

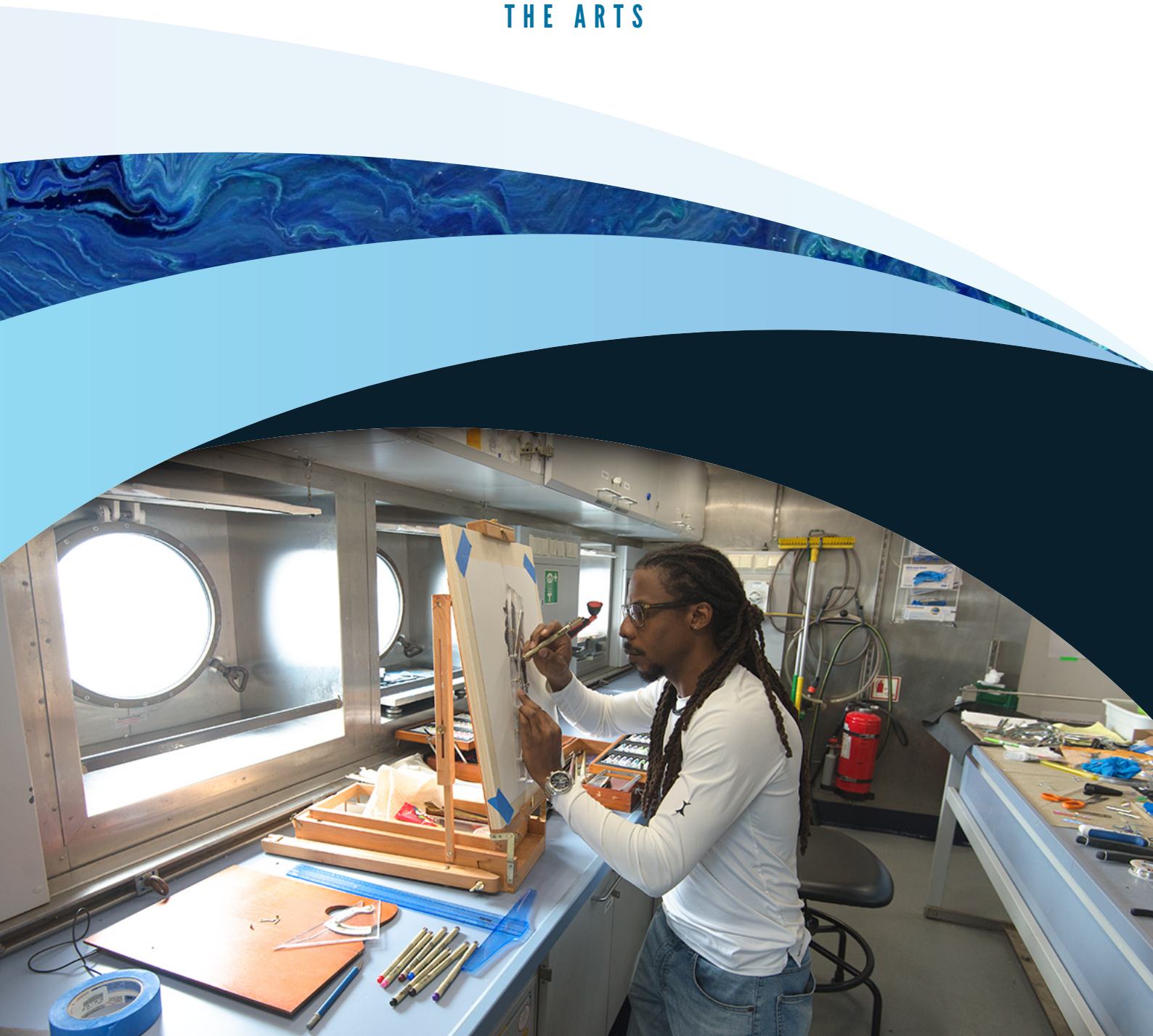


Ocean Rising

THE QUEST TO INSPIRE THE PUBLIC



THE ARTS



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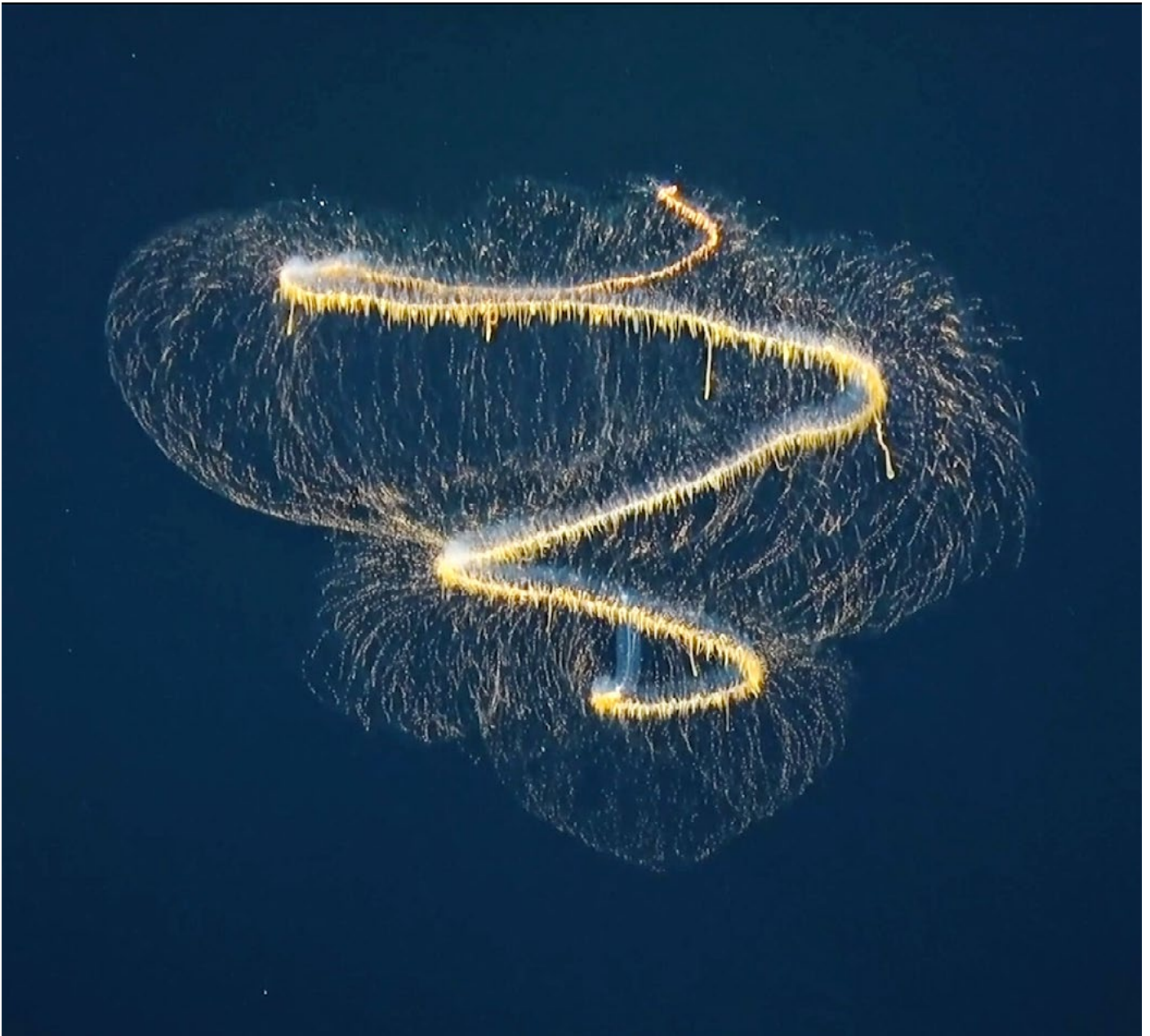
THE QUEST TO INSPIRE THE PUBLIC

INTRODUCTION

Our modern world came to a standstill in 2020, with the global COVID-19 pandemic pausing the fast-paced existence many of us led and proving unequivocally that existential threats are not just the stuff of Hollywood disaster movies. What steps would humanity have taken if we had known years in advance the turmoil that 2020 would unleash? We can't change our past, but we can, with global knowledge and awareness, act to create a harmonious and healthy future.

