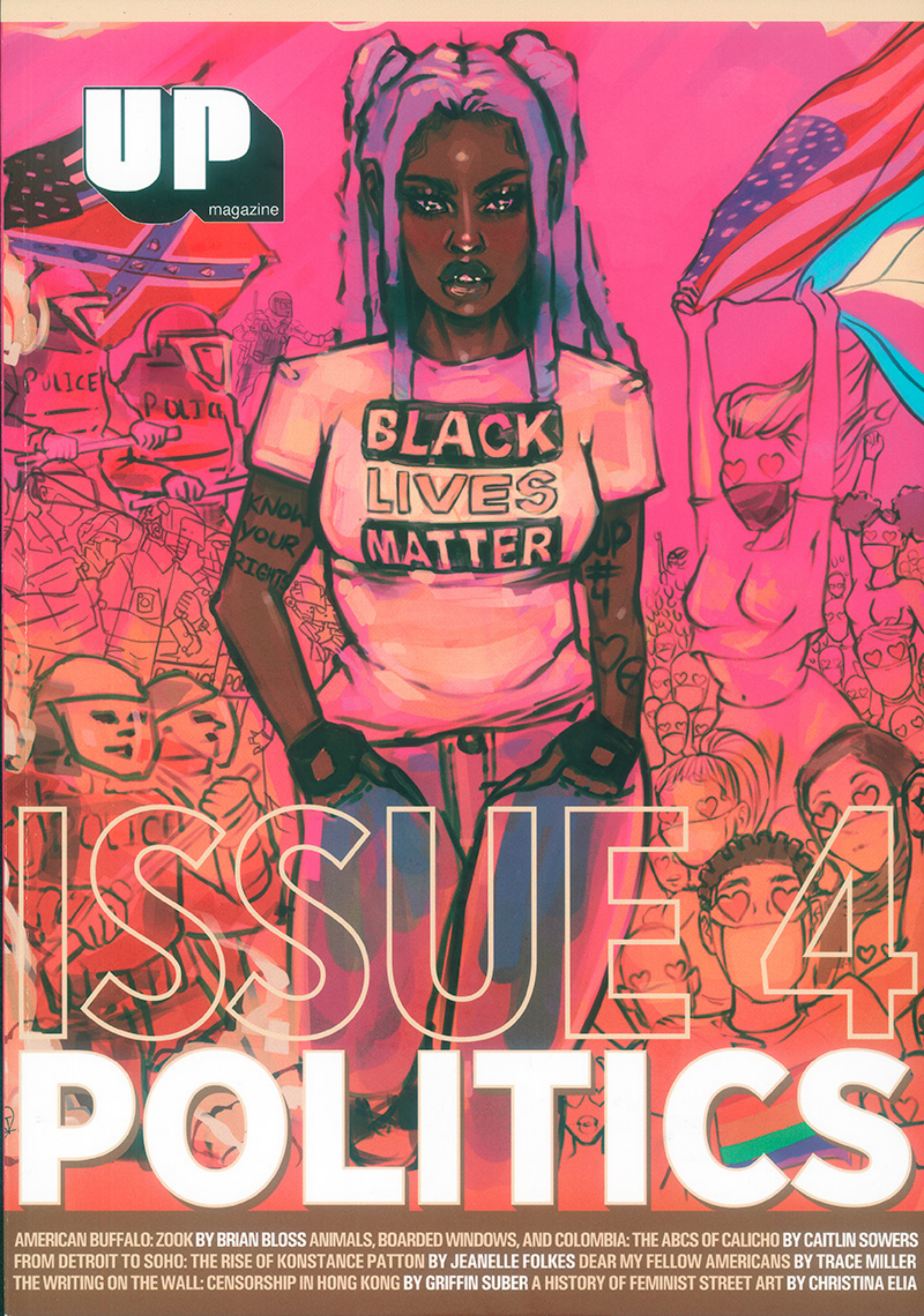


**UP**  
magazine



# ISSUE 4

# POLITICS

AMERICAN BUFFALO: ZOOK BY BRIAN BLOSS ANIMALS, BOARDED WINDOWS, AND COLOMBIA: THE ABCS OF CALICHO BY CAITLIN SOWERS  
FROM DETROIT TO SOHO: THE RISE OF KONSTANCE PATTON BY JEANELLE FOLKES DEAR MY FELLOW AMERICANS BY TRACE MILLER  
THE WRITING ON THE WALL: CENSORSHIP IN HONG KONG BY GRIFFIN SUBER A HISTORY OF FEMINIST STREET ART BY CHRISTINA ELIA





## ARTIVISM FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

*Written by Tyler Bruett*

Climate change is probably the most catastrophic issue facing the world today. It's a problem that affects people around the globe, in every class of society, and its consequences will change the way our economies and politics work, drastically and forever. It's a looming apocalypse; a destination not so distant from science fiction yet firmly anchored in reality.

