



LETTERS TO THE EARTH: Between Despair and Hope



MINDEN HILLS
Cultural Centre

Fall, 2026
Chapter 5

"... we are left with a stark choice: allow climate disruption to change everything about our world or change pretty much everything about our economy to avoid that fate. But we need to be very clear: because of our decades of collective denial, no gradual, incremental options are now available to us."

Naomi Klein, This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate

We express gratitude to the Indigenous peoples of the lands from which we came for their efforts to keep earth-based wisdom alive, and to our own ancestors.

We acknowledge and give great thanks and honour to the First Peoples of this land, Canada, which we now call home. They have been the stewards, wisdom, and spirit keepers of the land for thousands of years. We acknowledge their suffering and are grateful for the important contributions they have made, and continue to make, today.

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Cover Images: Handwritten Letters to the Earth by our dear friend, artist, Lillian Michiko Blakey who died March 2nd, 2026. Lillian was a key member of our organizing committee.(RIP)

LETTERS TO THE EARTH: BETWEEN DESPAIR AND HOPE

at the

Agnes Jamieson Gallery, Minden , Ontario
September 24 to November 28, 2026

BETWEEN DESPAIR AND HOPE



*Honour
Fragility
Sustenance
Listen
Regrowth
Protect*

Approximately 40% of all birds migrate. The Arctic tern flies over 70,000 km each year from its arctic breeding ground to the shores of Antarctica. The Blackpool warbler bulks up for its trip, doubling its body weight over the summer months, burning fat for fuel during its southern journey. While flying, the Swainson's thrush can take a nap lasting just a few seconds to reenergize during its migratory travels. Each is committed to following through on their biological drive to find food and rear their young. It is a delicate balance. One that depends on an Earth capable of sustaining life.

*Caution
Burn
Rage
Disorder
Broken
Exploitation*

Each of these words echo through the statements of the contributing artists to Letters to Earth: Between Despair and Hope, curated by Carmel Brennan. Through her curatorial experience, Brennan has observed that audiences respond most deeply to the creative arts when stories are shared — stories that convey urgency, care, and meaning.

For Letters to Earth, artists are invited to handwrite a personal letter to the Earth and submit it to Brennan alongside their artwork. This intimate gesture reflects Brennan's belief that environmental action must first become personal if it is to inspire meaningful change.

We are honoured that Brennan has shared her vision with us, alongside the work of these 25 artists.



Shannon Kelly
Manager of Cultural Services

Dear friends,

The summer of 2026 rendered the climate crisis impossible to ignore. Around the world, extreme heat fuelled raging forest fires, prolonged droughts, and devastating floods. These are not distant warnings; they are the visible consequences of a warming planet.

Canadian author, Naomi Klein argues that we face a stark choice: change now or accept the consequences of inaction. For decades, we have discussed the climate crisis while continuing to look away. The recent disaster in Nepal should be understood as another urgent warning. On Aug. 26, a chain of events high in the Himalayas began when a glacial collapse sent rock, ice, and meltwater rushing into the valleys below, triggering powerful downstream floods. This is not abstract. This is real, and it is unfolding before us.

When I began this project in 2021, one artist suggested that our work should not simply declare doom and gloom. I understand that caution, but silence is no longer an option. The moment demands honesty, urgency, and action. I want to say simply: do something now. We do not have the luxury of waiting. In our first exhibition in 2023, artist, Bert Liverance titled his work "Greed" and described a planet being drained for profit. His message remains painfully relevant. We already know many of the solutions; what we have not yet confronted is the system of values that prevents us from acting. The question is no longer whether change is necessary. The question is what we are willing to give up so that meaningful change can begin now. Is it still, as Al Gore asked twenty years ago, an "Inconvenient Truth"?

Thank you to all the creative artists who participate in these exhibitions - I value their earnest support for our earth. We will keep speaking up. Please take time to appreciate their work, read their statements and think about what you can do to avoid tipping the scales further. The earth is our only home.

Thank you to the Minden Hills Cultural Center, especially Shannon Kelly, and the staff, for hosting this exhibition. We appreciate the community endorsement and hope that our voices will be heard to protect future generations.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Carmel Brennan".

