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The Climate Museum Wants You To Know: You're Not Alone

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The Climate Museum Pop-Up. Photo: Sari Goodfriend/The Climate Museum

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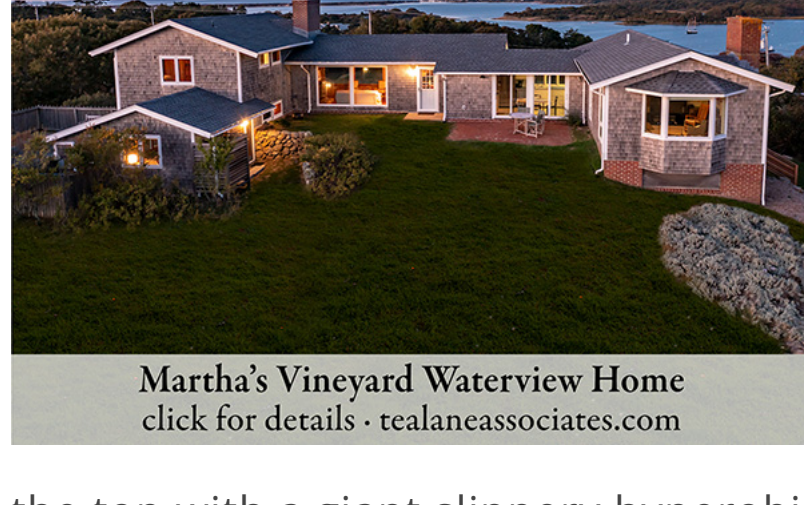
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Nestled on Wooster Street in SoHo, the latest Climate Museum Pop-Up exhibition promotes itself only with a sign out front reading “Climate Museum Pop-Up, Free.” That small sign has attracted 4,300 visitors to the museum since it opened on October 8, 2022.

Opened in 2018 by Miranda Massie, The Climate Museum (a 501(c)(3) non-profit) has held exhibitions all around New York City. One of the more notable exhibitions was *Climate Signals*, by Justin Brice, a city-wide public art installation using solar-powered traffic signs to break the silence around climate topics and make calls for action. The Climate Museum also partnered with The New School to present *In Human Time*, by Zaria Forman and Peggy Weil, an exploration of polar ice, humanity, and time, presented through two visual artworks. Massie explained that part of why she created the museum was because “Maybe what we need most in the climate crisis is a sense of not being alone.”



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The latest exhibition, *Someday, all this* by David Opdyke, will be the museum's longest standing exhibit, open to the public through April 30, 2023. *Someday, all this* is a mural made up of 400 modified vintage postcards, depicting a world impacted by the climate crisis. An audio guide, narrated by Opdyke himself, describes how the postcards call to the nostalgia of a time before a tangible climate crisis. The goal, Opdyke says, was to create an entry point for talking about climate. As Opdyke narrates, “If you want to do something about the climate crisis, you don't have to start at

the top with a giant slippery hyperobject we call global warming. We can start with what you see, what you know, and the problems at hand and work on that.”

Climate Signals. Photo: Lisa Goulet/The Climate Museum

Every postcard tells its own story, and I found myself lost in them — captivated by every community that was represented. Massie guided me away from the mural after a while, saying “People come away from [Opdyke's mural] with a readiness to ask ‘how do we avoid this future.’” She led me to the Climate Action Incubator, where some actions on how to avoid Opdyke's dystopian future are helpfully explained.

