

Sinking Land



Bloomberg via Getty Images

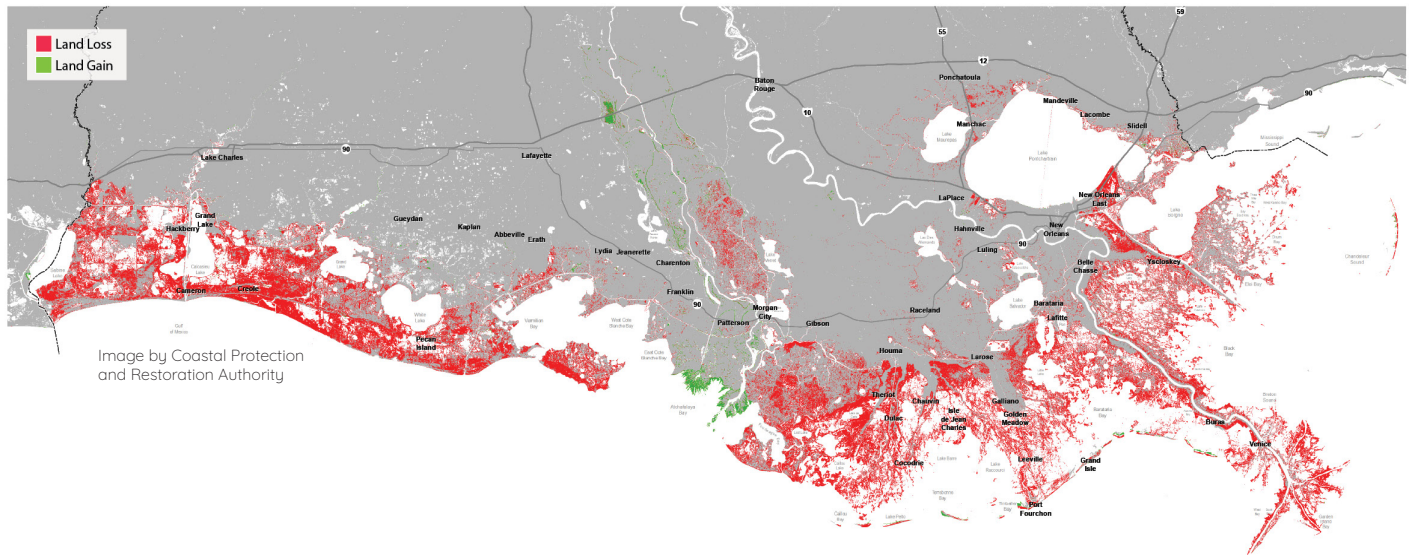
Using Public Installation to Mobilize Americans around Louisiana's Coastal Wetland Loss

By Lilith Winkler-Schor

What's being lost?

Louisiana's coastal wetlands are vital to the US economy, environment and our people.

Predicted Land Change over the Next 50 Years



Louisiana loses an average of 75 square kilometers of land annually—that is 80,730,000 square feet—due to man-made levees that force nearly 90 million tons of nutrient rich biomass to jump from the earth's hold into currents of nothingness.¹

Before the Army Corp of Engineers created levees along the whole Mississippi river, one of the largest infrastructure projects the country had seen, the river's biomass flooded the banks, leaving new earth matter on the hundreds of miles of sponge-like terrain. Further exacerbating the land-loss, oil and gas companies have dredged over 10,000 miles of channels to service gas and oil infrastructure, resulting in 30-59 percent of the total coastal land loss.² Now, almost nine decades later, Louisiana has lost approximately 2,000 square miles of land.³ This means that the Nation has watched as an area equivalent to the size of Delaware has slipped into the Gulf of Mexico. No alarms; no whistles. This massive ceding of land has happened without more than the sloshing sound of water as the ocean reaches further and further inland, grabbing fistfuls of brown mud, and the homes that stand upon it, with her.

While much of the Nation forgets coastal Louisiana, or perhaps never gave it much thought to begin with, this country relies on it heavily. The Louisiana wetlands alone have an estimated value of \$100 billion.⁴ Louisiana is responsible for 1.2 billion pounds of seafood each year,⁵ and Louisiana oil and gas make up a \$73 billion industry.⁶ Furthermore, South Louisiana is home to 2 million people—people that will all need to be relocated if we fail to act now to protect the place they call home.

