by climate crises. And after the hurricane in 1928, there were mass graves of black farmers that were never identified. And so I think she also wanted to talk about the ways in which we use culture as a means of recovery. And thinking about this song, Florida Storm and the way that it really brought people together.

Greg Dalton: Alonzo King, when you think about climate change, what comes to mind for you as an artist. There's so much information and so much grief so much loss. How do you process that as an artist?

Alonzo King: I think that it reduces to something as complicated and as huge as it is it really in its reduction in which is the art process is which is so interesting is that you are talking about ideas that are so big and you have to reduce them into symbology you have to make them a sort of an algebra so that symbols are reference for things that are much larger or words don't have the capacity to really grasp. But when you reduce what we've done to the climate what we've done to this planet it is selfishness and greed, plain and simple. Plain and simple, selfishness and greed. And it comes from the irony of not knowing who and what we are and thinking that ourselves is our bodies. And our bodies are not ourselves, they're separate.

It also is an error in education because we don't know what human beings are we're not those bodies, we're souls playing roles. And if people were to recognize that human beings are valuable just the fact that they were born I mean tons of people all the time who lament the fact that they feel worthless unless they have a degree from this place, unless they have this certain amount of money unless they have celebrity this is a horrible, horrible education. And so if this is the thinking of the masses and it is then we have set up a caste system where certain kind of people are important and other people are less important or not important at all. The same mechanism, the same thinking is

what has made art elitist and separate an ivory tower away from the common herd of eaters and that has to be destroyed. I look at it that every human being if they are serious about their life is some kind of an artist. And my definition is and I think people really should look at words and find their own definition, meaning they should search for what is the essence of this idea. How do I see it? And I see that art is the knowledge of how things are done.

Bottom line whether that's the art of government, whether it's crops, whether it's how to treat people. And the highest art is the art of living. Emerson said so beautifully that the goal of art is higher than art itself, meaning that through that culture and practice we would reveal ourselves as human masterpieces and that is the aim. And so the separation of caste that we have set up in terms of humans being low and high, important, not important, same way that we do art it is a horror. And so we're missing an internal dialogue we're missing what St. John calls the seven candles what yogis called the chakras in the body we're missing that staircase of wonder and limitless potential and of course that will come to the fore through science through the practice of yoga through people who during this pandemic are forced to examine their lives. They can't run away into busyness. They have to examine what am I doing, what do I want to change, what do I want to contribute to the world. How do I want to depart from the world and look back and say well done? These are the important questions and this is the artistic life. This is the artistic way that kind of self-reform of the painting of the book of the choreography and the human being.

And so if we're serious we have to say what have I contributed to this problem. If I've come to a place where I feel I left the sense of me and expanded the sense of we and have stepped into the idea of oneness how can I exploit a mountain. How can I exploit a people because I've gotten to a place where I realized that people that mountain is me that ocean that my country is going to polluting is me. The earliest folks who I remember talking about climate change and the problems they're in were indigenous people. Saying, I can't fish anymore. What is that thing called Shell that comes to my country and does this? I mean they were saying it long before other people because they were aware of their participation in nature and its changes and destruction was run amuk. So how we treat people is connected to how we think about ourselves and what we think people are.

Greg Dalton: Nora, I'd like to get your response to a lot in there including how art can take something so massive as climate change and bring it down to a human scale and something we can respond to that's more relatable, even if it's more than abstract.

Nora Lawrence: Absolutely and I think one work that was very well loved in our exhibition was by an artist named Jenny Kendler who I think did that also in a way that you were just speaking of, Alonzo. She used the term human exceptionalism. This idea that as humans we're not allowing ourselves to be part of nature, right. And it lets us make these decisions to extract whatever we're extracting from that mountain or kill all those fish or do whatever we need to do because we don't think of ourselves as just another species.

So she did this project called "birds watching" and she made a hundred large-scale replicas of the eyes of different birds that are endangered or threatened with extinction because of climate change within the next 50 years. And she put these hundred eyes out. So they have kind of this nature that is also looking back at you and they're the eyes. So they're saying you know what's different between you and the birds, right. How can you just make this category for yourself called bird and not even think that these are individuals as well. And I think that that helps people.

