

Maya Lin **“What is Missing?”**

Currently we are experiencing the sixth mass extinction in the planet’s history, and the only one to be caused not by a catastrophic event, but by the actions of a single species – mankind. On average, every 20 minutes a distinct living species of plant or animal disappears at the hands of mankind. At this rate, by some estimates, as much as 30 percent of the world’s animals and plants could be on a path to extinction in 100 years.

“What is Missing?” will first make one aware of this enormous loss of species and biodiversity that is presently occurring, chronicling not just specific species that have gone extinct, but focusing equal attention on the critically endangered species that will most likely disappear unless immediate action is taken. Crucial to this focus is the need to link those threatened species to the habitats and ecosystems that are vital to these species survival. “What is Missing?” will highlight the biomes that are rapidly disappearing throughout the world.

It will ask us to pay closer attention not just to this crisis in biodiversity loss, but like my other artworks will focus your attention on things that we have lost that we might not even be thinking about. I believe that Art, at times, can look at a subject differently, and in doing so can get people to pay closer attention. “What is Missing?” will focus attention on issues and things that people are not even aware are disappearing, from the sheer abundance of species to their scale, from the loss of migratory corridors to threatened ecosystems throughout the world that we are rapidly destroying, from the diminished sounds of songbirds that were so common in our childhood, to even the visibility of the stars at night.

What exactly is a place? And how can we protect it if we do not see it as existing? What is Missing? will pose these questions, challenging us to consider the air, land, and oceanic migratory corridors of birds, animals, and sea-life that are at risk. It will show us the alarming degradation of the world’s oceans and waterways – how over fishing has led to a 90% loss of large marine fish. “What is Missing?” will allow people to see an entire river system as a place, or the African Plains migratory corridors as a system – habitats that must be seen outside of man-made boundary zones. It will focus on the main causes of extinction – direct harvesting, non-sustainable hunting and fishing practices, the introduction of non-native species, habitat destruction, and especially global warming: problems that must be pondered in the absence of geopolitical boundaries.

Although it starts with making us aware of what we are losing, “What is Missing?” is equally focused on making us aware of what can be done to help. It is a project focused on giving us hope, highlighting conservation success stories as well as asking us to help specific areas in need.