

EXHIBITION TEXTS

OLIVER RESSLER. DOG DAYS BITE BACK

***A-Anti-Anticapitalista*, 2021**

Video, 4K, color, sound
2 min.

The slogan "A-Anti-Anticapitalista" is often shouted at demonstrations. By varying the rhythm, speed, and volume, the chants develop a musical quality. In his video of the same name, Oliver Ressler combines found and filmed footage of actions by various protest movements, such as Ende Gelände and Occupy, mobilizations against the G7, UK, and G20 summits, as well as other political contexts. The montage illustrates the unifying quality of a common slogan at the moment of collective expression: the protesting crowd appears united, even though their concerns differ. The future success of the climate justice movements will also depend on whether they succeed in forging alliances with other social movements that are fighting against ethnic, colonial, or gender-based oppression as well as unacceptable working conditions.

***Ancestral Future Rising*, 2023**

Video, 4K, color, sound
20 min.

The setting for Oliver Ressler's film *Ancestral Future Rising* is Pacto, near the Ecuadorian capital of Quito. Due to its enormous biodiversity, UNESCO designated the region as the seventh biosphere reserve in Ecuador in 2018, naming it the Choco Andino de Pichíncha Biosphere Reserve. Yet in the very same year, the state still granted concessions for the mining of gold, silver, and copper in the region, which is considered a key habitat for countless animal and plant species. To oppose this extractivism, local activists founded the initiative Quito sin minería (Quito without mining). In their fight to protect nature, they refer to ancient ceremonial sites of Indigenous cultures such as the Yumbo, Kitu Kara, and Inca. Ecuador is one of the countries in which transnational mining companies are constantly increasing the pressure to obtain new permits for the extraction of coveted raw materials. Meanwhile, the local and global effects of these destructive processes are ignored.

***Anubumin*, 2017**

In collaboration with Zanny Begg
HD video, color, sound
18 min.

Courtesy Oliver Ressler; àngels, Barcelona; The Gallery Apart, Rome

In *Anubumin*, Oliver Ressler and Australian filmmaker Zanny Begg explore the historical and current circumstances that have a decisive impact on Nauru. Originally rich in mineral resources, phosphate has been mined on the Pacific island and exported to Australia since 1906. However, the ongoing overexploitation has meant that Nauru has been barren since the 1980s. As a result, the bankrupt island state mutated into a tax haven. But as early as 2001, a new source of income was discovered: for a fee of 30 million dollars a year, Nauru allowed the Australian government to set up a so-called "reception camp" for refugees. In the film, four whistleblowers who worked there as doctors and nurses report on the devastating situation of the interned people. Today, the island is threatened

by rising sea levels, which may lead to the Nauruans themselves becoming the climate refugees of tomorrow.

Barricade Cultures of the Future, 2021

Video, 4K, color, sound
38 min.

Canopy cut down to sand, 2023

Six digital prints
Photography: Nicolas Lampert

In the six-part series *Canopy cut down to sand*, Oliver Ressler combines photographs with freely adapted passages from the poem "The Phoenix" (2008) by British author Joanne Maria McNally. Taken on Vancouver Island in the southwest of the Canadian province of British Columbia in 2022, the images show random formations drawn in the sand by waves. They immediately evoke flames and recall the devastating forest fires that raged in the region in 2022. Extensive areas were reduced to rubble and people had to leave their homes. In the same year, the highest level of carbon dioxide (CO₂) ever was measured in the atmosphere. As a greenhouse gas, CO₂ is partly responsible for global warming and the resulting climate breakdown. There is a growing risk that storms, droughts, heatwaves, and forest fires will destroy the essential foundations of life on our planet on a large scale and at an ever-faster pace.

Carbon and Captivity, 2020

Video, 4K, color, sound
33 min.

Research is being carried out into various approaches to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere and combat climate collapse. One of these new technologies is "Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)"—in other words, the capture, transportation, and permanent storage of CO₂ in the ground or seabed. However, in addition to the enormous amount of energy required, there is also the risk of large quantities of CO₂ being released in the event of an earthquake. In his film *Carbon and Captivity*, Oliver Ressler examines this extremely controversial method from several perspectives in four chapters and presents the Norwegian Technology Center Mongstad, the world's largest facility where this process is being tested. Promoted by Gassnova, Equinor, Shell, and Total, CCS is revealed to be a strategy for the oil companies to maintain their dependence on fossil fuels while delaying legal measures for decarbonization.

