

STREET LEVEL PHOTOWORKS

CODE RED

PETER KENNARD

30TH OCTOBER - 19TH DECEMBER 2021

CODE RED is a print installation by artist **Peter Kennard** for Street Level Photoworks, presented at Gallery 103 to coincide with the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow.

In August this year the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released their report. Their findings, prepared by 234 scientists from 66 countries, warn that human activity has warmed the climate to a point that is unparalleled by anything in the last 2,000 years and that by 2019 atmospheric CO2 concentrations were higher than at anytime in at least two million years. The United Nations Secretary – General Antonio Guterres said the IPCC report was the ‘code red for humanity, the alarm bells are deafening and the evidence is irrefutable’.

Through the use of photomontage the artist turns his outrage into images. Throughout Code Red Kennard re-appropriates the beautiful photo of the whole earth taken by the Apollo astronauts in 1972, which Kennard cuts and tears, combining it with images of industrial chimneys, oil refineries exploding, polluted dust, gas masks, parched earth and floods. His image of the earth surrounded by a clock symbolises climate/nuclear destruction, whilst in another image planet earth is transformed into a seed sprouting a tree. Kennard’s work makes visible the increasing destruction of the natural world, revealing the destruction not as inevitable but the direct result of human activity. The resulting montages can then be used a visual arm of the struggle for climate justice.

The exhibition is also showing off-site at Out of the Blue Drill Hall, Edinburgh from the 6th - 26th November 2021, presented by Street Level Photoworks in partnership with Peace & Justice (Scotland) as part of the Peace Cranes project.

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The empty words issuing from the mouths of government leaders worldwide on the climate crisis is backed up and supported by corporate profit for the good of share prices rather than human beings. The military-industrial complex is eating up the earth, spitting out the poorest people and waging war on them. The countries from which refugees flock have often been destroyed by the rapacious policies and weaponry of the very same countries that are refusing them entry.

Through photomontage I'm trying to turn my anger into image. In Code Red a recurring image I use and abuse is the beautiful photo of the whole earth taken by the Apollo astronauts in 1972. I cut it up, tear it, pummel it, add industrial chimneys, oil refineries exploding, polluted dust, gas masks, parched earth and floods. But I also show a montage of the earth surrounded by a clock, symbolising climate/nuclear destruction, its hands being pulled back from midnight by climate protesters. There is also an image of planet earth transformed into a seed sprouting a tree. Photos can become entwined through photomontage so that the increasing destruction of the natural world can be envisaged and shown as man-made rather than inexorable, becoming a visual arm of a struggle for climate justice.

In a photomontage two clicks of the camera shutter can be brought together to reveal a third meaning. What is shown in Code Red is that oil is still flowing freely out of the ground, the chimneys are still belching and that luxury yachts are growing longer by the day. E.M Forster's dictum 'only connect' applies equally to making montages on climate and military catastrophe. They are both existentially and physically deeply connected. The U.S military is the largest single consumer of petroleum in the world.

We're living in a time of acute emergency. We're tottering through the rubble of the rampant free market. It's a time in which images can open up a critical space that can jolt assumptions and break through denial. The poet Shelley wrote that 'we must imagine what we know'. By picturing the result of extracting wealth out of the ground by every means possible I'm trying to picture what we know will happen if we don't stop this plunder.

Peter Kennard