

Book Review

Review of Ecoart in Action: Activities, Case Studies, and Provocations for Classrooms and Communities

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Abstract: This article reviews *Ecoart in Action: Activities, Case Studies, and Provocations for Classrooms and Communities* (Geffen et al., 2022), a key resource linking art, environmental education, and activism. The book's tripartite design—Activities, Case Studies, and Provocations—offers practical guidance and theoretical framing for eco-art pedagogy. Its strength lies in the integration of art, ecology, and community practice, providing adaptable tools for diverse educational settings while enriching environmental aesthetics. Although somewhat U.S.-focused and uneven in tone, the volume remains a timely guide for educators, students, and practitioners seeking to foster ecological literacy and creative engagement through art.

Keywords: Eco-art education; environmental aesthetics; interdisciplinary pedagogy; community engagement; sustainability education

1. Introduction

Ecoart in Action is a 2022 edited volume (Geffen *et al.*) addressing how art can respond to urgent ecological crises. In posing questions such as “How do we educate those who feel an urgency to address our environmental and social challenges?” and



“What role might art play in actualizing environmental resilience?”, the editors frame the book at the intersection of art, education, and environmental activism. The volume is explicitly designed for educators, students, and community practitioners: as Hannigan (2024) notes, it is “designed for educators, students from a range of educational contexts, and those working with communities (human and other)”. Compiled from contributions of the international Ecoart Network, the book aims to serve as a practical field guide: it “offers practical solutions to critical environmental challenges” and is organized into three main parts—Activities, Case Studies, and Provocations—each providing adaptable models for eco-art practice. In sum, *Ecoart in Action* targets anyone who shares concern for the environment and believes that art can help inspire hope and action (Geffen *et al.*, 2022; Hannigan, 2024).

Book Structure

The volume is structured in three sections. **Section 1 (Activities)** documents 25 distinct pedagogical activities aimed at engaging learners with ecology and nature. These activities range from straightforward material-based projects (using sustainable or natural materials) to more interactive group exercises (for example, variations on the “exquisite corpse” game) and place-based investigations. Each activity includes clear instructions, learning goals, and reflection prompts. As Hannigan observes, many activities are designed to foster empathy and collaboration: they encourage students to “engage with nature, explore eco concerns and work collaboratively”. One illustrative example is Samantha DiRosa’s *Inventory of Obstacles and Concerns*: students list personal frustrations or “obstacles” they have with the natural world, then practice “reframing...problems into opportunities” to spark eco-art projects. Another chapter by Beth Grossman (in this section) explores performance and installation practices within an eco-art curriculum. Overall, Section 1 provides concrete, classroom-ready art activities grounded in environmental themes, often emphasizing place-based learning and mindful engagement with local ecosystems. According to reviewers, the activity guides are well-structured, with “clear instructions about materials needed and prompt questions to ask” that make them accessible even to non-specialist instructors.

Section 2 (Case Studies) presents 26 in-depth examples of eco-art projects, courses, and programs from various educational settings. Each case study is contextualized with background, rationale, and methodology. As the editors describe, each contribution offers “enough information for readers to replicate or create a



similar experience, while also offering historical contexts [and] rationales, and methodologies that contextualize eco art practice. Hannigan notes that this section is “well researched” and offers a “thorough understanding of what eco art is”. The case studies span a wide range of formats and contexts: for example, some describe intensive student workshops in natural settings, others describe long-term community art collaborations or curriculum modules at the university level. While specifics vary, all emphasize experiential learning and ecological themes (e.g. water, forests, biodiversity, climate, or food systems). The diversity of cases—from undergraduate studio courses to K–12 community projects—demonstrates how eco-art education can be adapted to different age groups and locales. As one reviewer remarks, these case studies cover both formal coursework and informal community engagement, collectively mapping the breadth of contemporary eco-art practice.

Section 3 (Provocations) offers more theoretical and conceptual essays on eco-art education. These chapters frame the field of eco-art through broader lenses – such as deep ecology, environmental justice, and aesthetics – and often pose critical questions or “provocations” for educators. Hannigan (2024) observes that Section 3 “steps up into more of a theoretical and conceptual framing of eco art”. For example, a chapter by Tim Collins and Reiko Goto Collins on Scottish forest art education argues that art “does not fix things, [but] rather...creates space for comment and discussion, producing surprising changes to extant concepts and experiences”. This highlights a key theme in the book: art’s role as a tool for dialogue rather than quick solutions. In fact, the reviewer suggests that after reading the book one gains “a wider understanding of how we can and need to engage with both the environment and art to research, learn and understand interconnections of self, place, environment and ecologies”. In this sense, the entire volume functions as a kind of informal course in **environmental aesthetics**: many activities and essays invite readers to perceive the environment in empathic, aesthetic terms. Hannigan concludes that the book as a whole “could be said to also be an education in environmental aesthetics” because its content consistently encourages reflection on our relationship with nature.

2. Theoretical Dialogue

Ecoart in Action is firmly grounded in contemporary eco-art theory and interdisciplinary practice. Contributors draw from ecology, art theory, education, and



activism, illustrating the inherently cross-disciplinary nature of the field. As one commentator notes, the book reflects “major activist and art-political movements, feminism and ecofeminism, conceptual art, performance art, and deep ecology,” with “interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity underpin [ning] many of the book’s contributions”. This aligns with the editors’ goal of integrating art with science and community action. For example, Linda Weintraub (2012) – a prominent eco-art scholar – has long argued that art education should encourage students to “question disciplinary boundaries” and see ecological problems from multiple perspectives (Weintraub, 2012, p.19). The book’s content reflects this: activities often connect art-making to scientific observation or social inquiry.

