



3000 days ... and counting...

one botanical artist's response to our changing climate

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Imagine ... You are looking out at your favourite place in nature ...

- *Look* – a riot of colour with blues, greens, yellows, reds
- *Listen* – rustling leaves, animals, birds, insects, sounds on the wind
- *Feel* – pulsing life from an electrically charged energy in the air which tingles on the surface of your skin





Now, re-imagine this same area as a massive graveyard, with every single plant dead.

- *Look* – skeletal remains of trees as far as the horizon and beyond, all grey
- *Listen* – the sounds of silence
- *Feel* – deadness in the air. This is a reality, a degraded landscape

There are only the shadows of things that are no longer there.

Context

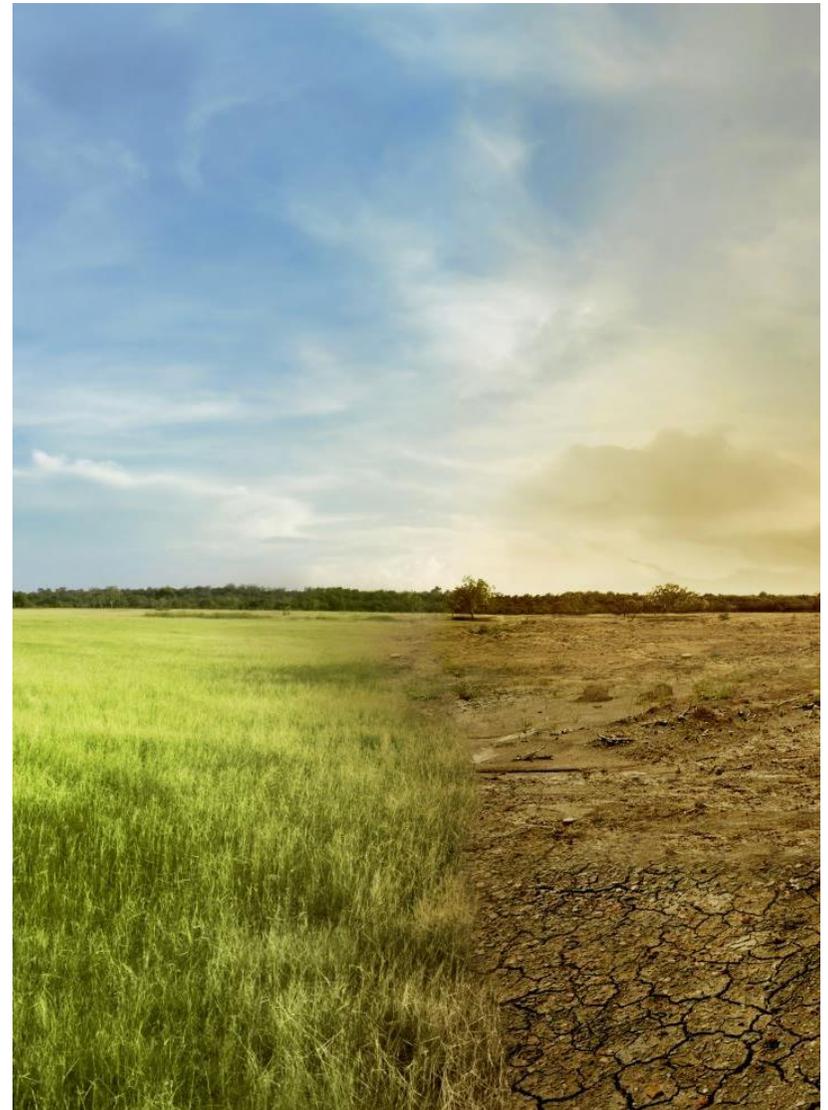
For a long time, I have been concerned about environmental issues and the impact people have on the natural environment – sometimes positive, sometimes not so; sometimes intentional, sometimes unintentional.

For decades, scientists and activists have tried their best to bring about an awareness of human-induced climate change and habitat destruction and the impact that is having on the natural environment.

No one listened, and now we have now reached a global tipping point - people need to understand and acknowledge that fact, and change their attitudes and behaviours accordingly.

However, many people find it very difficult to comprehend these messages - the potential problems are just so big, so overwhelming.

The result is that people just switch off. They just don't know what to do.





So, I thought, what can I do?

At home I have planted hundreds of trees, as well as flowering plants for bees and birds, decreased my use of plastics, and try to plan any trip I do as a multi- not single purpose trip.

I have also oriented my botanical artwork in its messaging to this end.

Why 3000 days?

An IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report at the end of 2021 said that:

- we need to keep the global temperature below a 1.5 degree Celsius (or 2.7 degree F) rise by 2030
- *I thought about 2030 ... that is only 3000 days away*
- As a botanical artist, I decided to set myself a challenge: to do a drawing/painting a day for the next 3000 days to highlight this issue

Why a scroll?

