



We Are Nature

WELCOME TO THE ANTHROPOCENE

CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF **NATURAL HISTORY** | DEPARTMENT OF EXHIBITIONS 2016

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Big Idea:

In order to process the Anthropocene we must first understand what it is.

The Anthropocene is a newly proposed geological era that defines the period when the overpopulated *human species* becomes an ubiquitous planetary force producing long lasting and observable impacts on the biosphere that are predicted to remain inexorably imprinted into Earth's geocological history. The Carnegie Museum of Natural History will be at the forefront of conversations related to this topic.

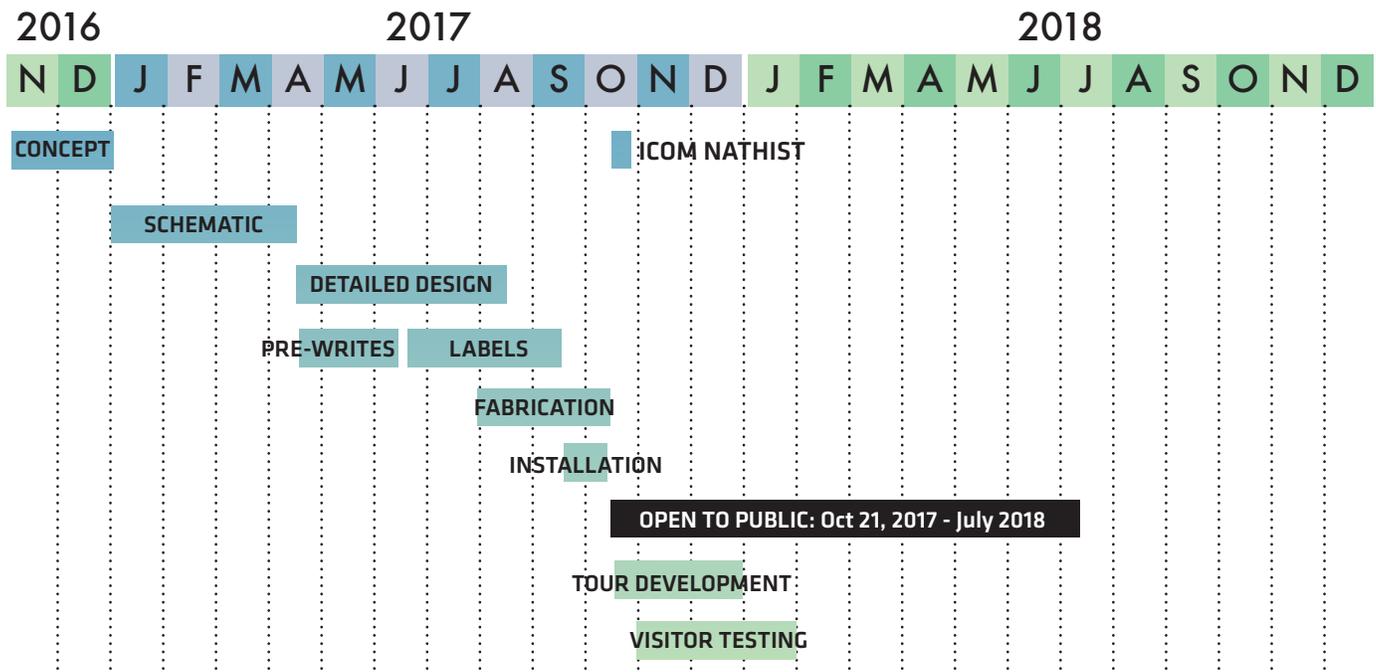
Project Location:

Carnegie Museum of Natural History
 R.P. Simmons Family Gallery
 October 21, 2017 - September 2018

Target Audience:

Millenials (labels and visitor testing)
 Families and Children (programs and interactives)

Project Timeline:



CMNH Goals:

Our primary institutional goal is to bring CMNH and its audiences to the forefront of discussions about the Anthropocene and to establish CMNH as the museum leader for conversations about the Anthropocene and Post-Natural topics.

Other museum goals include:

- Advocating/Articulating the importance of collections by using our own collection to tell stories
- Attract millennials
- Create a destination exhibition for ICOM NATHIST conference
- Work with community partners
- Inform development of a larger/more in depth exhibition

Visitor Goals:

We want visitors to feel... (Affective Goals):

- Nature content is relevant to my life and the future of humanity
- Contemplate ramifications of actions/behaviors/world-view
- Challenge one's own psychological barriers to action
- Inspire stewardship of the natural world

We want visitors to think about... (Cognitive Goals):

- Break down the line separating humans from nature
- Evidence that our behaviors have an effect on biodiversity
- The confirmation bias around Anthropocene issues
- Inequities and social justice issues surrounding the Anthropocene

We want visitors to be able to.... (Experiential Goals):

- Post questions/experiences/feelings/hypotheses about the Anthropocene
- Reconsider one's identity as a human being
- Engage with local projects
- Use tools to process their feelings about the anthropocene and connect to an action

More than just an Exhibition:

