

SABINE FLACH

## Paradise Lost. Art and the Anthropocene

Debates on the Anthropocene have also been a subject in art and cultural sciences, and the arts themselves, since the publication of Bruno Latour's book "We Have Never Been Modern" (first published: 1991) at the very latest. It can fundamentally be stated that, in the – occasionally disparate – debates on the relationship between art, ecology and the Anthropocene, there is general agreement that an understanding of climate change must be accompanied by an "ecological order of things" in which ecology is less – or no longer – perceived as a metaphorical concept but moved into the field of the materials, whether in dealing with the objects themselves or in material practice.

However, on the one hand, the determination of the relationship between art and nature and, on the other, the significance of the spatial concepts attached to this relationship that, in the meantime, have become decisive for interpreting the atmosphere of the Anthropocene and, in doing so, understanding the reality of the art, remain unexplained.

This state of affairs will be introduced in the lecture and discussed based on examples from the area of photography and art.

SABINE FLACH

Professor for Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of Graz and head of the Department of Art History; professor for contemporary art and art theory, permanent member of the faculty of the School of Visual Arts, Department of Fine Arts, New York City. She specializes in epistemology and methodology of contemporary art, aesthetics, aisthesis and media of embodiment, habitus in habitat, epistemology and aesthetics of the visual thinking art, intersections between art, art theory, art history and cognitive, neuro-, life sciences and perceptual psychology. Her publications include: *Frank Gillette Axis of Observation*, together with Suzanne Anker (Bern, Berlin, New York 2018), *Die WissensKünste der Avantgarden. Künstlerische Theorie und Praxis zwischen Wahrnehmungswissenschaft, Kunst und Medien 1915 – 1930* (Bielefeld 2016), *Naturally Hypernatural III: Hypernatural Landscapes in the Anthropocene*, ed. together with Gary Sherman (Bern, Berlin, New York 2016), *Naturally Hypernatural I: Concepts of Nature*, ed. Together with Suzanne Anker (Bern, Berlin, New York 2016).

SYMPOSIUM

# Poisoned Pictures – Photography & Ecology

From the moment the medium of photography itself was first invented, the photographic representation of nature has played a crucial role in our perception and reception of nature. In the natural sciences, photographs serve in many different ways as instruments of scientific understanding and visual documentation, for instance in the exploration of nature and expeditions to remote landscapes in distant climes. Nature and landscape are an ever popular photographic theme that seems inexhaustible in terms of both its aesthetic and its content. Nowadays photography also plays a pivotal role in showcasing the way our environment is being destroyed. Environmental photography is still a relatively young genre, but as a form of political art it seeks to highlight the catastrophic impact of our extreme capitalist consumerism, to catch the public's attention, and to influence our environmental behaviour.

With its series of scientific lectures by international experts, the Symposium *Poisoned Pictures – Photography & Ecology* explores the role of photography in our perception of nature from a wide range of perspectives and examines the opportunities it offers and its strategies for contributing to a new environmental awareness.

Friday, April 5, 2019, 2 pm to 5 pm

Venue: FOTO WIEN festival centre c/o Österreichische Postsparkasse, Georg-Coch-Platz 2, 1010 Vienna

SPEAKERS:

Prof. Liz Wells, Professor in Photographic Culture, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Plymouth

Dr. Inga Remmers, Art Historian and Specialist in German Studies

Aura Seikkula, Doctoral Candidate in Philosophy and Cultural Policy, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Prof. Dr. Christoph Schaden, Professor in Visual Culture Studies at the Design Faculty of the Nuremberg Institute of Technology Georg Simon Ohm

Univ.-Prof. Dr. phil. Sabine Flach, Head of Department at the Institute of Art History, University of Graz

Concept:

Verena Kaspar-Eisert (KUNST HAUS WIEN) and Uwe Schögl (European Society for the History of Photography, ESHPh)

A cooperation of KUNST HAUS WIEN and the European Society for the History of Photography (ESHPh) in the context of FOTO WIEN.

LIZ WELLS

## Critical Environments: Photography, Investigation and Mediation

Human action impacts the land. Consequences of our behaviour in the era of the Anthropocene are now widely acknowledged. Yet political action remains urgent if we are to mitigate risks including the effects of extreme climate change and the hazards of toxic pollution.

As visual storytellers, photographers draw attention to ecological issues. Photography evidences circumstances and acts as an advocate for change. In this talk, Liz Wells will reflect on photographic methods of investigation and representational strategies related to contemporary environmental awareness.

References will include work by Salamuddin Ahmed (Ban), Mandy Barker (UK), Edward Burtynsky (Ca), John Ganis (USA), Chrystel Lebas UK/Fr), Tyrone Martinsson (Swe), Kate Mellor (UK), Andreas Müller-Pohle (Ge), Anne Noble (NZ), Richard Misrach (USA), Yan Preston (UK/Ch), Jem Southam (UK), Munem Wasif (Ban).