I could have painted a series of discrete images, or created a specific-purpose journal, but none of these approaches would serve my purpose.

- I decided on a scroll because it would remain intact, it would tell a story and it would have a visual impact
- I started on Earth Hour Day – 26 March 2022

This scroll has become a visual representation of all the countless words and warnings people have heard about the impact of climate change and which now, they just don't hear any more.

I have now completed over 400 hundred images, each which is numbered, dated and described with its botanical and common names, and each has a small story attached to it. This information is held in a data base.





Impact

3000 days ... and counting ... has become an important outreach tool for me.

When it is rolled out in public, there is always an intake of breath. It

- has an impact on people because of its size
- uses a visual language which people understand
- tells a story - the blending of plants on the scroll reflects what occurs in nature in a healthy biodiverse habitat. In nature, there is no formal landscaping or planning. Mother Nature just throws it out there and lets the plants and animals create their own little worlds ... and it works!
- and, people can relate to the images because everyone knows and likes something about plants.

I showed *3000 days ... and counting ...* at the ASBA (American Society of Botanical Artists) Conference in New York in October 2022. It generated considerable discussion, along with a few tears.

Getting this sort of reaction is encouraging because it means my message is having an impact.



To date, I estimate that 3000 days ... and counting ... has been viewed by some 400 people in the United States and Europe. It

- has been presented to audiences backed by a beautiful, haunting song, *Fear*, written by Matt Arnaudon, a young Australian singer/songwriter
- has had a more classical musical composition written for it, which I commissioned from Dante Clavijo, and for which I am now negotiating the playing rights
- has inspired two beautiful poems which were heartfelt responses to viewing the scroll
- has been presented formally to international audiences
 - twice in the USA – once face to face (2022) at the *ASBA Annual Conference* in New York, and once *via Zoom* (2023) to participants attending a world-wide *ASBA Spring Symposium* on environmental issues.
 - at a botanical *Get Together* at the Botanical Gardens in Vienna (2023)
- will be presented virtually to the *Guild of Natural Science Illustrators* conference in August 2023, a group with international membership (in preparation)
- will be presented virtually to members of the *Association des Passionnes d'illustration Botanique* in France (under negotiation).

And I have rolled out the scroll for many smaller groups and individuals as the opportunity arises overseas and here in Australia.



People ask ...

But what can I do?

... I live in a flat/apartment

... I can't plant trees

... it's too hard to think about

... I'm only one person

This question becomes the catalyst for a discussion ... there are always things a person can do, if he or she has the will.

People come back to me months after seeing *3000 days ... and counting ...* to tell me that they still think about the message embodied in the scroll and they are able to tell me what they are doing in response.

And that can only be good.

Messages

Using the scroll, I can talk with children and adults about a range of issues. Because I have recorded the stories behind each of the plants I have recorded, they also learn more about the plants they observe.

There are a variety of takeaway messages from the scroll. People begin to

- appreciate that there is a lot in nature that they may not have considered before
- start to understand that even the most seemingly ordinary plants, animals and insects might be under threat because of the impact the changing climate and/or development is having in their local area
- learn that weeds might actually be good and useful plants
- appreciate that even introduced plants may now have a role to play in many environments – particularly where native vegetation has been cleared and local animals, insects, reptiles, and birds have had to adapt to new or introduced species for shelter and food



Messages (cont.)

- be surprised and delighted to learn that we are still finding new species – of everything
- are devastated to hear about native plants, animals, insects, reptiles and birds that have become locally extinct, and the resultant flow on effects that has
- learn that a “green” environment is not necessarily a biodiverse environment
- learn that a tidy yard can often be sterile
- understand the difference between grass and lawn
- understand that we don’t have to control and micro-manage every aspect of the natural environment in which we live
- become more aware that we, along with plants, animals, insects and fungi all rely on each other – we can’t exist without them, but they would be very happy without us!





Conclusion

3000 days ... and counting ... provides a basis for quite rich discussions about environmental issues in a non-threatening way. It is designed to be beautiful so that it draws people in, rather than repels them. People are usually very happy to talk about the issues and what more they can do.

As the scrolls develop (I estimate there will be eight in all) each will have a theme threading through its length. For example:

- **2022-2023: Biodiversity** – the chaos and beauty of nature in its complexity (*this part is complete*)
- **2023 – 2024: Unnamed so far** – showing the rising global temperature graph, from 1880 – 2030, based on NASA data, weaving through the plants (*this part is underway*)
- **2024 – 2025: Unnamed so far** – to show in black and white, the plants, insects and reptiles that are threatened or endangered by rising temperatures or increasing habitat loss (*yet to be drawn*)

and so on until 2030 is reached.

The visual message will become more dire as the scrolls develop, because that is the reality. The drawings will remain beautiful and detailed, but there will be an increasing punch in the message as time goes on – there has to be.

People need to be woken from their complacency so that they are inspired to become part of a solution, not the problem.



Sharon Field. 3000 days ... and counting ...