Preliminary Educational Programs:

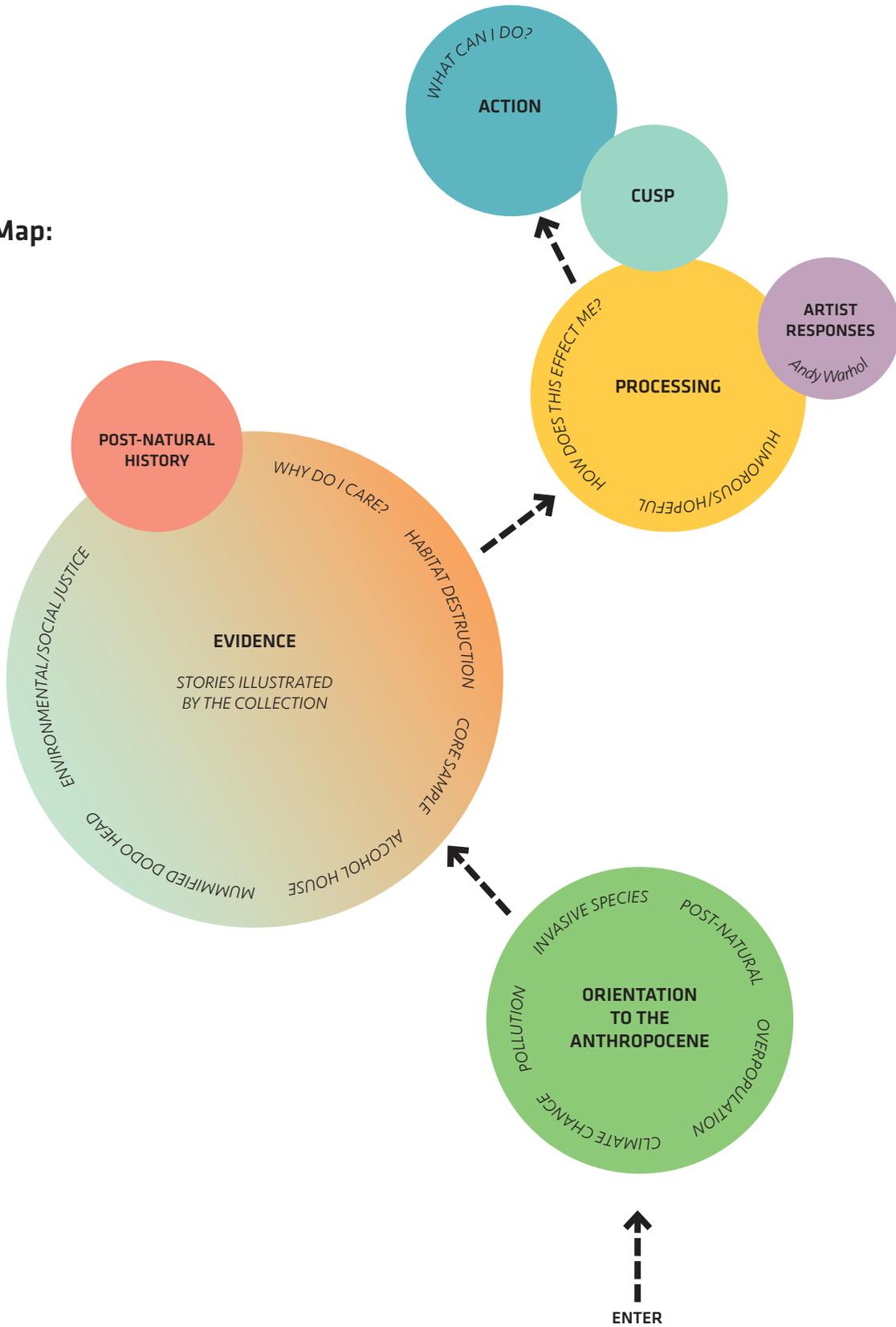
- Hands-on science activities in Discovery Basecamp
- Presentations with the museum's Living Collection (live animals) will focus on wildlife conservation.
- Museum summer camps and scout programs investigations conservation and sustainability
- Highlight ecology research at Powdermill
- School tours will connect the We Are Nature to science and collections throughout permanent exhibition galleries
- Panels discussions, speakers, and film screenings
- Guided community discussions
- Museum scientists will guide Anthropocene nature walks showing invasive and native plants

Preliminary Marketing Concepts:

