

Creating **CONSCIOUS CONVERSATIONS of CONSEQUENCE**

Inspired by an Artist's Brush

BY RUTH WESTREICH

CRITICAL THINKING is a vital and often missing aspect of forming and communicating opinions today. Our digital world has made commentary an often faceless and impersonal exercise. Open and honest conversations – where all opinions are considered – are what creates common ground to work toward collective solutions for the health of all people and our planet.

This discussion guide can facilitate an open intergenerational dialogue about the themes in this activist art series. Art has a unique ability to shift verbal language to visual language. Visual language opens the heart to new forms of dialogue.

What is dialogue? It is much more than talking. “It’s the embrace of different points of view – literally the art of thinking together,” says William Isaacs. He studies the art of dialogue and helps people with disparate views – like elected officials and citizens, employees and management, and even nations – conduct a successful and meaningful dialogue.

As you consider participating in a Conscious Conversation of Consequence, understand that these powerful visuals will open the heart for reflective expressions and is not designed to incite reflexive reactions of hostility and arguments. The dialogue around the art and the issues can open up possibilities of new thinking with the ultimate goal of finding commonality. By identifying where we agree, there is a better chance of finding common ground. It is the only way to collectively build solutions to the complex global problems presented in this art series.

WHY AN INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE?

Notice the word *Intergenerational* in the headlines above. No doubt this work presents issues through art and poetry that are controversial – no matter your age or your background. They come from the artist's decades of work as an activist and philanthropist, which influences the art she has produced in this body of work.

As you reflect on these complex issues, the art challenges you to step back and listen to the reflections of others, including the young, older, and in-between, before jumping in with preconceived thoughts. That has already been done, and it is why we are in this dire position today. Our next generations are depending on the decisions and actions that we make today. Youth and young adults, those who are just formulating their opinions, deserve a voice. After all, they are the inheritors of the Mother Earth.

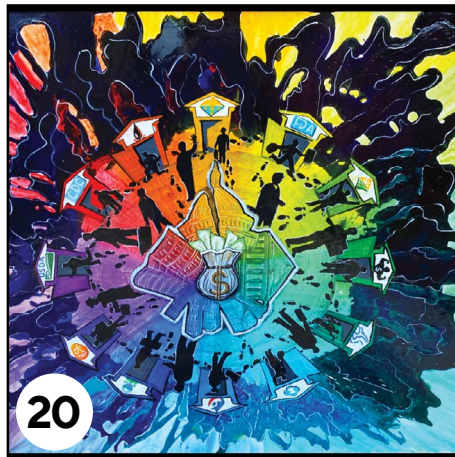
This art series is a powerful way to bring together children, teenagers, young adults, parents, and grandparents to discuss and tackle these difficult problems. Intergenerational conversations are critical to building the stepping stones to greater and better things in your life and for the life of this earth and the generations ahead of us.

By keeping an open heart and mind, your thoughts can shift and flow with the new information you hear and absorb. Considering the opinions of others – regardless of one's age – is essential to understanding the threats and injustices that affect our health and that of the planet.

For more on how to host a Conscious Conversation of Consequence, go to page 10.

ACTIVIST ART SERIES

The following is presented in the book, *Creating Conscious Conversations of Consequence, Inspired by An Artist's Brush*, by Ruth Westreich. The numbers for each piece are page numbers within the eBook to use as a reference when studying the art as you move through this discussion guide.







INTERGENERATIONAL CONSCIOUS CONVERSATIONS OF CONSEQUENCE

DISCUSSION GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. EASY ICE BREAKER QUESTION: Have you ever considered how art inspires and motivates people to conceive courageous thoughts and take action? When you look at this series in its entirety as an Activist Art Body of Work, how does it affect you?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

2. IN THE FOREWORD of this book, Emily Young, Ph.D., quotes Pope Francis on the Vatican's Care for Our Common Home appeal: "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental." Since 2015, when Pope Francis published this Papal letter, he has made statements about governments being negligent in caring for the planet and that those most affected are the poor and underdeveloped nations. He concludes this is an environmental justice issue, not solely a climate-change problem. In doing so, do his opinions make you rethink the ramifications of climate change, and who is most affected?

3. OUR FIRST ENVIRONMENTALISTS WERE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE. Though unlike Western society, which is constantly striving to overpower the earth, Indigenous peoples' entire cultures and identities embrace the natural world. *Mommy, Daddy tell Me What it Was Like Before* and *Our Mother Earth Thriving - Before* are juxtaposed examples of the past and the future. As if you were talking to a child - in the simplest language possible - describe what you see as the biggest threats to our planet and personal health? What are your thoughts as you imagine this conversation? **Pg. 7, Pg. 12**

4. IN THE FOUR PIECES – *Round and Round and Round the Collusion Goes, Democracy for Sale, Collusion, Corruption ... Uninterrupted, Puppet Masters All Around* the art reiterates the powerplays and corrupt goings-on among legislative –decision makers and corporate governance. What is meant by government overreach, revolving doors and behind the scenes manipulators that she portrays in these paintings?

