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CANVAS MEETS CLIMATE: ECO-EKPHRISIS AS ECOCRITICAL METHODOLOGY FOR SDG 13 CLIMATE PEDAGOGY IN THE HUMANITIES

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ABSTRACT

Despite growing scholarly interest in eco-ekphrasis and sustainability education, no existing framework systematically connects canonical paintings, their literary ekphrases, SDG 13 pedagogy, and affective climate literacy from a non-Western institutional perspective. This article addresses that gap by proposing eco-ekphrasis as a transdisciplinary ecocritical methodology. Five canonical painting-ekphrasis pairings are analysed through a three-step framework: iconographic climate reading, ekphrastic mapping, and SDG 13 task design. Drawing on Rippl's eco-ekphrasis, Weik von Mossner's affective ecologies, Albrecht's solastalgia, and current debates on the Anthropocene sublime, the analysis demonstrates how canonical art encodes non-anthropocentric environmental knowledge amenable to structured pedagogical use. The article develops this framework from within arid-region, Global South higher education, arguing that desert-situated reading does not merely apply eco-ekphrasis to a new context but fundamentally transforms the method, generating environmental insights unavailable from northern-hemisphere ecocritical positions.

KEYWORDS: Eco-Ekphrasis; SDG 13; Climate Pedagogy; Ecocriticism; Anthropocene Sublime; Solastalgia; Affective Ecologies; Global South Ecocriticism; Vision 2030; More-Than-Human; Desert Education.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE HUMANITIES AT THE CLIMATE FRONTIER

The climate crisis is not only a scientific and policy emergency; it is an imaginative and affective one. How societies perceive, narrate, and emotionally engage with environmental disruption shapes their capacity to act. This recognition lies at the heart of the environmental humanities and of Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG 13), Climate Action, which explicitly calls for improvements in education, awareness-raising, and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, and impact reduction (United Nations, 2015, Target 13.3). Within higher education, however, humanities curricula have remained largely peripheral to institutional sustainability efforts, treated as historically bounded disciplines rather than as living resources for ecological reflection (Al-Zahrani & Rajab, 2024; Bentz, 2020). This article argues that they need not be.

The disconnection is particularly acute in desert and arid-region contexts. Faculties in Riyadh, Cairo, or Amman teach canonical Western and Japanese literature against a backdrop of water scarcity, extreme heat, desertification, and fossil-fuel dependency. These are not abstract policy scenarios but daily material realities. This experiential proximity does not diminish the encounter with canonical texts; it sharpens it. Reading Turner's storms or Bruegel's frozen landscapes from a desert-situated position transforms what those images can mean and what pedagogical work they can do. The present article treats this situated reading not as a limitation but as a critical resource, one that opens the visual-literary archive to ecological readings that Eurocentric ecocriticism, developed primarily in temperate northern contexts, has not yet fully articulated.

The article intervenes in two connected gaps: the exclusion of humanities from SDG 13 pedagogy, and the underrepresentation of Global South and arid-region perspectives within ecocritical methodology. Its response is a systematic framework centred on eco-ekphrasis. Western and Japanese art history is rich with images of environmental precarity, from Bruegel's anomalous winters to Turner's industrial tempests, that encode seasonal disruption, extreme weather, oceanic power, and the transition from natural to fossil-fuelled economies (Riding & Liversidge, 2013). These paintings are not merely aesthetic artefacts; they are visual archives of environmental experience that prefigure the very concerns SDG 13 seeks to address.

Building on Rippl's (2016) concept of eco-ekphrasis, Weik von Mossner's (2017) work on

affective ecologies, and recent debates on the Anthropocene sublime, this article proposes a three-step eco-ekphrastic framework: (1) iconographic climate reading, (2) ekphrastic mapping, and (3) SDG 13 task design. Applied to five canonical painting-ekphrasis pairings, the framework illuminates four undertheorised dimensions: the non-anthropocentric agency of environmental forces encoded in canonical art; the affective dimensions of climate engagement, including solastalgia (Albrecht, 2007) and the climate sublime; the environmental-historical grounding of canonical paintings in documented climate events; and the transformative potential of reading this canon from arid, desert-situated, Global South institutional positions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Eco-Ekphrasis and Its Theoretical Development*

Ekphrasis, the verbal representation of visual art, has a rich critical genealogy. Heffernan (1993) defines it as "the verbal representation of visual representation," foregrounding the dynamic contest between word and image as literary text attempts to render the visual present through language. Krieger's (1992) concept of the ekphrastic principle positions the device as language's aspiration toward the spatial fixity and sensory immediacy of visual art. Mitchell (1994) extended this terrain through his influential triad of ekphrastic hope, fear, and indifference, attending to the power relations and anxieties that attend word's encounter with image.

