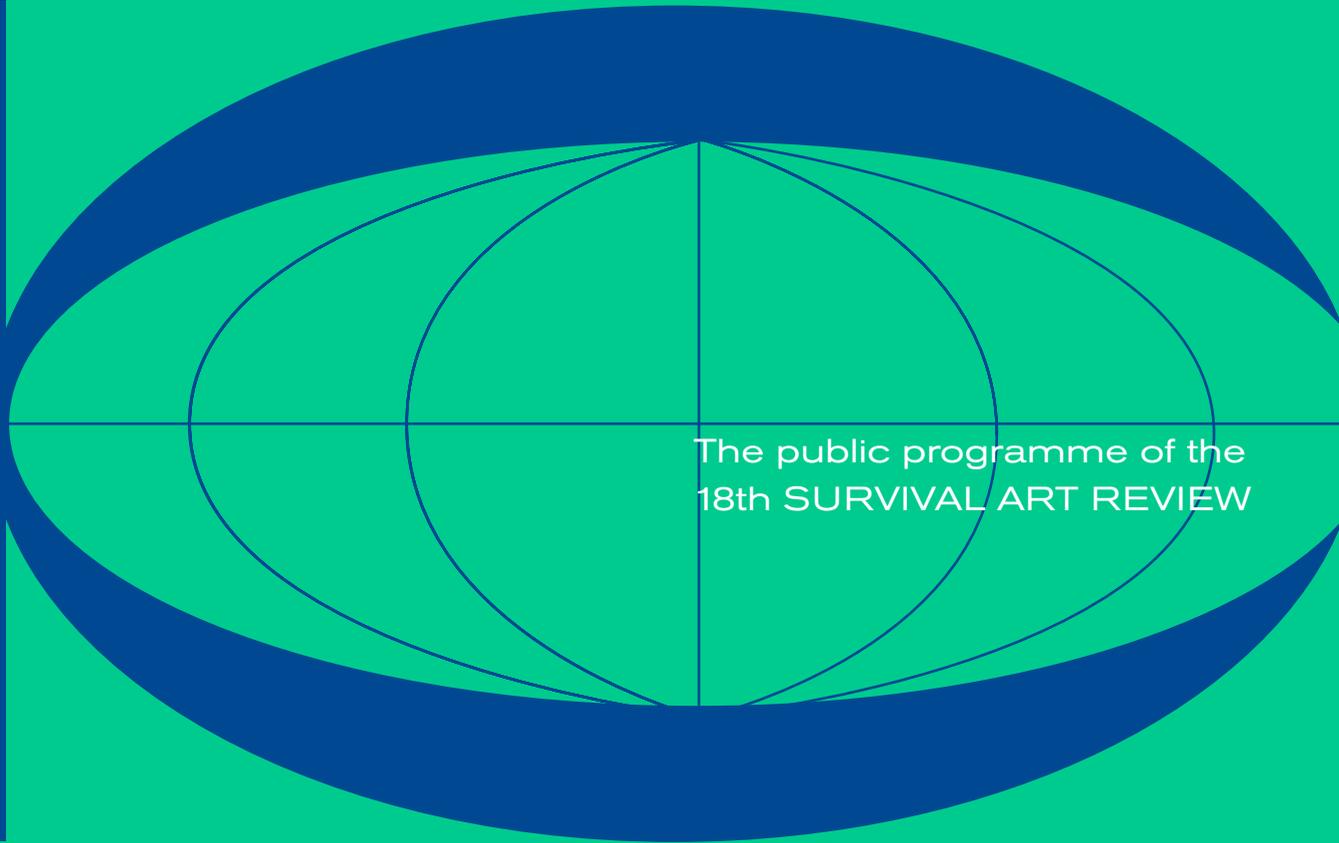


WASTELAND:
CULTURE FOR CLIMATE /
KULTUR FÜR DAS KLIMA



The public programme of the
18th SURVIVAL ART REVIEW

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WASTELAND: CULTURE FOR CLIMATE / KULTUR FÜR DAS KLIMA

The SURVIVAL Art Review is a nomadic event, which each year takes place in a different location in Wrocław. It consists of the main exhibition and accompanying events, the so-called public programme — a series of debates, meetings and workshops. Each year, the event attracts 5,000-8,000 visitors. The motto of the 2020 edition was “Wasteland,” which referred to T.S. Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land* (1922). When deciding on the motto, we wanted to encourage artists to creatively address and discuss issues such as ecology, wastefulness or the lack of systemic solutions in the face of the upcoming climate disaster.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the public programme was moved online. Co-financed by the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation and entitled “Wasteland: Culture for Climate / Kultur für das Klima,” it consisted of three debates that brought together people involved in broadly understood art, culture and education from Poland and Germany. The discussants exchanged experiences and views on climate change and shared inspiring examples of action. Intended to provoke critical thinking among the Review audience and online participants, the debates with experts, activists and practitioners from Poland and Germany challenged the status quo and questioned some of the popular opinions about social, political and economic issues connected with climate change.

This brochure records the thoughts of the panellists who participated in the debates.

This project was co-financed by the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany and by the Municipality of Wrocław.



Karolina Bieniek

CULTURE FOR CLIMATE

I am a pessimist. I do not believe that the humankind can contain the actions that have brought the climate to the brink of disaster. However, I do believe that it is the responsibility of each of us to do everything we can to mitigate these negative effects of human activity. Climate change is one of the most egalitarian contemporary problems. It affects each and every one of us, no matter on which latitude we were born or what our social status is. The ongoing changes will affect the rich North just as much as the poor South. Scientists' estimates are alarming. We already know today that without drastic changes in our approach to climate, life on Earth will be impossible or unbearable in several decades. Adaptation to the ongoing changes requires a new understanding of nature, in which it ceases to be the property of man and begins to be treated as a universal value shared by all creatures.

