I believe the process of creation should be just as cathartic as the appreciation of the finished piece. The style of this work is acrylic pour painting. I used a feathering technique to create the effect of Autumn leaves in “Falling”, a double swipe for the divided result in “Changing Tides” and a mixture in making “Artic Ice”. It relates to nature as its intent and inspiration comes from changing seasons and the dramatic effect of a shifting environment. But without a doubt the focal point of this collection is a celebration of fall and an appreciation of its beauty. There are also some aspects of sustainability to my work as I use old, discarded canvases which I then paint over and give new life.

“Arctic Ice"
Acrylic Pour Painting
(12” x 12”), 2021

“Falling”
Acrylic Pour Painting
(16” x 20”), 2021

“Changing Tides”
Acrylic Pour Painting
(12” x 12”), 2021
Anna Vitale

“A Chickadee in a Tree”
Digital photograph
(16” x 20”), 2021

I love this photo because it shows the contrast between something so small (chickadee) and something so big (the tree). It shows how two very different things can be so crucial to each other’s existence and how diversity and the ability to coexist can be so beautiful.

“A Nuthatch in Fall”
Digital photograph
(16” x 20”), 2021

The colors in this photo have always really stuck out to me and really embody the essence of autumn in Michigan. This photo shows how important preserving our natural world is and how beautiful simple moments can be.

“Invasive Carp Species in Michigan”
Watercolor, micron pen
(9” x 12”), 2021

This painting is of each species of invasive carp in Michigan. From top right to left there is a bighead carp (Hypophthalmichthys nobilis), a black carp (Mylopharyngodon piceus) a grass carp (Ctenopharyngodon idella), and a silver carp (Hypophthalmichthys molitrix). I used watercolor and a micron pen. I think that showcasing the invasive species in a beautiful way helps to spread information and helps people to not demonize these species, but rather inspire curiosity and the desire to learn.
Ava Kovacich

The piece I am submitting is inspired by the lack of urgency I feel that is related to the state of the environment. My entire life I’ve been taught about all the pollutants, the droughts, the forest fires, and climate change caused by humans. And how fixing it is something we have to work together to heal, but nothing changes. The first major human-caused crisis I remember living through was the oil spill in 2010. Then the Australian forest fires, and then the Californian forest fires, and then the most recent being the ocean literally catching fire. For most of my life, I’ve been watching these disasters happen over and over and nothing is done. There are constant pleas and cries from those around me, normal people doing everything they can to fight against the decreasing health of the Earth, but those who can really do change just sit and watch. The topic of the environment has become nothing more than a debate. Just a topic that means someone leans one way politically and not something that determines the fate of the human race. After all, soon all the people actually important to society can just go to Mars, leave this place forever, and start over. Soon the fact that humans once lived on Earth will be nothing more than a whisper. Forget the millions and millions of those displaced because the glaciers melting is flooding the world and flooding coastal cities. Forget that the damages done in natural disasters that could be preventable are still not fixed. Forget all the other animals and plant life affected by these natural disasters and human interference. None of that even matters, right?

“People Watching”, Watercolor (11” x 15”), 2021
This piece takes an old depiction of the environment and gives it a contemporary twist. With inspiration from the old master, Albert Bierstadt, and current landscape artists, I used a thirty-inch pole to paint this waterfall and mountainous scene. Just like finding new approaches to painting, we are forced to look at contemporary ways to care for our environment. This was something that sat in my mind while creating this piece.

Similar to the evolution of contemporary approaches to painting, modern sustainability approaches require innovation. While a remodeling to sustainability is important to solve modern environmental problems, it is also important to the arts. Artists have to come up with new viable techniques to art making in order to stay relevant.

At the same time, while they both require new approaches and contemporary strategies, it is important to understand the direct link between them. Even though there are artists dedicated to environmental studies and bringing forth awareness, we cannot deny the impact the arts has on the environment. The chemical waste brought on by paints and pigments leaves lasting harm. By using sustainable practices, artists can help to preserve this natural work of art. The relationship between the arts and environment is undeniable and critical.

Each can learn from the other, as we learn to create new approaches to not only painting but to caring for our planet. Dedicating works of art to the environment raises awareness of nature and our need to protect what we have available to us, because without it, such paintings will cease to exist.

