

Landscapes of Loss

The Exhibition for the UN Conference on Climate Change, COP23 at The Ministry of Environment, Berlin

Artists: Andreas Blank, Stefano Cagol, Miru Kim, Nezaket Ekici & Shahar Marcus, Janet Laurence, Reifenberg, Stefan Rinck, Erwin Wurm, Shingo Yoshida

Curators: Constanze Kleiner & Rachel Rits-Volloch

Duration: 3. – 5. November 2017 | 4-8 pm

Address: Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit, Stresemannstraße 128-130, 10117 Berlin (Admission is free)

The video works from this exhibition will also be shown in Bonn at COP23
6 – 17 November 2017

Exhibition Concept

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), adopted 25 years ago, this year holds the 23rd World Climate Conference in Germany under the presidency of the Fiji Islands. Diplomats, politicians and representatives of civil society from all over the world meet in Bonn on 6-17 November 2017 to reach the target set by the Paris Climate Change Agreement at COP21 in 2015: to limit global warming to below two degrees Celsius and to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system. The World Climate Conference in Bonn will be the largest intergovernmental conference ever held in Germany. Up to 25,000 participants from 197 nations around the world, as well as around 500 non-governmental organizations and more than 1,000 journalists are expected. In this context, we are proud to present *Landscapes of Loss* in Berlin and Bonn for the 23rd World Climate Conference.

While the world's experts meet in Bonn to agree on the necessary steps for nations to take to mitigate the human impact on the environment and prevent further catastrophic climate change, it is not only at the governmental level that practices must change. The damage already done to our environment will be healed through a transformation of the attitudes, expectations, and actions of every one of us. This is a slow process. Decisions implemented now will take years to show results. Yet, in this age of instant gratification - when all of us want things and we want them now; when the flow of information is instantaneous and the satisfaction of most of our urges seems only a click away; and when politicians are kept in office on the basis of promises quickly fulfilled – we need to re-learn how to think in the long-term.

With storms, droughts and fires raging around the world; with growing deserts meeting rising seas; with wars over natural resources engendering migrations; with mass displacements of people and mass extinctions of species, we are now already bearing witness to the sickness that ails our planet. Yet while Hollywood capitalizes on such disasters as entertainment, fueling our fear only to provide scenarios of instantaneous salvation, in reality there are no superheroes to miraculously save the day. We have to save our own planet, and it is going to take time. If governments continue to function on the basis of short-term promises, there is little hope of healing our damaged planet. To effect the kind of change that the COP conferences hope to achieve, we need to radically reform this age of immediacy; to change our thinking from what we can get in the here and now, to what we can do now in order to preserve the planet for the future.

Landscapes of Loss, the exhibition for COP23 at Berlin's Ministry of Environment, asks us to stop and take the time to think in the long-term. This exhibition of contemporary art brings together ten international artists with strong links to Berlin, who, each in their own way, address mankind's role in relation to the environment. Through video, photography, and sculpture, this exhibition is designed as an antidote to the hyper-immediacy of the lives we live. *Landscapes of Loss* invites us to disengage from our phones and iPads, to switch off the data stream, to stop tweeting and messaging, to opt out of the constant barrage of the now and immerse ourselves in our planet - from the Arctic tundra of Siberia, to the deserts of the Middle East, and the jungles and seas of the Antipodes – while we still can. As the world's climate change experts convene in Bonn in mid-November for COP23, *Landscapes of Loss* creates a space of contemplation and time for reflection upon the role we all play in ensuring that the decisions taken this year will in the long-term halt the disastrous deterioration of our planet's climate.

Of the ten artists in this exhibition, renowned Australian artist Janet Laurence is most known for her work with the environment, often undertaken together with scientists engaged in international conservation initiatives. Laurence's practice is a direct response to contemporary ecological catastrophes, positioning art within the essential dialogue of environmental politics to create and communicate an understanding of the impact that humans have upon the threatened natural world, in order to restore our vital relationships with it. Works from two series are shown here: Reflecting on the loneliness of the last of a species, *The Other Side of Nature / Panda* (2014), and *Dingo* (2013), shot in nature reserves in China and Australia, chronicle in intimate proximity the lives of animals that could soon be the last of their kind. Janet Laurence's video *Deep Breathing – Resuscitation for the Reef* (2015), and accompanying photo series *Corral Collapse Homeopathy* (2015) was created for COP21 in Paris. Shot in Australia's Great Barrier Reef - a World Heritage site which is the planet's largest living, and rapidly dying, structure - this series of works envisions a hospital for the Reef's threatened corals and other marine species, making visible the otherwise invisible devastation beneath the surface of the sea, and offering hope for the healing of the marine world from the consequences of global warming and human impact. If we can care for marine life in the same way that we care for our own species, there is a chance of deflecting environmental

catastrophe. Laurence's work is an emergency response: a hospital for the Reef in this time of ecological crisis, intended to aid survival and effect transformation.