The change in the official information policy of the United Nations, where the previously used "climate crisis" has been replaced with

a new, fully legitimate phrase "climate emergency," coincided with events such as the Youth Strike for Climate and Fridays for Future — initiatives inspired by Greta Thunberg that attracted crowds of mostly young people. The emerging climate awareness has resulted not only in fantastic activism and involvement of young people, but also in increasingly frequent cases of climate anxiety and depression. Apparently, knowledge about the irreversibility of changes coupled with a sense of helplessness cause a feeling of psychological discomfort in many young people, which in extreme cases may lead to mental health disorders.

The Art Transparent Foundation — the organiser of the SURVIVAL Art Review — has been working to the benefit of broadly understood culture and education, in Poland and abroad, for over eighteen years. Motivated by a sense of belonging to a global community, for years we have been striving to reduce our footprint on the natural environment by conducting educational and awareness-raising activities and giving voice to scientists and artists. We are aware that activities such as limiting prints to the necessary minimum, conscious choice of materials for the production of exhibitions, pro-environmental marketing policy, or the selection of like-minded partner organisations, are just the tip of the iceberg of what we should do as organisers of cultural life. Subsequent editions of the SURVIVAL Art Review, one of the largest festivals of art in public spaces in Poland, have resulted from this approach. The event has used various ways to acquaint the festival audience with the complexity of the problems facing our common atmosphere and, consequently, the most pressing challenges of the present day. The main exhibition of SURVIVAL 18, held in one of the most difficult years in decades, 2020, was entitled WASTELAND in direct reference to TS Eliot's iconic poem *The Waste Land*. The featured works by artists

from Poland and abroad raised subjects such as the barrenness of our civilisation, the complexity of climate problems, or new topics, such as “greenwashing.” As we were preparing the 18th edition of the review, we already knew that in addition to exploring the subject through artistic works, we would like to invite representatives of the cultural industry to discuss the current state of knowledge in terms of tackling climate change by our industry. We were supported by our partner organisation from Germany, Berlinerpool, thanks to which, and with the help of the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation and the Municipality of Wrocław, we were able to conduct three remote meetings gathering specialists from Poland and Germany. Held between 10 and 13 September 2020, the discussions concerned an exchange of knowledge on three levels: organisational, curatorial and artistic. The meetings moderated by Paulina Maloy of Culture Zone Wrocław, Agata Skrzypczyk of Hello Radio and Andrzej Raszyk of Berlinerpool were attended by six representatives of the cultural environment from Wrocław and Berlin.

This publication is a collection of thoughts resulting from the series of debates called Culture for Climate / Kultur fuer das Klima. It contains the reflections, experiences and observations recorded by: Tom Albrecht, curator at the Gallery for Sustainable Art in Berlin and former Environmental Manager at *Technische Universität Berlin*; Alfred Banze, an artist, activist and educator based in Berlin; Krzysztof Bielaszka, a cultural manager associated with the Ładne Historie Foundation and Culture Zone Wrocław; Konstanze Meyer, an organiser of numerous activities aimed at reducing the impact of Berlin’s nightlife on the ecological balance; Alicja Patanowska, an artist, potter and activist permanently associated with Wrocław; and Katarzyna Roj — curator, researcher, manager of BWA Dizajn in Wrocław.

I believe that the reflections contained in this publication will contribute to expanding the discussion on climate policy in Poland and Germany. There is much to be done and we would like to use the relations of the cultural industry with the public to become much more involved in the fight for climate and for our common atmosphere.





Tom Albrecht
Group Global 3000, Berlin, gg3.eu

CLIMATE CRISIS IN CULTURE

CLIMATE CRISIS IN CULTURE

I am happy to use less resources online than with a long train journey.

I will introduce you to the work of Group Global 3000, or GG3 for short. Working with art against the climate crisis is one thing, but to stop the climate crisis, much stronger political, national and international measures are required. We are pioneers due to our consistent work and I am pleased with this dialogue and with the fact that the climate crisis is now being addressed by art in many places. The excessive use of fossil fuels in the past decades has put our very existence at risk.

We prefer to say climate crisis instead of climate change, because change sounds too soft and manageable to us. For many people, the scale of the climate crisis is too big, too abstract, too slow, too final to imagine. Art helps to make it tangible, it creates images and visions that can touch the audience and shift their perspective.

START GG3

GG3 is a team of volunteers organized as an association, who do not take any money from the artists.. Founding Group Global 3000 with a program of art and sustainability in Berlin in 2012 was an adventure. We are part of a network of Berlin project spaces and initiatives. We have rented three rooms with a total area of 55 m² in the basement of old building in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg . The back room is mostly used as a black box for video projections.

Our gallery is not intended as a moralizing project. In September 2020 we organized our 50th exhibition, which we called *Art of Sustainability*. It features works by 41 of the 230 artists who have exhibited with us.

CHOICE OF THEME

Our exhibitions focus on ecological themes combined with the social and/or economic aspect. We choose the topics from the current social discourse, and we announce them internationally to artists in German and English. Our topics can also be found in the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. It is important for us to not only criticize, but also address utopias or hold up the mirror. The climate crisis can be explicitly mentioned in the title or addressed indirectly. For example, the consumption of things, travel and traffic have an indirect impact on the climate. Examples of our exhibitions: *Climate Change to Go* criticizes the carelessness with which fossil fuels are used; *Fossil Addiction* describes the individual and social dependence on fossil energy as a disease; *Artists for Future* shows solidarity with the youth movement against the climate crisis and has the goal to motivate artists to get involved; *The Retail Trade is Satisfied with the Christmas Business* takes a critical look at the annual consumer mania for the big holiday; *Sintflut Heute* examines the causes and effects of the frequent heavy rainfall; *To Buy or not to Buy* examines the relationship between identity and possession.

