

## Reflections from the fringes of COP 26



Despite many planning difficulties owing to Covid and general uncertainty about wider organisation in Glasgow, the Loving Earth project was able to find six venues in and around Glasgow to display groups of textile panels: a modern church in the Gorbals church and the Quaker Meeting House, the foyer of halls which hosted dinners for COP delegates, the windows of two Save the Children shops, and the Scottish Maritime Museum. We were delighted that the latter was deemed 'one of the best cultural events in Scotland for COP 26', according to The List [www.list.co.uk](http://www.list.co.uk)!

In addition to the displays in Glasgow in November, groups of Loving Earth panels were also on show in other parts of Scotland: the Geo Centre in Arran, the newly-reopened Quaker Meeting House in Dundee and the Speirs Centre in Alloa . Three classes from the local primary school made paintings collage and textile works to joined the Loving Earth display in Alloa, and it was visited by local dignitaries, with some lovely coverage in the local press. The Alloa display continues until 11th December and the one in the Maritime Museum in Dumbarton until January.

Other visitors responded warmly too, and Ian Galloway, a former Moderator of the Church of Scotland spoke warmly of the personal nature of each panel, and the skill and commitment involved in creating them. Seeing a large display of panels also emphasised for him the scale of the horrors already happening around the world and the determination of each panel-maker to take action themselves. He evoked the Yad

Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, and some of the exhibitions there, testifying to the small things people did during the terrible time of the Holocaust, trusting that there would be a future in the face of catastrophe. He wondered what would survive for a museum of the current time - the time when the great changes became inevitable- if ever there was such a museum?



The Loving Earth workshops and the Zoom conversation we hosted from Glasgow Quaker Meeting House illustrated that wide range of levels of experiences of environmental damage, and the difficulties many people have in knowing what they can do about it all. Starting with a simple steps we can easily take is important, and we can then make opportunities to learn more, to seek out people or organisations that share our concern, and see where that leads us.

“A celebration and a warning” was one reviewer’s summary of a Loving Earth display. Our exhibitions can be magnificent celebrations of what we love, and warnings of the imminent dangers to it, but they also show a wide range of examples of what people are doing to protect the future of what we love. To be more effective we need to spread the word, to learn more about the issues and can support and encourage one another in taking further steps, with joy and gratitude for all that we love.

**Clarissa Palmer wrote:**

This is my experience at COP26. I didn’t do anything exciting like glue myself to the pavement or attend official meetings. I went to support a project, because I had the time available, because it was in my country and because I believed it might prove to

be a watershed moment that would bring about positive change in our attempts to control global warming.

The most striking thing about Glasgow, to a non-native, is the truth behind the cliché that Glaswegians are a welcoming people. Indeed they are. Unfailingly in my limited experience. From the lovely people who offered me a room in their flat, to the conversations I had at bus stops, in two weeks of coming and going through the city I never met anyone local who wasn't genuinely friendly and approachable. And that despite a deep fear that COP26 would be a Covid super-spreader event, as well as rendering the city uninhabitable thanks to over-policing and traffic controls. Equally special were all those who had come to Glasgow to participate in COP26 fringe events (I didn't have access to any official spaces so can't comment on those). We may not all have wanted to express our opinions in the same way – I wasn't sure I could agree with a chap who wanted to 'eat the rich' (was he a vegetarian, how does that work?) – but we did have shared concerns for the future of this world.

I came to Glasgow to help with the Loving Earth Project (<https://lovingearth-project.uk> for more information). Exhibiting these thought-provoking panels across the city in several venues generated many profound conversations and one word that was repeated often was 'community'. Despite every panel being different, and every testament accompanying it equally diverse, the combined effect was one of community. These works (400 to date and still growing) have been made by people coming together to share their fears, hopes and pledges concerning climate change.