Carmel Brennan
Curator

PARTICIPANTS

Valerie Ashton	Joseph Muscat
Diana Bennett	Mary Ng
Michael Black	Katherine J. Palmer
Carmel Brennan	Frances Patella
Nancy R. Chalut	Victoria Pierce
Sharron Corrigan Forrest	Dominique Prevost
Sarah Cowley	Mark Puigmarti
Caroline Dear (UK)	Janet Read
Sharon Dembo	Susan E. Scherbak
Jean Eng	Roger Sutcliffe
Cesar Forero	Judith Tinkl
Michelle Letarte	Grazyna Tonkiel
William Lottering	Noriko Yamamoto

VALERIE ASHTON

Heron Homeland

16 x 12 inches

Found plastic



A Cautionary Tale

31 x 23 inches

Found plastic



LETTERS TO THE EARTH

From a distance we see Mother Nature at her best, water, trees rocks – a beautiful landscape. As we look closer, we begin to see the reality, plastic bags, plastic wrap, mylar, chip bags, large, small and everything in between. I strive to capture this in my collages. From a distance they show a waterscape, move closer and they reveal the plastic and garbage used to make up the images, all found in the lakes and rivers around my home in the Haliburton Highlands.

DIANA BENNETT

Medusa Jellyfish

24 x 18 inches

Collage

Jellyfish – Ancient Guardians of Ocean Health. It is their magical beauty that inspired me to delve into an understanding of their function. The species is half a billion years old – the oldest multi organ animal... vilified by humans because of its painful, sometimes fatal sting. However, they prevent overpopulation of specific marine species with venomous darts in their tentacles. They trap carbon for sea floor nutrient cycling. They are an important source of collagen. Dried jellyfish are consumed in parts of the world, providing a nutritious and very lean diet. Since our oceans are the lungs of our planet, generating 50% of our oxygen and absorbing 30% of carbon dioxide emissions, we need to honour and protect the diversity of life under the sea.



BETWEEN DESPAIR AND HOPE

MICHAEL BLACK



Winter Bloom

48 x 36 x 2 inches
Acrylic /mixed media on canvas

For me, this piece is an analogy for 'climate disorder': while we still have the ability to see beauty in the natural world around us, we carry with us the knowledge - and anxiety - that the organic systems which govern its order are somehow out-of-sync.

CARMEL BRENNAN

The Morning Light

21.5 x 30 inches
Photography



The Morning Light was created in February, 2026. The gentle light of mornings always fills me with hope.

In this piece, I see these written thoughts placed before me. These notes are a reminder of the resilience found within human beings, lifting the spirit and inspiring optimism even in such challenging times.

Rage

24 x 30 inches
Oil, cold wax, collage, mixed media on canvas



Rage is an intense, violent state of anger. The earth feels it. I feel it. We have been warned.

NANCY R. CHALUT



Chalk Lake Sustenance

24 x12 inches
Oil

Water- Life Blood of a Nation.
Chalk Lake Spring, at the top of the
Oak Ridges Moraine watershed, flows
in a southerly direction and
is a prime source of pristine water.
Through the use of oil on canvas, I
create a representational depiction of
this expressional liquid.

The purity of this spring has provided
drinking water for my family for many
years. My animals turn their
well tuned noses to any other water
source refusing to drink.

Only the nose knows! They still have
their senses about them.

SHARRON CORRIGAN FORREST

Forest Detritus

12 x 12 x 2.5 inches

Water-based inks, Sekishu Banshi, Oguni
Snowbleached Oguniban, other Kozo Washi
& Konnyaku to size the leaves, branches &
ground detritus



Forest Fallen Leaves #1

8 x 8 x 3.25 inches

Water-based inks, Sekishu Banshi, Oguni
Snowbleached Oguniban, other Kozo Washi
& Konnyaku to size the leaves, branches &
ground detritus



BETWEEN DESPAIR AND HOPE

As a child, I loved the awe-inspiring wildness and spiritual beauty of the ancient forest that surrounded my home in Northern Ontario; always believing it to be my 'Tree Family'. I considered the ancient White Pine and younger Paper Birch to be my closest relatives; their presence always welcoming and their branches always embracing. I loved treading upon their decomposing 'detritus'; listening to the wind rustling their leaves, while they softly whispered, "be still and listen to our tree friends". Today, when they speak, they wail; "WE ARE BROKEN SURVIVORS THREATENED BY CLIMATE CATASTROPHES. PLEASE TAKE CARE OF US!"