1. (Restore the Mississippi River Delta n.d.)
2. (Lens, ProPublica n.d.)
3. ("La. Flood Board Sues Oil Industry Over Wetlands" n.d.)
4. (Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act 1997)
5. (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration 2012)
6. (Scott 2014)

How do we save it?

Using public art installations to connect people to the problem

The issue with disappearing land is that it goes silently. How do we get people around the country to realize what is being lost? How do we get people to care about something they cannot see? How do we build empathy in our fellow Americans and ignite them to push for collective investment in our Gulf Coast?

Louisiana has failed to communicate the importance of its coast and the damage that land loss is causing. To bring awareness to the imminent danger of land lost, we must raise the consciousness of average citizens as well as decision-makers about this issue.

The best way to build momentum around American's coastal wetland loss is by using **large-scale public installation that will grow empathy in Americans that otherwise do not realize their connection to Louisiana's coastal land loss.**

We need people to care about something they cannot see. We need them to feel the loss of our wetlands, of these homes, of this culture—before it's too late.



Theory of Change

Emotionally connecting with individuals via art will reshape public perception around coastal land loss

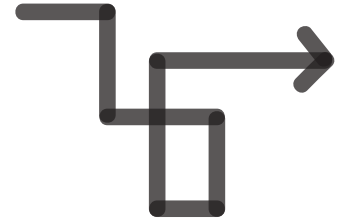
Value Shift



Culture Shift



Systems Change



Through public installation, we can place an issue at the center of someone's mind. When an individual interacts with the work, they become aware and internalize the experience. As the media highlights the issue, they begin to think about the topic, and discuss it with friends.

As more people engage with the installation, the issue rises in importance. Through discussion and collective experience, we can begin to change public opinion. With enough people thinking about the issue, there becomes a culture shift. In the policy world, this is the agenda setting period.

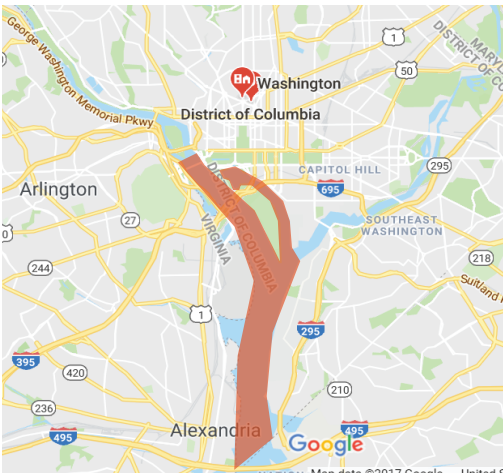
Once we have changed the collective values of our culture can we change the systems that shape our lives. Individual behavior change shapes voting and decisions which is needed to change our systems. The final step is institutional action around the issue.

Negrete and Rios (2013) found that when engaging with scientific data, individuals who learned the data through [A]rt installation, “were able to connect facts with the items, forms and colors presented in the art installation,” better than their counterparts who learned information purely through facts. Ultimately, the “participants in the art installation group [had] higher overall results on the four memory tasks, [and] demonstrated a better connection of scientific data to art installation concepts and objects,” (Negrete and Rios 2013, 15).

Project Proposal

What to communicate through art and how

“Sinking Land” is meant to communicate the ramifications of Louisiana’s coastal land loss. Rather than communicate in dollars or data, this installation focuses on the most relateable aspect of coastal land loss: human displacement and loss of homes. Paired with a robust media strategy and online action campaign, “Sinking Land,” can literally become the talk of th town, and of the nation.



Proposed Installation Site:

Potomac River and Washington Channel, Washington DC Area: Approximately 4 mi²

The goal of this location is two-fold: firstly, to remotely visualize a seeming localized issue to touch those who have little understanding of the issue, and secondly, to reach federal policy makers and urge them to make this a prominent policy issue. By installing this work in the Potomac River and Washington Channel, the installation will be viewed by hundreds of thousands of individuals as they commute to work, visit the capital, and go about daily life.