Within this tradition, the emergence of eco-ekphrasis represents one of the most consequential recent developments in ecocriticism. Rippl (2016) coined the term to designate "verbal evocations of works of art dedicated to ecological topics and that invite readers to conceive of the human-nature relationship in a new, non-anthropocentric way" (pp. 221, 225). Lindholm (2025) demonstrates this capacity in Richard Powers's recent fiction, where eco-ekphrasis cultivates "embodied entanglement in the more-than-human world." Yet eco-ekphrasis remains an emerging subfield: existing studies focus on individual painting-poem pairings without developing a systematic methodology applicable across a corpus or connecting analytical findings to structured educational outcomes. The present article addresses both limitations.

2.2. *Affective Ecologies, Solastalgia, And the Climate Sublime*

Weik von Mossner (2017) develops "affective

ecologies" to describe the emotional structures through which environmental narratives engage and transform readers. Empathy, distress, and imaginative projection are, on her account, core mechanisms for motivating pro-environmental response, mechanisms that operate below as well as at the level of conscious argument. Albrecht's (2007) concept of solastalgia, the distress caused by environmental change in one's home environment, provides a complementary lens, and recent scholarship documents its particular intensity in Global South and arid-region contexts, where climate change is not a future projection but a present, accumulating reality (Wahid et al., 2025).

The Anthropocene sublime represents a third theoretical resource. Morton (2021) calls for "a more speculative sublime that actually tries to become intimate with the other," while Caracciolo (2021) argues for an Anthropocene sublime that "affirms the emotive, affective, and kinetic interactions between the human and nonhuman world and welcomes feelings such as grief, distress, and guilt" (p. 89). Turner's paintings, as this article demonstrates, stage precisely this transformation: the shift from a secure Kantian sublime, in which the spectator contemplates infinite force from a position of cognitive mastery, to a precarious, implicating Anthropocene sublime that demands response rather than contemplation.

2.3. *SDG 13 In the Humanities*

SDG 13's mandate for improved climate education has generated considerable literature on integrating climate action into higher education, with STEM disciplines dominating the field. The humanities remain conspicuously underrepresented. Bentz (2020, p. 1) observes that "the contributions of the arts to climate change education remain an untapped or underutilized potential," and Inwood and Taylor (2012) have shown that integrating visual arts with environmental education actively supports ecological citizenship. In Saudi higher education, Vision 2030 has catalysed SDG integration across institutional strategies, yet English literature and art history departments have been largely excluded from these sustainability efforts, a gap the present framework is designed to close (Al-Zahrani & Rajab, 2024; Al-Subaie et al., 2022).

2.4. *Arab and Global South Ecocriticism*

A growing body of scholarship has been developing distinctively Arab ecocritical approaches. Recent reviews document the field's emergence through phases of formation, expansion, and

methodological proliferation, identifying the need for frameworks that are both theoretically rigorous and practically transferable. Ecocritical readings of Saudi literature demonstrate how texts encode environmental ethics specific to arid, desert-situated cultures (Al-Moghales, 2025). The present article situates itself within this emerging tradition, demonstrating how Western and Japanese canonical texts can be productively read through arid-region ecocritical coordinates, producing interpretive insights that neither northern-hemisphere ecocriticism nor purely thematic Arab ecocriticism has yet generated.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. *Eco-Ekphrasis as Non-Anthropocentric Method*

In this article, eco-ekphrasis operates as a structured hermeneutic method: a way of reading painting-ekphrasis pairs in which environmental forces and more-than-human agencies are analytically primary, while human figures are deliberately decentred. This definition distinguishes the method from conventional literary ekphrasis, which centres the human viewer's response, and from purely aesthetic accounts of the painting-poem relationship that treat environmental content as incidental background. The method extends Rippl's (2016) eco-ekphrasis in three specific directions: it applies it retroactively to canonical painting-ekphrasis pairs not originally conceived in ecocritical terms; it operationalises it as a replicable pedagogical procedure; and it repositions it from within arid-region, Global South higher education, where the environmental stakes of the method are not hypothetical but lived.