SARAH COWLEY

Truth Lies Within the Bones

16 x 10 x 8 inches

Mixed media, bones, beads, copper wire

Two little boys know I collect bones. Last winter they dragged home a deer's skeleton, deep from within the bush. It was gifted to me. "You'll make something with this," they said. How do we stop this current, rapid extinction of species? There aren't enough museums to hold the bones.

LETTERS TO THE EARTH



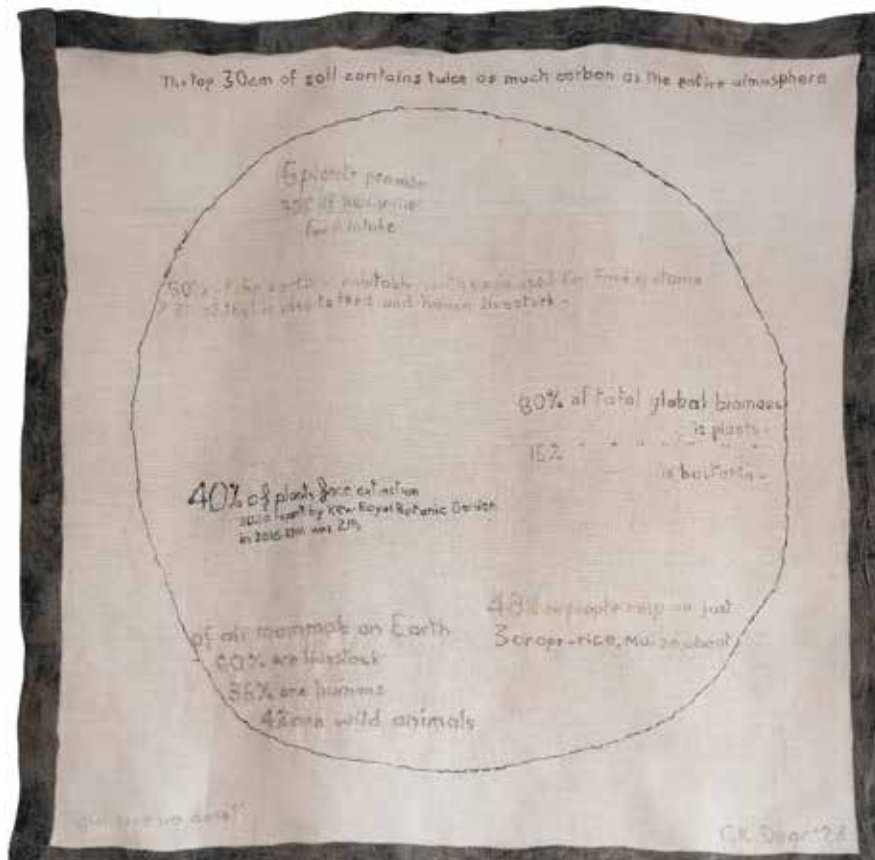
CAROLINE DEAR

What Have We Done?

31 x 31 inches

Embroidered thread made from plants on linen

'What have we done?' reflects on the state of the plant kingdom through factual quotes embroidered using thread made from plants onto linen, itself the first domesticated plant. A wake-up call aiming to highlight our fundamental reliance on the undervalued plant world around us. The plants used include; for dying indigo and peat (sphagnum), for embroidering linen (flax), soft rush, hair moss, nettle, lime bast, willow bark.



BETWEEN DESPAIR AND HOPE

SHARON DEMBO

Where Are We Headed? #1

13.5 x 9 inches

Monotype hand inked stencils



Where Are We Headed? #2

13.5 x 9 inches

Monotype hand inked stencils



LETTERS TO THE EARTH

These 2 artworks were conceived of as a visual dialogue with our changing planet. They translate bare winter canopies into an intimate inquiry: Where are we headed? Printed directly onto the textured surface of handmade mulberry paper, the branching silhouettes merge seamlessly with visible plant fibers, blurring the boundary between image and organic matter. Each piece stands as an open letter—a quiet, tactile witness to ecological vulnerability, that asks us to reflect on what remains when the landscape is stripped bare, and what hope of regrowth still lingers beneath the surface.

