



Barricading the Ice Sheets

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A research endeavor by Oliver Ressler

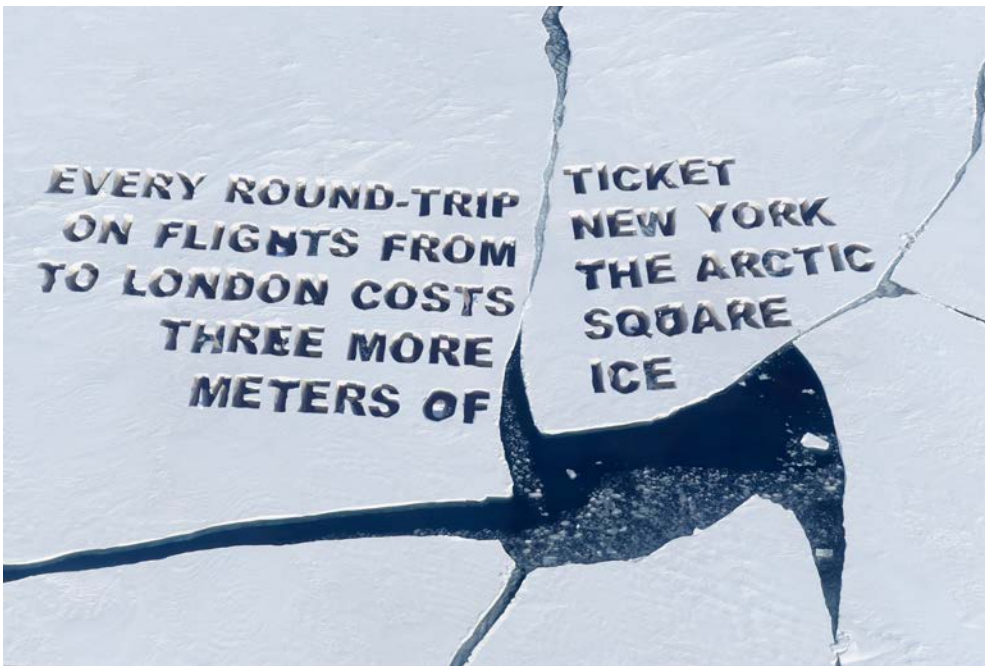
Solo exhibitions:

Camera Austria, Graz (AT), September – November 2021

Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (HR), November 2021 – beginning of 2022

Tallinn Art Hall, Tallinn (EE), 2022

n.b.k. – Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin (DE), 2022



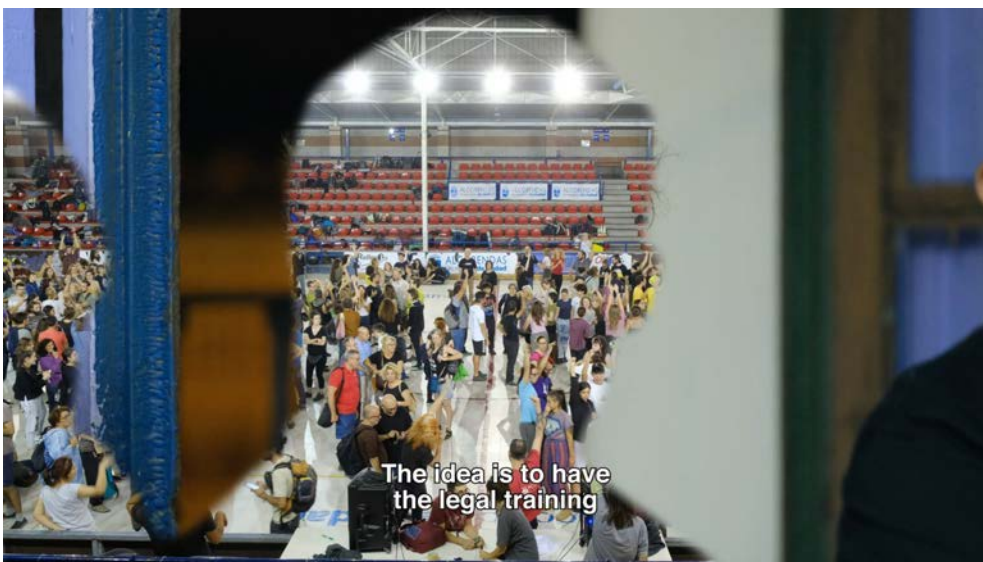
"Every round-trip ticket on flights from New York to London costs the Arctic three more square meters of ice",
Digital print on dibond, framed, 102,36 x 73,57 cm, 2019

Barricading the Ice Sheets investigates global warming, the climate justice movement and the relation of the latter to the arts. The research endeavor materializes as films, photographic works, a conference, publications and a cycle of solo exhibitions.

25 years of failed climate negotiations under the framework of the United Nations have not reduced global carbon emissions at all. Consequently, global temperature is still rising. This reckless inaction on the part of nation states has led people to take action themselves, without representation. Horizontally organized climate movements have emerged all over the world. Polite protest is a thing of the distant past: the movement has blocked fossil fuel extraction sites and transport routes, mobilized against airport expansion, run successful divestment campaigns, and

halted Arctic drilling. These actions *economically* undermine the fossil-fuel industry worldwide.