LOGO AND METHODS

Our logo expresses the wasteful way we deal with the world. We live and operate as if we had a second Earth. Our logo plays with the way global companies exploit the world. Our name Group Global 3000 shows that people act together locally, think globally and for the future. We work for the “best of both worlds.”

We value dialogue, thematic depth and encounter. Our exhibitions always include four events: vernissage, artist talk, expert lecture or workshop, and finissage. For several years we have worked in the countryside together with the Academy for Sufficiency, where we exhibited

works created during the residency. We invite speakers from the fields of science, NGOs, journalism and business.

Our media are: object art, installation, drawing, photography, video, performance, painting. Our events are free of charge. As a rule, we advertise the exhibition themes publicly and evaluate the submitted works. When selecting the applicants and their works, we pay close attention to how they address the announced theme. We communicate in English and German.

SELECTION OF ARTISTS AND WORKS

Our jury consists of different people from our team. We use the following criteria: Does the work address the announced topic? Does it have artistic quality? Just showing the beauty of nature is usually not enough for us. We try to avoid the associative and cryptic.

Some of our artists work mainly on sustainability. They respond to the challenges of the times. Some of them are inspired to create works through our calls for entries. Some of our artists use recycled materials, work with second-hand or surplus materials. They are often happy to find home in our gallery.

We have not yet abandoned the photo and video documentation of the exhibitions, unlike the well-known Tino Sehgal did in his exhibitions.

PUBLIC

We encourage the dialogue with the audience on equal terms. For this purpose we provide short texts in German and English next to the exhibited works in order to establish the relationship of the work with the theme. To reach the guests, we advertise a lot on web portals, social media and with direct mailing.

Our art comes out of the freedom to not tell other people how they should live. We want to provoke, create encounters, promote dialogue,

stimulate, challenge. We hope for amazement and a change of perspective. We offer knowledge. Humor and irony often help to make the access to the difficult topic easier. We take responsibility and invite the audience to join us. We do not want to force them. The border is defined by our art and the audience. However, we would like to expand it.

EVERYDAY PRACTICE AND CREDIBILITY

I distinguish our contents in art and culture and the operation of the institution. Art is not free, as the German constitution guarantees, but always needs resources to exist. Obviously this should be reflected in art. There is always a fundamental contradiction between the claim and practice of reducing emissions. All work generates emissions, but you can reduce them to become credible. As an artist, one can ask you, "Can your artistic statement be made in a simpler and more resource-saving way, with less energy and material?" We accept videos online or by post, so that the artists do not have to travel. Global IT must become more resource-efficient. I know from my former job as the environmental officer at the Technical University Berlin where resource-consuming chasms can be found, for example, in the improperly cooled server rooms. With Greensta.de, we have chosen a green IT provider for our mails and website in Germany, which uses certified green electricity.

Before a new exhibition, we ask the artists to reduce the file size of their photos before sending them in. This saves energy when transferring and saving files.

In our operational practice we pay attention to saving energy when heating, ventilating, lighting, separating waste. We like to use second-hand materials and certified recycled paper.

I myself have been reducing my ecological footprint for a long time, got rid of my car in 1991, I ride a train, bicycle, train, walk, recycle a lot also in my artistic work, I love Arte Povera, which works with used materials, I am a member and founder of a food cooperative for organic food, I run an eco power plant in our townhouse, I work in an

eco garden. It can be fun to be a pioneer, to experiment with new ways, with pleasure and reason.

OUTLOOK

At a time of the coronavirus and climate crisis, we currently ask, "What lesson does the coronavirus teach us to avoid the climate crisis?" In autumn we want to invite artists with works on "Endless Summer." –we are thinking about an exhibition that combines humor, laughter and sustainability.





Alfred Banze

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN CLIMATE PROTECTION

In a socially diverse Germany, we freely enjoy civil liberties rooted in a well-functioning democratic system. It is possible because Germany is very successful in economic terms. But at what cost? The economy is based on the automotive and chemical industries, arms exports and international financial transactions. When it comes to environmental issues, the government and businesses are ready to make far too many compromises, and while much is being said about global warming, little comes of it.

For me, urban gardening, researching the future, eco-design and alternative architectural or urban projects are like the flip side of the coin or pleasant conversation topics to be enjoyed by rich kids from the upper social classes while climbing the academic career ladder at an accelerated pace. Are these areas actually capable of making a real change to climate protection on a GLOBAL scale?

In 2004, Kenyan environmental activist and campaigner for women's rights Wangari Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Her aim was to combine nature conservation with cultural activities. As she argued, the protection of nature without the preservation, fostering and development of culture would be counterproductive, and thus irrelevant.

Works of art, music, films, etc. can reveal the complex relationships between nature and culture without being overly didactic. Individually and collectively, they can sensitise us to our own emotions and experiences, increase our empathy.

At this point, I would like to quote three significant examples from the field of participatory art projects that have been carried out in my hometown of Kassel, at the DOCUMENTA art festival.

1. JOSEPH BEUYS, 7,000 OAKS, 1982

I was impressed by the long time horizon of Joseph Beuys' project — oaks grow very slowly. In German culture, they have always been an important esoteric symbol, used by Nazi propaganda, among others. As part of the project, the artist planted a lot of oaks throughout the city, thus restoring them to nature and freeing from the burden of negative symbolism associated with the Second World War.

2. THOMAS HIRSCHHORN, BATAILLE MONUMENT, 2002

Thomas Hirschhorn implemented his project called *Bataille Monument* in a forgotten, working-class district in the northern part of Kassel, which was struggling with high unemployment. Together with the residents, he set up the Culture, Entertainment and Education Community Centre. Instead of permanent architecture, he used temporary structures made of cardboard and adhesive tape. The Centre had its own TV station, library, evening school, etc. The project did not directly address the issue of climate change. It was based on creating autonomous, collective structures to define one's own non-consumerist lifestyle.

