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The Virtual Water Gallery: Measuring attitude changes towards climate and water through art

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Water is life. Water-related challenges, such as droughts, floods, water quality degradation, permafrost thaw and glacier melt, exacerbated by climate change, affect everyone. Yet, it is challenging to communicate science on complex and highly volatile topics such as water and climate change. Conceptualizing water-related environmental and social issues in novel ways, for example using art, with engagement between diverse audiences may lead to comprehensive solutions to these complex challenges.

The Virtual Water Gallery (VWG) project, launched as part of the Global Water Futures (GWF) program in 2020 as a collaborative space merging science and art to address water challenges. Thirteen artists, representing diverse voices, teamed up with GWF scientists to explore specific challenges across Canada. The resulting artworks were exhibited on the VWG website (www.virtualwatergallery.ca) in 2021, with a first in-person exhibition in Canmore in 2022. Surveys were concurrently conducted to capture perspectives on climate change and water challenges, as well as on the role of art as a tool for engagement, from project participants, online and in-person gallery visitors.

Join us as we share key findings and lessons learned on the SciArt collaborations and exhibition. Participant survey results highlight the participating artists and scientists' experiences during the co-creation process. Visitor survey results help clarify the impact of art on people's understanding of climate change and its effects on water resources, alongside insights into behaviour changes (e.g., energy conservation, recycling, dietary choices) as a result of visiting the exhibition.