

Sir Nicholas Serota CH, Chair, Arts Council England

Dear Nick,

Inspiring Arts for Earth's sake

13 November 2018

The latest UN IPCC report has announced that we have only 12 years to avert climate change catastrophe. Yet, despite the evidence of the human causes of precipitous change in climate, biodiversity and soils, social and political tendencies around the world are now adding to the crisis through denial. The situation calls for urgent attention and unusual approaches – hence this letter.

Science teaches us many things, but we know that the Arts can move people in ways that complement conventional advocacy and education. Since the 1960s, there has been an ever-growing environmental movement, and this has been inspired as much by evocative images of the Earth seen from space, as it has by scientific evidence of our damaging impact on the planet.

Since then, a generation of artists and arts organisations have contributed to a public engagement with environmental issues, but these have been mainly supported in piecemeal fashion and have largely focused on post-hoc mitigation. At this critical time, we feel that the important role of the arts needs to be promoted in practice as a whole 'environmental arts' ecology. There is progress in making the arts more sustainable and environmentally friendly, and in making arts organisations more resilient to economic challenges; but few artists and arts organisations are being given the training and positive encouragement they need to fully engage with the transformative challenges of climate change and the Sixth Extinction.

Your achievements at Tate and other major art galleries have been huge and you now chair Arts Council England which will soon complete public consultation over its strategy for the years 2020-30; years that are critical if we are to avert the worst effects of climate change. This new strategy will directly affect the direction of public arts funding in this country, and other grant awarding trusts and foundations may well continue to follow your lead. Your encouragement could inspire an art-ecology renaissance around the world, and within other countries currently controlled by leaders who deny the science behind global warming.

To affect societal change in any meaningful way, a new spirit of cooperation needs to replace the polarising effects of competition. Networking and collaboration within the arts is on the increase, but funding systems can engender competing agendas. We would, therefore, invite a continuing public conversation with yourself, both as a respected colleague and as chair of Arts Council England to consider how we may work better together.

Kind Regards, Clive

Clive Adams, Member of CIWEM Arts+Environment Network