Though this installation will start in Washington DC, it will be able to travel. The ultimate hope is that this installation can be installed in bodies of water across the country to bring more individuals into this issue, and create collective movement towards remediation.



Sculptural Impact:

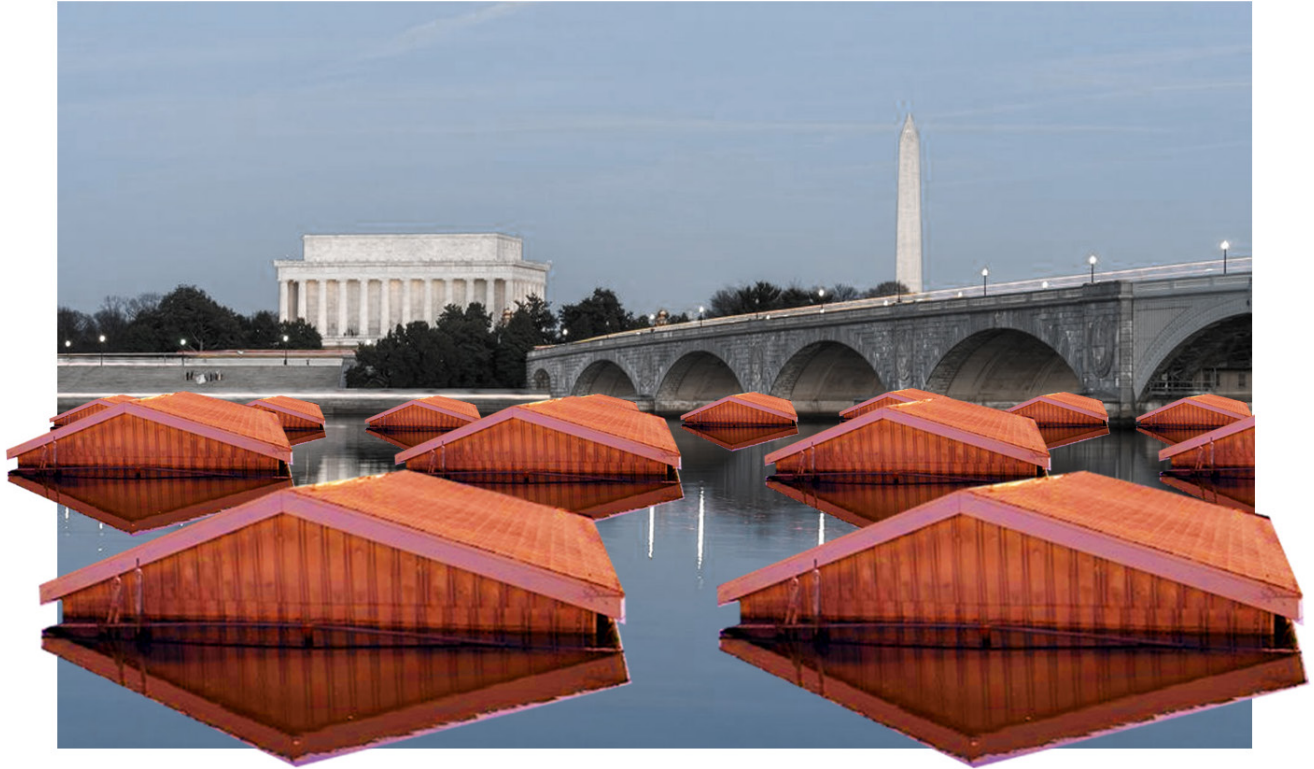
Sinking Land will be an installation of 750,000 roof lines floating in the water, reflecting what the future may hold for south Louisiana if our federal leaders fail to protect this vital land and its displaced residents. Most literally, the visual brings attention to the impermanence of land, and the vulnerable homes and communities that are being lost.