The world's population has risen to where we are unable to sustain our lifestyles without harming ourselves. Modern industry has nowhere to release its toxic waste except into the air we breathe and into the water we drink, and it has nowhere to grow except for tearing into the depths of our rainforests, which are vital in the earth's process of recycling greenhouse gases. Subsequently, our own personal waste has nowhere to go but into our soil and our oceans, interrupting the ecosystems and polluting the resources we as a species need to survive.



Stepping up to the environmental crisis is something that should not be as divisive as it is. Against the undeniable evidence, our impact on the planet has been hotly debated for decades. While forest fires rage, hurricanes become more turbulent, and polar ice caps melt, a certain sector of people refuse to acknowledge its existence, or, at least, won't allow their lives to be determined by the consequences of their actions.

Contrarians would love for us to believe that we have no more than a miniscule impact on our environment. They say global warming is a natural process, and that downsizing or changing our industry would only serve to damage the economy. Despite a muddle of conspiracy theories, the rapid deterioration of our environment is more prevalent than ever, and, at this point, we may be able only to adapt, rather than reverse the damage done.

Adapting to these crises will take effort on every level, from day-to-day, individual restraint on consumerism to federal mandates on renewable energy. The issue is complex and requires an astute awareness to handle properly. Propaganda and confusing statistics abound, and it can be hard for the everyday person to discern between fact and fiction, what can and can't be done. It takes a universally accessible language to get the point across; something that attracts attention and connects to everyone on a visceral level. And as street artists have served as effective messengers of important issues of the past, they seem likely candidates to deliver this quandary directly to the public.

I scouted out a few of the bigger names in "artivism" (a term describing artist-activists) active in America, Europe, and South Africa, to talk about the issues facing our planet and what they're doing to help. Doom and gloom were inevitable when talking about the various ways we impact the environment, and I was surprised to find that these influence our socio-political issues as well. The artists, nevertheless, remained optimistic and steadfast, and we spoke about what they're doing on a personal level to change their carbon output, how they're raising awareness, and what they think we could do to at least adapt to the coming storm.

## ACOOOL55

"It was 2010, I was part of the Plastiki Project," Acool55 recalled, speaking on his earlier years as an environmentalist before becoming a street artist. "It was a big sailboat built on recycled plastic bottles that we sailed across the Pacific Ocean. We did it to raise attention to the giant garbage patch in the middle of the Pacific. It was a successful expedition, sailing from San Francisco to Sydney. I was on the boat for two months, and I documented the making of the boat because no one had ever built something like that before."

Preferring to be referred to only by his moniker, Acool55 has been a street artist for merely four years, but an environmentalist for thirty. A prolific entrepreneur as well as a craftsman, his dedication to the cause knows no bounds. By trade, he's a photographer and videographer, and it

was through the opportunities this afforded him that he was able to surround himself with people of great influence in the world of environmental activism.

"While I was on the boat, there was the founder of *Tree Hugger Magazine*, which is a huge reference in the environmentalist world. Our mission leader and founder was David de Rothschild, who is a big environmentalist, was also on board. So, I found myself in a familiar place."

Acool55 described to me how the inspiration he took from this journey led him to the next phase of his career, bringing environmental efforts into the corporate arena. "When I got off the boat, I decided I was going to start

**WHILE FOREST FIRES RAGE, HURRICANES BECOME MORE TURBULENT, AND POLAR ICE CAPS MELT, A CERTAIN SECTOR OF PEOPLE REFUSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE ITS EXISTENCE, OR, AT LEAST, WON'T ALLOW THEIR LIVES TO BE DETERMINED BY THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS.**

a small agency with an environmental focus. I went back to school to learn the science and get certified to sign off on a CSR, a Corporate Social Responsibility report. I was lucky because we got a big client just six months in. So, my engagement with the environment after that was mostly with big corporations, helping them clean up their shit."

But Acool55 was not one to be stagnant or satisfied with a single conquest. He went on to describe his transition into street art:

"We did this successfully and I sort of had a crisis of growth. I didn't want to become a big agency, but clients kept coming. I said to myself, 'Okay, I've done this, what's next?'"

"I'm the oldest rookie," Acool55 laughed, speaking of his beginnings, "I was doing some art photography on the side and it was mostly environmental. It was four years ago, by accident, I met another street artist who said, 'Hey, this environmental stuff you're doing, you should put this on walls,' and I was like, 'Yeah, sure.'"

The artist has focused on launching several art campaigns across the country with his work scattered from New York to LA, focusing on potential solutions to the crisis,





**THE CONCEPT BEHIND THE WATER DOLLAR IS THAT IT'S AN ENVIRONMENTAL CURRENCY, MEANT TO TEACH CHILDREN HOW TO CONSERVE WATER AND LIMIT THEIR WASTE. ACOOL55 HAS DRAWN UP A LIST OF SMALL, SUSTAINABLE THINGS CHILDREN CAN DO, SUCH AS TURN OFF THE WATER WHILE THEY BRUSH THEIR TEETH OR DENY PLASTIC BOTTLES AND BAGS.**

both satirical and practical, and done with a finesse of wit that provokes contemplation.

