At the Tipping Point:

Art and Ecology from the Rooftop of the World

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The opening of the exhibition happened on June 5, 2025 in Kathmandu, Nepal with a perforance by Salil Subedi.

At the Tipping Point: Art and Ecology from the Rooftop of the World stages a critical artistic intervention into the accelerating crises of the Anthropocene. Set in the Himalayan foothills of the Kathmandu Valley, the exhibition is located at one of the most climatically vulnerable—and symbolically resonant—sites on Earth. With global temperatures already surpassing 1.2°C above pre-industrial levels, the world is approaching thresholds that scientists warn may trigger irreversible climate feedback loops. The Himalayas, which are warming at nearly double the global average, are among the most visible and volatile indicators of this planetary emergency.

Here, the effects of climate change are neither speculative nor future-bound. The Himalayas have lost over 40% of their glaciers in just the past few decades, with an estimated two-thirds projected to vanish by the end of the century if emissions continue unchecked. This glacial retreat directly threatens the freshwater sources of nearly two billion people across Asia, whose lives depend on the major rivers fed by Himalayan snowmelt. These mountains act as a climatic barometer—registering the pressures of a rapidly warming planet with stark, irreversible precision.

The exhibition activates this high-altitude vantage not to center Nepal as a subject, but to amplify its strategic location as a lens for planetary perception. Nepal's proximity to Mount Everest—the highest point on Earth—offers a symbolic and material vantage. From this "rooftop of the world," At the Tipping Point calls for a fundamental rethinking of the ecological imagination—where the local and the global, the visible and the invisible, the scientific and the spiritual converge. It leverages the symbolic resonance of Everest and the ecological precarity of the Himalayas to compel attention, awareness, and accountability. Everest functions as a planetary sensor, registering the impact of rising global temperatures with alarming clarity. From this elevated position, the exhibition launches a call to collective attention—using art to activate new forms of ecological perception, awareness, and response.

However, the curatorial framework does not isolate climate change as a discrete issue; instead, it maps a dense web of interconnected crises: rising temperatures, biodiversity collapse, deforestation, water scarcity, soil degradation, plastic inundation, and the erasure of indigenous ecological knowledge. These are not isolated phenomena but what Jason W. Moore describes as symptoms of the "Capitalocene"—a planetary condition driven by extractivist economies and colonial histories of resource domination[1]. Instead, the curatorial

emphasis borrows heavily from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of "planetarity" as a critical framework that shifts the focus from "planet," "earth," and "globalization," suggesting that these terms often refer to a unified natural space rather than a politically differentiated understanding of our connection to the Earth. Planetarity, in Spivak's view, is a way of thinking about our relationship to the Earth that acknowledges its difference and our responsibility to it, moving beyond the limitations of capitalist globalization[2]. She argues that the planet embodies a "sense of alterity, "meaning it exists beyond our complete understanding or control. By this suggestion, thinking of ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents allow for a more profound engagement with the concept of alterity, which includes various forms of existence and knowledge that are not derived from human experience. Hence the exhibition At the Tipping Point borrowing Spivak's theorization of "planetarity" invites a rethinking of our relationship with the planet, urging a move away from simplistic, anthropocentric views towards a more complex understanding of our place within a larger, interconnected system.

Each work in the exhibition functions as a node within a larger ecology of meaning and response. Whether through site-responsive installations, low-impact materials, with minimal carbon footprint, it performs an ecological ethic in both concept and form. It performs what theorist Andreas Boetzkes calls an "ethical ecology"[3]—where artistic form aligns with ecological consciousness, as a provocation: to listen differently, to see systemically, and to imagine otherwise asserting the critical role of art in cultivating planetary awareness and fostering modes of what Arturo Escobar calls "designs for the pluriverse"[4] alternative world-making practices grounded in relationality, reciprocity, and sustainability. Therefore, At the Tipping Point insists on the criticality of art as a medium for environmental thinking, insisting on the possibility of reworlding: of imagining new alignments between species, environments, and futures, as it strongly urges collective reflection on the shared consequences of human actions and the urgent need for sustainable stewardship to safeguard our planet.

When the Earth Speaks

Himali Singh Soin's we are opposite like that (2018) opens the exhibition with an Arctic counterpoint that invites Kathmandu's audiences to contemplate the interpolar entanglements of climate change. Shot in Svalbard, a failed coal-mining town, Soin's poetic video presents an embodied critique of extraction and colonial legacies. As a brown, alien-like figure traverses the terracotta clay terrain revealed by retreating glaciers, the artist stages herself as both witness and residue of planetary upheaval. Ice, here, becomes more than a backdrop: it is an archive, agent, and witness. The accompanying score by David Soin Tappeser—where stringed instruments collide like shifting ice sheets—renders the ecological collapse audible, transforming alarm into an invocation of possible futures.

