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Video Interview by Elizabeth McShane

Making Art with a Message

Interviewer's Note: Catherine Owens is a writer and artist whose chalk drawings have been featured all over Boston, from the menu at your favorite local spot to the cover of *Boston* magazine. In late November, I met Catherine in her Cambridge studio, where we discussed chalk art, running your own business, and her TW essay "[Encouraging Awe.](#)" [5]

In that essay, part of TW's Fall 2018 "Politics of Place" issue, she describes the "ecoanxiety" she and many of us feel when faced with the enormity of climate change. The trouble is, exhorting people to do the right thing is often a turn-off or just scares them more. Catherine admits to feeling helpless, until she took a trip to the Faroe Islands:

[A]s I hiked day after day, breathing in the sky and mountains and mist, my anxiety calmed. I felt more connected to the wider earth around me. I began to reconnect to the responsibility I have to act and to my own ability to make changes in my daily life.

She studied sustainable agriculture in graduate school, but has gone through a number of professional and creative shifts since, including the restaurant job where her chalk drawing began. Catherine now uses art and personal essays to spark sustainability in a fun and approachable way, often through her website *Quarry & Reseed*.

The converted warehouse space of her studio has high ceilings and a wall full of windows. On the day we talked, a wall that stretched up a good twenty feet contained a patchwork of art and photographs. Only one piece by Catherine hung in the mix. It was a work in progress, she said, a drawing of a coffee plant traced with her characteristically delicate chalk strokes that bloomed into life on a large sheet of heavy black paper. She explained that the paper is made of recycled coffee cups. The image is one in a series about the life cycle of coffee, from how it's grown to how we dispose of by-products like those cups.

In this edited video interview, we talk making art with a message—getting people to look *and* listen. You'll find more of Catherine's art and writing on her websites [Chalk & Ink](#) [6] and [Quarry & Reseed](#) [7].

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