While often not at the forefront of conversation on the global stage, our ocean is the backbone of climate and life on this planet. Every day we see signs of its impact – in our weather, in nature, along our coasts. It is used to transport goods across our globe, feed more than half the population, and keep humans breathing. The ocean is a magnificent resource that quietly gives to all, but is taken for granted and rarely recognized for the role it plays in planetary and human health. In order to change this status quo, we need to inspire the public about the ocean as they are inspired by space.

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SPACE AND OCEAN INSPIRATION

Technology makes it possible to walk the deepest depths of the ocean and see alien marine life without leaving your living room; however, there is a greater interest in searching for life on other planets. More than 21 million people watched the rover, *Perseverance* touchdown on Mars to begin its rock-collecting mission and search for signs of life, but when a marine scientist brings back volcanic rock from deep sea hydrothermal vents teeming with new life forms, the public barely blinks.

Those who explore the oceans, discovering alien life forms and strange and marvelous landscapes on a daily basis, often wonder why public interest in space exploration is so much greater than in ocean exploration. Is it simply because anyone can see the stars but not everyone lives by the coast, and those that do cannot see what hides beneath the sea surface? No – research shows there is more to this dichotomy than meets the eye.

The two communities have distinct and critical differences in how they inspire and engage a broader audience (Virmani, 2017). While space stories are generally positive, trigger the imagination, and are focused on exceptionalism, coverage of the ocean is negative and tends to be driven by pragmatism and problems. Popular culture and future technological inspirations revolve around space stories, whereas ocean tales are typically set in the past. Conversations about the ocean often have a call to action, which may alienate or even bore a segment of the population. Space conversations differ in that they encourage fun and creativity and although space is currently out of reach for most people, space narratives are mission-based and more easily understandable. Ocean narratives are often idea-based and therefore harder for people to grasp, perversely, making the ocean more inaccessible.



THE CHANGING TIDE

Presently, with the world's attention focused on human health and the economy, the ocean has fallen further down the news agenda. The good news is the growing interest in all forms of science, and a hunger to reconnect with our natural world with positive stories that lead people to explore all frontiers and achieve positive climate action. We have an opportunity to reframe the ocean as exciting, interesting, and spectacular.

As we aim to build back better in a post-COVID world, how do we get the populace to consider the ocean and its impact on our livelihoods, and inspire the public in substantive and meaningful ways? Ocean science is now available for public engagement, bringing in data visualization, technology, and the arts. The tools are in place for experts from all walks of life to convey the story

of the ocean, weaving key messages in unexpected and new ways into our everyday culture. We must expand the reach beyond those connected to the ocean through geography, sport, or career to connect our cultures more deeply to the ocean.

Creating various engagement points and tactics will help to reach diverse and inclusive audiences as every community is different and should be considered. In light of this, we argue that the key to transformation is targeting established industries outside of the community by providing successful examples, identifying what is missing, and making suggestions for a way forward. This paper will take prior recommendations on how to inspire the public and put them into an actionable framework, at first engaging five different industries:



Each sector plays a critical role in defining our diverse cultures and shaping human behaviour. We encourage readers to explore each section individually or read in its entirety, and to share widely with those who have not yet engaged with

the ocean. Our hope is that we can familiarize the public with the ocean – not just making them aware of its plight but engaging them with innovative and inspiring solutions.





