

Show, don't tell, about sea-level rise and its impact



Rachael Pacella, DelmarvaNow 10:31 a.m. EDT May 1, 2015



Photo: Submitted image from Lynn Tomlinson

Showing, not telling, might be a less intimidating, effective way to communicate complex ideas about sea level rise, or simple messages about not littering, artists say.

Earlier this year, Baltimore-based artist Lynn Tomlinson released a short film about the last house on Holland Island in Dorchester County, its history and eventual collapse into the Chesapeake Bay. Inspired by a photo, Tomlinson said she intentionally tied in the idea of sea level rise in the animated short, which she made by painting with clay

"I've been kind of approaching looming problems," she said. "Instead of fear tactics, trying to take a poetic or even nostalgic or quirky approaches to topics that are so difficult to discuss."



Lynn Tomlinson "paints" using clay to create her film, "The Ballad of Holland Island House." Photo: Submitted Image from Lynn Tomlinson

The animation also allows her to approach the subject from the perspective of the house, using it as a character - something that might be difficult to do using other mediums. The "Ballad of

"Holland Island House" begins with the house sitting alone on the island completely surrounded by water, with a song in the background narrating the story.

"I stand alone in the Chesapeake Bay, against a gray horizon, but a house that's not shelter is not a home, and the seas they are a risin'," the film begins.

It then flashes back to the oak tree the house was built from, how it was turned into lumber and shingles, brought to Holland Island and built into a home for a fisherman and his family. The house, as a character, says the fisherman believed it was sturdy and stable, and continues to say the people of the island "thrived on the bounty of the bay."



The last house sits alone in the bay in "The Ballad of Holland Island House." (Photo: Submitted image from Lynn Tomlinson)

Quickly in the film 200 years pass, in the blink of the eye for the earth, it is noted.

"It really also is about islands and time and how we think of things as being permanent when they've been around 200 years," Tomlinson said.

It shows the island eroding, caused by storms that don't cease, and it shows how some residents decided to take apart their homes and move them to dryer land. Eventually, the film progresses to show the house alone in the bay again, beginning to sag and then fall into the bay, while the narrator sings that it was a "lost house, lost home, lost island."

Tomlinson wrote the story from the house's point of view to help distance the subject of sea level rise by showing how it affects things other than humans, she said.

"One thing about animation is that it can be very disarming, people drop their guard a little and might be more open to thinking about something," she said.

Tomlinson has received praise and multiple awards for the film.

"I knew from the start that it could be really powerful, in terms of communicating these idea for people," she said.

To view the film, visit www.lynnTomlinson.com/hollandislandhouse.



People gather around a table to eat crabs in Lynn Tomlinson's video "The Ballad of Holland Island House." (Photo: Submitted image from Lynn Tomlinson)

In Ocean City, artist Teri Thomas-Edgeworth used a painting to communicate a simpler but still important message about littering. Near her vacation home in town she noticed a woman constantly cleaning up after people at a popular crabbing spot.

"Everyone thought she was cranky herself," she said.

So, she painted a scene titled "Come On In, The Water's Fine," with two crabs, one on a rock and another in clearly polluted water with a cigarette butt and six-pack ring.

"This way they get to see exactly who and what it is damaging," she said. "I think it's a simple fact, you just have to clean up after yourself."

The painting has been donated to the Maryland Coastal Bays Program, where she hopes its message will be well received.

"I think it's better said without words," she said.

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