

Designing Water's Future Video Transcript

Ric Grefe, Brian Collins, J. Carl Ganter

Shot, edited, and transcribed by Aaron Jaffe for Circle of Blue

[J. Carl Ganter:] I'm J. Carl Ganter director and co-founder of Circle of Blue, where we're using world-leading journalists and scientists to cover the global freshwater crisis. Collectively we know the science and the journalism, but the big questions that every news organization is asking today, is how do you break through the clutter?

To answer that question Brian Collins and I asked participants at the World Economic Forum in Davos. We set out to shape new communications thinking in a session called, "Designing Water's Future." What came out of that session is an international initiative that engages the talents of design students around the world to redefine how we communicate and respond to water.

[Ric Grefe:] I'm Ric Grefe; I'm the executive director of AIGA, the professional association for design, which is the largest membership association of professional designers in the United States, and in the world.

[Brian Collins:] My name is Brian Collins. I'm the chairman of a design innovation company based in New York City.

[Ric Grefe:] The value of design is that creativity offers an opportunity to defeat habit, and in fact habit is what has gotten us into many of these problems because we aren't creating solutions that go beyond what we already know.

[Brian Collins:] Design means so many things, but the definition that I and my team like to use is that design is hope made visible. I like that because it means that the ambition has a tangible outcome.

[Ric Grefe:] Designers by looking at global problems can address them not only not only because they can improve understanding of what the problem is, but also they can craft solutions that are simple and that are actionable, that are not the mega-solutions of the past, but rather the human-centered solutions of the future.

[Brian Collins:] What designing Water's Future is, is what we think is an unprecedented design initiative for design students, colleges, and universities around the world to come together to solve an emerging global problem around water.

[Ric Grefe:] We're challenging the next generation to help us solve this problem of inadequate attention to what is clearly a major problem in the case of understanding freshwater and the needs for freshwater, the need for access to freshwater, the needs to preserve it, the needs make better use of this scarce resource.

[Brian Collins:] What I want those students to do is to create such amazing images and amazing communications that it travels, that people see water in a whole new light.

[Ric Grefe:] Designing Water's Future is fascinating because we believe that design is all about collaboration and this is a perfect model of it. Circle of Blue had defined the problem and defined the storytelling element of it; how do we make people aware of the human aspect of the challenge over freshwater.

Then two other organizations came to bear on this. One is AIGA, the professional association for design, which is able to help engage the design community and also certainly has deep roots into the US design economy. And then, AIGA partnered with INDEX, which is the international design exhibition out of Copenhagen, which has the largest prize for design that improves the quality of life, and has regularly looked into ways to solve global, but human problems.

[Brian Collins:] And then my company called Collins: which is an innovation design company in New York, and we call came together because we realized that design thinking can address a problem that Circle of Blue has been trying to put on the front pages of the news and get on the frontline of global consciences.

[Ric Grefe:] So the four of us are working together in order find a way to raise awareness of this challenge of freshwater around the world.

[Brian Collins:] My greatest hope for Designing Water's Future is to show how involved engaged young designers and design students can have a dramatic effect on the way the world understands this problem. We need new stories and new metaphors to understand this and I can't think of anybody better than designers to attack this.

[Ric Grefe:] I hope that the outcome for Designing Water's Future will be that there is such clarity in terms how people around the world understand that this is not only a significant problem, it is also an urgent problem and finally it is a problem that can be solved not by others, but only by themselves, so the awareness itself will be the measure of whether we've been successful.