In a different but complementary geography, **Ursula Biemann's Forest Mind (2021)** shifts the axis from polar to equatorial, from glacier to rainforest. Her long-term collaboration with the Inga community in southern Colombia animates Indigenous cosmologies that view forests as sentient, conscious entities. Interweaving DNA sequencing, Ayahuasca rituals, and philosophical reflection, Biemann dismantles the false binary between scientific rationalism and animist worldviews. Her film resonates deeply with the cosmologies of Himalayan communities such as the Sherpa and Tamang, who understand their mountain forests and glacial flows as animate and sacred. Forest Mind becomes a call to sacred ecology—an epistemology where forests are not carbon sinks but co-inhabitants. It asserts the importance of Indigenous knowledge in resisting the corporate and state-led incursions that threaten both Amazonian and Himalayan ecosystems.

Utsa Hazarika's Yantra/Bloom recasts the monumental Samrat Yantra sundial of Delhi's Jantar Mantar as a hybrid of scientific instrument and living sculpture. Instead of simply marking time, the angular steel framework is pierced by living chameli vines (jasminum), a plant revered in Ayurvedic medicine and puja rituals. By embedding these vines into the geometric silhouette of the original sundial, Hazarika forges a dialogue between ancient astronomy, devotional practice, and urgent ecological concerns. The incomplete row of stairs that once led observers skyward now stands truncated, a visual reminder that human mastery over nature has its limits. As the chameli gradually overtakes the rigid form, observers are invited to see resilience not as domination but as symbiosis—proof that ecosystems thrive when human, plant, and cosmic forces work in tandem.

Echoing Biemann's ecocentric commitment, **Maksud Ali Mondal's Fungal Habitat (2025)** builds a self-sustaining sculptural ecosystem from clay, wood, paddy straw, and fungal spores. Rather than sculpting a fixed form, Mondal allows mushrooms and mycelial networks to shape the work's evolution. Drip-irrigation systems fed by rainwater or nearby springs sustain the installation's life cycles, enveloping viewers in a misty, breathing environment. Here, impermanence is not an aesthetic choice but a philosophical position, drawing on Buddhist notions of anicca (transience). As audiences move through soft textures and earthen scents, they become part of a habitat that teaches through decay, emergence, and renewal.

While Mondal's work is rooted in material process, **Saurganga Darshandhar**i turns to Nepal's ritual foods to explore ecological fragility and cultural continuity. Her twin installations—**Yomari wo Yomha ji and Grain of Gold (2025)**—draw from Newar harvest practices. The "yomari," a rice-flour sweet dumpling offered during Yomari Punhi (harvest festival), is both an edible sacrament and a symbol of abundance. By recreating this tradition as a child-sized yomari garland crafted from terracotta —it highlights how ritual forms risk becoming fossilized if agrarian cycles collapse. Grain of Gold, by contrast, places a small metal house beside a large heap of wheat, suggesting "food as home." This structure resonates not only as shelter but as a metaphorical granary, recalling times when communities survived famine through collective stores of grain, invoking a profound sense of fellowship and shared resilience. Her work also echoes ecofeminist critiques articulated by Vandana Shiva: by foregrounding women's labor—traditionally responsible for preparing yomari and safeguarding seed lineages—as well as embodying care, memory, her work calls us to reflect on the intertwined fragility of cultural continuity and environmental vulnerability.

Amit Machamasi's triptych—Not the Same Anymore, The Irony, and Seeds and Tools— continues the investigation of Kathmandu Valley's shifting agro-ecologies. Through a documentary lens, he chronicles the erasure of Bhaktapur's rice terraces, the gentrification of farmland into urban sprawl, and the commodification of communal resistance. In Not the Same Anymore, once-fertile Sipadol fields lie buried under construction debris. The Irony captures the contradictions of protest: farmers initially resist land grabs for a stadium but later sell land to survive an extractive economy. Seeds and Tools reverts to intimacy—heirloom rice, wooden ploughs, and straw baskets displayed like relics—marking the disintegration of Newari agroecological heritage and the rise of monocultural dependency.

From agriculture to performance, Nepali performance artist **Salil Subedi's Earth Emergence (2025)** is a visceral riverbank ritual that channels the earth's raw, generative voice. Performed shortly after World Environment Day, the piece unfolds as invocation—Subedi's mud-smeared body becomes both medium and conduit, vibrating with the planet's deep-time rhythms. Integrating the elemental sounds of the didgeridoo, Himalayan singing bowls, and overtone throat singing, the performance weaves together sonic traditions that resonate with the earth's own vibrations. Subedi collapses the boundaries between body, soil, and sound, enacting a ritual of reconnection, evoking the earth's capacity for regeneration amid degradation. Earth Emergence draws on both indigenous sonic lineages and contemporary performance to reassert the vitality of land as living archive—inviting a multisensory empathy with the planet as a sentient, wounded, and yet still responsive being.

Engaging the temporal scale of geological materials, **Monica Ursina Jäeger's Liquid Time (2022)** interrogates the silent ubiquity of sand. This five-channel video installation follows sand's metamorphosis from mountain rock to granular sediment to the grey dust of concrete cities. Described as a "material timekeeper," sand bears witness to both deep time and rapid urban acceleration. Footage of desert mining, river dredging, and high-rise construction collapse multiple temporalities into one disorienting frame. Sand, the second most extracted resource after water, is simultaneously invisible and foundational. Jaeger's work demands we consider how the ground beneath us—so easily abstracted—marks the ecological costs of industrial modernity.