Climate Feedback Loops, 2023

Two-channel video installation, 4K, color, sound
23 min.

Temperatures in the Arctic are rising much faster than the global average. One particular hotspot is the island of Svalbard between the north coast of Norway and the North Pole, where the sea ice almost completely melts in summer. Sunlight is therefore no longer reflected by the white surface but absorbed by water and rocks. This phenomenon, known as "Arctic amplification," promotes a renewed rise in temperature, which in turn accelerates the thawing of the permafrost. This allows huge quantities of methane, which has been trapped in the earth for thousands of years, to escape into the atmosphere. There, greenhouse gases further increase temperatures. This results in "climate feedback

loops," —chain reactions that can no longer be stopped. Oliver Ressler's video installation shows footage from Svalbard from July 2022, where the massive disruption of this ecosystem finds its acoustic counterpart in harsh Arctic sounds.

***Coal Kills*, 2017/19**

Poster wallpaper, digital print

Global climate justice movements are stronger today than ever before: their supporters are blocking pipeline projects, drilling in the Arctic, and fracking activities, as well as exerting pressure on companies that generate profits from fossil fuels. Coal-fired power plants have also been forced to close as a result of massive resistance campaigns. Taken in June 2017, Oliver Ressler's photograph *Coal Kills* documents an act of civil disobedience by the Dutch group Code Rood in the port of Amsterdam. Most of the coal arriving there comes from Colombia, where it is mined in environmentally and socially devastating conditions. The blockade of Europe's second-largest coal port is part of the activists' call for an immediate end to the fossil fuel era in order to combat the threat of climate collapse.

***Drillbit*, 2021**

Wood, drill heads, metal tubes, ropes

The installation *Drillbit*, which is around four meters high, consists of a wooden tripod of the kind often used for blockades. Mounted high above the ground, the platforms for demonstrators are intended to make it more difficult for the police to clear the area. In Oliver Ressler's sculpture, the round timbers end in drill heads from the oil industry, reminiscent of medieval weapons or torture instruments. A large-format photomontage can be seen in the vicinity of the construction, in which an unusually large number of protesters gather on a tripod. The tripod spans the eight kilometers of the highly controversial Lobau Tunnel in Vienna, which for years had been planned to run underneath the Donau-Auen National Park—in other words, through the middle of a nature reserve. At the end of 2021, the transport minister responsible for the project, Leonore Gewessler (Green Party), decided not to go ahead with the tunnel construction. The Mayor of Vienna, Michael Ludwig (Social Democrats), announced that he would fight the decision.

***Failed Investments*, 2015**

Two vinyl prints
each 199 × 398 cm

Using the Polish city of Krakow as an example, Oliver Ressler explores current developments in the construction sector as a result of the leading neoliberal policies throughout Europe. Because the municipal government no longer supports social housing, private investors are financing new homes in the suburbs and advertising them on countless billboards. The artist appropriates their visual language while subverting it at the same time: using text and image montage, he addresses the uncontrolled expansion of private housing and its influence on global warming. For example, the burning suburban house on Ressler's banner illustrates the expected rise in temperature and associated periods of drought. Sealed soils, increased car traffic, and individual heating systems in private homes also lead to increased pollutants. In times of peak oil and climate collapse, these buildings will soon prove to be ecologically unsustainable investment ruins—in other words, "failed investments."

***Green House*, 1994**

Acrylic and varnish on aluminum

86 x 64 cm

The painting *Green House*, created in 1994, is not just the earliest work in the exhibition; it also illustrates Oliver Ressler's artistic development from the classic medium of painting at the beginning of his career to time-based techniques such as video and film, but also photography. In this work, he uses painterly means to visualize the English term greenhouse effect. The green houses are depicted three-dimensionally in the style of architectural drawings. Their reduced form consisting of a cube and prism resembles an arrow pointing upwards, which can be interpreted as rising heat. Here, the artist invokes the increasing carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere which are causing temperatures to rise and in turn promoting global climate collapse.