3. SAKARIN KRUE-ON, TERRACED RICE FIELD, 2007

In collaboration with a large group of volunteers, Sakarin Krue-On created a rice field in front of Wilhelmshöhe Castle. It was a collage connecting elements of distant cultures and ecosystems. The artist transferred the traditional Asian agricultural landscape to the very centre of a German aristocratic park. Wilhelmshöhe Park itself has an

“exotic” character due to kitschy mock-ups of ancient ruins created only a few decades before Walt Disney's amusement park, whose purpose was to make the prince's name famous (at the price of the blood of Hessian soldiers sent to the American Civil War). Thanks to the creation of the rice field with the participation of many Kassel inhabitants, the kitschy landscape was momentarily freed from its aristocratic past.

“The beauty of nature was not made for man.
Maybe you've seen it on TV before
Animals are better connoisseurs of beauty”

(song lyrics by Alfred Banze, 2018)

The role of culture in climate protection is not to educate. We have extensive knowledge about the effects of climate change, we even seem to be over-informed. Our imaginations are filled with wonderful pictures of nature, which tomorrow may be just a memory. This form of presenting the problem of climate change is hypocritical! The task of culture is to develop a sense of collective responsibility for climate protection at an individual level.







HARBINGERS OF CHANGE IN THE CULTURAL INDUSTRY

Ecology in the cultural industry is a relatively fresh topic — especially with regard to institutions and non-governmental organisations in Central Europe. It would seem that as the countries of the Global North — the largest emitters of CO₂ on a planetary scale — we should all have long been at the stage of implementing specific strategies intended to reduce the negative impact of our activities on the natural environment. Meanwhile, we are still in the starting blocks: we lack expert competencies, tools developed specifically for our sector (which differs significantly from the world of business) and, above all, systemic support, which is indispensable to initiate any real change. But harbingers of a breakthrough in thinking about the production of culture are already here — most often in the form of grassroots initiatives of people who are already aware of the threats posed by the climate catastrophe to culture and art.

The discussion on the role of the creative industries in relation to the natural environment, also with regard to institutions and non-governmental organisations that seem unable to keep up with the world of art and activism in the field of combating climate change, is becoming wider and wider. Perhaps it is an aftermath of the pandemic that redefined our reality in March this year. It suddenly turned out that not all the services we buy cater to our basic needs, some of us can do without office space, and we can participate in international conferences via online tools (it is worth noting at this point that the system is ruthless — while we were working from homes, planes were

still flying over our heads — the production and distribution chains were not reconfigured or redesigned in any way). However, the global slowdown did not have a visible impact on reducing emissions or changing the way our society functions, which many of us found sad and extremely disheartening — if a pandemic was unable to stop consumerism, how can this mad desire to possess come to an end?

So how can we, workers of culture and art, maintain the enthusiasm for creating a real, pro-environmental change in thinking about the organisation of activities in our sector? First of all, we must remember that the effects of climate change over the next ten years will have a huge impact on the form of participation in our events, the pool of resources and tools at our disposal, and, above all, the definition of culture as such. Soon, culture in cities will be completely transformed, and the new standard — and a priority for our audience! — will be to offer the consumers shelter from heat waves, free and safe drinking water and a meal — preferably prepared together, with plant-based products grown on our roofs or terraces. Perhaps we will also be forced to change the formula of action — in the face of the overpopulation of cities in the Global North, spaces for culture will have to offer residents a temporary roof over their heads or an outdoor space for a camping site, analogously to the situation in which employees of theatres and operas sewed protective masks during the lockdown. The spectre of the disaster and its consequences — a crisis in access to water and food, severe weather phenomena or migration resulting from climate change — requires us to simultaneously develop and implement mitigation and adaptation strategies. Yes, it is true — the emissions attributed to the world of art and culture are not comparable with industrial emissions on a global scale. However, this does not change the fact that our sector is closer to society, and therefore affects public opinion to a greater degree. By “our sector” I also mean culture that is more profit-driven than galleries or art reviews — in the form of television, streaming services or popular festivals. It is high time mass culture also became more critical and socially useful (instead of being a carrier and “fixative” of consumerism).

So, can a large cultural event be organised in keeping with the green standards? After all, festivals are for the most part based on commercial mechanisms. Even if the organisers finance them from public

funds, these subsidies are often insufficient to cover all expenses connected with production — in many cases they constitute a negligible percentage of the total budget. It is worth bearing in mind that marketing activities around a large cultural brand do not necessarily have to be based on standard channels, such as outdoor or large-format advertising — there is also the Internet, social media and opinion leaders who can be engaged in promoting our initiatives. When carrying out a “zero footprint” campaign, it is a good idea to introduce an environment-related narrative into the story of our brand — this way, more climate-conscious people will join our audience while “the regulars” can be persuaded to adopt the “less waste” philosophy. However, consistency is crucial — a brand that positions itself as environmentally conscious but does not implement its philosophy in practice will not be taken seriously. Examples of bad practices include the admission of caterers using plastic packaging to the catering zone, the lack of waste segregation at the festival site, or investing in cooperation with business partners whose products and services pose a threat to the environment (e.g. manufacturers of tobacco or automotive products). Our partners, both institutional and businesses, should share the values we represent — also with regard to climate.

The organisation of large events is mostly about planning — programme, administration and production. Planning is a time of making strategic decisions, and it is at this stage that the “less is more” strategy should be implemented. When preparing the programme of a festival, we should ask ourselves — and in the case of the line-up, ask our recipients! — whether we really have to invite artists from other continents to our city (and, as a result, contribute to the emissions caused by the use of airplanes), whether we should really produce the entire festival furniture from scratch (I know from experience that it is usually enough to repaint fruit crates or borrow deckchairs from our partners), and finally whether anyone really needs another festival gadget. In the rare circumstance of having excessive funds to promote our event, why not think about a tree-planting campaign in cooperation with a local non-governmental organisation? In this way, we will not only strengthen the natural immune system of our planet, but also establish cooperation with professionals involved in the fight against climate change, whose expert support can prove to be essential.

