

EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”
[Native American Proverb]

In a billboard work during COP26 in Glasgow recently, **Project Pressure** debunked an axiom we learn as children that bears hibernate in winter, by displaying the statement BEARS STAY AWAKE IN WINTER NOW to alert us to the cause of climate change due to warmer winters. Is climate change escalating? Do bears shit in the woods!

The exhibition ‘Forever Changes’ brings together a selection of Nordic artists whose work comes face to face with the environment, climate change and ecology. The various photographic tableaux differ in approach and at times intersect – reflections upon nature, from the poetic and conceptual, documentary storytelling to the making of art from a more activist practice that aims to transform our attitudes and habits.

Klaus Thymann founded Project Pressure in 2008 as a way of visualizing climate change and using art as a positive touch point to invoke change. In the exhibition he presents a series of 8 works which capture landscape vistas in various continents emphasizing the global reach of glacial recession. The bear billboard work by Project Pressure also marked the launch of a public petition to classify greenhouse gases as pollutants which were seen in the city during that time.

Glacial mass are in effect barometers of climate change, and this is explored separately in the works of both **Christian Houge** and **Lasse Lecklin**. Both refer to the current [post] post-geological era that we have entered, that of the Anthropocene which suggests that human influence on the Earth has been so impactful that the change is irreversible, “a point of no return” says Lecklin. In *Death of a Mountain* Houge creates a homage to the Rhone glacier in Switzerland, covered in white fabric which aims to halt glacial melting, an act which Houge sees as a metaphor for Man’s feeble attempt to stop the inevitable. Lecklin’s work *Crossings* refers directly to that epoch shift through aerial shots from Europe’s largest glacier, Vatnajökull in Iceland. At a distance the imagery resembles abstract painting, but on closer inspection it’s a photographic chronicle of a journey of melting solidity, where icebergs “leave the glacier and flow down to cross and meet the ocean, becoming water once more. The great white is gradually turning black.” All that is solid melts into... water.

Christian Houge asks “Is nature with us or against us?” and “Are we with or against nature” which highlights the juxtaposition between utopia and dystopia in humanity’s drive to progress – a double edged sword, as he puts it. Human exploitation of the planet is the embedded subject matter in the landscapes of **Helene Schmitz**, a sample from the larger series *Thinking Like a Mountain*. In this work, the artist speculates on the relationship between ownership and exploitation of natural resources in the Nordic countries, and by extension through globalisation, contemporary technologies, nation states and multinational corporations, that colonial power never subsided, just changed its clothes. Using a large format camera, the imagery captures in great detail the highly industrialised transformation of landscapes populated with manmade mountains, new lakes, and geothermal power plants.

In *Nothing to write home about* **Hallgerður Hallgrímsdóttir** has collected multiple postcards of volcanic eruptions taken by other photographers. It speculates on how we humans perceive natural disasters, which of course we are having more of, though now mostly man-made. She remarks, “perhaps, in our dystopian future, we will be forced to view all kinds of disasters with the same almost casual (yet a little bit excited) attitude Icelanders seem to have towards volcanic eruptions.” There is a quirky nod to the Apocalyptic Sublime here.

In *Silent Spring* **Katrín Elvarsdóttir** turns our attention to the fragility of the planet’s ecology, such as animals which are threatened with extinction, acidification in the ocean and “the impact of climate change on the future of our children”. The large scale negative of a polar bear in Berlin zoo alongside photographic specimens of details of the bear, evoke a future nostalgia when these animals may no longer be here. It is aptly titled *Memories of a Polar Bear*. Images of two oceans which are 17,000 km’s apart are displayed on the opposite sides of a freestanding wall – bringing distance closer, and difference similar. Elsewhere is equally here.

Stills from the location shooting over a 4 year period of **Mike Day’s** film *The Islands and the Whales* portray a story of Faroe Islanders who believe whale hunting is vital to their way of life and to their food supply, but contained within that meat are high levels of mercury which is slowly poisoning adults and children alike. Mercury is emitted into the atmosphere and our oceans by coal burning power plants and other industrial facilities. The project presents an unbiased account of the issues facing these communities across 17 islands of the archipelago. Tradition and lifestyle, or health and the future? This is a microcosm of what is happening across the globe and illustrates the extent to which our ecosystem is at peril. Climate change knows no boundaries, in sea, land or air.

Bjarni Mohr’s *Solitude Survival* presents another portrayal of the Faroe Islands, this time in temporary suspension due to restrictions arising from COVID-19. Being islands, the food supply chain was seriously affected with no farming or food production locally. Whilst it has been noted that there was a drop in pollution levels due to the pandemic in 2020, this has rebounded dramatically with carbon emissions rising across the world’s 20 richest nations. More alarmingly, scientists are expressing concern that with the gradual melting of Permafrost, which covers large regions of the Earth, new viruses, aeons old, could be released which animal species of our era don’t have immunity against, including humans.

This isn’t science fiction. There is no planet B. Our leaders, the multinationals, and the military corporate machine can’t buy or lie their way out of it, try as they will. Integrating environmental awareness, responsibility, and activism into our professional and personal lives will help amplify the message across non-cultural sectors. Art and photography have the power to educate, inform, and heighten shifts in consciousness to inspire action on climate change which all of the artists embrace in inspiring and compelling ways.

Malcolm Dickson

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1. © Christian Houge
2. © Klaus Thymann
3. © Lasse Lecklin
4. © Katrín Elvarsdóttir
5. © Mike Day
6. © Bjarni Mohr
7. © Hallgerður Hallgrímsdóttir
Front cover: © Klaus Thymann
Back cover: © Helene Schmitz



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