

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery for
The Honorable Lynn Scarlett
Deputy Secretary of the Interior
Wyland's "Hands Across the Ocean" Art Exhibit
Washington, DC
September 30, 2008

Good morning! I'd like to offer a special welcome to the students and teachers from Miner Elementary School and Freedom High School. With youth across the world, these students are making history through these magnificent works of art. I had a chance to join the students this morning to paint a sea horse on a mural. I offer a special thanks to renowned artist Wyland, the Wyland Foundation, and the Alice Ferguson Foundation. What a fantastic project!

As I contemplate this art project, I think of the ancient Greek philosophers who wrote that the highest ideals in life center on three values—pursuit of “the true, the beautiful, and the good.”

In this worldwide project, we have a reflection of “the true”—an artistic depiction of what science tells us about our oceans and the life they sustain. This project is a venture in environmental education that we may understand the world around us

So, too, we have “the beautiful”—expressions through color, shape, and patterns of Nature's beauty.

We also have an affirmation of “the good”—through art we are inspired to tend and protect our oceans and landscapes.

Many of you know the inspiration author and scientist Rachel Carson bequeathed to us through her many writings. It was the sea—the world's great oceans that first captured her imagination. In her book *Under the Sea-Wind*, published over 60 years ago, she wrote: “To stand at the edge of the sea, to sense the ebb and flow of the tides, to feel the breath of mist moving over a great salt marsh, to watch the flight of shorebirds that have swept up and down the surf lines of the continents for untold thousands of years, to see the running of the old eels and

the young shad to the sea is to have knowledge of things that are as nearly eternal as any earthly life can be.

And, yet, these things may not be eternal if we—citizens of this Earth—do not lend a caring hand to our oceans, their wild life, and plant life. Rachel Carson’s work blended science and literature. Her works describe in meticulous detail the oceans and ocean critters. Yet these descriptions were not the words of an academic text; they were poetry. In that combination lay their power—a power to impart knowledge and inspiration at the same time.

As I look at these murals—created by youth from 115 nations—I believe they, too, are powerful. They educate, they inspire.

Scientist and writer Vladimir Nabokov, contemplating Audubon’s bird paintings, once asked: “Does there not exist a high ridge, where the mountainside of ‘scientific’ knowledge meets the opposite slope of ‘artistic’ imagination?” In these murals, we have that meeting.

I think it was Walt Whitman who wrote: “To me the sea is a continual miracle.” Like Rachel Carson, I grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a city that boasts three rivers but no ocean. I knew nothing of stingrays or jellyfish. But, reading Rachel Carson’s work and contemplating the writing of Jacques Cousteau, I was captivated by the richness of ocean life.

The beauty of the undersea world—our coasts and estuaries—is uncontested. But consider, too, the mysteries and possibilities of our oceans. I learned recently that some 150 species of coral release their eggs all at the same time. Waxing poetic, one researcher remarked at a recent ocean conference that: “if released as music, their notes would be as rich and complex as Beethoven’s 9th symphony.”

This same researcher peered into a future where sponges, jellyfish, and alga might help us advance human health. Mother of pearl—phenomenally strong structurally—may guide us

toward developing new, lightweight but strong materials, perhaps even artificial bones.

The ocean holds many mysteries, and its complexities lie at the intersection of many “knowledges.” But, with its mysteries, we must also not forget its beauty—the poetry it evokes, the inspiration it offers.

I recall snorkeling amid the mangroves at the edge of a cove at St. John in the Virgin Islands. The mangroves served as a nursery for ocean critters—critters who sought the protection of the tangled roots. I saw wee sea horses, miniature turtles, and thousands of gold, cobalt, and ruby-colored fish.

Knowing our oceans, coasts, and estuaries is a prerequisite to managing them well and wisely. Knowledge is important for its intrinsic value—the sheer wonder evoked by seeing the delicate intricacies of a sea horse. Knowledge important for its practical applications—learning, for example, about “Nature’s Capital.” Learning of Nature’s Capital, we come to understand how wetlands serve as horizontal levees to protect communities and how they act as water purifying systems. Knowledge is also a stepping stone for professional pursuits—opening up doors to the possibility, for example, of becoming a marine biologist.

Knowledge is also a foundation for environmental stewardship. So, too, are art and poetry foundations for stewardship. Here with this mural we have building blocks of knowledge. We also have a sort of visual poetry that evokes the sense of wonder about which Rachel Carson wrote.

That sense of wonder creates the catalyst for conservation.

Thank you!