

# SAVING THE WISHING WELL

A SHOWING OF ORIGINAL ART WORKS

BY

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*Whatever befalls the Earth,  
befalls the sons and daughters of the Earth.  
Man did not weave the web of life;  
he is merely a strand in it.  
Whatever he does to the web,  
he does to himself.*

—Chief Seattle

This current show of my most recent original art works, called “Saving the Wishing Well” coincides with the celebration of my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. The contents of the show deal primarily with issues of environmental responsibility and humankind’s relationship to what the great Native American leader, Chief Seattle called the web of life.

I use the image of the wishing well—somewhere we can all go to hope and dream in exchange for some small degree of sacrifice—as a metaphor for the planet and the natural abundance it has produced for our collective benefit since the beginning of time. My impression is that we have so egregiously taxed our earthly wishing well in recent times that we are increasingly compelled to focus on saving it, lest we fail to save ourselves.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, man’s relationship to the web of life seems as complicated as it has ever been. Economic and environmental decline, strains in the relations of nations, mounting human rights abuses, and a growing sense of personal constraints impact modern societies in profound ways. These and other sources of pressure account for the unsettling tenor of our times, most of it self-imposed by human beings. Industrial farming, deforestation, species depletion, and hyper-population growth—all have conspired, with our tacit assistance, to place the planet at unprecedented peril.

According to the World Wildlife Fund, many of the animals that I was introduced to as a child through books and movies as the definitive exemplars of nature have recently become extinct or are at imminent risk of extinction. The Tiger, the Polar Bear, the Rhino, the Elephant, various Great Apes, and the Panda—each of these endangered species is on the verge of being disappeared forever from the planet.

So much of the problem has to do with humanity's relentless expansion across the globe. In 1959, when I was born, the world was inhabited by 3 billion people. Presently, the world is home to over 6 billion people. By 2050, experts project a total world population in the range of 9 billion—fully three times the total during my infancy. The largest increases in anticipated population growth will be in developing countries like India, China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Somalia, and Indonesia—all nations that have experienced significant and often violent political upheaval and/or terrorism in recent decades, largely as a result of poverty and repressive policies.

In addition, various reliable experts, including the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), have reported recently that owing largely to man-made economic production processes the planet is warming to dangerous and potentially unsustainable levels. In 1945, the average global temperature was 57 degrees Fahrenheit. Today it is over 58.5 degrees Fahrenheit. While this seemingly modest increment in heat appears innocuous, it could be the difference between planetary survival and demise.

My concern about these developments is partly that of the average citizen who is trying to survive and thrive against the backdrop of such daunting data. But it is also the result of approaching a final, more mature stage of my life at which I find myself asking fundamental questions that all of us should probably be considering more intentionally: What is the nature and meaning of life? What is my responsibility to others and to the planet? What, if anything, will endure if we do not soon change our ways of living and of governing?

These questions have elevated on my radar in recent times owing especially to my decision last year to relocate from the heart of New York City to a rural ranch located near my birthplace along the California Central Coast. Through this move, my wife Claudia and I have reconnected with nature. We have acquired three large dogs, a stray cat, and six chickens of various breeds. We have made it a habit to start each day with a long walk over various parts of our ten acre property and to end each day under the Milky Way reflecting on our many gifts. Usually, the gifts we now consider most important have nothing to do with the material world. Rather, they are all about celebrating life's most simple things—ironically, the things it seems so many of us have otherwise gotten farthest away from in the elusive race for so-called fame and fortune.

In the pieces that anchor this show, I have sought to ask tough questions about the fate of our planet and our present, personal responsibility to address them. Part of the content appeals to notions of faith as a rationale for needed change; part of it speaks to our reason as the basis for creating a more sustainable world. My purpose in speaking to the issues both as a matter of faith and of reason is neither to preach nor to pretend that I have definitive answers to the world's growing array of environmental and human rights challenges. Rather, my goal is to do the work of the artist across the sweep of history: to stand as a witness, to hold up a mirror, and to pose questions that still too few others are prepared to put into play.

If you have a moment, I would strongly urge you to join me in the cause of imagining a new and cleaner world for our future—a more sustainable wishing well, that is, through which we can all more fully share the joy of life.