I think that zeroing in on these moments beyond what you referenced, Alonzo, at the beginning of what you're saying is just this kind of mass of horror, right, or this thing that's just way too big for us to kind of keep in mind all the time. But if we look at different parts of it we can sort of use that almost as a synecdoche for the whole, right, and think about something bigger as well. And I think

that's really important for people to be able to do and that's something that art can help with.

Greg Dalton: And Alonzo King, you talk about how the human body is a replica of the planet and that most humans are denatured. What do you mean by that?

Alonzo King: That the first thing I was thinking was that when you look at indigenous cultures even the idea when someone would say sign this paper. The idea that someone can own land was such a query that how do you grab that to say how can I own the land. How is that possible? And the idea also that the earth is mother and how do you treat mother a really important question. How do we treat mother? How do we look at women, big question. And so the nurturer we're destroying because there is an abstract idea that this is the planet that we can exploit instead of seeing it as the provider that we have to take care of. And that anyone who thinks that way is silly, but it's the smartest thinking in terms of the wonder of human beings because the reality even though we have behaved cruelly we are the pinnacle of creation in terms of nature. And so that means we have a bigger responsibility. The macrocosm which is mind-boggling when you think 100 billion galaxies, all with their suns the intelligence doesn't grasp that, it's impossible. The term infinity, intellect doesn't grasp that. What can grasp that? The intuitive experience. We're talking about art making again. And the recognition if anyone has found a sense of awe within themselves they would have to realize that as a human being if I'm able to step away from my ego and step into a vastness which is the whole point of the little self dancing in groups in community you step into the larger self. And if there is largeness in your personal experience that moment on revere other human beings because that potential also lies within them. And so to answer your question directly. We are miniatures of the cosmos and so this little body is actually nothing externally but internally the body is gargantuan. And so our search our work is really internal and those discoveries, the great discoveries are internal.

Greg Dalton: You're listening to a Climate One conversation about connecting with a heated world through art. Coming up, the role of artists in the pandemic era.

Nora Lawrence: I think people really crave art. And I don't think it's for an escapist reason, I think it's for…self-care. I think it's for enlightenment. I think it's for bridging something that speaks beyond today. [:14]

Greg Dalton: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Greg Dalton: This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton, and we're talking about seeing climate change through the artist's eyes. My guests are Alonzo King, choreographer and founder of Alonzo King LINES Ballet, and Nora Lawrence, Senior Curator at the Storm King Art Center. Before we continue our conversation about dance, sculpture and other art forms, let's consider what music of climate change sounds like.

In 2018, classical composer Adam Schoenberg was commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony to write a percussion concerto. He didn't have the environment in mind as a topic, but while on the plane to San Francisco, Shoenberg happened to read a New York Times Magazine article entitled "Losing Earth: The Day We Almost Stopped Climate Change."

PROGRAM PART 2

Adam Schoenberg: And it was a horrifying article to read. And when I got off the plane I just

knew that somehow the percussion concerto is going to be a response to the idea of climate change or really the fear of climate change, especially now being a father of two young boys.

It's complicated as a composer because at the end of the day my job is still to write a piece of music that can stand on its own, just as a piece of music. And so the piece just begins with the bass drums literally traveling around the hall going "da-da-da-da-da-dum" and then a big grand pause of just silence. I disrupt the orchestra by literally stopping the orchestra. And those disruptions are meant to evoke all the natural disasters that are occurring around us so that we actually snap out of our own little bubble and start to be aware of what's happening around our surroundings. The second section is dubbed as this underwater world as if what's happening with our receding coastlines and the sea levels rising. And then the third movement or third section I should say is really the virtuosic dancelike movement which is really the call to arms where the orchestra wakes up sort of saying. what is going on?

What makes music so universal is that it is its own language that is its own vocabulary but it's not a language or vocabulary that everyone has to speak you just sort of feel it. And so I think without any information you wouldn't necessarily know that it's about climate change. But for me it's all about artistic integrity and doing work that you wholeheartedly believe in and feel that you can put your best foot forward.

