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TOP STORY

## Museum exhibit explores climate change

By KIMBERLY CAUVEL @Kimberly\_SVH Sep 17, 2016



Brandy Shreve / Skagit Valley Herald

Bellingham artist Cara Jaye hangs her installation "Water on the Mountain" at the Museum of Northwest Art on Wednesday afternoon. She and other artists prepare for an exhibit called "Surge." The exhibit looks at how oceans, rivers, forests, wildlife and people of the region might be affected by climate change during the next 35 years.

LA CONNER — The massive eye of a whale emerges from the wall, strings of sea glass hang from the ceiling and piles of salt granules surround dissolving salt blocks in display cases at the Museum of Northwest Art.

The collection presents a look at how the oceans, rivers, forests, wildlife and people of the region might be affected by climate change during the next 35 years.

“With the museum celebrating 35 years, we wanted to look ahead another 35 years to about 2050 ... really looking at the long-term changes to communities like Mount Vernon, Burlington, La Conner and Anacortes,” museum Executive Director Christopher Shainin said.

The exhibit, called Surge, opens today. This is the second year a Surge exhibit is being held.

A major concern for the area is storm surge, which causes inland flooding during storms. Storm surges and flooding are expected to become more extreme because of sea level rise.

“The whole Skagit Valley area is significantly impacted by flooding and the projections are showing an increase,” Shainin said.

Two years ago, Shainin didn’t know what storm surge was, he said. But through discussions with La Conner officials and the Skagit Climate Science Consortium, he learned fast.

Storm surge is one of the impacts of climate change that the Skagit Climate Science Consortium is researching. The consortium is a group of scientists working to study how climate change will impact the area.

The Surge exhibit is an effort of the consortium and museum to share the researchers’ findings and help start a discussion about climate change, consortium administrator Carol Macilroy said.

“Climate change tends to have a doom-and-gloom, the world-is-coming-to-an-end kind of perspective. We were interested in finding ways to provide perspective to the public that would inspire more curiosity,” Macilroy said.

Artists partnered with members of the consortium to draw, paint, sculpt or otherwise capture climate science data in a meaningful way.

“Our theory is that artists have a lot to contribute to addressing community problems because they think visually and can communicate visually,” Shainin said.

Geologist and consortium member Jon Riedel, who monitors some of the state's glaciers, said he worked closely with some of the artists, and he was looking forward to seeing the finished pieces at Surge.

"It's basically to get information out and to make people aware about the climate change, that it's real and that it has some serious implications for our valley," he said.

Seattle artist Alice Dubiel is participating in Surge for the second time.

Her piece, "The Lay of the Land: A Tale of Skagit Marshes" explores how climate change impacts water and wildlife. It includes a painting, as well as jars of water and sand collected from the river delta.

Dubiel said her hope for Surge is that the artwork will help people realize they can make a difference and inspire them to take action in the face of climate change.

Glass artist Lin McJunkin of Conway said she hopes the exhibit encourages people to make climate-conscious choices about the energy they use and the politics they support.

"I want people to be informed because climate change does affect a lot of things in our area," said McJunkin, who is also participating in Surge for the second time.

McJunkin's nine pieces in the show explore what might happen as the concentration of salt in the marshlands changes in response to climate change.

The first Surge event was held during a weekend in September 2015.

This year, the event will extend more than a week, through Sunday, Sept. 25.

The museum has also added some events, including live performances today and Sunday, and speeches at 2 p.m. Sunday from Brian Cladoosby, chairman of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and president of the National Congress of American Indians, and Steve Moddemeyer of Seattle, who specializes in sustainable building.

The event will close Sept. 25 following a 3 p.m. panel discussion with some of the artists and scientists behind the exhibit, as well as community leaders.

The museum and consortium are discussing plans for a third Surge exhibit next year.

The Skagit Land Trust, Skagit Watershed Council and Swinomish Indian Tribal Community are also partners in the event.

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## **If you go**

**What:** Surge, an exhibit combining science and art to explore the impacts of climate change.

**When:** Today through Sunday, Sept. 25.

**Hours:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday and Monday

**Where:** Museum of Northwest Art, 121 First St., La Conner

**Cost:** Free

More information: [monamuseum.org/surge](http://monamuseum.org/surge)

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