Finally, an important thought — nothing can be achieved by acting alone. Our strength lies in cooperation — exchange of experience and knowledge, cooperation in creating tools dedicated to culture — and above all in inter-sectoral cooperation. Only through cooperation can we create a critical green mass in the world of culture which, in turn, will become the driving force influencing the creation of systemic solutions (green policies for our sector, and, as a result, financial programmes aimed at reducing CO2 emissions and investments in green infrastructure), creating eco-friendly trends in the field of culture and art marketing, and supporting creatives and designers whose work addresses the subject of the climate catastrophe.





DISCUSSION: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ORGANI- SATION OF (LARGE) CULTURAL EVENTS

WHY SHOULD THE CULTURAL SECTOR ALSO ADDRESS CLI- MATE CHANGE? WHAT IS THE CLUBS' RESPONSIBILITY?

From a global point of view, the cultural sector has not yet been the subject of the discussion on sustainability. However, when we take a closer look at cultural events, we will understand that not only are these activities responsible for a significant amount of direct pollution, such as noise, particulate matter and waste production, but they also indirectly contribute to greater emissions by consuming electricity produced by burning fossil fuels. For example, a medium-sized club consumes the same amount of electricity during one weekend as a single-person household throughout the year — approximately 1,000 kWh (data source: BUND Berlin e.V.). Only a small number of clubs use green electricity, produced entirely from renewable energy sources, hence the high CO₂ emissions.

Nevertheless, it is of little use to chastise cultural clubs and institutions for not being green enough. Instead, the fact that the cultural sector can act as a catalyst accelerating the speed of sustainable change in society should be used. Clubs are social spaces in which culture develops, where various subcultures meet to exchange and discuss values. In a nutshell, they are inspirational places. Clubs can — should — fully use their creative potential by setting an example in the sphere of climate protection and inspiring the local communities to adopt pro-ecological attitudes aimed at protecting the resources. Clubtopia has set itself the double goal of bringing about a pro-environmental change within the club scene while informing and encouraging the clubbers

to take pro-ecological actions. In keeping with the motto “No Music on a Dead Planet,” the global movement Music Declares Emergency fights for climate protection while raising the awareness of the fact that animal species are dying out because of human activity.

1.
Introduction – what is Clubtopia? What is Clubtopia’s approach to sustainability?

To combat climate change, the city of Berlin wants to become climate neutral by 2030. This ambitious goal, which can only be achieved with the residents’ support, is also the reason why at the beginning of 2019 BUND Berlin and the clubliebe association founded Clubtopia. With the support of the Berlin Senate Department for the Environment, Transport and Climate Protection, the initiative aims to accelerate the sustainable transformation of the Berlin club scene by creating a network of contacts between experts in nightlife and sustainability and by encouraging concrete pro-environmental actions in the sector. This goal will be achieved by organising innovative workshops, round tables, energy consultations and online training, among other things.

2.
What factors have so far prevented clubs and cultural institutions from adopting a more climate-friendly policy?

In recent years, the club scene has become increasingly interested in more sustainable and green solutions for the organisation of events. Many club managers and activists are highly motivated to transform clubs into more climate-friendly venues. However, they encounter three main difficulties: lack of knowledge, time and money.

Knowledge. Concrete knowledge about ecology is been sufficiently popularised in the nightlife industry. Pro-climate alternatives are not generally used in clubs and smaller cultural institutions. It is important

to present concrete and easy-to-implement solutions and provide people in this industry with appropriate training.

Time. Clubs are places that use spaces and buildings for relatively short periods. Fixed-term lease contracts or ideas for short-term use of space determine their uncertain future. This situation makes long-term investment, especially in buildings and major equipment, highly risky and economically unprofitable. That is why Clubtopia advises on issues such as low-cost investments, eco-friendly changes of habits, or portable energy-saving equipment.

Money. This aspect is closely connected with the time investment needed to break the routine, find green alternatives or test new solutions. All this is related to labour costs or (minor) investments. However, clubs often do not have the necessary funds, as many of them generate just enough money to cover the running costs. Clubtopia suggests solutions which ensure quick return on investment due to energy savings.

3.
How should the cultural sector develop in the future? What alternatives exist in times of resource scarcity?

In the future, we expect clubs and cultural institutions to take into greater consideration the idea of efficiency, i.e. the use of pro-ecological and low-waste solutions. Less means more. In the cultural sector, this means that the existing practices must be radically questioned due to their ecological footprint, which must be factored into the planning of a successful cultural event.

For example, club managers may ask themselves: How often should you book artists whose performance requires long-haul flights? How much lighting is necessary during an event? How many decorations? How many drinks should be on the menu? Of course, the quality of cultural production should not suffer because of this.

Once the most obvious items have been checked, the first steps towards change can be taken; it is important, for example, to change the power source to 100% renewable energy. Further down the road, club managers and culture creators can decide to switch to energy-efficient technical solutions (in terms of lighting, cooling, ventilation) and shape their own mobility and logistics habits in the most environmentally-friendly way possible. Strategies such as upcycling, zero waste, repairing and sharing equipment and other assets are ways to sparingly use resources in the cultural events industry. Ultimately, the key to a sustainable club lies in communicating with the patrons. They can be actively involved in the implementation of the principles of sustainable development and take inspiration from the solutions used in clubs. Because you can dance better in a greener world!

A strong alliance for a green club night

Clubtopia is a project created in cooperation with: BUND Berlin e.V., clubliebe e.V. and Clubcommission Berlin. It receives grants from the Senate Department for the Environment, Transport and Climate Protection. The project is supported by the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, the Centre for Sustainable Tourism (ZENAT) and Livekomm.