[End Playback]

Greg Dalton: That was composer Adam Schoenberg who wrote the concerto Saving Earth performed by the San Francisco Symphony in 2019. Nora Lawrence, is art meaningful if you don't really know it's about climate can really be a vehicle for social change, or is it just you know is this is an insider thing? I saw that piece by the way, we're at the San Francisco Symphony it was astounding of course I was thinking with climate eyes. But if you didn't have those climate eyes on I'm not sure that art would really enlighten you?

Nora Lawrence: I see it a little differently and maybe I just reverse it a bit. Because to me there's one thing that Adam said in there I just wanted to make a great piece of music or I needed to make the best piece of music I could. And that's so critical. Bad art is never going to get anybody to figure out more about it. But good art I think, an art that really moves people and that he knows he put in his absolute best effort to that's what's going to get somebody they may not have come in, they don't have a climate podcast, right. They didn't come in with your perspective, but it doesn't mean that people aren't going to learn a little bit more and find out a little bit more about that piece if it's great. So I think that can also be extremely helpful because I think one thing that can go wrong with climate art is I think sometimes if it really hits people over the head it doesn't mean it's affecting people. It doesn't mean it's really moving them or bringing them along with the artist or anything.

One artist in our show, Hara Waltz is also, she's an artist she's also a biologist. And one thing she had said is if I'm writing a study about climate change I'm going to give you an essay, I'm gonna give you some data and some graphs and it's gonna be rather dry. I'm not going to cry, but I might if I'm giving you a work of art about climate change. I might show more of myself I might do something different that inspires something else in you besides a certain part of your brain.

Greg Dalton: Alonzo King, I've had many climate conversations where I've described things very similar to what Nora just said. Where climate started with physics and chemistry in outer space and it came to like smokestacks and tailpipes and the way we use energy and it's very cerebral and technocratic. And I've often said we need arts and other we need to reach people's hearts and make them cry as Nora said. Is that right though you might see it differently the rational mind reaches

people in a different way than the emotion of art.

Alonzo King: I think that again for me it comes back to the human and we are imbalanced and we are denatured. We have a balancing act between logic and feeling. In their highest realms the union of the merging of those two, the marriage of those two again is met through intuition. There is nothing that exists that you can create that does not have science, it's impossible. There's nothing that doesn't have music, it's impossible. At one time music was categorized as a science in the Middle Ages. It was a science, that's what that category of study was. So the idea of in a low stage the idea of logic can be dry, calculated, predictable. The idea of feeling can be indulgent, chaotic, illegible and those have to be elevated again through a human evolution of awareness. And the language of these communications be it science be it art -- because they're really married they're not separate -- is again a problem of education. If I needed those to tell me about the experience I'm having that's a problem because it either means that I'm not comfortable with my own intuitive perspective as every artist would want you to be. This is what I say but what do you say and what do you see? And famously as Chopin would say, listen to what Liszt is doing to my sonata! He was in awe of his interpretation.

And so that engagement comes from people who from childhood was seeing paintings were not going just to exhibits; they were painting themselves they were dancing themselves they were playing instruments. And the internal world of the awe and wonder of children gets cut off through that dangerous bridge of taking them out of wonder in what we call law and logic. But in reality they work together.

Greg Dalton: Nora Lawrence we're at a time where a lot of people are reconsidering lots of things including art and whether it is an essential service now. Museums are closed, Alonzo just said art is vital, you know, we've cut arts education in a lot of America. So how is art being reconsidered now in the era of COVID?

Nora Lawrence: Wow. Okay. So, big question. I mean I think one thing is that artists are still working. People are still craving art. Just anecdotally at Storm King we are one of the only since we're all completely outdoors and since we're outside of New York City. We have been for the past month one of the only places that people in the New York area can see art. And we have been sold out every single day. I mean we're up to these New York State limits we have to limit audiences, etc. but people really I think people really crave art.

And I don't think it's for an escapist reason, I think it's for a whole number of reasons. I think it's for self-care. I think it's for enlightenment. I think it's for bridging something that speaks beyond today, right. I think there are so many things right now that it's so easy to get sort of just completely obsessed with and bogged down with and involved in. But art I think I love that, Alonzo, the way you spoke about the universe and these different stars and just thinking about how much more is out there is something that I think art can do for people. I was also thinking, you know, if you think macrocosmically even stars fall, right. I mean, there are these lifespans of everything out there.

