

Artistic Value as a New Paradigm to Promote Ocean Conservation

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This position paper explores the artistic value that can be attributed to the ocean through works of art. The starting point is the economic argument used in ocean conservation, which is based on the concept of ecosystem services (ES), primarily considered as goods and services the ocean provides to society. Through an interdisciplinary approach, we briefly discuss the successes and limitations of this concept and the potential role of artistic value in relation to it. We then examine three case studies of contemporary artworks produced between 2015 and 2021, closely tied to marine natural sciences. Through these works, we explore how contemporary art can potentially operate within the ES framework, while also surpassing it through the specific type of value it induces in the ocean. Each of the case studies exemplifies a type of tangible engagement that art can provoke towards the ocean: (1) creating “embodied knowledge” of scientific understanding of the ocean (Nicolas Floc’h), (2) raising awareness through awe (Irene Kopelman), and (3) shaping a different type of concern for marine animals and their environments (Joan Jonas). Finally, through a critical analysis, we argue that a serious consideration of an artistic value attributed to the ocean can serve to place social points of reference that bridge canonical scientific knowledge with a diversity of other types of narratives related to it, thus contributing to a shift towards a new paradigm for supporting ocean conservation.

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