From the ephemeral landscape and its vanishing creatures, we turn to the solid permanence of stone. German artists Andreas Blank and Stefan Rinck are sculptors both working exclusively with stone. Each is conscious of his chosen medium as a material reflecting the very substance of time; in its strata are recorded the ages of the planet. While in *Untitled* (2010) Andreas Blank fashions out of quartz a perfect replica of a plastic bag, Stefan Rinck creates creatures reminiscent of a bygone age of totems and effigies in the series of five sculptures: *Die Streichwürstin* (2017), *Chiaroscuro* (2014), *Gibbons don't have good press* (2014), *Roo* (2013), and *Unicorn* (2009). While Andreas Blank turns his art to sculpting the detritus of our planet, recreating in timeless stone the all too temporary objects of the day-to-day, Stefan Rinck builds an alternative mythology, pitting man-made time against the timelessness of imagination, populating his world with eternal creatures of stone able to withstand any extinction.

Berlin-based Israeli artist Reifenberg also addresses the detritus polluting our environment, working throughout his practice with plastic bags recycled into the medium of his art. In *Oil Spill 12.10* (2010) he fashions a lightbox recreating the satellite image of an oil spill; ironically using the petroleum-based material of the ubiquitous plastic bag to depict one of the many man-made catastrophes to devastate our planet.

Italian artist Stefano Cagol and Japanese artist Shingo Yoshida each ventured on a long journey into the Arctic to record mankind's impact upon nature at its most extreme. In the Norwegian Arctic Circle, Stefano Cagol's video *Evoke Provoke [The Border]* (2011) documents his solitary attempts at communication in the vast emptiness with a succession of lights and flares. The irony here is not lost; while one man cannot make a visible impact upon this frozen landscape, the impact of mankind as a whole is all too devastating. Shingo Yoshida's journey in his film *The End of Day and Beginning of the World* (2015) took him to Siberia, to the point where the Arctic Circle crosses the 180th Meridian, the basis for the International Date Line separating two consecutive calendar days. Inspired by local Chukchi folklore and customs, this film is a journey into a place where nature rules, and mankind clings to the traditions of their ancestors in order to survive. Straddling the border between two days, it is a place of strong mythologies and magical landscapes; an environment of extremes which defies man-made borders and mankind's influence, yet is still perilously close to destruction from climate change.

Turkish/German artist Nezaket Ekici and Israeli artist Shahar Marcus together address geopolitical and environmental forces through the medium of performance in their video *Sandclock* (2012). Shot in the burning sands of Israel's Negev Desert, their performance ironically confronts human endurance with the extremes of nature and culture. In this actual and political hotbed, time is running out, and Muslim and Jew alike are turned into human sand-clocks measuring how quickly we are getting nowhere with solutions for political and environmental stability.

Likewise, Korean/American artist Miru Kim engages with the desert in her *Camel's Way* series (2012). The female nude, an archetype since the dawn of western art history, is here transposed to the sands and mountains in a 3-week journey through Jordan's Wadi Rum Desert. In positioning the fragility of her own body within the drama of this natural landscape, Miru Kim succeeds in highlighting the fragility of the landscape itself.

Celebrated Austrian artist Erwin Wurm brings us out of the jungles and seas, the Arctic wastes, and the scorching deserts, back into the city. Our urban landscape is an environment changing as rapidly as our natural one. The way people have lived upon this planet for millennia in family groups and villages is well on its way to being replaced by the megacity, with millions living and working packed into faceless high-rises. Erwin Wurm's photo series of one-minute sculptures, *Leopoldstadt* (2004), confronts through absurdity our place in the urban landscape. The solitary figures posing incongruously in empty streets could be seen as a sign of urban alienation, but the humor inherent to these scenarios gives us hope that humanity will find a way to fit into our landscape, however fragile the balance.