One of Acool55's campaigns is *In Nature We Trust*, a collection focusing on the pollution of our oceans and water waste. The work consists of the slogan stenciled over a large print of modified currency called Water Dollars which resemble a US Dollar with ocean life printed on the back. The concept behind the Water Dollar is that it's an environmental currency, meant to teach children how to conserve water and limit their waste. Acool55 has drawn up a list of small, sustainable things children can do, such as turn off the water while they brush their teeth or deny plastic bottles and bags. For each activity they achieve, they earn a Water Dollar and can turn in the Water Dollars for real money at the end of the week.

"The Water Dollars were actually kind of a semi-commercial project. It was for one of my agency clients. I wasn't a street artist yet. I wanted to know: how can we make this simple? Because everyone is talking about this big science. Everyone shows infographics and catastrophic documentaries. But the children are the ones that need to know," he said about its inception.

*Life Traces* is another original concept by Acool55. The idea behind this artwork is that we leave a trail of energy across the world that stays even after we die. Acool55 maps these trails fifty years from now using the model of aeronautical charts marked with the slogan "Be Aware of Crossing Angels" stenciled across each map which recount climate catastrophes, extinct species, influential figures, and our world's recovery from a harmful past. Since the pieces are set in the future, Acool55 continually updates these works when new events occur, or if he crosses paths with new people, varying on the piece.

*Imagine A World Without Plastic* is a more dystopian, cynical take for Acool55 which depicts people trapped in plastic wrappings and containers, meant to remind us that plastic is quickly overtaking our oceans, and this industrial pollution has deeper ramifications for the food chain and the air we breathe as well. *Genetically Modified Humans* takes the cynicism slightly further, telling us that it is most likely too late to reverse a lot of the damage we've done to our planet, and henceforth a plan to adapt to these changes is inevitable. Thus, the satire that we must genetically modify, and a baby with a turtle's shell is the first solution to our rising oceans.

*Space Cows Mission to Mars* takes a twist on the idea of space colonization. Space colonization, although a trope of most science fiction movies, has actually been a topic of serious interest by modern day mad scientist Elon Musk, whose SpaceX project suggests we take humans to Mars. *Space Cows* suggests that, rather than send humans to Mars, we send our cattle.

"It's undeniable that animal farming is destroying the Amazon rainforest," he elaborated on his motivation for the project, "if we have another 250 million people that can buy meat, they say, 'let's go destroy another chunk of the rainforest and put some cows there.' And we have to teach these people, you just can't fucking do that. The rainforests are the lungs of the earth."

A lifetime dedicated to the cause, Acool55 continues to fight for a better world.



**VOTING, ESPECIALLY  
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**VOTE PLANET**

Rudman wanted to emphasize how keeping a consistent attitude and focus would allow the public to better handle this issue of accountability, as it can often seem a futile effort, but every bit counts.

“One of the main goals when working with Green Peace is to draw attention to the areas where government falls short,” he tells me, “because I also think it’s inappropriate to blame or shame individuals for using plastic when we live in a society where it’s almost inevitable. There’s no way to avoid it completely.”

He goes on, “People often get what they call activism fatigue, where they take the weight of the movement and place it on the individual when in reality, we should be putting pressure on governments to pass legislation that helps and pressuring the companies that are producing the plastic.”

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What I took away from the conversations I had with these artist-activists is that personal accountability is paramount to mitigating our climate crisis. The world has already begun to show the effects of pollution and climate change, but it isn’t too late to stop it where it stands. It’s important to be aware of what our industries are doing, the waste they’re yielding, and where they’re putting it. Voting, especially in local government, is crucial in deciding what happens in our communities. Helping to initiate the regulation of local industry would be one of the most immediate steps we could take.

Another, perhaps even more vital, way to make an impact would be to observe and correct our personal consumption. It’s as simple as taking shorter showers and recycling. Supporting companies who are environmentally conscious or have sustainable services that include repurposing materials and spaces, are some ways of doing this. But nothing is ever an isolated issue; it’s going to take effort on every level to turn this around.

When an issue takes on a global scale, it can be overwhelming to the average individual. Distinguishing between propaganda and science becomes a matter of intuition, especially when one isn’t faced with the dilemma on a day-to-day basis. But, as with most daunting enterprises, we must take measures toward progress, no matter how small.

Developing the awareness required to reduce our carbon footprint takes a determined effort, but it’s not impossible. That’s where our artists come in to help. They not only keep us honest by reminding us of the issue, but they create works that get us thinking, and hopefully, inspire us to embrace the responsibility we have to our environment, even giving us a few ideas on the first steps we can take. □



ART BY @acool55  
PHOTO PROVIDED BY ARTIST

**BE AWARE OF  
CROSSING ANGELS**

