

## **EXTREME. ENVIRONMENTS** RAY 2018 Fotografieprojekte Frankfurt/RheinMain

**Mathieu Asselin, Krista Caballero & Frank Ekeberg, Lois Hechenblaikner,  
Paula Luttringer, Pradip Malde, Gideon Mendel, Ami Vitale**

### **MATHIEU ASSELIN (1973, FR)**

#### **VITA**

Mathieu Asselin began his career working on film productions in Caracas, Venezuela, but honed his documentary photography style in the United States. His work has been featured in *Foam*, *Liberation*, *Paris Match*, *Huck Magazine*, *The New Yorker Photo Booth*, and *GEO Freitag*, among others. His work has been exhibited at *Les Rencontre d'Arles* in France, as well as in other major cities such as New York City, Miami, Washington, D.C., and Caracas. In 2014, he was selected for *Plat(t)form* at Fotomuseum Winterthur and as an Artist in Residence with *Imagine Science Films*. He currently lives and works in New York City and Arles, France. Mathieu Asselin holds a Master's degree from ENSP – École Nationale Supérieure de la Photographie d'Arles in France. His book *Monsanto®: A Photographic Investigation* won the First Photo Book Award at Paris Photo in 2017. He has been a finalist for the *Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize* 2018.

#### **MONSANTO®: A PHOTOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION**

Monsanto's dozens of Superfund sites (large contaminated sites of high priority for the US Environmental Protection Agency) across the United States alone are affecting hundreds of communities and their environment with terrifying health and ecological consequences. Monsanto maintains strong ties with the US-government, and especially with the FDA (United States Food and Drugs Administration). It is a bed-fellow with many other economical and political power houses around the world. The company engages in campaigns of misinformation, the persecution of institutions and individuals, including scientists, farmers and activists that dare to disclose their crimes. Monsanto is spreading new technologies and products, while scientists, ecological institutions and human rights organization are putting out alerts for issues like public health, food safety and ecological sustainability—issues on which our future on this planet depends. This is all particularly troublesome since Monsanto is entering a new chapter of disregard for our planet through the creation and commercialization of GMOs, genetically modified organisms. Visiting its past and presents, this project aims to picture what Monsanto's near future will look like.

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### **FRANK EKEBERG (1970, NO)**

#### **VITA**

Frank Ekeberg is a transdisciplinary artist, music composer and researcher working in the intersection of art, science and technology. His work explores issues of ecology, time, space and change, with a particular focus on biodiversity and species extinction. His research-based approach often involves collaborations within as well as beyond the art field. Ekeberg creates work for concert performance, dance, film, theatre, radio plays and intermedia installations, and is widely presented in festivals, exhibitions, concerts and conferences around the world. He is currently Artist Research Fellow at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., USA.

### **KRISTA CABALLERO (1976, US)**

#### **VITA**

Krista Caballero is an interdisciplinary artist exploring issues of structure and agency, survival, and environmental change. In 2010 she created *Mapping Meaning*, an ongoing project that brings together artists, scientists and scholars to explore issues of ecological complexity through experimental workshops, exhibitions, and transdisciplinary research. Caballero received her MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts / Tufts University and was recently selected as a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow. Her work has been presented across the United States as well as internationally in exhibitions and festivals such as the *International Symposium on Electronic Art* in Dubai and New Mexico, *Paradoxes in Video* at Mohsen Gallery in Tehran, and the *Balance-Unbalance International Festival* in Australia. Caballero is currently the Interim Director of the Design Cultures & Creativity program at the University of Maryland in College Park.

### **BIRDING THE FUTURE**

#### **KRISTA CABALLERO & FRANK EKEBERG**

*Birding the Future* is an interdisciplinary art project that explores current extinction rates by specifically focusing on the warning abilities of birds. The installation invites visitors to listen to endangered and extinct bird calls and to view visionary avian landscapes through a set of stereoscopic cards and video. This ongoing project explores how declining bird populations signal profound changes over our entire planet. Four regional versions of the project have already been completed: 2013 in Queensland, Australia, 2014 in the Arabian Peninsula, 2016 in Norway and the Mid-Atlantic US, 2017 in Salt-Lake City. *Birding the Future* will inaugurate its Rhine Main, Germany Series at Ray 2018, highlighting regional specificities while simultaneously mapping global commonalities.