JEAN ENG

K-9 Brodie

6 x 12 inches

Acrylic on canvas



BETWEEN DESPAIR AND HOPE

The effects of global climate-related change have increased. They occur faster than we are able to prevent them. Major challenges now involve trying to deal with and manage the aftermath of those changes. "K-9 Brodie" belongs to a fantasy scenario. Animals that normally assist in services such as disaster relief, law enforcement, or mental and emotional health support, instinctively extend their training to include, facilitate the evacuation and safety of other living things as well, whenever possible.

CESAR FORERO

Budding Waters (one)

6 x 6 x 6 inches
Ceramic (high fired glazed)

Budding Waters (two)

5 x 5 x 5 inches
Ceramic (high fired glazed)

LETTERS TO THE EARTH



The water in the oceans is warming and its oxygen levels are changing. These are ideal conditions for jellyfish blooms. The problem isn't the jellyfish themselves, but the terrible pollution we humans are causing. We see plastic on beaches all over the world, and marine life can't take it anymore. For this exhibition, I've decided to create miniature works that will draw attention and encourage us to look closely and carefully at what we can do to quickly remedy the damage we're causing to the planet. By reducing the scale, each piece asks viewers to slow down, lean in, and truly observe. These tiny sculptures transform quiet contemplation into awareness, reminding us that even the smallest actions, multiplied together, can help restore and protect our fragile oceans.

MICHELLE LETARTE

Reconstructed Haliburton Forest

36 x 24 inches

Photo transfers and acrylic on recycled canvas



This work is based on photos taken during a hike in the Haliburton Forest. Old despairing huge trees aided in the aging process by climate changes and acid rain were nourishing bracket fungus and standing tall, next to young saplings and green foliage. A composite image was built from 12 transfers of black and white photos to a recycled textured canvas, to recreate a view of the old, wooded area. The artwork was presented in a Broken Forest exhibition in 2022. Recently applied colours conferred a more optimistic look to the reconstructed forest, giving us hope for new lasting growth.

WILLIAM LOTTERING



The New Reality is Here

12 x 40 inches
Acrylic paint on panel

When I paint works related to environmental change, they tend to be in two categories: Fire from Above and Fire from Below. In 2026, I finally completed this painting of an erupting volcano. In my imagination, I could hear and see the eruption's soundwave obliterating a large landscape. I felt compelled to register a warning in Afrikaans on the surface: The New Reality. The image is my personal reaction to the issue.

The New Reality

24 x 40 inches
Mixed media on panel

In 2022, I started creating artworks related to current environmental changes; in particular wildfires,



volcanoes and war.

This painting shows an abstracted bridge against a smoking volcano. It took a few months to complete, because the painting somehow dictated its own process – I felt it was like making a rock painting, or that I was painting on an ancient parchment. The image

is my personal reaction to The New Reality.

JOSEPH MUSCAT

Tree-House Tree 17

24 x 32 inches
Mixed media



Tree-House Tree 21

32 x 24 inches
Mixed media



BETWEEN DESPAIR AND HOPE

Since the start of my art career, I've had a keen awareness of the state of our environment and the ever-present threats to its survival. At the start of the new millennium, I produced a body of paintings and collages based on a whimsical yet serious concept of trees bearing a tree-house which in turn stands guard for them. Trees huddle together, sheltered by a tree-house, their foliage darkened as if charred by fire yet still bearing lively green leaves, while a solitary well preserved tree, stands proudly inside a protective mound under the watchful wings of the human built tree-house.

MARY NG

LETTERS TO THE EARTH



Ticking Time Bomb

36 x 36 inches
Acrylic

The painting is an attempt to warn the world about our feverish exploitation of natural resources. The fast and unstoppable generation of garbage and pollution will be the ticking time bomb that ultimately destroys Planet Earth. Since most people use plastic containers and bags when making purchases and inevitably discard them later as garbage, I use the patterns of plastic containers to make the ticking time bombs.

KATHERINE J. PALMER

Stitches

18 x 24 inches
Acrylic on Canvas



This piece shows stitches used to repair a rock face. Scars will remain. Humans create our own modern day scarring of the world around us with little thought to the destruction we cause.

Inner Workings

24 x 18 inches
Pen and ink on paper



The 'folly of humans' is of interest.

This includes

how we as humans, exempt ourselves from our actions and responsibilities in the natural world. I've employed the anatomical heart as a motif to describe how the body is affected by functional degradation, the repairs undertaken, and the protections employed inside the body. The creation of 'armour' in the form of barbed wire, to protect or constrain the organ extends this investigation of the ways humans convince ourselves that we are "protected", exempt from the act of living in this world.

