



## Artists, Our Significance and The Environment

The power of art to organize, to connect and educate has always put artists and art at the forefront of revolutions and social movements. In this period, artists are playing key roles in calling attention to, and organizing around, the climate crisis. Artists are working with designers, architects and scientists to create sustainable environments and ecosystems. Art to end the climate emergency communicates the reality of the situation: the heartbreak of loss, devastation, and destruction, and the possibility of repair, recovery, equity, and community.

All of us are from peoples that used and continue to use all forms of art to communicate powerful ideas and shape

their lives and the world around them. Throughout history, art has been used to cross communication barriers, and to lift the voices of oppressed people. It is made by humans everywhere, the young and the elderly. People create art to think, express, transform and envision. Generations of people preserve culture and the intelligence of a people through art making. Culture is passed on and preserved through its art.

Whether it be in our clothing, adornment, words, song, dance, architecture, painting or photography, art reflects and can restore our connection to and interdependence with one another, the land, and the earth



itself. Indigenous and Global Majority people\* have had art as an integral part

\*The peoples of Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, the Caribbean, and Latin America, and those descended from them, are over eighty percent of the global population. These people also occupy most of the global land mass.

Using the term "Global Majority (GM)" for these people acknowledges their majority status in the world and interrupts how the dominant (U.S. and European) culture assigns them a minority status.

Many Global Majority people living in dominant-culture countries have been assimilated into the dominant culture—by force, in order to survive, in seeking a better life for themselves and their families, or in pursuing the economic, political, or other inclusion of their communities. Calling these people "Global Majority" contradicts the assimilation.

of their way of life. Artmaking has been an essential way to share generations of their knowledge and show the caring relationships with the land, water, peoples, and other living beings.

Through the development of capitalism and oppression, however, artists and their art are often reduced to commodities, products to be exchanged, and made into profit. Culture is bought and sold. Capitalism



*Sustaining All Life* (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) consists of a wide diversity of people in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from emotional harm resulting from oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging the release of painful emotions, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



[SustainingAllLife.org](https://www.SustainingAllLife.org)



[UnitedToEndRacism.org](https://www.UnitedToEndRacism.org)



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directly alters what sorts of creativity we think are valuable. In our consumer society, standardization, quantity, and profit are the main goals. A very small percentage of artists are now part of a global market of investment that helps to grow the wealth of the owning class. Most artists are compensated, at most, a small fraction of their artworks value, setting up a culture of scarcity and competition. These oppressive forces can impact our inherent human capacity for creative thinking and action, our initiative and commitment to make art, and our connection to one another.

Many poor and working-class artists who are not from globally dominant countries are exploited into making art for mass production for slave and meager wages. Their artwork is exported and funneled toward markets in the Global North for buyers to unawaresly consume. This cycle of mass production, consumption and

extraction of our natural surroundings lies at the center of the climate crisis.

Artists, and our art play a critical role in the collective effort to build and fight for a just world and a thriving environment. Like others, we need opportunities to share and celebrate our efforts, our successes, and defeats. *Sustaining All Life* offers tools for us artists to recover from the impact of working in exploitative and oppressive systems, including the competition for limited resources and the marginality many of us face. With this support we can continue building a united front and creating artwork that engages, inspires, and moves us toward a sustainable world where we live in concert with each other and everything around us, a world with us in the center of our lives, communities, and movements.





## The Work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—if we make some very large changes in our economy, our energy systems, and our lives in the next five to ten years. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis can be resolved only if we simultaneously address racism, genocide of Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on the groups targeted by these oppressions, and on other vulnerable populations (including populations of people who are elderly, disabled, and very young). Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of climate change, racism, and exploitation.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings that it's too late and any actions will be ineffective, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the climate emergency, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

### **The role of oppression**

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional harm we experience is the result of this passing on of hurt. Our experience is that though people are vulnerable

to acting in oppressive ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a person has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

### **The importance of healing personal harm**

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other harmful behavior is neither quick nor easy work. Many of us resist this personal healing work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the harm done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this harm. In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing.

By releasing emotional pain in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



### **For more information, see:**

[www.sustainingalllife.org](http://www.sustainingalllife.org) or [www.unitedtoendracism.org](http://www.unitedtoendracism.org)  
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