So I think that's one way to think about it, Greg. I know we had also talked a little bit about monuments falling and what all of this means right now in the context both of COVID of racial justice. And I think that's another thing to really think about and a thing that I think is really important and really inspiring. I mean I was looking at a Confederate monument today during a panel that I was watching and then how now what it has is no statue atop it and then just all of this other art, right, all of this painting that's coming on top of that and, you know, this isn't new it reminds me of the Berlin wall, right. I think there's so much there and there's so much happening and I think the response of people are having and thinking about in terms of what should be taking up our public space is really important. And I think also shows the ways in which people are

thinking about how art should be used and what types of art should be in our way, right.

Greg Dalton: We have a question from the audience. Becky McGarvey for Alonzo King. "How can we make art that highlights the connection with others in a time when we are being socially distant?"

Alonzo King: I think that tons of people have flooded museum sites to look at works, gone to sites to see dance. Gone to deep reading of books to become enlightened and learn more about themselves and vis-à-vis the world. What Nora's bringing up brings up the question to me who is being talked to. Who are we talking to who are we not including and that for me means again looking at the past, at how we behaved and how to fix it. If the colonizers come into a country and don't recognize intelligence in the way crops are growing in the knowledge of what plants can heal which these people held in the invisible mounds that were created by the Native Americans here. All of these brilliant levels of intelligences were just wiped out and ignored. I mean that's shocking. And so in that same way who are we talking to and who are we ignoring is a big deal. And it goes back to that question again of do we revere people. How do we look at people and that tells everything.

And to the question I would say that what art is doing is it is it's like what is it like, it's like a tuning fork. And it's especially needed for people who live in cities. It's curious that people who are farmers, agrarian or they're in nature all the time, that is art. That is the great work of the Divine Mother. And so in cities where there's concrete and skyscrapers we need that nurturing in another way. And individually that same kind of nurturing can come from what the art is the truth is that the art is within the artist. And that pool of information that pool of accessibility is when the mind quiets itself from distraction, when the jabbering roommate that's in your head shuts up and there's a sense of expansion. Everyone should take the time to find that because art is within everybody. Everyone should find that place of quietness, that place of solitude and that place of information. Every artist talks about it. There becomes a quietness, the noise settles down expansion comes in and then you're swimming in a playful pool of knowledge and information.

Greg Dalton: Nora Lawrence, I'd like to ask you about how you responded to a very public and political piece of protest art recently. When you first saw Black Lives Matter painted in yellow letters on a street in Washington DC where did you see it and how did you receive it and was it art?

Nora Lawrence: So I first saw it in a very I'd say artistic, sort of framed in a very artistic way. So I saw it on the Instagram page of the artist Simone Leigh. And I saw it as kind of an elevated and I'm telling you this because of the aesthetics, that felt important, an elevated span of the entire statement. So I didn't hear about it first, I just saw it. And I felt really I mean impressed and surprised and for that to be right at the White House felt like it was an incredible day I guess. So to me that felt like an artistic experience, something that I didn't know was possible. I didn't know that it was coming. And that, you know, I think also now we've seen it in a lot of other places too, right. So I think that desire for imitation is also speaking to the power that I think that gesture had.

Greg Dalton: Alonzo King you've talked about how there's a lot of introspection now, am I a racist, am I selfish? Your thoughts on that and what you think of the Black Lives Matter art on the street or any of their other artistic expressions?

Alonzo King: I think that there's a lens that's now been opened and focused on what Black, Native American and indigenous people have seen all the time that have lived in this horror have lived in the recognition of anti-blackness. You know how when you travel around the world and you go to communities where everyone is black and brown and you look at the posters and the ads in the cities and they're all quite white folks and it's not reflecting the community or the cities that people

inhabit. And you see that in institutions, you see it in ballet companies, you know, whatever it is because anti-blackness is enormous and it has to be eradicated. It's huge, the idea of white supremacy which everyone has taught, everyone has been taught that. That's been put into people's minds. And it's only people who, well, the majority of people who say you know that is a falsehood, you know, to look at that and to remove that from a consciousness, that's not easy. Because it's deeper than the sub conscience.