FRANCES PATELLA



Forester, Cones & Kite

19 x 24 inches
Mixed media, acrylic &
photography on wood
panel

The City of Toronto conducts prescribed burns to regenerate the Oak Savannahs in High Park. The urban nature of the Golden Horseshoe has squeezed these rare, endangered ecosystems into specially designated areas. Fire stimulates the germination of Savannah species and controls invasive ones. During the burn events, the Savannahs are transformed into ephemeral places by fire and smoke. I have photographed these landscapes, which transition through states of destruction and recreation, capturing serial and incremental changes. I have used elements of the Savannahs, including burnt wood, to create three-dimensional scenes.

VICTORIA PIERCE

Fires Burning, Fires Burning, Draw Nearer, Draw Nearer



36 x 36
inches
Acrylic

The forest fires that have spread out of control across many parts of Canada have been alarming to us all. The once innocent pastime of a camping or cottage campfire takes on a new meaning and challenge to many of us. The once played camp song (the painting title), sung with my Girl Guide group now takes on a menacing tone. We fear the drawing nearer, of those oh so destructive forest fires and the smoke they spread over thousands of miles affecting the health of every human and animal alike.

The forest in this painting is based on my cottage property in Haliburton county on the edge of Algonquin Park where the smoke was so evident in the past few years.

Running Wild

36 x 24 inches
Acrylic



Again, this fire painting was inspired by the recent wildfires out of control across our country and now the world. Truly, a warning the world must heed.

DOMINIQUE PREVOST

Riverbed

20 x 20 inches
Hand marbled and Lino printed Unryu
washi

Mycelium Garden

20 x 20 inches
Hand marbled and Lino printed Usu Kuchi washi

LETTERS TO THE EARTH



My work alludes to time, repetition, and movement and showcases the interconnectedness between soil, water and vegetation. I'm interested in the underground, the roots, the layers of sediment; all those rich bits that work in the background to provide foundation and sustenance for life to stem forth!

MARK PUIGMARTI

Unity Undeniable

98 x 38 x 24 inches

Forged stainless steel, bronze

Unity Undeniable is a metaphor for the rage the natural world has for the human ignorance concerning the use and abuse of the environment we all share. It is not sustainable. Get it??



JANET READ

Arctic Melt #4: Ice retreat

12 inch diameter
Oil on duralar mounted on panel



LETTERS TO THE EARTH

Arctic Melt #4: Ice Retreat is an abstract exploration of the process of melting that is accelerating in the high Arctic. Open leads of water fragment the ice needed by polar bears and seals for raising young and hunting. Open water exists where none has been before altering human traditional hunting patterns as well. Navigable straits open the Arctic to geopolitical conflicts and resource extraction.

Arctic Melt #5: Fractured ice

12 inch diameter
Cyanotype on paper mounted on panel



Arctic Melt #5: Fractured Ice is a cyanotype. A cyanotype is a contact print using sunlight to print the image. I painted a negative and exposed the cyanotype solution painted onto paper to the sun to print. The deep blues resonate with the northern Arctic seas with isolated icebergs making their way south. Areas of unbroken ice are breaking up, swirling and traveling, our blue planet heating up and rapidly changing the ways of animals and humans in the north.

SUSAN E. SCHERBAK

Sleeping Bee

20 x 30 inches
Photography
Indoor/outdoor
Metal art



BETWEEN DESPAIR AND HOPE

In these still moments of quiet reflection, I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to have captured photographs of Mother Nature's hard-working pollinators. I continue to be in awe of how she invisibly shares her sensory, colourfully hued flowers and their frequencies timed perfectly to attract pollinating mates. The interaction between flower and pollinator is needed in the creating of a stable, biodiverse ecosystem, plant reproduction and for healthy food creation.

ROGER SUTCLIFFE

Letters to the Earth #6

18.375 x 22.875 inches

Woodcut on Stonehenge steel grey paper, Graphic Chemical oil-based ink, lettering Indian ink



"Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed."

Mohandas K. Gandhi

As I printed Letters to the Earth #6, I reflected on our future with the 'deadly rise of anti-science', political changes occurring in the USA that would impact our environment and human health, and words attributed to Gandhi. We need to act NOW and hold politicians to account for our common good!