The volume also engages emerging ideas in environmental aesthetics and pedagogy. Several chapters foreground aesthetic experience as a means of ecological engagement. Hannigan (2024) highlights the Collinses’ deliberative approach in nature, and notes that many activities allow students to “explore our relationships with the natural environment, nature and ecologies” in an empathic way. This echoes current trends in environmental education that view aesthetic sensitivity as key to fostering environmental care (cf. Sekules, 2023). Interestingly, the reviewer critiques one framing: the editors’ remark that STEM is “slowly evolving into STEAM” is questioned, since many educators see art as long integrated with science (indeed, educational discourse is already moving beyond STEAM into broader “transdisciplinary” models). In sum, the book positions eco-art as inherently holistic and reflective, encouraging learners to think critically about ecological issues rather than simply treating art as a technical skill. The extensive bibliography included – covering topics from art to ecology to pedagogy – further underscores this interdisciplinary dialogue.

3. Case Analysis

The practical examples in the book demonstrate how its theoretical aims play out in real contexts. For instance, one case study (Grossman, in Section 1) describes an interdisciplinary workshop in which art students study pioneering eco-artists (including site-specific and community-engaged practitioners) before creating their own nature-based installations. Another example is the Inventory of Obstacles activity (DiRosa), which explicitly links emotional reflections to collaborative art projects. In



the Provocations section, Collins and Goto Collins recount fieldwork at Scottish forests where students engage in slow, site-based art exercises that cultivate patience and observation (Collins & Goto Collins, 2022, pp.215–223) – illustrating the book’s emphasis on place-based learning. Throughout the cases, common threads emerge: projects are often **participatory** (inviting community or student ownership), **place-conscious** (drawing on local ecology or culture), and **process-oriented** (valuing dialogue and reflection). As Hannigan observes, many of these cases “would be of use internationally” even if adapted for local curricula, since they teach transferable skills such as critical thinking, ecological literacy, and collaboration. The variety of contexts (from university studios to outdoor schools to urban community art) shows that eco-art education can be scaled and customized: seasoned educators can pick and adapt activities or projects to their settings.

4. Critique and Reflection

The review identifies several strengths of *Ecoart in Action*. Most chapters are very clearly written and structured, making the book user-friendly. Although contributions vary in style (since each chapter is by a different author), a common layout – headings like Overview, Objectives, Materials, Procedure, and Reflection – provides consistency. The instructions and prompts within activities and case studies are noted as particularly useful: Hannigan remarks that even novice instructors could follow them successfully, thanks to detail on materials, steps, and discussion questions. The breadth of content is another positive: the book’s evolution from the Ecoart Network (a long-running artist-educator community) lends it depth and “richness,” yielding a wealth of ideas that an individual author might not generate alone. In her overall judgement, Hannigan is “really impressed,” calling it a “rich collection of approaches” that can both inspire and guide eco-art teaching.

A few critiques are also noted. The chapter voices differ markedly in tone and focus, so readers may need to adjust when moving between sections; however, this is not seen as a major flaw given the book’s use-as-needed format. A more substantive concern is occasional cultural bias: the book occasionally assumes U.S.-specific knowledge (for example, referencing the First Amendment without explanation). International readers might have appreciated more context for such references. Another smaller critique is terminological: as noted, the idea that STEM is only now



“evolving into STEAM” feels dated, since educators have been integrating art and science for decades. Finally, some activities require adaptation for different audiences, so the most benefit may come to experienced educators who can tailor the projects. Nevertheless, most sections explicitly invite modification and reflection, so users are empowered to customize them.

In balance, the reviewers conclude that *Ecoart in Action* succeeds remarkably well as a pedagogical resource. The content is simultaneously deep (grounded in theory and research) and practical (full of hands-on lessons). It is praised for being adaptable – as one endorsement puts it, “transformative projects are carefully laid out...Packed with brilliant ideas for a vast number of contexts and participants” (Lippard, 2022) – and as a “field guide” for integrating art, science, and community practice. Any remaining shortcomings (writing style differences or minor cultural assumptions) do not substantially detract from its utility.

5. Conclusion

In summary, *Ecoart in Action* is a comprehensive and timely contribution to environmental art education. It maintains a clear academic tone while remaining accessible to practitioners. The editors (Geffen *et al.*, 2022) have curated a volume that both documents state-of-the-art eco-art pedagogy and provokes deeper reflection. As one reviewer notes, after engaging with the book “I was left with a wider understanding of how we can and need to engage with both the environment and art”. In effect, the book serves as an “education in environmental aesthetics” that invites us to reimagine our role as stewards of the natural world through art. It stands as an invaluable field guide: practical, well-researched, and interdisciplinary. Educators, students, and community leaders interested in eco-art practice will find in it both inspiration and concrete tools for action (Geffen *et al.*, 2022; Hannigan, 2024). Overall, the volume is **highly recommended** as a resource that can help bridge the gap between environmental awareness and creative engagement, ultimately fostering a more hopeful and active approach to ecological education.

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