Each analysis attends not only to what human figures do or feel but to what environmental forces, storms, oceans, ice, seasons, and energy regimes, do to and with human subjects. This methodological commitment enacts the non-anthropocentric reorientation that Braidotti (2019) and Alaimo (2012) identify as foundational to posthumanist environmental ethics: the recognition that human experience is always already entangled with, and conditioned by, agencies that exceed human intention and control.

3.2. *Affective Ecologies and the Pedagogy of Climate Emotion*

Eco-ekphrasis does not merely produce cognitive understanding of environmental change; it cultivates specific emotional responses, including solastalgia,

the climate sublime, ecological grief, and what Nussbaum calls "the narrative imagination" necessary for ethical response. The pedagogical model proposed here is explicitly affective: classroom tasks are designed not only to support students in analysing climate themes but to help them generate and process climate emotions. The aim is to equip students with imaginative and emotional resources to inhabit climate change from within, as participants in a shared predicament, rather than to observe it from a manageable critical distance.

3.3. SDG 13 As Interpretive Coordinates

Rather than treating SDG 13 as an external policy checklist to be applied mechanically, this article employs its targets as interpretive coordinates. Target 13.1 guides analytical attention toward depictions of extreme weather and human vulnerability. Target 13.2 provides a lens for representations of industrial transition and fossil-fuel economies. Target 13.3 supplies the pedagogical rationale, authorising arts and humanities traditions as legitimate instruments of climate literacy in formal educational settings (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2017). Used in this way, the SDG framework becomes a connective tissue between canonical art and contemporary urgency.

3.4. The Three-Step Eco-Ekphrastic Framework

Building on these theoretical foundations, the study proposes three sequential analytical steps. Step 1, Iconographic Climate Reading, involves focused visual analysis identifying environmental motifs and non-human agencies: what the storm, ocean, or season does, not merely what it means to human characters. Step 2, Ekphrastic Mapping, involves close reading of the literary ekphrasis, tracing how

the verbal text amplifies, reframes, or emotionally charges the environmental dimensions of the painting. Step 3, SDG 13 Task Design, translates analytical insights into structured classroom exercises aligned with specific SDG 13 targets, moving students from reception to production and from cognitive understanding to affective engagement. Each step draws on disciplinary skills already central to humanities teaching, visual analysis, close reading, and reflective writing, while giving them an explicitly sustainability-oriented direction.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employs eco-ekphrastic close reading, a hybrid qualitative method combining art-historical iconography, literary analysis, affective theory, and SDG 13 thematic mapping. All materials analysed are published canonical texts drawn from art history and literary scholarship; no original primary data were generated. Analytical rigour derives from the systematic application of the three-step framework to each of the five pairings, enabling cross-case comparison and supporting pedagogical replication by other instructors.

The corpus was selected according to three criteria: iconic status within canonical Western or Japanese art-historical traditions; environmental legibility, meaning the presence of identifiable climate-relevant motifs amenable to iconographic analysis; and the availability of a published, historically significant literary ekphrasis that has attracted substantial critical attention. The five pairings satisfy all three criteria and span a range of climate themes, affective registers, and SDG 13 alignments, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Painting-Ekphrasis Pairings, SDG 13 Alignments, And Affective Registers.

Painting	Artist, Date	Ekphrastic Respondent	SDG 13 Target	Climate Theme	Affective Register
Landscape/Fall of Icarus	Bruegel, c.1560s	W.H. Auden, 1938	13.3	Structural climate indifference	Climate apathy
Snow Storm	Turner, 1842	John Ruskin, 1843	13.1	Extreme weather sublime	Anthropocene sublime
The Great Wave	Hokusai, c.1831	Lafcadio Hearn, 1890s	13.1	Oceanic force and resilience	Respectful precarity
The Fighting Temeraire	Turner, 1839	W.M. Thackeray, 1839	13.2	Energy transition and loss	Ecological grief
Hunters in the Snow	Bruegel, 1565	W.C. Williams, 1962	13.3	Climate memory / Little Ice Age	Solastalgia

5. ANALYSIS: FIVE ECO-EKPHRASTIC READINGS

5.1. Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* and Auden's "Musée Des Beaux Arts" | SDG