Joana Moll's 4004 (2021) examines a different but equally insidious form of ecological collapse: the link between burgeoning microprocessor production and plummeting insect populations. Named after Intel's first processor, 4004 intercuts footage of semiconductor manufacturing with data visualizations of insect population collapse. Moll unearths the hidden ecologies embedded in every digital device—from rare earth mining to water-intensive chip fabrication. Her installation urges viewers to rethink technological progress not as innovation, but as accumulation—of debt, of damage, of silence where once wings fluttered. In this frame, smartphones become fossilized traces of extraction, leaving behind not footprints, but absences.

In sharp contrast to Moll but in a similar vein, **Chris Jordan's Midway: Message from the Gyre (2009–2013) and Albatross (2017)** stage the aftermath of ecological desecration. Set on Midway Atoll in the North Pacific, his haunting photographs of dead baby albatrosses filled with plastic debris present a stark indictment of global consumer waste. Bottle caps, lighters, and nylon fragments—fed unwittingly by parents—litter the birds' corpses. This tragic image mirrors human complicity: we too feed on a system that poisons us. Jordan's cinematic sequences of albatrosses in flight—majestic, slow, and mournful—magnify this ecological grief. The viewer is no longer a distant observer but a participant in a planetary tragedy.

Closer to Kathmandu, **Samyukta Bhandari's Echoes of Survival** addresses a similar plight as house sparrows whose dawn chorus is increasingly drowned out by urban noise. Modeled as a labyrinth of exposed wiring, ceramic sparrow figurines, motion sensors, and mirrors, the installation conjures a disrupted soundscape. As visitors move through the space, sparrow calls are triggered amidst ambient urban noise—traffic, construction, human chatter. Mirrored surfaces etched with sparrow silhouettes reflect spectators into the birds' vanishing world. Here, cohabitation is both metaphor and demand: to live together means to listen, and to listen means to care. Bhandari's work positions sound not just as sensory input but as an ethical invitation to coexist with the nonhuman.

Finally, **Robertina Šebjanič's aquatic trilogy—Aquatocene, The Atlantic Tales, and Co_Sonic 1884 km²**—transports us to oceanic and fluvial bodies that resonate with Kathmandu's own polluted rivers. In the Aquatocene, hydrophones capture marine soundscapes now saturated with sonar, shipping traffic, and seismic testing. Fish calls, shrimp clicks, and the quiet rhythms of reef life are drowned in anthropogenic noise. Co_Sonic 1884 km² tracks Slovenia's subterranean waterways, reminding us that water knows no surface boundaries—just as Himalayan glacier melt sustains unseen aquifers. In The Atlantic Tales, Šebjanič embarks on a sonic expedition aboard the RV Celtic Explorer, layering recordings of basking sharks and flame shells with the improvisational strains of sean-nós, an ancient Irish singing tradition. Her soundscape collapses myth, science, and song, drawing listeners into a poly temporal world where silence itself pulses with life.

Conclusion: Listening to the Earth

At the Tipping Point brings together a constellation of artists whose practices illuminate the intricate entanglements of ecology, culture, and consciousness. Through poetic inquiry, material experimentation, and embodied engagement, their works reframe the environmental crisis not as a distant abstraction but as an intimate, lived reality rooted in memory, ritual, and resilience.

Insisting that ecological consciousness is not just scientific or activist—it is also deeply aesthetic, spiritual, and political. The artists remind us that our entanglement with the Earth is not a new discovery, but an ancient truth obscured by the logic of modernity, extraction, and colonial separation. Their works recall submerged histories, animist cosmologies, and intergenerational knowledge that foreground cohabitation and reciprocity rather than dominance and control, opening a space for renewal, reimagining, and responsibility.

It invites us to listen more closely—to melting glaciers and fungal spores, to ancestral chants and disappearing rivers. In doing so, the exhibition becomes a space of generative possibility: a call to imagine other futures rooted in relational awareness, speculative kinship, and planetary care. Across these diverse works—from frozen poles to tropical forests, from Kathmandu's riverbanks to Pacific gyres—artists and thinkers invite us to reconsider the earth not as passive backdrop but as active interlocutor. Through performance, installation, video, and sound, they ask: What if land remembers? What if ice mourns? What if rivers sing? And most importantly, are we willing to listen?

[1] Moore, Jason W. 2016. Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism. Oakland: PM Press.

[2] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Planetarity' in Barbara Cassin, editor Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon. Translated by Steven Ren Hubert, Jeffrey Mehlman, Nathanael Stein, and Michael Syro translation © 2014 Princeton University Press. Reprinted with Princeton University, 290-291. The term planetarity was first presented in a paper in 1997 and later published in 1999. Spivak emphasizes that "planetarity" cannot be easily translated or understood through existing frameworks, as it challenges the conventional understanding of the planet as merely a physical or geopolitical entity.

[3] Boetzkes, Andreas. 2021. Plastic Capitalism: Contemporary Art and the Drive to Waste. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

[4] Escobar, Arturo. 2018. Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.