

WITNESS

Piecing Together a Changing Planet was created by Studio Art Quilt Associates members in Florida, but the show has spent the past two years traveling to national parks and park partners from coast to coast.

The journey began at Biscayne National Park, where rising seas and ocean acidification threaten the reasons for which the park was established. It traveled to Glacier National Park in Montana, a place whose namesake glaciers are disappearing at a rapid rate. It visited Statue of Liberty National Monument, a park that is still recovering from the impacts of “Superstorm Sandy,” the remnants of a 2012 hurricane widely believed by scientists to have been made worse by a changing climate.

In November, 2016, the show opened at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Just days after the show opened, a wildfire that began in Great Smoky Mountains National Park swept through, destroying parts of the city and contributing to the deaths of 14 people. Although the cause of the fire is believed to be arson, the ravaging effects were exacerbated by extended drought in the area.

While the people of Gatlinburg watched lives and dreams go up in smoke, staff at Arrowmont were also concerned about their campus. “I was here that night and I really didn’t know if the school was going to be here Tuesday morning,” said Executive Director Bill May.

Three buildings (two dormitories and a maintenance building) were destroyed by the fire, but most of the Arrowmont campus survived. May says they’re grateful no one lost their lives and that the artwork in their collection and on loan in the galleries was not damaged.

“We have a permanent collection of more than 1000 objects and they’re simply irreplaceable. And our wood collection — a renowned wood collection — there wouldn’t be any way to replace that, either. So the fact that they survived is part of history,” he said.

Surviving the Gatlinburg fire has changed *Piecing Together a Changing Planet* ever so slightly, adding to its history as a witness to the very subject it seeks to teach about.