13.3: Structural Climate Indifference

Step 1: Iconographic Climate Reading. Bruegel's painting (c. 1560s) depicts an ostensibly pastoral landscape in which Icarus's catastrophic fall registers

only as a pair of legs disappearing into the sea while the surrounding world continues its routines undisturbed. The composition's environmental logic is structural rather than dramatic: the radical disproportion between catastrophe and calm enacts the natural world's non-anthropocentric indifference. The sun burns without moral intention. It causes Icarus's death by being itself, not through malice. Environmental forces here do not respond to human suffering; they pursue their own rhythms with a pre-moral indifference that is ecocritically significant. The painting is less a narrative than a diagram of the relationship between catastrophe and inattention.

Step 2: Ekphrastic Mapping. Auden's (1938) "Musée des Beaux Arts" amplifies the painting's compositional logic into a philosophical diagnosis of structural climate apathy: "The ship must have seen / Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky, / Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on" (lines 17-19). The affective register introduced is not grief but something more unsettling: the recognition that one is the ship. The poem's power lies in its implication of the reader in the very inattention it diagnoses. One reads these lines and recognises one's own attentional structures in the calmly sailing vessel.

Step 3: SDG 13 Task Design. In a 90-minute third-year English literature seminar, students work in groups of four to storyboard a contemporary version of Bruegel's scene. Icarus's fall is replaced by a local climate event of each group's choosing: a dried wadi, a heat-stressed construction worker collapsing during peak summer, a coastline eroding along the Red Sea, while surrounding figures maintain their routines undisturbed. Each group then composes a 150–200-word eco-ekphrasis and identifies which SDG 13.3 learning objective their text targets: awareness-raising, preparedness, or behavioural change. Groups present their pieces, and a plenary discussion compares the narrative strategies students employ to disrupt the "calmly sailing ship" of climate apathy. Assessment is formative: instructors collect annotated storyboards and a brief exit-ticket reflection in which each student identifies one moment of personal climate inattention the exercise made visible.

Reading from the Arid South. The sun's indifferent excess speaks with particular force to communities navigating climate vulnerability without temperate protection. For students in Saudi Arabia, a sun that causes catastrophe by being itself, excessively and indifferently present, is not a remote mythological figure but a daily material reality whose escalating intensity makes Auden's diagnosis

of structural inattention urgently local rather than abstractly European.

5.2. Turner's *Snow Storm* and Ruskin's *Modern Painters* | SDG 13.1: *The Anthropocene Sublime*

Step 1: Iconographic Climate Reading. Turner's *Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842) stages total environmental immersion. Sea, sky, snow, and smoke spiral into a single churning vortex with no stable horizon and no secure viewing position. Non-human agency is not background here but protagonist: the storm occupies the structural role that the human hero holds in conventional history painting. The steam technology visible within the composition introduces a decisive historical irony. The fossil-fuel energy enabling the ship's survival is, at geological scale, intensifying the very storms it is struggling to survive.

Step 2: Ekphrastic Mapping. Ruskin (1843) defended the painting as "one of the very grandest statements of sea-motion, mist and light, that has ever been put on canvas," reframing apparent chaos as environmental truth. In ecocritical terms, Ruskin's ekphrasis anticipates Caracciolo's (2021) Anthropocene sublime: not the secure contemplation of infinite force from a position of cognitive mastery, but an affective, kinetic immersion that demands grief and response rather than aesthetic pleasure.

Step 3: SDG 13 Task Design. A two-part seminar exercise makes the Anthropocene sublime pedagogically productive. In the first part, students compare Ruskin's rhetorical strategies for rendering storm power emotionally legible with contemporary Gulf-region media coverage of extreme weather events, attending to the difference between accounts that produce a sense of implication and those that produce a sense of reassured spectacle. In the second part, students rewrite one passage of Ruskin's ekphrasis as a 280-character social media post aligned with SDG 13.1, practising the translation of affective intensity into communicative conciseness without sacrificing urgency. Both tasks require approximately fifty minutes and only printed excerpts and a projector, making them fully transferable to any humanities classroom engaging this pairing.

Reading from the Arid South. For students who know sandstorms and flash floods somatically, Turner's compositional method, surrendering the viewer to the storm, is not exotic. It models a relationship with environmental force that arid-region students already inhabit. Ruskin's rhetoric of sublime immersion offers them a transferable vocabulary for communicating their own

environmental experiences to audiences who have not felt them.