Pg. 17, Pg. 20, Pg. 39, Pg. 47

5. PERHAPS NO OTHER TIME IN MODERN HISTORY has awareness about our health been so affected by global decisions during COVID-19. As this art was in completion, lockdowns were in place and the world stood still while the virus has its way. However, as this work shows, our health has been in jeopardy for many years because of poor decisions made about the environment – we were just not always aware of those risks. Though *Atlas and the Anthropocene* was created before the pandemic, it serves as a reminder that we are all responsible for holding up our piece of the world. How has COVID-19 changed your thoughts on the interconnection between human health and planetary health?

Pg. 29

6. THE TRUE COST OF PRIVILEGE represents the colloquial .01% who garner most of the world's wealth. *Is Tech too Big to Fail, Collusion, Corruption ... Uninterrupted, and Too Big to Fail, Global, Galling, Gluttonous Gargantuan Greed ... 5G* represent the playgrounds and the boardrooms of the wealthy and the powerful, while the rest of the world toils and worries. These inequities also apply to the racial injustices that are very much in forefront of American society. How does it make you feel that profits are placed before the needs of Mother Earth and the most oppressed of her inhabitants without respect for the future?

Pg. 32, Pg. 39, Pg. 50, Pg. 58, Pg. 61

7. THE EXPRESSION IGNORANCE IS BLISS could easily be the tagline for the pollution that plagues our planet and human health. Indifference and ignorance are born from a combination of fear and hopelessness. The works titled, *End of Denial*, *Only Humans Deny Climate Change*, and *Out of Time ... and Still Running* reflect the confusion, uncertainty, and futility that many feel as the waters rise, the oceans warm and the land burns. How do these paintings push you toward learning more and taking action? **Pg. 23, Pg. 26, Pg. 35**

8. OUR OCEANS have become the litmus test for human and planetary health, as depicted in *If Only You Could SEA*, and *What Happens When a Reef Dies*. As temperatures rise, oceans warm, allergens and air pollution multiply, and plastics permeate our seas and food, the symptoms of what is before us continue to mount. What changes can you make in your community to facilitate lasting change? **Pg. 53, Pg. 55**

9. WHAT WILL IT TAKE IN THIS GENERATION and in future generations to see a return to wellness for the planet and its people, as represented in *The Great Reckoning as People Rise Up and The Return?* What ways do we see this happen with the Black Lives Matter social justice and equity movement? How is the BLM movement intersecting with those of climate and environmental justice, as well as intergenerational justice? **Pg. 65**

10. NATURE IS THE ARTIST'S MUSE and spiritual teacher for her work. She draws comparisons in *Mother Nature*, *Mother Earth*, *Mothers Protect*, and *Out of Chaos, Gaia Comes*, between the protective nature of mothers and Mother Nature. After reading the book and studying the art, how protective are you willing to be toward the planet and your health and the health of your children? What might that look like? **Pg. 70, Pg. 73**

11. WHICH OF THE HAIKU poems speaks most strongly to your thoughts about the environment and how it is being treated? And why?

12. THE CONNECTIVITY OF HUMAN AND PLANETARY HEALTH is what drives the artist's philanthropic work, activism, and art. What could you do to give back and be more of an activist to improve the health of the environment and your health?

13. CONCLUDING QUESTION: Is there a particular issue presented within the art and poetry that is of particular urgency for you to take action? What do you believe you can do about this or these issues in your own life?

HOSTING AN INTERGENERATIONAL CONSCIOUS CONVERSATION OF CONSEQUENCE

We are pleased that you have decided to host a gathering either live or virtually that allows a diverse group of people to connect through art, dialogue, and meaningful connections. By finding effective ways to communicate about the most pressing matters of the day surrounding our health and the condition of the planet, everyone present will gain insight, knowledge, and wisdom. Sounds intriguing, doesn't it?

Imagine what might come of such a gathering? It is exciting to consider the possibilities.

We've come up with a few considerations to allow everyone present to gain a better understanding of how to get the most from open dialogue and Conscious Conversation of Consequence. True dialogue put forth by William Issacs, founder of Dialogos, states in order to have true dialogue among disparate people, everyone must be willing to suspend their preconceived notions and beliefs at the door so that everyone may feel free to share and participate with an equal voice.

1. INVITE A BROAD SPECTRUM OF PEOPLE – ideally 6-8 – and make sure they are not carbon copies of one another. Like minds and ages make for boring conversation. If you know of experts in any of the topics presented in eBook, invite them too.

2. ASK INVITEES TO PREPARE AHEAD OF TIME to read a section of the book, study-specific art pieces, and research people, topics, and opinions from the book that is new information.

3. ASSIGN A NOTE-TAKER TO IDENTIFY ACTION ITEMS and areas that warrant more research.

4. ASSIGN SOMEONE TO make certain that any disagreements do not lead to personal attacks and hurtful feelings. Remember that this type of dialogue is a lost art. Social media has not helped our society learn to communicate openly while considering other opinions and making lasting connections.

5. LASTLY, DON'T LET THE EVENT DIE AWAY. The topics presented here are vital to your community's future. Schedule the second dialogue and so on to ignite momentum and facilitate lasting change. Our health and that of the planet are counting on your taking action.

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Art as a Creator of an Intergenerational Dialogue
Imagining a Better Future by Creating a Sustainable and Regenerative Path Forward
BY RUTH WESTREICH

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