Climate change in pictures

Artist Alisa Singer is inspired by data. In turn, she hopes to inspire the public to explore the science of climate change.

Among the thousands of statisticians and hundreds of sessions that make up the annual Joint Statistical Meetings, organisers of this year’s event had invited a half-dozen “data artists” to display their work in a roped-off area of Chicago’s McCormick Place.

Some of the most striking pieces came from the Environmental Graphiti collection by Alisa Singer – a project that aims to “expand public awareness” of the urgent need to address climate change.

Singer, a former corporate lawyer, says, via email: “I never set out to become an artist that uses data as the foundation for my work, nor had that process characterized my earlier work.” Yet, having retired, she says: “I hoped to be able to do something of socially redeeming value.”

Climate change was a particular concern. Singer says: “It had long puzzled me that the general public wasn’t more alarmed about the facts about climate change. I found the graphic depictions of these facts – the charts, graphs, etc. – to be especially dramatic and persuasive. But I realized that many people could be put off, confused, or intimidated by them. And while most people would not be likely to go to an exhibit of charts and graphs, they would usually be happy to look at art. So it occurred to me: What if that art could become the vehicle for ‘delivering’ the scientific message?”

This line of thinking led to a series of artworks built around climate data. The artwork reproduced here is based on a graph showing the increase in carbon emissions since 1850. Other pieces depict temperature data, rainfall measures and sea-level changes. The collection can be viewed at environmentalgraphiti.org. Data sources for all artworks are listed (bit.ly/2bTgWmJ), and Singer hopes that her art will lead more people to delve into the information and science that inspired it.