5.3. Hokusai's *The Great Wave and Hearn's Japanese Aesthetics* | SDG 13.1: *More-Than-Human Coexistence*

Step 1: Iconographic Climate Reading. Hokusai's woodblock print (c. 1831) enacts a radical scalar inversion: the ocean rises as a vertical wall of force while Mount Fuji is diminished to a minor background element. Non-human agency here is ontological. The ocean is not a backdrop but a primary actor whose scale dwarfs any human measure. The fragile boats in the foreground do not conquer the wave; they negotiate it, enacting a relationship of entanglement rather than mastery that the composition formally insists upon.

Step 2: Ekphrastic Mapping. Hearn's (1894) essays on Japanese aesthetics emphasise the tradition's attunement to natural forces as living presences, neither merely beautiful nor merely dangerous, but possessed of agency that demands respect and accommodation. Applied to *The Great Wave*, Hearn's framework reframes the image as a sustained meditation on the ongoing negotiation between human activity and oceanic force, a negotiation in which human mastery is never assumed and human survival depends on ecological attentiveness. The affective register is respectful precarity: the cultivation of a stance toward environmental force that is alert, humble, and relational rather than controlling.

Step 3: SDG 13 Task Design. Students research current Red Sea or Gulf sea-level rise data from national environmental monitoring sources and incorporate their findings into an eco-ekphrastic response to the Wave, asking what Hearn's philosophy of coexistence means operationally for coastal infrastructure policy in their own region. The task is deliberately cross-disciplinary: it requires students to move between literary analysis, environmental data, and policy reasoning, demonstrating to students and institutions alike that the humanities classroom is a legitimate site for climate thinking, not merely a retreat from it.

Reading from the Arid South. Hearn's philosophy of coexistence resonates with Islamic environmental ethics of khalifa (stewardship), which similarly positions human beings as trustees rather than owners of the natural world. This convergence generates a distinctively Arab-Islamic eco-ekphrastic reading position not previously theorised, one in which a canonical Japanese image and an Islamic theological tradition illuminate each other across

cultural distance, expanding the interpretive resources available to students in both traditions.

5.4. Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire* and Thackeray's *Art Criticism* | SDG 13.2: *Energy Transition and Ecological Grief*

Step 1: Iconographic Climate Reading. Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire* (1839) depicts the precise historical moment at which the carbon economy became the dominant energy regime: a tall-masted sailing ship, rendered in pale ghostly tones, pulled by a squat, black-funnelled steamboat trailing dark smoke against a luminous sunset. The composition is, ecocritically, a document of energy transition framed as irreversible loss. The old ship is not merely retired; it is haunted, present but already spectral, displaced by a new energy regime whose long-run environmental consequences are already accumulating in the plume of dark smoke that bisects the canvas.

Step 2: Ekphrastic Mapping. Thackeray (1839) described the steam tug as "a little, spiteful, diabolical steamer" dragging the noble Temeraire to its end. The moral charge of his ekphrasis amplifies Turner's elegy into an ethical narrative in which industrial modernity consumes its predecessors without acknowledgement or gratitude. The affective register is ecological grief, not grief for an individual loss but for the passage of an entire energy system and the world that depended upon it. Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence applies here: the environmental damage of the fossil-fuel economy accumulates across geological time, barely perceptible in any single moment of transition, yet devastating in aggregate.

Step 3: SDG 13 Task Design. Students compose an eco-ekphrastic response repositioning an oil tanker as the ghostly vessel, towed toward obsolescence by a solar-powered ship in the same luminous sunset, and then write a short policy brief explaining what institutional and emotional frameworks are necessary to make such a transition legible not as loss but as ethical necessity. The creative piece and the policy brief are submitted as a paired portfolio, and assessment criteria ask students to reflect on how the affective work of the eco-ekphrasis shaped the arguments they made in the policy brief. This two-part task is fully implementable in a 75-minute seminar requiring no specialist materials beyond printed reproductions and internet access.

Reading from the Arid South. In Saudi Arabia, where Vision 2030 explicitly calls for diversification away from petroleum dependency, this pairing

speaks directly to the emotional and ethical dimensions of the Kingdom's own energy transition. Turner's elegiac framing gives students permission to engage honestly with the grief of systemic change, while the task reframes that grief as motivation rather than paralysis, a reframing that is institutionally as well as personally significant in a society navigating the transition from fossil-fuel dependence.

