

Using Art to Change the World

Changemakers - Petroc Sesti



The artist Petroc Sesti is a co-founder of Platform Earth, an organisation which aims to bring together artists and scientists to deal with the pressing environmental issues that face humanity

“Artists are the conduits for new cultural narratives,” says Petroc Sesti. “We are well placed to engage the public and help make the cultural shift needed to get to net zero.”

A man wearing glasses and a white shirt standing with his hands on his hips
He’s talking about Platform Earth, an organisation he co-founded in 2021, which “was born out of the desire to steer the contemporary arts toward environmental activism”. It aims to bridge the gap between the arts and the sciences, educate the public and provide finance streams for scientists who are working on carbon capture and marine projects.

Platform Earth’s most recent project involved using Air-Ink, made from particle pollution captured on the streets of India, and asking some of the world’s most celebrated artists, including Rachel Whiteread, Tracey Emin, Shezad Dawood and Brian Eno, to create works from it. These works were sold at a charity event in London in February 2022 featuring the likes of US astronaut Nicole Stott and actor Jude Law, both of whom are supporters of Platform Earth, with all proceeds going towards the restoring of a forest of carbon-sequestering kelp, a sea plant that naturally stores carbon and promotes biodiversity, off the UK coast.

Sesti was born and now lives in London. His parents, who are from an old Italian family, moved from the UK to Tuscany where they own a wine estate that produces the region’s eponymous Brunello di Montalcino. He studied at the Chelsea School of Art and, after graduating, he briefly trained in classical sculpture in Carrara, Italy (home of the famous marble), then opened his first studio in New York before returning to London, where he now works in Hackney. His art is in museums and private collections around the world.

Sesti’s work is characterised by its interaction with both viewer and its environment, and his exploration as an artist of the metaphysical nature of existence beyond day-to-day human experiences reflect his passion for physics and astrophysics, fluid dynamics, ecosystems, marine biology and climate change. And so, Platform Earth is a natural extension.

“We live in a time where we can’t ignore what’s happening on the environmental front,” he explains. “Platform Earth is a direct response to this. I want art to play a leading role in defining how we react to the climate crisis and the ocean crisis, in the same way that music played a role in defining civil rights and opposition to the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s.”

Sesti says that, as an artist himself, he saw that artists were often individually very concerned about the environment but not engaged as a cohesive group. “I thought, ‘Let’s create a platform where artists can start engaging with scientists and environmental movements.’”

“What led me into natural carbon sequestration and the creation of Platform Earth was time spent in Asian rainforests using laser-scanning techniques to harvest 3D models of vast ancient trees for my Tree Beacon sculpture project. I had a waking moment working with scientists studying the amount of carbon locked in trees using laser-scanning techniques to effectively capture the complexity of the largest living habitats on the planet. And then I imagined an organisation where artists and institutions work closely with scientists, sharing knowledge and providing financial streams to protect and restore carbon locking habitats.



Tree Beacon (Recycled Bronze) will be a permanent exhibit in the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition 2022 curated by Alison Wilding with the theme of ‘Climate’. Image courtesy and copyright Petroc Sesti studio.

Biography / key dates

2008 Exhibits Vanishing Point at Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York City

2012 Work included in the 9th Shanghai Biennale

2012 Turbulence exhibited at the Espace Louis Vuitton Foundation, Paris

2014-15 Selector for the Prudential Eye Art Awards, Singapore

2018-2022 Co-judges the Aon Community Art Award

2020 Sagittarius A - Nebula, light based interactive artwork & audio visual Solar Relay III installation, exhibited at the Manifesta 13 Biannual Marseille 2020

2021 Founds Platform Earth

Upcoming:

2022 Exhibitor in Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, curated by Alison Wilding RA with the theme of ‘Climate’