Something about the juxtaposition of a hand-made textile panel with a deeply felt personal statement transcends the power of both mediums and engages the public so that they too feel included in the project. Conversations follow. In many ways this typified what was happening at all the fringe events. Creativity, art, music, talks, workshops etc. created spaces where that shared community

could find itself and be strengthened by the experience. For me these events, and the people I met there, were the highlight of the fortnight and a source of enrichment and wonder as I considered the power of human imagination to stretch our understanding, confront fear yet offer consolation too. Sadly I found most reports from the official venues stretched my incredulity and offered only desolation.

Climate justice was an official theme. Strong impassioned young people from countries that are suffering terribly from the effects of climate change shared their

experiences with anyone who wanted to learn. Churches and meeting halls became hubs for encounters that couldn't have happened in other circumstances. Committed individuals from local communities opened their arms to many groups who sadly did not feel so welcomed within the 'ring of steel' official site. I don't know if poor organisation was the only reason some of the people I met felt that they'd been left out, unheard, despite having been invited and travelling thousands of miles to be at COP26. It was heartbreaking for those of us gathered in these ad hoc venues to discover that, clearly, if these communities were given adequate funding the dire situation they were in could be addressed. 'We don't want investment (the money just goes back to the investors), we don't want your experts (we are the experts here), we just need money.' Simply put, these communities need to be listened to: I fear that the powerful who could make such a difference, prefer them to remain unheard. In my naivety I hadn't realised that not a penny of the money promised at previous COPs had ever made its way to these countries so negatively impacted by our emissions. The rule book to govern a system of 'loss and damage' payments is still not written despite the principle being agreed at the Paris conference. There are calls for the UN to be in charge of the funding so that individual countries and banking systems don't influence the distribution once a decision is agreed collectively. Like much surrounding these official structures and debates it all seems so blindingly obvious that it beggars belief, yet very little gets done. And time is not on our side.



Some nights I found myself going back to my warm Glasgow home filled with despair. How grateful I was not to be alone at such a time. My hosts were grateful too because they felt that my experiences were deepening their understanding, and they in turn talked to their friends and colleagues and so the climate justice conversation spread. Witnessing and sharing (in however small a way) became what I held on to in order to be able to manage the pain that I felt facing some of the realities I was learning. For example, rising sea levels are not like a tide that gradually comes in a little higher over the decades, they are cyclones that come with more ferocity and more regularity than ever before, once in a lifetime weather events now coming several times a year. There is very little time to adapt. I learnt that in one country impoverished coastal dwellers who have lost their livelihoods have to pay 70% of the cost of relocation (their

government paying 30%) so they often cut down their only tree to pay for a new home inland. And so a truly vicious circle perpetuates as the loss of that coastal tree lessens the shoreline's ability to withstand erosion.

My trip to Glasgow informed me and helped me deepen my own response to climate change. Meeting people facing its horrors right now has helped me understand better the impact my own choices are having in the world. Personally, my optimism has not survived COP26, but strangely nor has my fear. Both were quashed by the enormity of the problem. Resignation has not take their place. Instead, despite despair, I've found joy in a deep sense of connection with others who care. In those moments of shared concern for our planet, its people and all living things we effectively embraced each other whatever our backgrounds, ages, creeds etc. The march on Saturday 6 November was, according to an English policeman I overheard, the biggest and most peaceful he'd ever encountered. So it comes back to where I started, with people. We are the ones who can make a difference, we have to make ourselves heard. Momentum is building; subjects such as climate justice, loss and damage etc. were not discussed as often as they are now. All major faith groups have come together and pledged their support to fight climate change and demand climate justice, this is a first and as they represent many millions of people around the globe, it must be a good thing. Meanwhile all our individual gestures, however small, have a cumulative effect. Normalising the conversation has happened, and that is a big step. Now we need positive action within this decade. Global warming is here and it's devastating. We fuelled it, we can limit it if we so choose. Those who can have to keep campaigning so that the enormity of the problem is fully and fairly addressed before it is too late.