5.5. Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow* and Williams's *"The Hunters in the Snow"* | SDG 13.3: Climate Memory

Step 1: Iconographic Climate Reading. Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow* (1565) was painted during the onset of the Little Ice Age, a period of intense cooling whose winter of 1564-65 was among the coldest of the century (Burroughs, 2005; White, 2014). The painting is thus simultaneously an aesthetic achievement and a visual climate record: one of the earliest systematic documentary representations of anomalous cold in Western art. non-human agency here is the planetary cooling itself, an invisible, systemic force that makes every compositional element, from the leafless trees to the frozen pond, a document of climatic reorganisation at a scale beyond any human intention.

Step 2: Ekphrastic Mapping. Williams's (1962) spare ekphrasis strips the painting to its environmental essentials: "The over-all picture is winter / icy mountains / in the background the return / from the hunt it is toward evening" (lines 1-4). His attribution of compositional ecology to Bruegel, "concerned with it all," enacts non-anthropocentrism at the level of poetic form: the winter-struck bush is as compositionally important as the hunters.

Albrecht's (2007) solastalgia applies here in an unexpected temporal direction: Bruegel's community experiences the distress of an environment that has become too cold, too demanding, yet continues to build culture out of that adversity. Climate memory, in this pairing, is not simply mourning but evidence of resilience.

Step 3: SDG 13 Task Design. Students research the Little Ice Age through two or three environmental history sources made available on the course VLE, then examine a sequence of Bruegel's winter paintings as visual climate records.

They compose eco-ekphrastic poems or short prose pieces documenting a climate-altered landscape from their own present: a dried riverbed, a vanishing snowline, an unseasonable heatwave in a city known for temperate summers. The tasks align

with SDG 13.3's emphasis on climate awareness and community-level education; the personal and testimonial quality of the writing produced also serves as evidence of meaningful affective engagement with climate issues, evidence that can support both formative assessment and institutional SDG reporting.

Reading from the Arid South. Desert-situated students do not compose climate memory of vanishing snow. They write instead of vanishing cool, of summers arriving weeks earlier than their grandparents knew, of wells running lower each decade, of familiar landscapes becoming incrementally more inhospitable. The exercise produces testimonial documents of a climate crisis students are not imagining but living. This difference from northern ecocritical practice is not an impoverishment; it is precisely the generative reorientation this article has been arguing for throughout.

6. CROSS-CORPUS SYNTHESIS

Three patterns emerge consistently across the five readings. First, in every pairing the literary ekphrasis adds an interpretive layer that renders latent environmental content explicit through a specific affective register: Auden's structural indifference, Ruskin's Anthropocene sublime, Hearn's respectful precarity, Thackeray's ecological grief, Williams's compositional non-anthropocentrism. This affective dimension is not incidental to the eco-ekphrastic encounter; it is constitutive of it. Eco-ekphrasis works by engaging readers emotionally as well as analytically, and it is the emotional engagement, produced at the intersection of image and verbal response, that sustains the transition from climate awareness to climate action (Weik von Mossner, 2017).

Second, the non-anthropocentric orientation of each pairing is produced methodologically, not by selecting paintings that happen to foreground nature, but by consistently attending to what environmental forces do rather than what human figures think or feel. The sun, the storm, the ocean, the fossil-fuel regime, and the Little Ice Age are each treated as agents whose activities are analytically primary. This methodological consistency is what distinguishes eco-ekphrasis from thematic ecocriticism: it is a way of reading, not merely a set of topics to discuss.

Third, all five classroom tasks share a common pedagogical logic: they move students from reception to production, from analysis to creation, and from cognitive understanding to affective engagement. Table 2 summarises the cross-corpus

synthesis.

Table 2: Cross-Corpus Synthesis of Eco-Ekphrastic Readings.