All I Want To Do Is

16 x 20 inches

Acrylic on gallery canvas



All I Want To Do Is, reflects my despair at the "deadly rise of anti-science." Promoters of misinformation negatively impacting policy globally in our interconnected world, leading to adverse impacts on our health and environment, from, for example, re-emergence of eradicated diseases to effects of climate change. Wake up! Take action! Lies and conspiracy theories must be countered for the common good. Human ingenuity and scientific and technological advancements have capability and capacity to provide understanding and solutions to health and environmentally-related issues for good of all.

JUDITH TINKL

Forest Fires

35 x 13.5
inches

Machine
embroidery
framed and
mounted on
charred panel.

This work was motivated by reports last year of forest fires in the news and this year they are even more relevant. Painting with thread is similar to actual painting as it allows for all kinds of colour and texture interactions. I pile them onto the background fabric in a process very similar to painting. Freeform stitching on the sewing machine fixed the chaotic compositions of the three pieces. Framing them and mounting them on charred wood seemed to be an ideal way of presenting them.



Mother Nature

55 x 50 inches

Cottons and poly-cottons, machine pieced, hand
quilted with beads



The quilt is composed of just two triangles which are put together randomly except for the occasional hexagonal forms. Two eyes and a large mouth seem to appear in the centre. Out of the mouth flows a vast swarm of life which explodes into the landscape. We don't pay attention to all the forms of life around us as much as we should.

GRAZYNA TONKIEL



Queen Alexandra Butterfly - Model

3.5 x 8 x 9.5 inches

Paper-mâché, print on canvas of the original drawing, acrylic paint

For 26 years, I have watched the silence descend. On my two-acre Certified Wildlife Habitat, butterflies have vanished in catastrophic numbers. My art seeks to restore what is being lost—to render their fragile beauty visible and unforgettable. Here I present the magnificent Queen Alexandra's Birdwing, largest of all butterflies and hovering at the edge of extinction. This is not merely a species; it is a thread in the vast, unraveling Web of Life. To protect it is to protect the living systems we all depend upon.

NORIKO YAMAMOTO

Still Hope

42 x 30 x 11 inches

Tree branch, plastic wrap, washi,
pigment, acrylic
paint, acrylic glue, wire



and bountiful Planet Earth. We are the ones who are now witnessing it dying – not a slow, quiet death, but rather an ear-piercing, gruesome one. We have all contributed to this slaughter. Despite nature's strength and resiliency, we must now all make a concerted effort to halt the carnage and and mitigate the damage. While this artwork is blatantly shocking, the remaining bits of green amongst the red leave us with a glimmer of hope. Still Hope is a call to action.

Lotus Flower

10 minute Mime-Dance



BETWEEN DESPAIR AND HOPE

We are the ones who
have walked, breathed
and lived our beautiful

Lotus Flower is a meditation
on the simple and quiet
beauty of nature. For me, the
lotus flower represents this
peacefulness. It is my heaven.

And with the sad state our
planet is currently in, I need
this calmness, this escape.

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MINDEN HILLS
Cultural Centre



Ontario
Society
of Artists

With gratitude, we celebrate the Ontario Society of Artists' generous grant support for this fifth exhibition. Founded in 1872, the OSA is Canada's longest continuing art society and a registered Canadian charity championing visual artists across Ontario.

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Please send your handwritten letter to the earth to:

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L0C 1H0

billion years. That's the decay of all living things, the cycle of life, rebirth. Over... and... people had been the caregivers for us, thanking you and taking only what was needed, in less than a nanosecond of time. EVERY THING changed. People no longer relate to you and all of the living things you cherish. There is wanton waste and destruction everywhere you look and one... by... our creatures and resources are disappearing - rapidly. The vast oceans are stunning on the surface, a reflection of the heavens, but underneath... they are rapidly filling up with islands of plastic, dumped by humans who are killing sea life without thought. Oil slicks, pollution, global warming. Fires, floods every layer of waste. Clear cutting. Destruction of the ozone layer, frost and ice cap melting. Fires, floods every layer of mountains of garbage. Even in outer space! Poison of our greed and our refusal to see what is in front of our eyes. All because we don't give a damn about you, Earth. No one cares. NIMBLE. Four Horsemen of Pestilence are leading the world as we know it. Y