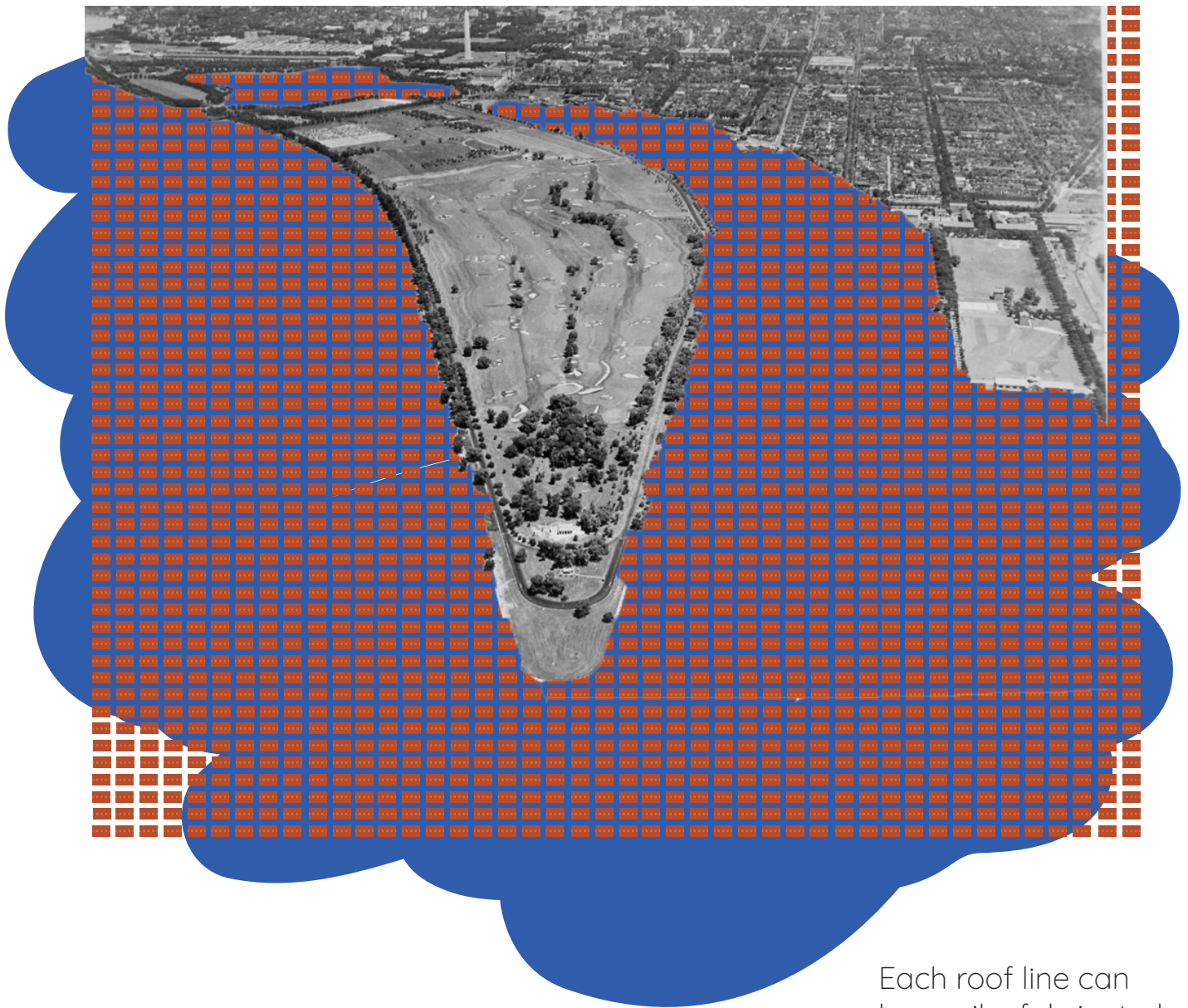
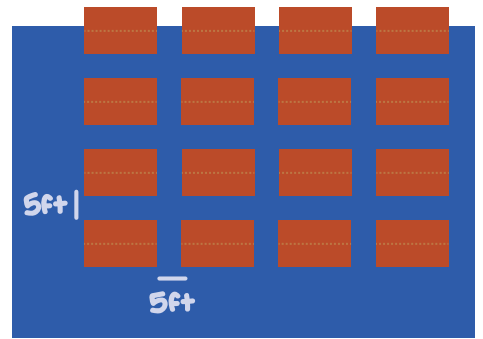
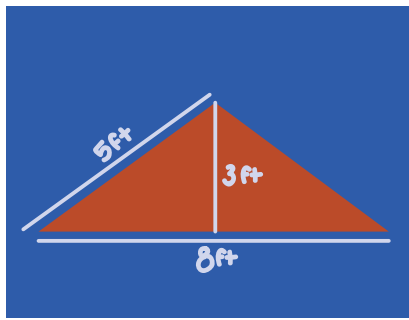
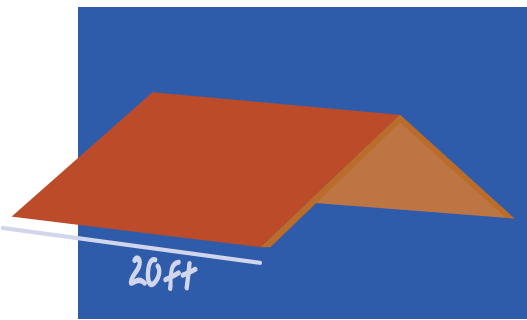
Submerged roof lines draw on images from Hurricane Katrina, images which may quickly reemerge if the coast line continues to disappear, leaving southern Louisiana’s residents more vulnerable to storms and flooding. The exact representation of the number of households that will be displaced is meant to

