

# CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

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with foreword by Vice President Al Gore

Preface by Roald Hoffmann

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## PREFACE

TRANSFORMATION by Roald Hoffmann

In this century science and technology have changed the world. What we have added, mostly for the best of reasons, is in danger of modifying qualitatively the great cycles of the planet. We see the effects of our intervention in the change in the ozone layer, the pollution and acidity of our waters, in why we wash an apple, in the crumbling statuary, in our heritage dissolving.

The effect of science and technology was surely felt before. But not till this century did the man- and woman-made, the synthetic, the unnatural, truly contend with nature. Is this a time to praise, a time to fear? The world that men and women entered before there ever was such a thing as chemistry was not a romantic paradise but a brutish, inimical environment in which men and women hardly lived past forty.

That natural world was transformed by our social institutions, our art, our science. Certainly not by science and technology alone. We do not kill female children, nor keep slaves, nor let the sick die, all practices some societies, I'm sorry to say some religions, once thought natural. Even though we have such a long way to go, we have changed our nature. Our lives are improved by detergents and synthetic fibers, and by a social web of human, constructed support. Our lives are enriched by Mozart and Bob Marley and the Waiters, by Buckminster Fuller's structures and dreams, bringing to us a world of synthesized, transformed beauty and satisfaction.

Some scientists, especially chemists, are anguished because they feel society types them as producers of the unnatural. The thoughtful artist is unlikely to condemn the artifactual, the man- and woman-made, be it crafted by hand or with a tool. For what does the artist do but create what was not on earth before --- a painting, a poem, a dance? The artist, like the scientist, changes the natural, transforms it, seeking an understanding of ourselves, of our universe.

Yet we also use our transforming capacity destructively--to annihilate a quarter of the species in this world, to hurt our brothers and sisters. It is we who do this; there is no hiding behind a "they." This seems to be our dark side. We have a problem in finding a balance, with not letting our transforming nature run amok; we seem to have difficulty in cooperating with our own world.

In the tradition I come from, the Jewish tradition, there is a concept that is relevant to this theme of runaway change, of natural/unnatural. It is *tikkun*. The word literally means "repair"--of a shoe, but also of a soul, of the world. The sense is of change by human intervention. So the word's meaning shades over to transformation and reclamation. *Tikkun olam*--the transformation of the world, by human beings, more than a salvaging, a making of our future consistent with what we are given.

The artists who take part in this exhibition understand the sense of *tikkun* very well. Their work does not merely document the horrors that human selfishness has loosed upon this wonderful world. That's too easy. Their aim is to transform, through art, but also through technology, the barren and despoiled into the living. And, since they are artists, their transformations also allow the earth, whose voice is so gentle and long in coming that we often fail to listen to it, to speak to us.

Friends, it is not given to us not to make new things--be they molecules, a sculpture, or a civil rights bill. We are sentenced by our nature to create whether we are artists or scientists. But we do have a choice, to fashion this world in consonance with the best in us, or the worst. One can doubt whether our transformations are of human value; but there can be no doubt as to what they should be.