***New Model Army*, 2016/17**

4 mannequins dressed as climate activists

Named after the organized "mob" that fought in the English Civil War of the 1640s, Oliver Ressler's *New Model Army* represents the global climate justice movements. The four mannequins symbolize the tireless fight of its members against the ongoing destruction of our planet. Their signs are emblazoned with headline-like slogans written by Ressler, which address issues such as exceeding the 1.5°C threshold. In recent years, climate protests have also reached the art and cultural sector: by attacking world-famous paintings, activists are now using museums to communicate their messages and demands to the public in a sensational way.

Not Sinking, Swarming, 2021

Video, 4K, color, sound

37 min.

Alternating English and German subtitles

In October 2019, representatives of various groups gathered in Madrid to prepare an act of civil disobedience. The organizations present, including Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future, Climacció, and Greenpeace, are all part of the international platform By 2020 We rise up. In his video *Not Sinking, Swarming*, Oliver Ressler documents the discussions and thus provides a direct insight into the processes of self-organization within the climate justice movements. The artist interweaves the footage with that of a street blockade near government buildings in Madrid, which was planned in the assembly and actually carried out on October 7. Pixelation is a key element that gives the work its unique visual form. As a protective measure against possible criminal prosecution, the people taking part are made unrecognizable.

Occupy, Resist, Produce, 2014–18

In collaboration with Dario Azzellini

Four-channel video installation, HD video, color, sound

RiMaflow, 2014: 34 min.

Officine Zero, 2015: 33 min.

Vio.Me., 2015: 30 min.

Scop Ti, 2018: 34 min.

Alternating English and German subtitles

Active labor struggles and forms of resistance in occupied factories in Milan, Rome, Thessaloniki, and Gémenos are the central themes of this work.. As a result of the economic crisis of 2007/08, numerous European companies closed down their factories and offshored production to other countries. This triggered a massive wave of redundancies in large companies, leaving thousands with

little hope of finding a new job. *Occupy, Resist, Produce* shows real examples of how workers are taking control of former production sites, organizing themselves democratically, and actively participating in decision-making processes. In the process, they develop more resource-efficient and fairer alternatives, found solidarity cooperatives and recycling centers, and establish alliances with local communities and social movements.

***Oil Spill Flag*, 2020**

Print on fabric

The entire oil production chain—namely the extraction, transportation, refining, and burning of the raw material—poses one of the greatest threats to life on earth. Oil spills are permanently destroying marine ecosystems worldwide, and oil combustion is one of the main drivers of global warming. In *Oil Spill Flag*, Oliver Ressler has added a pervasive black oil stain to Norway's national flag in order to highlight these dangers. Although the European country is regarded as a world leader in pursuing the decarbonization of its economy, it is also financing this transition through the ongoing extraction of oil. First presented on the flagpole in front of Tromsø Kunstforening as part of a project curated by Randi Grov Berger, Ressler's oil-smearred flag sparked fierce controversy between local right-wing conservative politicians and liberal opponents of oil production. The latter defended the artwork by pointing out Norway's contribution to the climate catastrophe.

Overturn the Present, Barricade the Future, 2021

Video, 4K, color, sound
10 min.

What role do artists and cultural producers play in the climate justice movement? This question is the focus of Oliver Ressler's films *Barricade Cultures of the Future* and *Overturn the Present, Barricade the Future*. Both works are based on conversations between five international protagonists working at the intersection of art and climate activism: Nnimmo Bassey (Health of Mother Earth Foundation, Nigeria), Jay Jordan (The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, France), Steve Lyons (The Natural History Museum, USA), Marta Moreno Muñoz (Extinction Rebellion, Spain), and Aka Niviâna (Inuk Poet, Greenland). Their methods, goals, perspectives, and approaches to their respective artistic-activist activities differ significantly. However, they all share the insight that environmental issues are inextricably linked to socio-political and economic conditions.