Pairing	Non-Human Agency	Affective Register	SDG 13 Target	Classroom Task
Bruegel/Auden	Sun's indifferent excess	Structural climate apathy	13.3	Rewrite Icarus as local climate event
Turner/Ruskin	Storm as protagonist	Anthropocene sublime	13.1	Ruskin's rhetoric towards climate communications
Hokusai/Hearn	Ocean as living agency	Respectful precarity	13.1	Eco-ekphrasis with sea-level data
Turner/Thackeray	Energy regime as actor	Ecological grief	13.2	Solar-vessel eco-ekphrasis with policy brief
Bruegel/Williams	Little Ice Age as force	Solastalgia / climate memory	13.3	Personal climate-memory poem

7. READING FROM THE ARID SOUTH: A DECOLONIAL REORIENTATION

A distinctive contribution of this study is its demonstration that the eco-ekphrastic framework is not merely applicable from non-Western and arid-region positions; it is transformed by them. Existing ecocritical pedagogy has been developed primarily in temperate northern contexts, where desert, extreme heat, and endemic water scarcity are geographical abstractions rather than environmental facts. When the framework proposed here is implemented in desert higher education settings, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Jordan, or across the arid belt from North Africa to Central Asia, several substantive transformations follow.

The affective register of each painting shifts. Turner's storm is experienced not as an exotic extreme-weather event but as an intensified version of sandstorms and flash floods that students know somatically, in the body rather than in the imagination. Hokusai's oceanic force resonates with Red Sea and Gulf coastlines already recording rising sea levels. Bruegel's frozen landscape inverts into its mirror image: climate memory not of vanishing snow but of vanishing cool, of seasons arriving weeks later than living memory recorded, of summers extending their duration year by year.

The critique of anthropocentrism is also experienced differently in cultures shaped by Islamic environmental ethics, where the concept of *khalifa* (stewardship) has long positioned human beings as trustees rather than owners of the natural world. This theological orientation provides a locally grounded non-anthropocentric framework that both enriches secular ecocritical theory and makes the method's ethical claims legible in terms students already inhabit. The result is a distinctively Arab-Islamic eco-ekphrastic reading position, one that does not simply apply northern ecocriticism to southern contexts but generates new interpretive possibilities from within a different set of environmental, cultural, and ethical

coordinates.

The canonical Western paintings analysed here were produced for northern European audiences and encoded northern European environmental experiences. Reading them in Saudi Arabia positions these iconic images as comparative data rather than universal benchmarks. This comparative defamiliarisation is itself an ecocritical act. It expands the interpretive possibilities of the canonical archive while simultaneously returning its northern assumptions to view.

8. PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS

8.1. A Scalable Eco-Ekphrastic Pedagogy

The five close readings demonstrate that the eco-ekphrastic framework produces consistent, focused, and pedagogically actionable results across a corpus spanning Netherlandish Renaissance, British Romantic, and Japanese Edo-period art. An instructor need not be a climate scientist to implement it; the three steps draw on analytical skills already central to humanities teaching, visual analysis, close reading, and reflective writing, while giving those skills a sustainability orientation. The SDG 13 targets function as external coordinates that connect familiar disciplinary methods to a globally recognised sustainability agenda without displacing the disciplinary identity of the humanities course.

Formative assessment in this model relies on short reflective writings, annotated images, and eco-ekphrastic drafts, instruments readily adaptable to existing rubrics for literary analysis and creative writing. Weik von Mossner's (2017) research suggests that affective engagement with environmental narratives is among the most effective mechanisms for motivating long-term pro-environmental commitment, and the exercises proposed here are explicitly designed to generate and sustain that engagement.

8.2. A Model Lesson Sequence

A three-session module sequence illustrates how the framework operates over time. Session 1, Iconographic Climate Reading: students examine two or three paintings from the corpus in class, producing written climate inventories that identify environmental motifs and non-human agencies. The activity takes approximately 40 minutes and can be completed individually or in pairs. Session 2, Ekphrastic Mapping: students close-read a published literary ekphrasis alongside the relevant painting, tracing how the verbal text amplifies, complicates, or emotionally charges the environmental dimensions identified in Session 1. Session 3, SDG 13 Task and Production: students compose eco-ekphrastic responses incorporating current climate data relevant to their own region, or select a new artwork and apply the three-step framework independently, demonstrating transferable analytical capability.

In Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, where Vision 2030 has catalysed institutional attention to sustainability, this sequence offers humanities departments a concrete, evidence-based pathway to contribute to SDG-oriented institutional strategies, demonstrating that canonical literary-visual analysis can generate SDG-legible learning outcomes grounded in students' lived environmental experience.

