



Artist-led campaign urges climate action across California

The initiative A Cool Million, launched by three artist-led collectives, features climate-themed public artworks and aims to preserve one million acres.



Sayre Gomez, *Fire Season 6*, 2021

Photo: Robert Wedemeyer. Courtesy of the artist and Xavier Hufkens

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Climate-themed marketing and exhibitions are to be expected as Earth Month is observed in April, but a new art campaign seeks to make environmental activism the norm. Called A Cool Million, the artist-led initiative is turning climate-related pieces by 14 artists into large-scale public works on billboards and other public spaces, and will also support the conservation of one million acres of biodiverse landscape. Created by the art collectives For Freedoms, Art + Climate Action and Art into Acres, the campaign pairs one artist with each participating California art institution and will be installed across the state throughout April, with an official launch on Earth Day (22 April).

“A Cool Million is a solidarity campaign to show the art sector’s commitment to one of the greatest universal issues of our era,” says Micki Meng, co-founder of Art + Climate Action. “Our aim is to inspire a deeper commitment to climate responsibility amongst our peers and our publics as we fight for a more sustainable and just future.”

Art + Climate Action was created to unite artists, workers, patrons and institutions promoting environmental justice. In launching A Cool Million, the collective was able to tap into For Freedoms’s experience in artist-led billboard campaigns, which the organisation has been staging since its founding in 2016 to promote civic engagement. A Cool Million is For Freedoms’s first climate-specific campaign. “Environmental and climate justice are some of the most urgent civil rights issues of our time, and we are thrilled to further amplify this crucial conversation and prompt our community to envision a more just future,” says Taylor Brock, project manager at For Freedoms.

In addition to promoting public engagement, the campaign will highlight the importance of climate action in art institutions. Johanna Burton, the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles, says her institution “is in the process of making climate, conservation and environmental justice central to the museum’s mission”. She adds, “Supporting A Cool Million is a part of our effort, alongside other California institutions, to engage collective dialogue on this urgent topic.”



Josh Kline, *Luxury Home, Los Altos Hills*, 2019
Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York

While all the works in the campaign address environmental concerns, some depict climate change more directly than others. For instance Los Angeles-based artist Sayre Gomez's work *Fire Season 6* (2021), which will be displayed on the Los Angeles Chinese Theatre marquee through a partnership with MOCA, features a haunting image of a scorched cityscape blanketed in thick, ruddy clouds, a nod to California's annual wildfires. A glowing sun struggles to break through the suffocating clouds.

Gomez's work is joined by pieces from artists including Katherine Bernhardt, Petra Cortright, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Josh Kline and Hugo McCloud. In addition to MOCA, partnering institutions include the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, The Broad, the Getty Museum, SFMOMA and others.

Some of the original artworks the campaign's billboards are based on will be sold to benefit land conservation through Art into Acres, a nonprofit founded by Haley Mellin, a co-organiser of A Cool Million. The goal is to protect one million acres of forest that are vital to supporting California's hydrological system by 2025, a critical issue as the state experienced its second-driest year on record in 2021 and is currently on track for 2022 to be its third consecutive year of drought.