The Arts

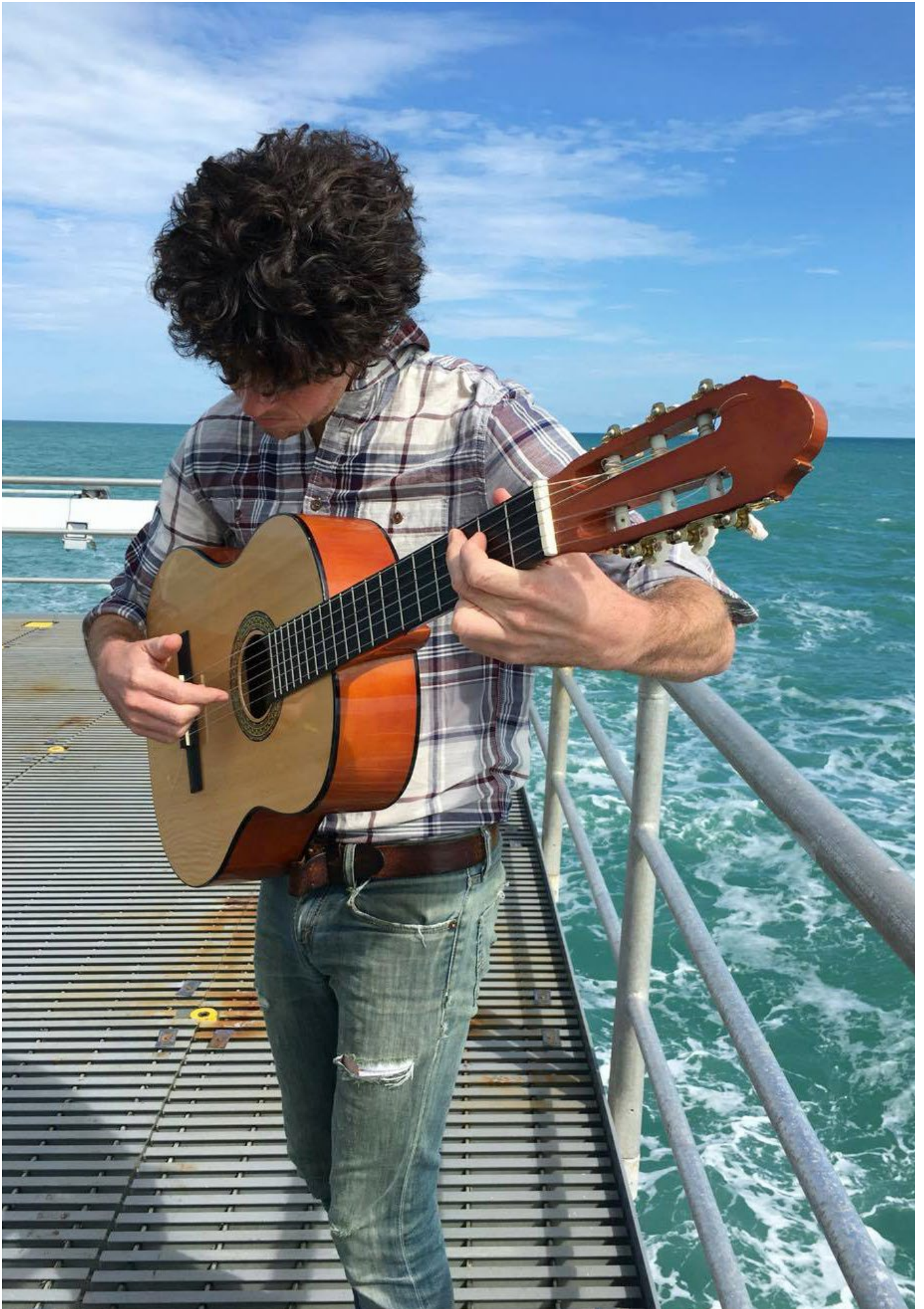
The arts offer a powerful voice in the past, present, and future interpretation of the ocean. They provide a chance to bring forth issues of concern, inspire curiosity, and generate discussion and empathy in a digestible, unassuming way. The arts can be used as an important medium to inspire change in thinking or behavior, by translating ideas and experiences using emotion and connection.

Representation of the ocean is present through much of art history. Paintings illustrate scary sea monsters, or ships of early exploration like Turner's *Fisherman at Sea* painting (1796), demonstrating the historical and social impact of art and, in this case, 'seascape'. They offer a glimpse into the early perceptions of the sea as a vast and scary place, a notion that unfortunately still prevails for many. Art can shift this representation to illustrate the dependence and need for the ocean we now know to be true.