Many people still see personal behavior change as a solution to the climate disruption. Admirable as it may be to take a train instead of a plane, eat vegetables instead of meat, or put solar panels on a residential roof, private gestures of good faith are not equipped to stop epochal climate vandalism on a planetary scale. Planetary life is more than consumer behavior. Our powers and responsibility as inhabitants of the Earth are collective and social, not private and personal. Powerful structures, not personal decisions, force us into lives that destroy livelihoods, devalue life and ultimately endanger survival. We who suffer from those structures are *collectively* implicated in them, which is why they must be changed by our collective action.

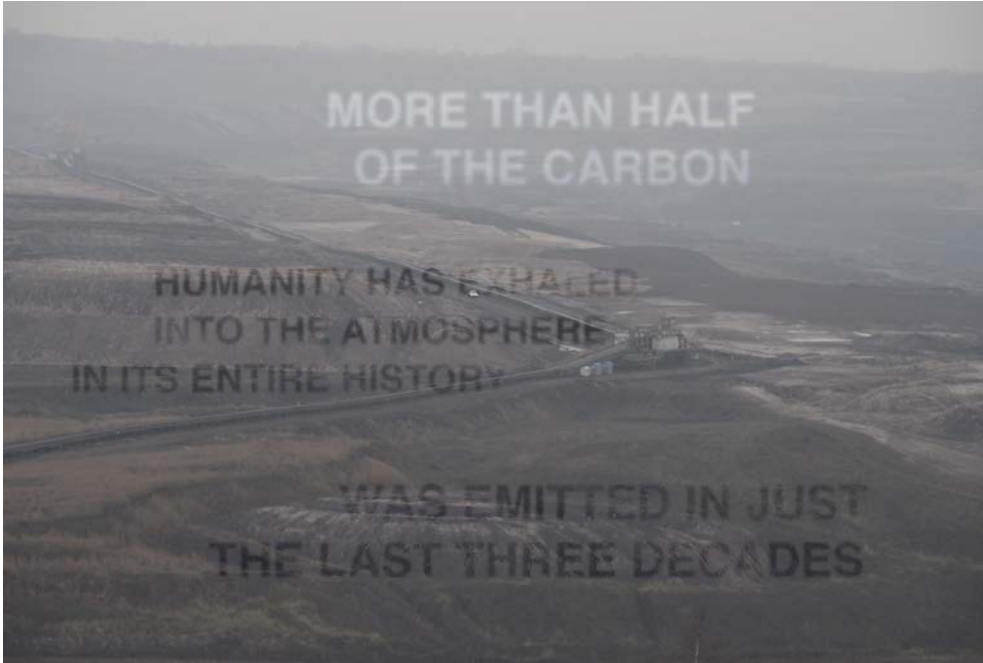


"Not Sinking, Swarming", 37 min., 4K, AT 2020

The title *Barricading the Ice Sheets* refers to the scale of the emergency the climate justice movement faces and the scope of what it sets out to do. To barricade ice sheets as they melt is physically impossible, but the movement is attempting something historically unprecedented, because the planet has never in recorded human history confronted so absolute a threat. When Arctic ice melts, sea levels rise everywhere; islands and cities sink, global exploitation of agriculture/series lurches off schedule.

Barricading the Ice Sheets records and documents some exemplary mobilizations, activities, assemblies and work meetings of the climate movements. But no "neutral" position exists from which a social movement could be merely documented. Every decision – concerning *how* and *what* to record, what to omit or the inclusion/exclusion and editing of the activists' direct speech – must be recognized as simultaneously conditioned by and constitutive of the relation to that movement. Consequently, the artistic production drawn from my research will include material that might momentarily be seen as straightforwardly "documentary", along with other elements where the "artistic" engagement is more

obvious. Any sustained attention to the work, however, will reveal its systematic blurring of any artificial line between “document” and “artwork”.



“More than half of the carbon humanity has exhaled into the atmosphere in its entire history was emitted in just the last three decades”, Digital print on dibond, framed, 102,36 x 73,57 cm, 2020

Examples of work completed or planned under the framework of *Barricading the Ice Sheets* are:

The film “Not Sinking, Swarming” (4K, 37 Min., A T 2020), which originated in a four-hour assembly in Madrid in October 2019, where delegates from various Spanish environmental groups gathered to prepare an act of civil disobedience.

On February 28 and 29, 2020, the two day-long conference *Barricading the Ice Sheets* took place at the project's research institution Camera Austria in Graz. The conference brought together various internationally respected climate movement protagonists working between art and activism. The artist-activists discussed the movements' methods, purposes, its past and future. The conference was fully documented and can be streamed online.

The encounter of these various artist-activists was also used for a separate film production on the role of artists in the climate movement, which is due to be completed soon.

One book has already been published under the aegis of the project: *“Barricading the Ice Sheets. Artists and Climate Action in the Age of Irreversible Decision”*,

Oliver Ressler (Ed.), Graz: Edition Camera Austria, 2020

It can be ordered [here](#)



"Arctic permafrost is less permanent than its name suggests", Digital print on dibond, framed, 102,36 x 80,69 cm, 2019

Research Associate: [Lisbeth Kovacic](#)

"Barricading the Ice Sheets" is a research endeavor by Oliver Ressler and supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF: AR 526).

FWF

Der Wissenschaftsfonds.