And so when people feel white is superior that is so deeply impacted. That doesn't come out because of one affirmation or you decide okay I'm going to change, which is great. That is work because it's so deep it's in everything. It's in our educational system, it's in the hierarchy that we place all things in, it's on all media. And so that has to be re-examined. And the beautiful thing is that there got to be a mass, there got to be a point a critical mass where people did what they identified with oppression. They identified with the knee on someone's neck and that became them. And the them that became is so marvelous because it's compassion. I recognize that this is injustice it's what the eyes of people were seeing. But more importantly, or additionally, I should say, is that it's connected to war, ecological disaster, religious sectarianism, the way women are treated, all of the isms -- they're all interconnected, they're not separate. And so the address of this racism the address of this brutality is the address of all oppression should and the greatest fear of oligarchs let's be real is the 99% joining. And so everyone who feels that they have their own oppression. It has to say no, this is ours, all of us are suffering from this. And those are the big ones: war, ecological destruction, religious sectarianism, racism. Those are the big ones. How we treat people. How do we treat people?

Greg Dalton: You're listening to a conversation about artists responding to our current times. Coming up, using art to heal.

Alonzo King: There is also work that says while there is darkness, you still have this opportunity to alleviate it but you can also look to the light. [:11]

Greg Dalton: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Greg Dalton: This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. We're talking about art and climate change, with Alonzo King of LINES Ballet in San Francisco, and Nora Lawrence of Storm King Art Center in the Hudson Valley.

A listener named Marnie wrote in asking what artworks about climate change have profoundly impacted them. Nora Lawrence recalls a piece included in Storm King's 2018 sculpture exhibit.

PROGRAM PART 3

Nora Lawrence: An artist named David Brooks who I think has really devoted most of his career to this. So one piece that we have that I really love that we're going to have at Storm King forever as David said, it's called Permanent Field Observations. And I want to bring it up because I love the piece but also I think it connects to a lot of different topics that we're getting at here. David took a long walk through the wooded areas of Storm King and found these intersections of let's say a rock and a vine or he found one that was coyote scat and he found one that was a deer skeleton. And he cast 30 different instances into bronze and put the bronze back in the woods next to the originals. So of course as you can imagine the coyote scat stayed next to its bronze replica for almost no time

at all. The rock that's right next to it is going to be there for quite a bit longer but the promise and he called it Permanent Field Observations.

And so they're his favorite parts of the woods they're hidden out there they're not really meant to be found unless you do a close scientific observation of the woods to really look for them. And he call them Permanent Field Observations because he wanted it to feel like an expedition. And what I think is beautiful about them is this idea of permanence and this really questioning that he's having of what permanence really means, right. He says okay these have to be here forever. And so to keep them there forever he made them in bronze, right, they're gonna be there for a long time as long as nobody moves them.

And I, as a person who works with outdoor art I'm always thinking about that idea of forever or permanent. And I think that's also something with monuments that's coming up a lot. And the question about okay how do we move forward and what does it means to memorialize a person or what is it mean to call anything forever to use bronze in the first place. So it's something that I've been thinking about a lot and what it also means for the climate, right, because everything's changing and it does feel like this kind of interplay of a lot of events for me right now that I'm always thinking about.

Greg Dalton: And I think of the Eastern philosophy of the impermanence of everything, right, the very notion of that so, Alonzo.

Alonzo King: I think what it brings up for me is when Adam was showing that we saw that little clip of what was the San Francisco Symphony and realizing that at the end of it he said I was left with having to make a good work. I mean that's the bottom line. And so there is a kind of a pull, a tug-of-war between disruption in society and literally showing that and saying this is my work. And having people say, oh that is a re-creation of what I'm experiencing.

There is also work that says while there is darkness, you still have this opportunity to alleviate it but you can also look to the light. And so when I heard that first question I thought if we were to just see a baby, just a baby smiling, you know, a month old and we were to just watch the baby that tells us everything about climate change about war about racism. Just to look at a beautiful little baby and just watch it for a long time that is an art piece that is as you know, human beings, let's look at the babies. And that should answer a lot of questions and give us a lot of information just look at the babies.

Greg Dalton: If you're just joining us we're talking about climate through the artist's eyes on Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. My guests are the choreographer Alonzo King and Nora Lawrence a curator with the Storm King Art Center.

We're gonna to our lightning round and ask you a true or false question and then association question. So first for Alonzo King. True or false. Growing up you never looked to white as something to aspire to?