Reclaiming Abundance, 2021

12-part series:
six digital prints, six legends as digital prints, mounted on aluminum
Photographs each: 52.7 × 100 cm
Legends each: 48 × 40 cm
Drone shots: Verena Tscherner
Rendering: estudio elgozo

In the work series *Reclaiming Abundance*, Oliver Ressler imagines how the locations depicted might possibly be used in the year 2050. The drone shots show real existing infrastructures in Styria that all depend on fossil energy sources: Graz Airport, a slaughterhouse and meatpacking facility, the Mellach gas and steam power plant, the Magna Steyr automotive works, the Bruck an der Mur freeway junction, and a ski jumping hill. In order to prevent the impending climate collapse, the conversion to a carbon-neutral society visualized in the photomontages must be realized in the foreseeable future.

The title, on the other hand, alludes to the widespread view that only capitalism produces prosperity. Ressler reverses this logic: abundance for all will only be possible when we succeed in completely reorganizing the relationships between human and non-human beings.

Storage Block, 2024

Bio-based resin

The furniture piece *Storage Block* is made from a bio-based resin that has comparable properties to plastics made from fossil fuels. The need to phase out these materials also means that alternative methods of manufacturing plastics must be developed. *Storage Block* is produced using one such new technique, which involves storing the carbon dioxide (CO₂) captured during plant growth. This method, called "Carbon Capture and Utilization" (CCU)—in other words, reusing carbon compounds—represents an alternative to "Carbon Capture and Storage" (CCS), a process utilized by oil companies to continue their destructive business model. The word "block" here refers both to the shape of the object and to a form of civil disobedience: the act of blocking something, such as environmentally damaging infrastructure, can also be practiced while sitting down.

The economy is wounded: let it die!, 2016

Poster wallpaper, digital print

The title of the wall-sized photographic work *The economy is wounded – let it die!* stems from French graffiti in Paris from May 1968. In this montage, Oliver Ressler shows heavily laden container ships in distress at sea and in danger of sinking. With this striking image, the artist refers to the global trade in goods and services from the global South to the North. In the process, transportation by cargo ships burning heavy fuel oil causes permanent ecological and social disasters. Like many activist movements, Ressler believes that the so-called free movement of goods must be drastically reduced and we should instead increase our reliance on regional products.

18 photographs:

1 *Dog Days Bite Back*, 2023

2 *We are all learning about nature's circulatory systems by poisoning them*, 2021

3 *Arctic permafrost is less permanent than its name suggests*, 2019

4 *There is blood, blood, blood, blood and fire*, 2021

5 *More than half the world's original forests have already disappeared*, 2022

6 *Imagine a world where the dominant way of thinking is so far out of touch with reality, so bereft of critical insight, that fossil fuel corporations are not considered the real terrorists*, 2022

7 *Violence in the air*, 2022

8 *We're fossils in the making*, 2022

9 *Air is the unseen absolute*, 2021

10 *Property Will Cost Us the Earth*, 2021/23

Drawing: Claudia Schioppa

11 *More than half of the carbon humanity has exhaled into the atmosphere in its entire history was emitted in just the last three decades*, 2020

12 *The Terminal Tower*, 2023

13 *Every round-trip ticket on flights from New York to London costs the Arctic three more square meters of ice*, 2019

14 *Absorb and Bind*, 2021

15 *The last time there was as much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere as there is today, humans didn't exist*, 2020

16 *The Desert Lives*, 2022

17 *Die Wüste lebt*, 2022

18 *Drillbit*, 2021

"The dog days of summer are not just barking, they are biting," stated UN Secretary-General António Guterres with regard to the hottest summer in recorded history last year. The work *Dog Days Bite Back* (2023), which lends its title to the exhibition, is one of eighteen photographs in which Oliver Ressler devotes himself to key aspects of economic, democratic, and climate activist concerns and actions, mostly in image-text montages. We encounter landscape formations such as permafrost soil, sea ice, open-cast lignite mines, an oil slick on a sandy beach, and clouds, each interwoven with a short text. Adopting the visual language of protest posters, they have a captivating urgency. Some photographs have been installed in public spaces as large-format posters, while another was used as a sticker for a campaign to reduce air traffic. The works were largely created as part of Ressler's research project *Barricading the Ice Sheets* (2019–23), which explores the climate justice movements and their relationship to art.

Courtesy Oliver Ressler; àngels, Barcelona; The Gallery Apart, Rome