

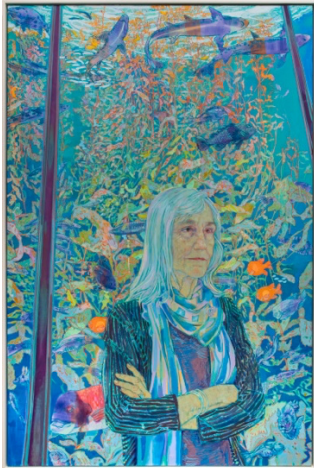
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Meet the Steely Gaze of Environmentalism

A new show at the National Portrait Gallery focuses on the defenders of Mother Earth over the past 150 years

By Angelica Aboulhosn



Julie Packard by Hope Gangloff is on view at the National Portrait Gallery in the new show, "Forces of Nature: Voices That Shaped Environmentalism." NPG, funded by the Monterey Bay Aquarium Board of Trustees © Hope Gangloff

For the marine biologist Julie Packard, one of the founders of California's Monterey Bay Aquarium, to be an environmental activist means educating the public about conserving the world's oceans. "We depend on it for so much. The good news is that the ocean is resilient," Packard has said. "It can recover if we act quickly."

Packard's portrait by the American painter Hope Gangloff is featured—among a host of others depicting some of the nation's most influential environmental activists—in the new exhibition "Forces of Nature: Voices That Shaped Environmentalism" at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Packard is posed before a seafoam-green aquarium tank where fiery orange fish ripple the water column and sharks circle overhead, her wispy white hair laced with ecstatic purples, greens and yellows. Her arms are crossed assertively, and she looks beyond the frame, at once apart from and absorbed in the life of the sea.

Packard serves as a light in the show, says Mindy Farmer, the consulting curator for the exhibition: She assures us that "all is not lost."

The pair were surely "environmental activists," but the term itself is fluid, Farmer explains. "In the more than two dozen portraits on view, visitors can study its changing nature over time."

From writers to scientists to political leaders, those featured are forceful but never despairing. As Burroughs wrote in a 1921 essay: "We may never hitch our wagons to the stars, but we can hitch them to the mountain streams, and make the summer breezes lift our burdens."

"Forces of Nature: Voices That Shaped Environmentalism," guest curated by Lacey Baradel, former science historian at the National Science Foundation, is on view through September 2, 2024, at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.