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Calls of extinct birds are combined with non-vocalization sounds of birds. Over the duration of the exhibition the bird sounds are computer manipulated in real-time to project the rate of extinction for the end of the century by decreasing the diversity and density of the sounds. A series of stereographs offer a loose narration through the soundscape. Similar to the function of technology in the soundscape, the stereoscope becomes the visual tool to see what is now extinct. Popular from the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, the stereoscope has been chosen as the viewing instrument for its potential to heighten perceptual awareness and provide a historical link to human impact on the environment. Textual and visual analysis including poetry, scientific data and composite photographs map and connect regional issues with a global perspective. Video footage from the Goller Lab at the University of Utah further explores the ethics and technological impact of research conducted in a more-than-human world.

### **LOIS HECHENBLAIKNER (1958, AT)**

#### **VITA**

Since the mid 1990's, Lois Hechenblaikner has dedicated himself to the subject of Tyrolean tourism and its traditional cultural entertainment, polarizing with a critical glance behind the backdrop of mass tourism and major events. As an artistic medium, he uses multiple photographs from small and large format cameras and creates works over the course of several years. His works have been exhibited in among others the Fotoforum West Innsbruck (1997), in the Leica Galleries in Solms and Tokio (2003), the Städtische Fotogalerie Montpellier (2005) and in the Alpinen Museum Bern (2012). His works have been published in numerous publications, among others *Winter Wonderland*, Steidl Verlag, Göttingen 2012, *off piste. an Alpine story*, Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2009, *Hinter den Bergen*, Steidl Verlag, Göttingen, 2015, *Volksmusik*, Steidl Verlag, Göttingen, 2018.

#### **THE PATHOLOGY OF GLACIERS, MOUNTAIN EXPLOITS, INTENSIVE CARE UNITS and other works**

Lois Hechenblaikner works within thematic chapters. His photographs of man-altered landscapes and behind-the-scenes events reveal the impact of winter tourism in his alpine homeland. With irony and shocking realities his work provides incomparable insight to how the industry deals with the imminent *The pathology of glaciers* and the continual fervour of providing *Alpine Entertainment*.

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### **PAULA LUTTRINGER (1955, AR)**

#### **VITA**

The work of Paula Luttringer is largely concerned with the history of her country and her life. She was a political prisoner in one of the more than 500 Secret Detention Centers (SDCs) in Argentina during the country's Dirty War 1976—1983. Luttringer received asylum in France. Through photography and testimony she is personally engaged in the lifelong process of re-creating a life after disappearance.

In 1999 she won the first prize at the PhotoEspaña in Madrid for the best portfolio for her project *El Matadero* (The Slaughterhouse). In the same year she was announced at the FotoFest in Houston, Texas as one of the Discoveries of the Meeting Place. She received a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in 2001 and in the following year, the National Art Fund of Argentina awarded her an artist's grant.

Her works are part of the collections of the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (MAMBA) and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the George Eastman House Photography Collection in Rochester, the Portland Art Museum in Oregon, the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, as well as part of numerous private collections. Paula Luttringer lives in Paris and Buenos Aires.

#### **ENTREVERO**

While I was photographing the tree trunks of Villa Epecuén\* for my series *Lignum Mortuum*, I shot many rolls of film.

One day I accidentally I put three rolls of exposed film into the pocket where I kept new film, and then the next day I used those rolls again. As soon as I developed the film, I realized what I had done. At first I was furious with myself, and I put that film aside.

Later I returned to the film, curious about those tangled images of dead trees. I made a contact sheet, and I saw different worlds superimposed on each other, haunted landscapes of broken trunks and unearthed roots layered texturally on each other as memory is layered. Now I think chaos or chance played a role in the creation of these photographs. The word for these images that comes to me in Spanish is *entrevero*, a word that has many meanings and no equivalent in English. It can mean confusion, disorder or a brawl. When *gauchos* are off work and drinking, if they begin to fight, their word for that is *entrevero*.

I see the double exposures layered on each other, twisted around each other and entwined as in an *entrevero*.

\* A resort area located on the salt-rich Laguna Epecuén, which became flooded through a broken neglected dam in 1985.

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### **PRADIP MALDE (1957, TZ)**

#### **VITA**

Pradip Malde is a photographer and professor at the *University of the South*, Sewanee, TN, where he is the co-director of the Haiti Institute. Much of his work considers the experience of loss and how it serves as a catalyst for regeneration. He is currently working in rural communities in Haiti, Tanzania and Tennessee, designing models for community development through photography. Works are held in the collections of *Museum of the Art Institute, Chicago; Princeton University Museum; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Yale University Museum* and the *Scottish National Portrait Gallery*, Edinburgh, among others. He has recently been appointed as a Faculty Fellow by the Appalachian College Association and a 2018 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellow.

