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## Artist's Statement

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# Artist's Statement

Erin O'Halloran\*

**Toward a global commons, 2020**  
Oil on canvas, 44 x 48 in



**I**t seems to me that the amorphous nature of the term “peace” offers an opening... an opportunity to step into a framework of decolonial higher education. To me the intersection between Human Rights Education and Peace Education is a third space. A place where other ways of knowing can be elevated. A place whose amorphous nature allows for co-learning and co-creation. When I read that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the backdrop for HRE, I instantly knew that it was likely a hindrance to the process of decoloniality. There is good content there to be sure, but it is inaccessible (Whereas...,Whereas..., Whereas...), and it does not go far enough.

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\* Erin O'Halloran is an artist and liberation psychologist whose work seeks to use art making as an act of mutual accompaniment with those who see the world differently. Find out more at [activistgallery.com](http://activistgallery.com). [erin.ohalloran@my.pacifica.edu](mailto:erin.ohalloran@my.pacifica.edu)

I turned to the Earth Charter for inspiration because for me it is a better match for a goal of decolonial, inclusive, rights-based, peaceable education. The preamble opens with these words, which I believe are more relevant in the year 2020 than they were on the day they came into being:

We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise.

My re-imagining of the intersection of human rights education and peace education as a third space – is one that depicts nature and its other-than-human inhabitants as equally deserving of representation. In her book, *Mutual Accompaniment and the Creations of the Commons*, Mary Watkins talks of replacing the destructive ways of being that prevail in modernist society “... with a mutual accompaniment in which we seek attunement with those around us, enabling our responsiveness, care, and love, and galvanizing our action in solidarity with others to resist and overturn systemic injustices and injuries.”

**Mother Earth, 2018**  
Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in



The main image is of Mother Earth as the tree of life. With arms stretched to the sky she offers a nurturing safe space for learning to take place. The tree has a variety of different flowers on it to represent the dynamic learning that can be available with a participatory pedagogy. The pods are inspired by the Bodhi tree and have written dreams of liberation for higher education that include: human potential, creativity, grace of being, inner vision, honest authenticity, and presence. The cocoons also represent a growing process with all three phases of development pictured. This can be seen as representative of the different needs one may require from the higher education experience depending on where they are in their individual development. The diamonds are my nod to Maya Angelou's *Still I Rise* with the intention, along with the fetus, to highlight what women bring to academia and the importance of making room for them in the classroom.

The hair is made from the plastic that was the by-product of a case of bottled water... there are small seashells strewn about in the hair to bring attention to the huge problem of plastic polluting the ocean. The 3 people, cut from bronze panels are meant to represent us, the learners, as weavers. We find ourselves tangled up in our weaving material with the contrast between what we perceive to be the values of decolonial higher education and the requirements of the degree granting system.