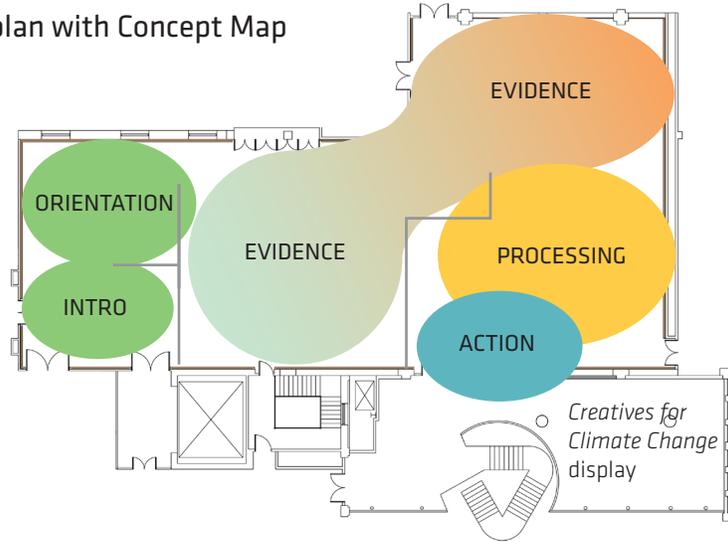
- Hashtag to share Anthropocene related photos on Instagram
- Poetry/photo/film contest via social media that invites participation
- Selfies and shareable GIFs
- Social media campaign



Concept Map:



Floorplan with Concept Map



The Experience of the Exhibition:

1. Introduction

As you enter the gallery you are met with a minimal white title on a black wall, spot lit from above. The gallery is dimly lit, and you round the corner, curiosity spurred by the mystery of the setting.



2. Orientation

As you round the corner you enter an enclosed space, where you can see the glimmer of many vitrines through an entry to your right. You are drawn first however, to the graphics on the wall explaining the concept of the Anthropocene in simple and darkly humorous language. There will be an interactive that breaks down the barrier between humans and nature, showing visitors that nature is *everywhere*. Also here you will find an explanation of what you can experience through that entryway, explanations of climate change, pollution, invasive species, and humans as nature.

3. Evidence

You walk towards the entry way and the room opens up, revealing a forest of vitrines with singular objects in them. In this room the walls are painted black, dim main lighting with spotlights shining on each vitrine. 15-30 pedestals, some large, some small, each showcase a natural history

specimen from CMNH's collection. Each vitrine holds a story, a key to understanding the Anthropocene further. You are encouraged to explore at your leisure. The presentation remains minimal, like that of an art museum. Some specimens are mounted to the wall like art; a mummified dodo head is displayed in a pedestal. There is a digital interactive exhibit allowing visitors to explore the Alcohol House and its many stories.



As you approach a pedestal, an ID label tells a darkly, humorous story:



That Darn Cat! The Stephen Island Wren. Extinct, 1942
Over millions of years, this flightless wren evolved to fit comfortably within the web of life in its Stephen Island ecosystem (map). In 19XX, humans built a lighthouse on the island to maintain a trade route. The lighthouse keeper brought his cat to live with him. Tibbles was a successful hunter; she alone ended the lifeline of this species of wren.

Each pedestal has a similar style of label.

Adjacent to, and part of the “Evidence” gallery, Post Natural content is introduced. Genetically manipulated specimens are on display here. Some examples are a lab rat, GMO corn, glowing fish, and a goat that excretes spider silk from its teats.

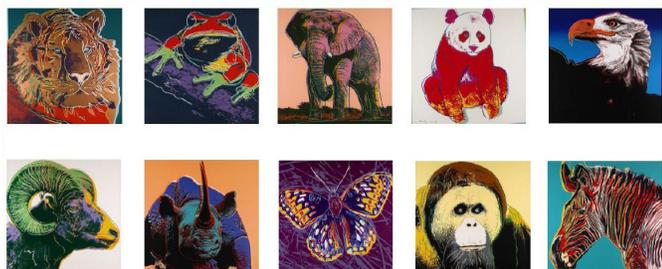


This gallery highlights at least 5 genetically manipulated specimens identified from the Carnegie’s collection, and also borrowed from the Center for Post Natural History.

In another area of the gallery, there is an earth dome. When you sit inside this space, there is a projected view of the earth as seen from space. You are prompted to do a thought activity that may help you expand your own identity to one that includes all life on earth.

4. Processing

Visitors turn the corner and the environment becomes brighter, with activities and seating. The space has a recycled materials aesthetic with eco-friendly woods, glass, and sage green paint. It feels warm and friendly here. This area focuses on “How Does This Effect Me” and how to process the stories you just encountered in the evidence gallery.



Andy Warhol’s endangered species series is on view, an example of a personal way to process humanities effect on our natural world. A large display introduces the stages of

grief people might feel about environmental change: from denial, through horror and depression to acceptance and activism. You can add your own story to this participatory activity by writing and posting it. You can identify where you are in the spectrum and share concerns or hopes. There is a “climate confessional” a small space where you can enter and privately admit to ideas and actions that may be in conflict with your beliefs (i.e. “I believe in climate change but I don’t recycle”).

5. Action

In this space you move from comprehension of humans interaction with Anthropocene, to an area driven by action. Here you explore “What Can I Do?”. There are engaging interactive models based on CUSP projects. Each activity illustrates locally relevant ways you could contribute to changing our current trajectory.

You can email your future self a prompt or a thought based on the exhibition. A prompt may be as simple as “This week take shorter showers”, “Take public transport one day this week” etc. Then in a year’s time, you will be reminded of what you planned to do and see how you are progressing.