J. M. W. Turner, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

The arts play an essential role in ocean storytelling and communication, offering a democratic approach. The arts that historically helped create a popular fear of the ocean, or thalassophobia, can now reframe the aesthetic and ask us to think differently. Anyone can create it, and by moving from passive observation to active environmentalism, many are using the arts to put forth solutions.





WHAT ARE GREAT EXAMPLES?

UNDERWATER MUSEUMS

Underwater attractions for scuba divers have grown in popularity, with many ocean museums and artificial reefs drawing interest from visitors all over the world. [Paolo Fanciulli](#), an Italian fisherman, commissioned artists to make huge marble sculptures to put underwater to stop trawler fishermen. The site now attracts many divers, creating a new spot of interest for tourists and locals. Paulo is not the only one.



[musamexico.org/snorkel/
snorkel-at-the-gallery-of-punta-nizuc/](https://musamexico.org/snorkel/snorkel-at-the-gallery-of-punta-nizuc/)

Jason Decaires Taylor gave new meaning to using art as a tool for conservation through his underwater museum, [MUSA](#), in Cancun, Mexico, which houses over 500 sculptures made from concrete and rebar.

He [partnered](#) with Mexico's Environment and Natural Resources secretariat to repair damaged coral reefs using the sculptures as artificial habitat for sea life regrowth. As a result of one of his other exhibits, located in the Canary Islands, basking sharks have now returned to that small corner of the Atlantic.

"When we think of museums, we think of places of precious objects of conservation, of keeping things that are important to us. And I wanted to relay that same sentiment to the underwater world where it's actually a privilege to go underwater," said Jason Decaires Taylor in a recent *Catch Our Drift* podcast interview. "I try to use art to make people aware of what's there and have a stronger connection to the ocean." Jason's works are considered one of the 25 Wonders of the World by National Geographic.

Other examples of underwater museums that provide a platform of engagement are the 36 exhibits in Herod's Harbor in the port of Caesarea, in Israel, the "Alley of Leaders" that lies in the Black Sea off Cape Tarkhankut in Crimea, and Shipwreck Trail in the Florida Keys.

AT-SEA ARTIST RESIDENCIES

Recognizing the importance of communicating about the ocean through art, several sea-going organizations have begun to offer at-sea residencies on shipping containers, historic houseboats, and research vessels. The nonprofit [Schmidt Ocean Institute](#) has notably positioned itself by providing collaborations between artists and some of the world's leading marine scientists, using their research vessel Falkor as a platform of connection and interdisciplinary reach. The program has hosted more than 36 artists from various arts disciplines, lending artistic exploration to marine science.

Another group offering at-sea residencies is [TBA-21 Academy](#), a contemporary art organization and nonprofit that focuses on fostering a deeper relationship to the ocean through the lens of art. The Academy acts as an incubator for a collective of research and artistic productions, exhibited in their Ocean Space in the Church of San Lorenzo, Venice – a center for catalyzing ocean literacy, research, and advocacy through the arts. Residencies in the Polar Regions have also been an important source of inspiration for artists focusing on the changing climate in Antarctica and the Arctic's cold waters.

“I think in this moment everyone is outside of their comfort zones and that is really where the exciting moments happen,” says Markus Reymann, Director of TBA-21 Academy as he recognizes the importance of artists working outside their studios and with ocean scientists. “By pulling scientists into the conversation with artists and framing it as an artistic programme, you allow the scientists to think poetically, and more freely than they would be with other scientists.”

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UPCYCLED OCEAN ART

Many artists have taken to marine debris – the ghost nets and plastic floating in the ocean and waterways – to create art with a political and environmental message, such as art activist [Liina Klauss](#) who collected 5,000 flip-flop soles from Bali's west-coast beaches for an installation, Australian artist [Jessica Leitmanis](#) who uses marine

debris rope to create intricate weavings that tackle the issue of overfishing, or American artist [Cindy Pease Roe](#) who creates life-sized sculptures from 100 percent marine debris. These artists are just a few of the many who provide connections to the plastic pollution crisis by turning ocean trash into art, highlighting the growing issue.

