



The Art of Saving the Planet
Alejandro Martinez
Spain

Alejandro Martinez is fighting to preserve his country's natural beauty. "It's really about having an appreciation for beauty," he says. Alejandro is one of the founders of Juventud x Clima, Spain's branch of the Fridays for Future movement. "What we've been doing with Fridays for Future is not so much fighting *against* something, but rather fighting to protect what we love."

It's no wonder that Spain is the country that produced Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, and Antoni Gaudí. The vibrant palettes that make their work so stunning were inspired from the country's diverse natural landscapes: from the dense, green forests of the north to the red-soiled fields of olive trees in the south, the white-topped mountain ranges of the southern Pyrenees all the way down to the blue ocean vistas along the Mediterranean coast.

But over the next 20 years, this beauty — these colors — might fade away, due to climate change. Scientists have estimated that two-thirds of Spain could be covered by deserts by 2050. In terms of climate, Madrid would more closely resemble Marrakech than Paris. Much of the middle of the country would be unrecognizable: a flat canvas of yellow.

In Spain, saving the climate is also about saving art and beauty, and the country's colorful history. Through their movement, Alejandro and other young people in Spain are trying to ensure that future generations will be able to appreciate that beauty for centuries to come.

For Alejandro it's important to frame the fight this way — fighting *for* something positive, instead of *against* something negative. Throughout his life, he's had to do this. Ever since he was a kid, he's seen things in a bit of a different light from the rest of his family, and from the rest of his *compañeros*, at school and elsewhere.

Alejandro's first big fight wasn't for the climate; actually, it was a fight to convince his parents to allow him to study art in Madrid.

Growing up, he had a creative mind. He loved science — whenever he had the chance to do a class presentation, he would try to make it about the climate, or biodiversity — but he also loved art. When he saw a documentary about Pixar, the California-based production house that brought together amazing technology and wildly creative artists, he knew immediately that he wanted to become an animator.

But when he told his parents, they quickly shut him down. They didn't see a career for him in the arts. They wanted him to prepare for a career that had more stable job prospects; and eventually they won that first battle. At the end of high school, Alejandro enrolled in law school. The first year of school was the most difficult of his life. He felt crushed by the studies, like his life was being lived in two dimensions instead of three.

"Of all the curiosity I feel for so many things, the law just isn't one of them," he says. "I was killing myself, going to class every day to study something I didn't love."

In his second year of law school, he decided to confront his parents. He told them that even if they didn't want to pay for his studies, he was going to find a way to go to school for fine arts.

Happily, when they realized how serious and passionate he was about his desire to study art, they let him pursue his dreams.

He didn't let the opportunity slip by.

Alejandro enrolled at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid's School of Fine Arts. Here, his art and his activism began to come together.

Climate change had always been important to Alejandro, and he strove to set an example for his family. As a kid, it was Alejandro, not his parents, who educated the rest of the family about how to be more environmentally responsible. From the simple things — like recycling — to the more challenging ones — like eating less red meat — Alejandro instilled in them a greater environmental consciousness.

In art school, in a more multicultural and youthful setting, he joined the Spanish Fridays for Future movement, spearheaded by Greta Thunberg, and worked his way up to the role of the movement's spokesperson. He learned not just from people like Greta but also from environmental and human rights defenders like Berta Caceres, an indigenous activist who had founded the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, and who was killed in 2016, for protecting the land.

He learned how to recite statistics about climate change off the top of his head, and he learned about the different degrees of global warming and what they could mean for humanity. As one of the older leaders of the group, Alejandro has been an important voice. At 25, he's already a veteran climate activist veteran.

Juventud x Clima now has 60 members, and what they've accomplished is already quite impressive. In March 2019, they stormed the European Parliament in Brussels and called on leaders to set more ambitious climate goals. They succeeded at bringing Greta Thunberg to Madrid for a rally during the COP 25 climate conference. They've made their plea to the political left and right alike. In the next 10 years, they hope to push the Spanish government to set goals to reduce country-wide greenhouse gas emissions; their goal is 55 percent by 2030, and 100 percent by 2050.

Even this might not be enough to stave off a two-degree warming scenario that could set off a number of tipping points, if natural processes create a positive feedback loop of warming that can't be stopped. In Spain, the effects of global warming have already begun to be felt in full force, Alejandro says. "The summers last for a month longer than they used to. The winters are warmer than before," he says. "Right now, as we speak, it's winter and it feels like spring."

But he still has hope — and for months he saw that hope expressed by young people across Spain every Friday in the streets of not only Madrid, but other cities, too: Valencia, Barcelona, Bilbao. He heard it in their chants to the tune of the song *Bella Ciao*, a revolutionary Italian anti-fascist hymn that was repurposed for the climate movement:

We need to rise up

We need to wise up

We need to open our eyes and do it now, now, now.

We need to build a better future.

And we need to start right now!

Giovanna Daffini

Even as he prepares to enter graduate school for animation, Alejandro has continued to work tirelessly for Juventud x Clima. For the past year, he has been putting together a personal art project that takes viewers inside the Fridays for Future movement.

Each month he makes a short video showing climate activists mobilizing, around the world. They gather in conference rooms and outside of government buildings. They take to the streets and ride together in buses. They go to museums,

and also do the things that normal kids do: goof around and play games, be silly. Often the videos are sped up to a hyper-lapse speed. It's an apt image in a world of accelerating warming.

Alejandro calls this project "Document Your Life," and he has been sharing it on YouTube, to serve as a resource for future generations of young people to be inspired by.

"Document Your Life" is about creating momentum, but it's also about slowing things down and learning how to appreciate the moments of youth that can lead to great change. This is how Alejandro feels when he's making art. He feels like he's able to capture a powerful moment in time — a feeling, a rush of motion — just like Picasso and other great Spanish artists have done before him.

"When I decide to sit down to draw or to paint, it's because I don't want to forget things — I don't want to lose these precious moments that will last forever," he says.

The role of the artist is that of the soldier of the revolution.

Diego Rivera

Call to Action: Join Alejandro in calling for Climate Action Now! Follow #FridaysForFuture Espana on Twitter <https://twitter.com/JuventudXClima?s=20> and bring #FridaysForFuture to your community: <https://fridaysforfuture.org/>

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