LIZ WELLS

Professor in Photographic Culture, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Plymouth University, UK and elected member of the Board of Directors, Society for Photographic Education (2011-2018). She has curated a number of exhibitions relating to land, landscape and environment. She writes and lectures on photographic practices; co-editor for photographs, Routledge journals. Publications on landscape include *Land Matters, Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (2011); series editor for *Photography, Place, Environment*, Bloomsbury Academic Publishing; editor of *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (2015, 5<sup>th</sup> ed.) and *The Photography Reader* (2003; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. in two volumes, forthcoming 2019).

INGA REMMERS

## Adventurers, explorers, tourists. The polar regions in the focus of photography

The discovery and exploration of the polar regions in the 19th century coincided with the invention of photography, which from then on was used for visual documentation. A fundamental change took place in the perception and presentation of the polar landscape, which is illustrated by the early polar photographs of Herbert G. Ponting and the contemporary photographs of Olaf Otto Becker. The staging of heroic adventure and discovery is contrasted with the demonstration of anthropogenic changes in nature. In Becker's book "Above Zero" (2009), the photographs are evidence of destruction. As shown by example, the photo book – through the sequence of images and accompanying text – becomes a medium of artistic-political expression.

INGA REMMERS

studied Art History, German Language and Literature at the universities of Trier, Leipzig and Florence. In her PhD thesis "Politische Landschaften der Natur. Fotografie des Anthropozäns" (Kromsdorf/Weimar: Jonas Verlag, 2018) she investigated the representation of environmental themes in historical and contemporary photography.

AURA SEIKKULA

## Interventions in the Course of the World

We are bearing witness to climate change. It is defining our imminent future. As in the words of French hermeneutic Paul Ricoeur, 'Initiative is an intervention of the agent of action in the course of the world'. Aura Seikkula will discuss the potential of the photographic intervention but also look into the ecological and social responsibility as well as ethical implications of the medium. Ecology in Photography should be thus defined through a threefold conceptualization: i) expressing concern in a visual form; ii) taking responsibility in production and dissemination; iii) reaching to ethical implication on a global level.

AURA SEIKKULA

Curator and researcher; currently working as an advisor at the Arts Promotion Centre Finland in the Development Program for Artistic Expertise and Mediation. Using epistemological analysis as her tool, her recent PhD research in philosophy discusses the potential of Intellectual Sustainability. She has worked in curatorial and advisory positions and curated exhibitions and events in 20 countries, and on six continents. Most recent positions include the Kulturhuset Stadsteatern and Artipelag Konsthall, Stockholm as well as Künstlerhaus Bethaninen, Berlin and the Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki. She is the co-founder of the Curatorial Program for Research and SKY Curators Union Finland and contributes to various international art publications.

CHRISTOPH SCHADEN

## Toxic readings

Comments on the Conception and Visual Aesthetics of the Photobook "Poisoned Landscape" by Wout Berger

The Amsterdam publishing house Fragment Uitgeverij released Wout Berger's photobook "Giflandschap / Poisoned Landscape" in the year 1992. In the form of an extensive visual investigation, the slender brochure documents the contaminated soil in landscape areas of the Netherlands in a manner that is both revolutionary and innovative. Today, this "sensational publication" (Frits Gierstberg) is rightly considered a milestone in the history of the photobook.

Within the framework of a case study, the presentation focuses on the visual-aesthetic and conceptual premises of the photobook. Calculatedly, Berger's large-scale colour photographs reference the traditional New Color Photography of the USA, as well as landscape paintings from the "Gouden Eeuw". Through the dialectical interrelationships between the image and text, seeing and reading, perception and knowledge, the analysis opens up an ecological receptive perception. It reveals itself as being just as complex as it is relevant to the present day.

CHRISTOPH SCHADEN

Professor for Image Sciences at the Department for Design of the Nuremberg Tec / Technische Hochschule Georg Simon Ohm since 2010. Studies in Art History, Psychology and German Language and Literature in Bonn and Cologne, 2000 dissertation on a late medieval topic; living and working in Cologne and Nuremberg; numerous publications about photography and art; exhibitions include: *Der rote Bulli. Stephen Shore und die neue Düsseldorfer Fotografie*, NRW-Forum Düsseldorf (2010); *Ein Gramm Licht*, Museum Industriekultur Nuremberg (2014); *Bilderstrom. Der Rhein und die Fotografie 2016 - 1853*, LVR Museum Bonn (2016/17); *Bauhaus und die Fotografie*, NRW-Forum Düsseldorf (2019).