OCEAN MUSIC

Dick Dale's iconic song [Pipeline](#) immediately transports you to the ocean and big wave surfing, with the distinctive sounds of surf rock guitar. From 1970s surf punk to Jack Johnson's mellow acoustic of the 2000s, and the resurgence of sea shanties in 2021, music can bring unity and connection to the ocean. [#ShantyTok](#) spread during the pandemic and brought individuals together during a very isolating time.

The Beatles brought the ocean to the masses with [Yellow Submarine](#), and Jack Johnson's [Only the Ocean](#) introduced a new generation to the

sea through music. Younger audiences learned about animals of the reef with Pinkfong's [Baby Shark](#) craze that reached almost every preschool classroom. [Cosmo Sheldrake](#), an ocean ecologist and musician created soundscapes of the ocean merging entertainment and science for the masses, and making people think about ocean depths. And journalist Ian Urbina recently created music from journalism with his [Outlaw Ocean Music Project](#) to reach his 17-year-old son who wasn't interested in news stories but did care about music. The language and ocean references found in songs can play into the cultural importance of the ocean in our history.





WHAT ARE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES?

As powerful as the arts can be for ocean awareness, its focus has been minimal. This is a missed opportunity to challenge perceptions and increase connection to the ocean's role in our lives. Artist residencies could be increased beyond at-sea vessels, by including ocean science labs and universities. Expansion with artistic mediums can grow past figurative forms via contemporary ballets, operas, and light shows that can educate about the ocean by conveying important informational messages that last beyond the performance.

Pink Fong immediately jumped to merchandising with the Baby Shark craze, but think about how much impact the ocean community could have had in making connections to shark conservation or developing conversations with children and their families about the ocean that led to further educational messaging. The children's music group, The Banana Slug String Band, does this in their [Only One Ocean](#) album.

There are countless popular children's books series, which could be translated to musicals and shows. Two examples are [The Rainbow Fish](#), which was adapted into a children's animated television series, and [The Pout Pout Fish](#) that has recently been transformed to a musical [theater production](#) with puppets. When ocean-based programming for children becomes widespread, it will inherently inspire a passion and interest for the ocean and become a recognizable backdrop in both children's and their family's lives. The question to ask is how can we bring the ocean to the screens of our events, canvases, and conversations?

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

Art collectives can help bring together diverse backgrounds and incorporate technology to create immersive experiences. [Superflex](#), the Danish art collective, is an excellent example, where they say “the best idea might come from a fish”. Using artificial intelligence and virtual reality to create new space and awareness of our ocean may help broaden empathy and action.

Artists can also serve as role models for the ocean as demonstrated by [Jack Steadman](#), frontman of the band Bombay Bicycle Club. Jack refused to fly back to Europe after a tour and instead wrote an entire album whilst traveling home on a container ship. Other groups like the non-profit music collective [Julie's Bicycle](#) (UK) and [Reverb](#) (US) bring artists together to speak about the ocean and their reduction of single use plastics. These artists' collectives have influence over impressionable audiences and can use their platform to make caring about the ocean mainstream. Additionally, as important as it is to have artists incorporating the ocean into their work, we need spaces for them to work and display, as well as investors to fund them, to really maximize the power of art for social change.

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Next Steps

The above-mentioned examples are just a few of the efforts that connect the public to the ocean. We need to engage with the cross-section of the public that is not connected to the ocean in any way, and explore those sectors of our popular culture that have a global reach. How do we make knowing our ocean a celebrated experience? Businesses, artists, sports people – all can help to inspire the public about the ocean, engage new audiences, and bring the ocean to topics of dinner table conversation.





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AT-SEA ARTIST RESIDENCIES

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Jessica Leitmanis - <https://www.jessicaleitmanis.com/>

Cindy Pease Roe - <https://www.cindypeaseroe.com/>

OCEAN MUSIC

Pipeline - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56SAxtf-RTg>

Sea Shanty - <https://time.com/5929245/sea-shanty-tiktok-2021/>

Yellow Submarine - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2uTFF_3MaA

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The Outlaw Ocean Music Project - <https://www.theoutlawoceanmusic.com/>

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