Malde was born in Arusha, Tanzania in 1957. His parents were the children of Indians who emigrated to East Africa, and after having established a privileged life in Tanzania, fled from the turmoil that spread through that region in the 1970s. Concerned about loss and belonging since then, he has come to think of artefacts as membranes, where what may be explicit and immutable begins to lead us into the more mutable realms of meaning and memory.

#### **THE THIRD HEAVEN**

Haiti has a centuries-long history of abuse and coercion, inflicted both from within and external, foreign interests. The global community needs to pay attention to Haiti in order to understand, and protect itself from, the worst possible outcomes of cultural, political and environmental opportunism and neglect. All of these negative outcomes have played themselves out repeatedly in Haiti for over 200 years. The problem of Haiti matters to all of us.

Since 2006 I have revisited the nation at least twice every year since then. Each trip has left me more perplexed and alarmed by its history. Haiti and its people are in a state of long-term trauma. It is symptomized by fractured communities competing with each other for resources, by communities prone to flash-point responses when dealing with environmental, human and political stress. If Haiti were a person, this would be the person who is both pitied and reviled by the (global) village, this would be the person who becomes overly familiar with pain and suffering and now functions by attracting or self-inflicting more of the same. This person, scary and fascinating, has pathos. This person, at the core, has something authentic, essential and unknowable, something that should amount to being beautiful and loved, but stops at being pitied. Pity takes the air out of the room and suffocates us.

Much has been reported and photographed, about Haiti's trauma, and this tends to drown out the quieter Haitian attitudes of kindness, civility and charity. *The Third Heaven* is less about dramatic events than it is about love, kindness and hope; less about solutions than it is about a state of being — like heaven. But heaven, and the beautiful, cannot be considered without hell and the

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sublime. This third heaven becomes both a window and a mirror. The photographic work is based on a narrative of disorder and resuscitation, tenacity and determination.

In addition to the collection of images on the wall *The Third Heaven* is also presented as a printed, double concertina book, which allows the image sequence to be read in any number of ways: from the center folding out on both sides; from right to left or left to right, so that multiple sheets are visible at any moment.

All the prints on Hahnemühle Bamboo and Museo Portfolio Rag papers using Epson archival pigment inks. All materials meet archival standards.

Pradip Malde  
Sewanee, 2018

### **GIDEON MENDEL (1959 ZA)**

#### **VITA**

Gideon Mendel's intimate style of image-making and long-term commitment to socially engaged projects has earned him international acclaim. Born in Johannesburg in 1959, Mendel established his career with his searing photographs of the final years of apartheid.

In 1991 he moved to London, and continued to respond to global issues, especially HIV/AIDS. In 1996 he received a grant from the *W. Eugene Smith Memorial Fund*, which eventually led to the publication of his book *A Broken Landscape: HIV & AIDS in Africa*, Blume Publishing, 2001.

Since 2007, Mendel has been working on *Drowning World*, an art and advocacy project about flooding that is his personal response to climate change. Solo shows of *Drowning World* have been shown at many galleries and public installations around the world, most recently at *Les Rencontres de la Photographie* in Arles. During 2016, Mendel received the inaugural *Jackson Pollock Prize for Creativity* and the *Greenpeace Photo Award*.

Shortlisted for the *Prix Pictet* in 2015, he has received numerous awards including the *Amnesty International Media Award* and six *World Press Awards*.

#### **DROWNING WORLD**

*Drowning World* is my attempt to explore the effects of climate change in an intimate way, taking us beyond faceless statistics and into the individual experiences of its victims. Portraits rest at the heart of the project: *Submerged Portraits*. I often follow my subjects as they return through deep waters, working with them to create an image in their flooded homes. While their pose may be conventional, their environment is disconcertingly altered.

The flood is an ancient metaphor, found within the myths and legends of many cultures. It represents an overwhelming, destructive force that renders humanity powerless in its wake and leaves us seeking refuge. As global warming drives an increasing number of extreme flooding events each year, this message continues to resonate.

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I began work on *Drowning World* in 2007 when I photographed two floods that occurred within weeks of each other, one in the UK and the other in India. I was deeply struck by the contrasting impacts of these floods, and the shared vulnerability that seemed to unite their victims. Since then I have endeavoured to visit flood zones around the world, travelling to Haiti, Pakistan, Australia, Thailand, Brazil, Nigeria, Germany, the Philippines and the USA in search of these commonalities and differences.