“Landscape with a Drunken Stick”, Acrylic paint (30” x 40”), 2021
These photos show the vast differences between those in a place of privilege and those who have been historically marginalized and how they interact with the nature around them. The photo with the rainbow shows tourists walking around and being immersed in the beauty of the landscape around them. There is still an appreciation for the land, but its main purpose is for tourism and to leisurely explore the area. The space is meticulously manicured and left preserved for future groups to be able to experience. In contrast, the photo at the river shows the local people bathing and doing their laundry in the water. The people utilize the land out of necessity and have a much deeper connection to the it, as it provides basic needs for human life. The land is much more rugged, unkept, and even has remnants of trash showing that the culture for environmentalism is much less developed. There is a duality of the nature of humans between these two images, as one comes from a place of utilizing the natural world for pleasure and profit, while the other is simply a means of survival.

It is also important to note my role, as the person behind the camera taking these photos. I have the privilege to be able to capture a moment of others candidly, while being able to return to my reality. Both photos were taken abroad in Portugal and the Dominican Republic and show the cultural, economic, and environmental disparities between the two places. I was also very intentional with the placement of the photos, as those who are marginalized rarely have the same level access to resources and support as more affluent individuals do, therefore placing them at the bottom.
Jossalyn Rogalski

This piece was designed to bring awareness to the reality of our human impacts on nature, and what a better way to do that than to create a natural creature from the litter ruining our world. I decided that I wanted to create an eye-catching sculpture to enter into my local fair for environmental awareness, so with that thought I went into the construction phase and purchased a poster to build the sculpture on, although I wish I did have a more professional design. I had limited time to create this for its original deadline, but I went to work immediately by spending hours collecting loads of trash in various areas for a range of materials to choose from for the piece. I then disinfected each item, organized by color, properly disposed of what wouldn’t be used, and got to work hot-gluing what my mind had envisioned. There truthfully wasn’t a set plan for the shape of the sculpture when I started; I just had the idea of a sea turtle in my mind and worked with the litter as puzzle pieces and slowly each item became perfect for this design. I wanted the turtle to be obviously noticeable, but I also wanted it to clearly be a random assortment of trash to emphasize the amount of waste that humans produce that is negatively affecting the animals that depend on the ecosystem we are destroying. I added the words last simply because I wanted the message to be even more clear to those who are less environmentally friendly and to hopefully sway the viewer into caring more about their actions, but I must add that I do prefer the simplicity of the art without it. In the end though, I love what this piece stands for, and I now have a desire to sculpt many different creatures from the waste coating our world; that way I can truly turn trash into treasure.

“The Reality of Humanity”
Recycled garbage and paint (30” x 20”), 2021
Mira Marino

I have always cared about nature and our ability as humans to sustain it. Printmaking is my favorite medium to work with, and I wanted to create something meaningful and fit with the medium. I created this piece because I wanted to show how through the use of different lines and positive and negative space a picture can be created. While flowers like roses can be hearty or strong, they can also be very delicate. This piece shows a small piece of nature that we need to work together to protect and save.

"Flowers", Printmaking (5.5" x 4"), 2021
Shahana Afsar

Merging Waters is trying to tell a story of movement and transition. When I started painting this, I was occupied with thoughts of connecting past with present and dreaming for a pleasant future. Using colors that depicted life and nature, I chose slightly different shades to merge them into each other and create a confluence. Diluted acrylic paints were used with wide strokes to show roughness of life and were coupled with some smooth layers to merge into the other tone. The base design shows the previous and current times. In the beginning it was going to be just a combination of different colors, but I later decided to paint more on top; something that showed beauty, growth, hope and sustainability. The same paint with less dilution and more pointed brushes were used for the two designs on the diagonals. They are the future state which might fill the whole canvas of life in times to come.

“Merging Waters”, Acrylic Paint (16” x 20”), 2020
This piece was inspired by the tranquility of a pond. The shapes used can be representational of tadpoles, water lilys, algae, and flowing movement such natural light and water.

“Waterlife Mandala”, Pen on paper (12” x 12”), 2020