CLIMATE CHANGE AND ARTISTS' RESPONSIBILITY

¹ McKibben, Bill, "What the World Needs Now is Art, Sweet Art," available at <https://grist.org/article/mckibben-imagine/>

² *Sun & Sea (Marina)* is an opera composed by Lina Lapelytė with a libretto by Vaiva Grainytė and directed by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė. It was presented in the Lithuanian Pavilion during the 2019 Venice Biennale as part of a project curated by Lucia Pietroiusti.

If we want to cause social change, we must engage the imagination, writes Bill McKibben, author of the first widely discussed book on global warming entitled *The End of Nature*. In his article entitled "What the World Needs Now is Art, Sweet Art,"¹ the journalist and author of many publications on the earth's climate problems urges artists to act, to introduce the subject of climate catastrophe to the field of art. He appeals to them to create paintings, installations, performances and operas. I wonder if his books was on the reading list of the winners of the Golden Lion at the 58th Venice Biennale, who created the poignant, holiday-catastrophic opera entitled *Sun & Sea (Marina)*² for the Lithuanian Pavilion?

Scientific graphs do not have the power to captivate crowds. Charts with data do not inspire the masses. The language of art has these features. To me, art is a mirror in which both the creator and the recipient can see themselves. Although everyone will see only as much as they are ready to take in, it is literature, music, film, the visual arts, design and theatre that have the power to digest what is happening to us. It is relatively easy for artists to guise facts in a non-literal, abstract, open-minded form that accepts varying degrees of insight. This way of taking in knowledge favours familiarisation. It is impossible to fully comprehend and soak in the gravity of the fact that the comfortable life of us, First World people, is the direct cause of a climate apocalypse. Because how to get your mind around what it actually is? To illustrate it, you can show some snapshots from Chernobyl, appeal to imagination and memories of the 1986 disaster. And to watch a series in which the vivid depiction of suffering almost hurts the viewer. The picture stimulates the imagination and has the power of persuasion. This is how scientists began to talk about the looming climate threat. This is

what Sir David Attenborough did when he decided to begin his latest series of films³ devoted to the climate catastrophe with the image of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

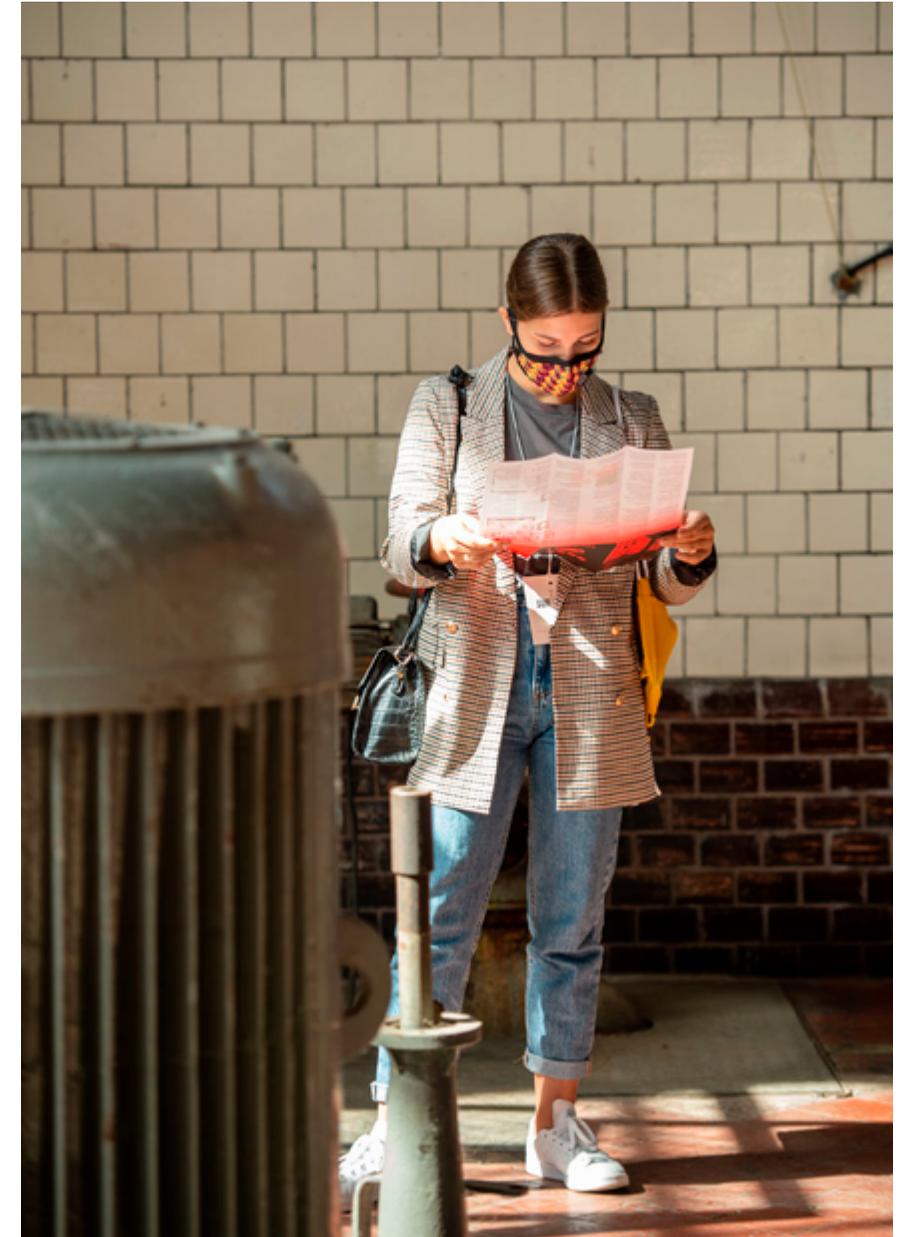
The use of visual means is a common and effective practice in reaching the recipient. Although popular culture has appropriated it, it is worth remembering that their roots trace back to art. Artists, both those cooperating with the world of pop culture and those who reject it, very often comment on the condition of the climate through their actions, emphasising the responsibility that people bear towards it. It is impossible to mention here a representative sample of activities reflecting how artists think about climate and comment on its problems in a multifaceted, perverse or innovative manner, what solutions they propose and how they talk about the current situation. From the last major project by Joseph Beuys entitled *Difesa della Natura* (*Defence of Nature*), in which the artist planted endangered tree species; to Olafur Eliason's ice block-clocks melting in front of the entrance to London's TATE; beautiful but overwhelming traces of civilisation photographed by David Maisel; Naziha Mestaoui's multimedia installation *One Heart, One Tree*, in which viewers participated in the planting of real trees by watching virtual ones; to the *Rain Room*, a field of falling water that pauses wherever a human body is detected, thus opening up to even the saddest interpretations; to what I find one of the most beautiful works on littering the environment, Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Surrounded Islands* — twelve uninhabited islands in Biscayne Bay near Miami, on which 40 tons of rubbish was collected at one time, surrounded with floating pink fabric. In Poland, it is Diana Lelonek with her records of the Anthropocene. There are many examples and each of them brings a new perspective to the discussion on the problems facing the natural environment. Regardless of the medium and narrative, all the artistic activities which I have come across demonstrate a consistent belief that human actions are the cause of climate change, leading to irreversible degradation of nature. Artists feel the need to contribute to the discussion. However, I think that what prompts us to comment on climate problems is not the profession of being an artist — it is the awareness of being a consumer. Because the climate debate is about dealing with your own consumerism. Without stopping the universally binding model of life based on incessant economic