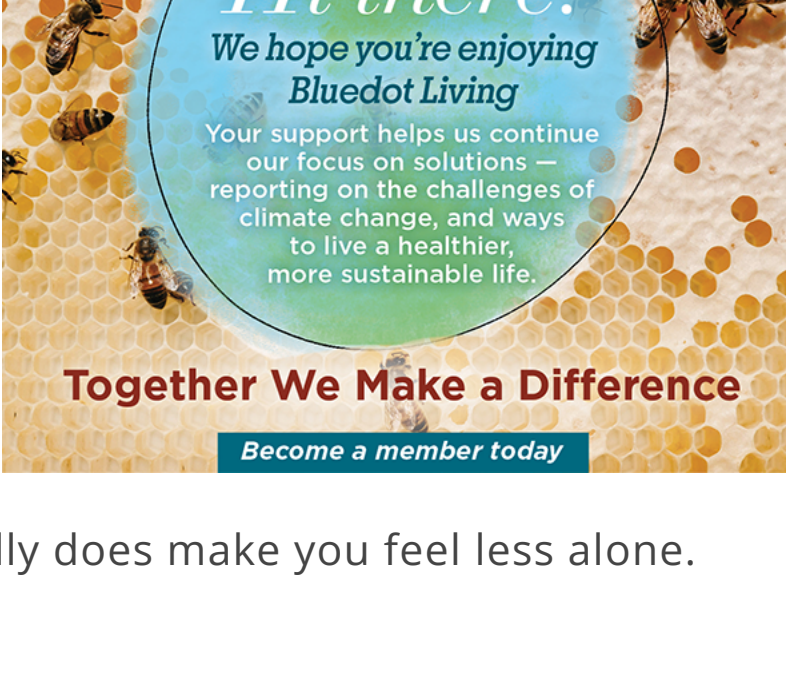
The Climate Action Incubator moves you from the emotion of Opdyke's mural into clear facts and calls to action. A wall of text leads you through a journey that Massie herself was once on. The thesis? We underestimate the support for climate action by half. The Climate Museum pulled together research to explain that while 66% of people believe that climate change is a problem, they perceive themselves to be in the minority, believing that only 33% of people actually believe in it and want to see climate action.

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“People feel like they're in a minority, and that makes it so much harder to act,” Massie explained. If we can understand that we are in “an astounding supermajority” then “Imagine a world in which that two-thirds sentiment was fully expressed in public, [...] the entire window of what's politically possible would be in a different place.”

Across from these revelatory facts is a wall of stickers. Each sticker has an action, such as calling your local bank, sending a postcard to a lawmaker, making a change in their home, etc., where visitors can sign their name before sticking their action to the wall. The reason for the stickers is, in the words of Massie, to get visitors to wonder “How do you think about your own climate protagonism and agency? What are your circles of influence and trust? How can you mobilize them? What would make you feel great to do?”



There are thousands of stickers on the wall, and it really does make you feel less alone.

Between Opdyke's mural, and the action wall, it's hard to believe that more action isn't being taken. Massie suggests that the reason for inaction is that, “We're really trained, in the US especially, to think about environmental politics in individual consumer choice terms, and that is really disempowering. It's not that those choices are irrelevant, and we're not trying to dunk on people who define their climate action in those terms, but we want them to build on that as a basis for going out and taking more public-facing civic actions.” This might explain why climate philanthropy only makes up 2% of global philanthropy.

In the back of the museum, you can write a postcard to your local decision-maker, and The Climate Museum will send it out for you. The museum also provides sheets and information to easily call your bank and say “Stop investing in oil and gas.”



It becomes a therapeutic exercise, passing through the museum gives us a wide-angle view of what the climate crisis can cause, illustrated by Opdyke's mural. But key to the exercise is that the museum gives us an outlet for the emotions generated — by taking action, by creating hope.

Someday, all this by David Opdyke. Photo: David Opdyke

Climate work can feel overwhelming, says Prisca Dognon, who works at the museum. The Climate Museum, she says, “helps bring a sense of hope to climate work.” Prisca continued, “The wider the breadth of information and content that exists, the more people understand that there are many entry points and there is room for hope; there is room for your despair and anger but there is room for hope too.”

Tricia Brown, the Director of Education and Engagement at The Climate Museum suggests that making a museum to discuss the climate crisis “gives you the idea that you're empowered to speak up about it. You don't have to be a scientist or a politician to engage with climate. Talking is something every single person can do.”

Massie ended my tour of the museum with a helpful, and hopeful, message: “The more we're talking to each other, busting the myth of indifference and telling the truth about those numbers, the more we can get that shift in social psychology and public culture, the more we're supporting the right legislative moves.”

Someday, all this and the Climate Action Incubator show you how you can make change in the simplest of ways, without upending your life. In the words of Climate Museum worker Prisca, “Change feels so inevitable that we have to push for it.”

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