Alonzo King: No. In the community that I grew up in I was surrounded by brilliant black beautiful black faces. So that was my prejudice and the ideal for me.

Greg Dalton: True or false. Nora Lawrence, statues of Confederate soldiers are works of art?

Nora Lawrence: I think it's false. I think they're more works of repetitive propaganda stemming from Greece, Rome before that and meant to really reify a culture that was already in charge and reify white supremacy.

Greg Dalton: Alonzo King. True or false, all art is propaganda?

Alonzo King: I think that one of the wonderful things about art making and the curious contradictions of it is that kind of intelligence can be used for evil or good. And also with artists there can be artist who produce beautiful work and they're not such beautiful people. I mean if we look at the lives of Wagner with that amazing work and a kind of messed up person with the things that he believed in and that is the human condition. And so the irony is there could be something that was created beautifully by an artist but what it represents is something rotten. And that's how it is.

Greg Dalton: Alonzo King, what's the first word or phrase that comes to mind when I say George Balanchine?

Alonzo King: Water.

Greg Dalton: Nora Lawrence, what comes to mind when I say Alexander Calder?

Nora Lawrence: Red.

Greg Dalton: Alonzo King, your favorite vocalist?

Alonzo King: All of them. Everyone who sings.

Greg Dalton: Alonzo King, a living artist you would most like to collaborate with?

Alonzo King: Bach, I think his work is living.

Nora Lawrence: Now I know we can twist it if we want.

Greg Dalton: Alonzo King, a form of art that you can't stand?

Alonzo King: The art of manipulation.

Greg Dalton: Alright. That ends our lightning round. Thanks for getting through all of that.

We have a question from Sarah Rosenberg, a listener citing a previous guest on Climate One, Margaret Klein Salamon who's actually was a practicing psychiatrist and now she's a climate activist. And she talks about grieving the future that we thought we were going to have and how art and culture contribute to this process of grieving a future that we're losing. There's so much grief in the world right now. So Alonzo King how can art process those future grief and past grief?

Alonzo King: I see that we are moving into a higher age and unfortunately grief and suffering are the prods to change. And the dream world that most people have in their heads where there is harmony where there is a oneness where there's a collective of caring what we the term that we always hear the common good at not common is the pejorative anymore, but the wholeness the health of everybody. That means physical, mental and spiritual health of the world community, we're headed there. But there is weight and darkness, and contraction in that transformation.

And so I see that from this darkness and this grief you see the youth of today who are so inspiring they're out there in the street. They're making their own voices they have their blogs they're bold and moving forward. This is beautiful. And the transformation of moving into a higher age which is inevitable. We are at a place technically where we are above unfortunately our humanity. And so we have to accelerate the evolution of our humanity until we get to a high level. And so all the dark

negative stuff of the racism of the sexism of the wars, blah, blah, blah, that is not over, but there is a huge collection of people on planet Earth who are saying no more, no more. And that is not going to stop, it's going to keep expanding it's going to quell. So we're in a war.

We're in a war internally and externally. Internally and externally. But I mean the external is a result of our internal war. And so the peace and harmony that we're looking for I think we're headed there. I think that the tragedy of the way that the world exists now there's work all around about people wanting to transform and I see it everywhere individually and collectively.

Greg Dalton: You've been listening to Climate One. We've been talking about processing climate change through the artist's eyes. My guests were Alonzo King, choreographer and founder of LINES Ballet in San Francisco, and Nora Lawrence, senior curator at Storm King Art Center in New York's Hudson Valley. This episode is generously underwritten by The Sydney E Frank Foundation.

Greg Dalton: To hear more Climate One conversations, subscribe to our podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you get your pods. Please help us get people talking more about climate by giving us a rating or review. It really does help advance the climate conversation.

Greg Dalton: Kelli Pennington directs our audience engagement. Tyler Reed is our producer. Sara-Katherine Coxon is the strategy and content manager. Steve Fox is director of advancement. Anny Celsi edited the program. Our audio team is Mark Kirchner, Arnav Gupta, and Andrew Stelzer. Dr. Gloria Duffy is CEO of The Commonwealth Club of California, where our program originates. I'm Greg Dalton.