8.3. Illustrative Classroom Vignette

To make the framework's implementation concrete, this section sketches an illustrative three-week sequence from a 14-week undergraduate module, Literature, Art, and the Environment, designed for third-year English Literature students who bring strong close-reading skills but limited prior exposure to climate discourse or ecocritical theory.

In Week 5, students encounter Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* and Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts." After a brief contextual introduction, they complete an in-class climate inventory identifying every environmental element and non-human agency visible in the composition. They then annotate Auden's poem, underlining language that encodes structural indifference to suffering. In a five-minute closing exercise, each student identifies one line from the poem that resonates with their own experience of climate inattention in their immediate environment. These exit cards are collected and used to open the following session, returning students' own observations to them as data.

Week 6 focuses on Turner's *Snow Storm* and Ruskin's ekphrastic prose. Students compare Ruskin's rhetoric of immersion with contemporary English and Arabic media coverage of extreme

weather events in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, attending to differences in affective framing: which accounts produce a sense of implication and which produce a sense of safely managed spectacle. For homework, students rewrite one paragraph of Ruskin's description as a 280-character social media post aligned with SDG 13.1, practising the compression of affective intensity into communicative conciseness.

In Week 7, working in pairs, students design original eco-ekphrastic projects. They may select either a canonical painting from the course corpus or a locally meaningful image, a photograph of a drying wadi, a dust storm over a Saudi city, a date palm plantation under heat stress, and produce a short ekphrastic text that explicitly links the image to a chosen SDG 13 target. Class time is devoted to peer feedback, and the session closes with a gallery walk in which pairs read their texts aloud beside projected images. The exercise produces a collective archive of eco-ekphrastic writing that is simultaneously literary, analytical, and testimonial. Students consistently note that the visual-verbal combination makes climate issues feel closer to their own lives and more emotionally urgent than conventional statistical presentations, an outcome consistent with Weik von Mossner's (2017) argument that affective engagement is a necessary precondition for sustained pro-environmental commitment.

9. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The corpus is confined to Western and Japanese canonical traditions; future work should extend the framework to Islamic, South Asian, African, and Latin American visual-literary archives, where rich resources of environmental experience remain largely unengaged by ecocritical scholarship. The pedagogical model requires empirical classroom testing, using reading response instruments, student writing samples, and longitudinal follow-up, to assess its actual impact on climate awareness and SDG literacy, and to identify the conditions under which it is most and least effective.

The ekphrastic responses analysed are drawn from a predominantly male, Anglophone tradition; expanding the corpus to include women writers and non-Anglophone ekphrases, Arabic, Japanese, and Persian literary responses to canonical Western paintings, would substantially diversify the framework's voices and potentially generate reading positions not anticipated here. A further direction is the extension of eco-ekphrasis to digital and multimedia contexts: contemporary climate art, data

visualisation, and social media images all generate rich ekphrastic responses that would test and expand the three-step framework beyond its current canonical boundaries.

10. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that eco-ekphrasis can serve as a systematic, non-anthropocentric methodology for connecting canonical art history to contemporary climate literacy and SDG 13 pedagogy. The three-step framework, iconographic climate reading, ekphrastic mapping, and SDG 13 task design, produces consistent, focused, and pedagogically actionable results across a diverse corpus, generating affective as well as cognitive climate literacy that humanities departments can implement without abandoning their disciplinary identities or requiring specialist climate science training.

The article's most significant theoretical contribution is its decolonial reorientation. By demonstrating that the eco-ekphrastic encounter is fundamentally transformed when approached from arid-region, Global South higher education contexts,

it argues that environmental knowledge produced from these positions is not merely derivative or applied northern methodology but generative. It expands the interpretive possibilities of the canonical archive itself. A student in Riyadh reading *Hunters in the Snow* as a climate record, and composing a climate-memory poem about a Saudi landscape in transition, is not performing a lesser version of northern ecocriticism: she is doing something northern ecocriticism cannot do, and the field is richer for it.

The humanities, with their distinctive competencies in close reading, affective engagement, and cultural memory, are not a luxury supplement to climate science and policy. They are the disciplines through which the imaginative resources that sustain long-term climate action are cultivated. In an era when the climate crisis demands not only scientific solutions but new habits of perception, feeling, and ethical imagination, the eco-ekphrastic classroom offers a space where art history and climate literacy genuinely converge, and where paintings made centuries ago still have something urgent and irreplaceable to say about suffering, indifference, and the imperative to look again.

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