growth, we will transform the earth into a place that is no longer hospitable to human life.

Activists are taking to the streets ever more often. They are joined by citizens of different age and education. The student climate protests initiated by Greta Thunberg could not be ignored by the mass media. Although nothing will change without political decisions, it is the consistent gathering into protest groups that again turns out to be the strongest form of manifesting one's position. Artists are aware of the power of protesting for the climate and include this action as a medium in their works. The figure of activist-artist opens up new perspectives by highlighting inter-species cooperation in order to create "more-than-human" stories. At this point, it is worth mentioning the curatorial projects *Zoopolis — Design for Plants and Animals* and *Zoopolis — Design for Weeds and Pests*, in which the collective actions of the artists and curators aim to create new narratives based on visibility, respect and coexistence of all living creatures on equal terms. In this case, I understand the term "design" as "redesigning the world" while rejecting an exclusively anthropocentric perspective.

Naturally, design is an extremely important subject that has a real impact on the condition of the environment. However, we must abandon all illusions — making any products, even eco-friendly ones, even the ones made for me, causes losses for the natural environment. As a designer and artist looking for an alternative to mass production, I turned my attention to shortening the supply chain and locality. Like never before, contemporary craftsmanship consciously combines elements of traditional workmanship with design and art. Today's craftsmen have distinctive manual skills that can be also used in other areas. Glenn Adamson, an eminent art and design critic, calls it the supplementary function of craftsmanship. In my opinion, the power of craftsmanship lies in the intelligence of the body, knowledge of the hands — in trusting your own body. It is Grotowski or Pina Bauch's theatre transferred to the field of production. Every step is taken consciously here, with the awareness that to keep your balance, you mustn't lean only one side — the side of continuous capitalist growth based on industrial production. I am convinced that mass production cannot be avoided. It must be acknowledged that it has contributed significantly to the improvement of the standard of living. However, the main task of

production based on short series, direct contact between the customer and the manufacturer, and long-term usefulness of the product is the function of sensitising the user. It introduces the need for high quality and beauty in order to teach people how to care for a product, hoping that in the broader perspective it will lead to the reduction of junk consumption. Nowadays, craftsmanship is a way of acting, looking at the world, participating in a world that is based on an ethical commitment that turns out to be necessary in contexts such as climate change or people's mental health: less products, but higher quality, responsibility, participation.







When the streaming of our conversation had finished, many thoughts came to my mind, so I'm very happy to have the opportunity to return to them. I don't know about you, but sometimes I find it difficult to take part in remote meetings. It's hard for me to stay focused. My voice echoes in the empty room and sometimes I have the impression that it's unreal. And I sometimes catch myself looking at my own reflection, which only adds to my confusion and deepens my sense of un-reality. In the past, probably due to stress, I'd sometimes "drop out" even from a physical meeting, but it happened sporadically. During our conversation, I experienced this state twice. Is it a common sensation or is it just me? In order to enter into a conversation, I need physical contact with a human being, and now I have to unlearn it somehow. Not only because it is a necessity resulting from the ongoing pandemic. There are reasons why I really like online meetings. There is certain energy in them, they have great polemical potential. They can be held despite many other circumstances, as a direct consequence of current events, at different latitudes, simultaneously. A bit like the new television, because the Polish one still fails to provide people with adequate knowledge and causes cognitive dissonance in too many of us.