In a flooded landscape, life is suddenly turned upside down and normality is suspended. With an almost “tracing paper” effect on the societies in which they occur, flood waters often reveal underlying tensions and difficulties as they recede. It is these elements that continue to draw me to flood zones, evoking many questions about our sense of stability in the world.

This journey has led to two further, related, bodies of work: *Flood Lines* documents the impact of floodwaters on interior landscapes and surfaces. *Water Marks* records the curious changes that are left by floodwaters on personal photographs caught in the maelstrom.

### **AMI VITALE (1971, US)**

#### **VITA**

Ami Vitale's journey as photographer, writer, and filmmaker has taken her to nearly 100 countries where she has had the opportunity to witness life's extremes, from civil unrest and violence to the beauty and enduring power of the human spirit. She has lived in mud huts and war zones, contracted malaria, and donned a panda suit — all in keeping with her philosophy of “living the story”.

For her work with pandas, Vitale made multiple trips over three years to China, getting to know the people involved in panda conservation efforts along with the bears themselves —even learning to think like a panda. Ami came away with renewed confidence that those who care most about the animals are on the right path to save them. “There is still a great deal of effort, research, and melding of policy, law, and science needed to perfect the process of re-wilding giant pandas and protecting the habitat they need to survive. As the work moves forward, I see a China that proudly provides a home to a growing population of one of its greatest wild assets – the fanciful black-and-white bear that helps make the world a more balanced and beautiful place for us all.”

The recipient of many prestigious awards, Vitale is an Ambassador for Nikon and a photographer and writer with National Geographic magazine. She is a founding member of Ripple Effect Images, an artists' collective focused on women's issues in developing countries. When not teaching, lecturing, or covering the planet's most pressing issues — from wildlife conservation to devastating human conflict — Vitale digs into the smaller but equally compelling stories that haven't yet been told, the “stories within the story”.

“In a world of seven billion people, we must see ourselves as part of the landscape. Our fate is linked to the fate of animals. Saving nature is really about saving ourselves. Can we re-imagine a world where all life is important?”

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### **PANDAS GONE WILD**

In December 1936, a wild panda cub named Su-Lin was smuggled out of Shanghai in a wicker basket by a San Franciscan socialite named Ruth Harkness. She had an export permit reading, “One dog, \$20.00.” Soon after her return, the woman sold Su-Lin to a zoo. The West had only recently become aware of the noble giant panda after President Roosevelt’s sons shot one on an expedition in 1928. But Su-Lin was alive, and in Chicago for everyone to see. On the opening day of the exhibit more than 50 000 people came to see the panda. Zoos today pay millions of dollars to mount exhibits, and panda “ambassadors” on loan from China never fail to attract a crowd.

In the mountains of Li Zi Ping Forest Reserve in Sichuan Province, things are a little different. Here, getting close to a giant panda can be challenging, to say the least. We must never forget the “wild” in wildlife. Close interactions can have lethal consequences — for us and for the animals themselves. Their minds are very concerned about any interference with the finicky animal’s biology or conservation and, let’s not forget, they are enormous animals with teeth and claws. The best and safest way to learn about any kind of wildlife is to keep your distance and be respectful. To photograph this story, I had to blend in: I wore a panda costume that was scented with panda urine, just like the staff would wear.

Fewer than 2 000 giant pandas exist in the wild. Their breeding secrets have long resisted the efforts of zoos, and the mountainous bamboo forests they call home have been decimated by development and agriculture. But in a region where bad environmental news is common, the future of the giant panda might prove to be the exception. Over thirty years, researchers have been working on breeding and releasing pandas, augmenting existing populations and protecting their habitat. And they’re finally having success.

As well as helping with the difficult insemination process — female pandas are only fertile once a year, for only 24 to 72 hours — the researchers at the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda monitor the cubs, and once they’re two years old, help ease them towards surviving in the wild. Eventually, they are moved to a large habitat in the mountains where a mother can coach her cubs in survival.

The pandas in these far away mountains will have no lines of school children waiting to meet them, nor a fan page on Facebook. But as the great bears trundle off into the wild, they take with them hope for their species. The slow and steady incline in the population of giant pandas a testament to the perseverance and efforts of Chinese scientists and conservationists. By breeding and releasing pandas, and protecting their habitat, China may be on its way to successfully saving its most famous ambassador and in the process put the wild back into an icon.

Ami Vitale

Excerpt from the book *Panda Love: The Secret Life of Pandas*, 2018