

*Steel bands brace tree logs on the museum wall; screens flicker, and flowers left to honor the dead wilt up on the shelf. As we watch, a grimy black and white scene brings an explosion, oil, water and a fistfight to our senses. Sludge dissolves into gangsters as you hear the sounds of the ocean, a mermaid chorus and the deep rhythms of drilling. Salt water smells waft up from the tools of fishermen. We are left wondering who will win the conflict between man and nature.*

The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill interrupted our collective priorities and put water and in particular the economics of water, on our central stage. Issues about water had not been in the forefront of many Americans' concerns, especially in the bright light of the country's economic downturn, our involvement in two wars, and a national debate on healthcare.

Without warning, people in the fishing industry found themselves at the nexus of forces beyond their grasp. As I listened to their stories, I saw the complex relationship coastal residents have with corporations bringing economic opportunity; elected government officials who create environmental legislation; and the researchers who provide evidence to guide these regulations. A family of fishing net-makers grasped my imagination. In 2011, I made *Requiem for the Netmakers* in an effort to bring the classic tale of *Man v. Nature* to a contemporary perspective.

The 1970 State of the Union address envisioned a new era in Man's relationship to Nature. As his presidency failed in 1972, Richard Nixon's rallying cry went unfilled. In *Requiem*, we see his text presented as an artwork; but at the same time, encounter the drama of environmental disaster decades later. My impulse is to bring these elements into relationship with each other, to reveal something to the viewer that she could not otherwise have seen, felt or intellectually grasped. In this light, an artist's job is to develop and hone a contextual and aesthetic language.

Some people believe that the purpose of an artist is to be her community's soothsayer. In his plays, Shakespeare had the truth told by a fool in the guise of a court comedian. Likewise, the role of the artist is to bring the unspoken to the surface. Artists have their own language: one of color, light, form, medium and message. While some artists readily distinguish and assume this mantle, I question these responsibilities. My inquiry takes shape in a dialogue with the public.

Landscape dominates my aesthetic and contextual outlook: the earth, the ocean, electronic connectivity and of course, our political and community maps. I look to Anselm Kiefer for guidance in portraying the mythic, history-riddled landscape; Christo and Jean-Claude for their grand sense of scale and communal engagement; Patti Smith and Yoko Ono for their fierce yet poetically expressed politics; Warhol for his cool and smart use of imaging technology.

As the daughter of an engineer and a psychiatric nurse, I see the world through a matrix of abstract structures and human relationships. My deepest desire is to solve societal problems and cure peoples' ills. With projects, the big picture drives me: laying a foundation, designing structure and creating context. My aesthetics, use of technology and material concerns arise secondarily in the process of making art. Some say that it's the curious and poetic associations that shape my art. I feel like I'm inside of a crucible. Forging the next expression is hard, transformative work.

**Carolyn Speranza**  
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