

Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future TOPICAL LUNCH

Title: “Art for Gaia’s Sake”

Host: Jack Elliott

Date: Thursday April 7, 2016 – 12:00 – 1:00pm

Society is facing unprecedented biophysical challenges including desertification, invasive species, mass extinctions, new microbiological hazards, groundwater loss, toxification/pollution of the biosphere, overpopulation, and climate change, to name a few. However, these are not simply technical problems that need to be fixed. They are embedded in human societies and must be tackled through societal mechanisms. What is the role of the visual arts as one of these mechanisms? Is it to solve a problem or is it to reflect on or to provoke? Is it for the connoisseur, the consumer, or the community? How has art been used in the past to help change society? What is its relationship with other fields, particularly STEM? What about STEAM (<http://stemtosteam.org>)?

The idea behind this topical lunch is to reflect on the importance of the aesthetic experience, not just in specialized fields, but for all global citizens of the 21st century. As David Skorton asserted, “our nation’s future may depend on our creativity and our ability to understand and appreciate the cultures around the world as much as on our proficiency in reading and math.” While it is difficult to refute this statement, I would like to investigate the idea of “creativity” investigated in a more specific sense, to move it away from a generic catch-all towards intentional efforts to creative aesthetic experience. I would like to investigate the role of the visual arts in the Anthropocene, the Age of Environmental Decline. As the only visual artist participating in the inaugural year of ACSF's Faculty Fellowship for Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, these questions are particularly germane to my own work and, I believe, to society at large.