overwhelm the viewer. In its vastness, the installation aims to touch viewers emotionally and thus growing empathy. This emotional connection is the foundation for the call to action to mobilize our national leaders.

Visualizing Human Loss

Communicating human displacement through sculpture

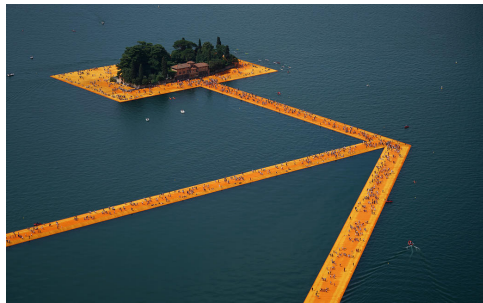




Each roof line can be easily fabricated from one 10 x 20 foot aluminum sheet and can stack neatly for transportation.

Precedents for “Sinking Land” Public Art Installation

Examples illustrating project feasibility



Christo and Jeanne-Claude

use large scale installations on water that invite human engagement and create high visual impact.

Christo and Jeanne Claude, Surrounding Islands, The Floating Piers, and Valley Curtain. Photos by Wolfgang Voltz



Banksy

places politically-charged work in the public domain that prove site-specific work can spread beyond its local setting and can connect with viewers outside of art world.

Banksy street art installations, responding to the Israeli West Bank Barrier, Brexit, and Climate Change, from Banksy.co.uk



Paulo Grangeon

uses representative sculptures to communicate the severity of panda endangerment, and matches his traveling installation with an online, interactive interface.

Paulo Grangeon’s “Pandas on Tour,” in South Korea, Taipei and on the Internet, images from Tomodachi.us

Conclusion

Project summary

This proposed art installation, “Sinking Land,” aims to bring national attention to Louisiana’s coastal land loss, thus reframing the issue as American coastal land loss, through public art that will emotionally engage a broad swath of viewer. Though debuting in the Capital, this show is easily transportable and thus can bring attention to the issue via installations across the country, as well as digital documentation.

Negrete and Rios (2013) showed that when individuals engaged in installation art, they were better able to retain scientific data, as well as were more likely to follow up with researchers about the project, including asking for more information about the issue. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Banksy, and Paulo Grangeon all illustrate how a project of this size can be both feasible and impactful.

Paulo Grangeon’s 1600 “Pandas on Tour,” in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund, established a precedent for using unique methods of engagement for mobilizing individuals to be concerned about environmental issues. Further, the project speaks to the potential for using digital platforms in tandem with installation work to continue engagement and communicate information. Alongside the physical installation, I propose that “Sinking Land,” develop an online presence that will more literally state the issue, and offer advice to viewers about how to get involved.

The Louisiana coast line is currently suffering in silence. We cannot continue to keep this issue on the sideline. Through a national debut in a novel format, Louisiana can put this issue on the agenda, and pressure politicians to take ownership over this national issue.

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