

From coral reefs to puppet shows: Art making climate change personal

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Explores role of creativity in climate communication

Environment

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Woven Together recently won first place at the Sustainability Shorts Film Festival at University of Illinois (Photo: Dikshaa Puri)

The role of art and artists in tackling climate change was discussed at a talk on Climate Change and the Arts in Delhi. The event featured a panel discussion between Neelambaree Prasad, dancer and founder of ClimArts, and Neha Bansal, founder of Asianism Retold, focussing on the integration of art into the climate change discourse.

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As part of its three-part series, Kri Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation working in the fields of arts, social development, and knowledge creation organised a talk on Climate Change and the Arts, focussing on the integration of art with the pressing global concern of climate change. Held in Delhi, this programme aimed to explore how artistic practices can engage with and respond to the climate crisis.

The foundation's manager and trustee, Arshiya Sethi, opened the inaugural session by introducing the theme and setting the tone for the series by emphasising the power of art to transform identity and drive the crucial goals of awareness and action.

The event featured dancer and ClimArts founder Neelambaree Prasad, whose organisation aims to connect climate experts with artists to collaborate, create, and share evidence-based stories about climate change.

Using art to tell climate change stories

During a conversation with Neha Bansal, who is a founder of Asianism Retold, a research think tank, which is focused on shape Asia's influence in geopolitics and development and Prasad highlighted the need to make scientific information more accessible and emotionally resonant.

During the conversation, she noted that while scientists are adept at communicating within their own circles through data, graphs and presentations, there is a need to go beyond technical formats and package information in ways that connect with broader audiences.

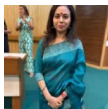
"Scientists are very good at communicating with their peers, other scientists, using formats their community understands, like graphs, PowerPoint presentations, and data. One could argue that things have now moved toward data visualisation, but I believe it needs to go a step further, packaging information in a way that is truly accessible and resonant. Historically, innovation in science has often coincided with innovation in the arts. Take Einstein's theory of relativity, which emerged around the same time as Picasso's cubism, both part of a larger cultural moment. Or consider the German chemist who discovered the benzene ring. As the story goes, he had a vision of the Egyptian symbol of a snake biting its own tail, which inspired his model of the ring structure. I share these examples to emphasise that while translating science is important, making it accessible requires more. Humans have always learned through stories, and we process images faster than text or numbers. So, it is intuitive to use creativity and the arts not just to translate science, but to make its solutions more relatable and impactful," says Prasad.

Art fostering conversation around climate change

According to Prasad, her foundation aims to foster a new culture of climate change communication by transforming complex scientific data into emotionally engaging, human-centred narratives that make the urgency of the climate crisis more accessible and compelling.

Citing the example of a dancer who enrolled in its programme and used ballet to depict coral bleaching in the upcoming documentary *Fragmented*, she emphasised that art can play a vital role in making people care about climate change and effectively communicating its solutions.

On the impact of storytelling in raising awareness about climate change during the question hour session, Prasad acknowledged that while it is difficult to measure its precise effect, the process empowers storytellers to engage with audiences and climate experts alike, creating a space to discuss both the challenges and potential solutions.



Neelambaree Prasad

"What we measure is really the impact we have on the storytellers who joined our programme. For instance, the Indonesian stand-up comedian I mentioned now has a steady audience, not just among UN policymakers, but also within her local community. She has begun teaching students the climate practices she picked up from our sessions. That is how we gauge impact. It was a deliberate decision, because claiming we can reach the general public directly and measure how a single story changes their lives, is both unrealistic and presumptuous. Our focus is on empowering storytellers and measuring how their creativity and sense of agency evolve," Prasad tells *Media India Group*.

Earlier in the session, *Woven Together*, a documentary by Emma Cregan and Torajamelo, was screened. The film, combining puppetry and animation, narrated the story of the Indigenous Toraja women of Indonesia, highlighting their sustainable craft practices that help preserve cultural heritage and reduce outward migration from their communities.

Notably, *Woven Together* recently won first place at the Sustainability Shorts Film Festival at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in the United States, standing out among more than 1,100 submissions, 18 official selections, and 4 honourable mentions.

"Puppetry felt like the ideal medium, given Indonesia's rich folk traditions. The documentary by Emma Cregan and Torajamelo showcases how Indigenous Toraja women are preserving cultural heritage while creating sustainable livelihoods that combat climate-driven migration. This film ticks so many boxes. It powerfully shows how partnering with Indigenous communities can drive environmental revival. It is not about seeking Western validation, but about using storytelling to make climate change real, beyond numbers and data," says Prasad.

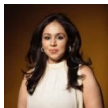
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Later, when asked what more art and media could do to make climate change feel personal, Prasad emphasised that localising the issue is key to helping people connect with and make them care about it.

"We should focus on localised stories. There are so many examples of environmental stewardship and successful solutions already out there, the raw material exists. What is needed is strong, engaging filmmaking, something like a Gurinder Chadha film, full of drama and appeal that draws people in and then delivers a powerful message. That formula works for social messaging, and the stories are right here in our villages and towns," adds Prasad.

Later, outlining the purpose of the programme, Neha Bansal, founder of a think tank Asianism Retold says that the primary aim is to personalise the issue of climate change and make it more relatable to individuals.

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Neha Bansal

"We have been mainly talking about climate change either in terms of policies, in terms of the scientific data, or terms of finance. But climate change must become personal to us. If it is not personal to you, if it is not personal to me, there is very little that we will achieve. That is exactly what we are seeing at the moment. So Ayesha Sethi, with her vision, thought believes that it is very important to bring in artists to talk about climate change," Bansal tells *Media India Group*.

This insight reinforces the need to shift the narrative and engage people on a personal level. By combining the power of art, storytelling, and localized solutions, the programme aims to foster deeper connections to the issue of climate change, inspiring action that transcends data and policies.