In recent months, I've participated in many online discussions, both actively and passively. In the latter case, the conversations were the background to my various activities, often ordinary and domestic. I remember from my philosophical studies that reality has many layers and we are not necessarily the same person in all of them. So it's important to integrate these layers and experience something at their intersection; see a thing in different contexts, find out how it works on many levels of life. The main topics of most of these

online events were: the role of cultural institutions in counteracting climate change, the situation of Polish art in the context of COVID-19, resilience, recovery programmes, adapting urban infrastructures to climate change, doughnut economics, the Green New Deal, switching to renewable energy, climate justice, biomimetics, the politics of care, regenerative design and post-growth. This is the filter I've put on my interests in recent months. Participants in many of these events admitted that, unless they were doing caring or organisational work, the lockdown had allowed them to read new books, prepare their working translations into their own languages, learn about new concepts and phenomena and verify their own views and interests precisely through this perspective. And immediately share it with others. These conversations were often informal in character, accompanied by phrases such as "I'm reading," "I've just found out," "it sheds new light," as well as a general sense of frustration and a certain defencelessness in the face of the circumstances. The world that had so far impressed me with its aloofness and standoffishness suddenly shed the epidermis, which didn't make it any more vulnerable.

I remember the last months as a period of heated conversations, in the format of familiar faces multiplied against unfamiliar backgrounds. The most interesting moments for me were those when my interlocutors gave up their intellectual positions and started "thinking live." This moment is not always safe for the listener, but it's invariably interesting. I like listening to someone coming to terms with new knowledge, taking it in, turning new concepts in their head, doing it aloud. This encouraged me to do similar exercises. At one point, I felt the urge to be part of the process of supporting new, environmentally-conscious social practices. I realised how many previously hidden connections were now surfacing; disciplines intersect, drive each other and there are huge transfers of knowledge. This creates interdisciplinary alliances, and increasingly often I see people with an artistic background successfully find their place in them, creating new, multi-threaded narratives.

SEVERAL REALLY INTERESTING THREADS EMERGED IN OUR CONVERSATION, AND SEVERAL OTHERS APPEARED ON THE MARGIN:

1. The ecologisation of cultural institutions

This is the most obvious thread connecting our professional environment with the subject of climate change. We've recently witnessed increased interest in the production of cultural events. Of course, in terms of wastefulness we are nowhere near industrial plants, but in our case it is about symbols and adding credibility to our "green" programmatic activity. Smaller and less subsidised institutions have been familiar with this issue for years. Individually or in small networks of cooperation with other organisations, they create, for example, furniture designed in such a way that it can be adapted to various exhibition needs and used for years. In recent months, there's been a lot of talk about energy and environmental audits. Many institutions and organisations that I know have appointed the so-called green expert, whose role is to introduce environmentally-friendly or at least sustainable practices to the workplace. But this greening of institutions often goes beyond obvious ideas such as saving paper, reducing the amount of promotional materials or catering. Institutions problematise the issue of ownership and access to their own resources, such as equipment and even space. I was guided by such thinking when initiating the Livery project, a social and educational space at the Dizajn BWA Wrocław gallery. During the time when no activities are offered there, which is at least several dozen hours a week, the users interact with the space according to their own ideas and needs. Among the new challenges faced by institutions is environmental impact of Internet communication and the internal documentation and archiving policy.

2. Eco-realism

I hope that the subject of climate change or environmental emergency in art, or, more broadly, in culture, is not just a temporary shift or trend, but a genuine attempt to work through the collective anxiety. Sometimes I say that the role of cultural institutions is to use all possible rhetorical means to inform the society about the risks associated with this area. I've noticed that it stirs up controversy in some circles, which may interpret it as an attempt to impose a programmatic direction or even restrict creative freedom in the fashion of socialist realism. This has never been my intention. My perspective is closer to concluding that "there will be no art on a dead planet" than practices in the vein of "art and climate change." The range of programmatic activities is wide and requires editorial work rather than censorship. Personally, what I look for in art is cracks rather than literalism, and I perceive my participation in culture as a secular performance of spirituality.

3. Resilience

My job is to curate and edit exhibitions connected with design and I see in this discipline an opportunity to solve at least some of the crises related to climate change and ecological disasters. For many decades, design favoured an economic model based on the idea of constant growth, dehumanised public spaces and hyperconsumption, although many designers themselves have warned against them in numerous appeals and manifestos since at least the 1960s. Currently, I am interested in practices whose goal is more ambitious than sustainable development, which is actually insufficient in the current situation because it means reducing bad practices. Before we build systems that are resistant to the negative effects of climate change and loss of biodiversity, we should understand both our own immune mechanisms and those of the entire environment. We are facing a gradual adjustment of all infrastructures, and in this process we cannot cut ourselves off from other earthly life forms.

4. Social engagement

In the last decade, Polish cultural institutions have been developing educational and public programmes which, starting from meetings intended to introduce the context of the presented works of art, have also established a number of new forms of relationships with the public based on active participation. They have a huge potential for further activities, oriented not only towards the programme of the institution, but also towards environmental issues. For example, I am looking forward to intergenerational workshops devoted to the classification of clouds, which, as we know, are not only a popular motif in art, but are currently undergoing transformations due to the current climatic conditions. There are lots of inspiring scenarios problematising the relationship between culture and nature, and it is high time to reintroduce this dimension in the public debate.

5. Deep listening

Such hyper-consumption also applies to the image, which has dominated the other senses. Therefore, deep listening practices introduce a lot of new quality. The audience of the Survival Art Review are familiar with them thanks to the many years of practice of Daniel Brożek, the Sound Art Forum curator. I've learned from our many conversations that deep listening is a specific type of activity that brings us closer to phenomena that we usually unknowingly ignore. They neither pose a threat nor offer potential rewards, which is why we have evolved to ignore them. The fact that this year's laureate of the Audience Awards was Alicja Patanowska and her sound sculpture entitled *Auditory Imagination Chamber* demonstrates both the finely developed sense of listening of the Survival audience and the expressiveness of the sound of a falling drop of water, enhanced by the ceramic resonator and the acoustics of the pump hall.

6. Imagination

We began our conversation with the words of Bill McKibben, an American writer and ecologist, author of *The End of Nature*, a pioneering book from 1989 that popularised the problem of climate change. In one of his texts, McKibben admitted that in order to change something, one must resort to the imagination, because knowledge alone is not enough. This is why society needs artists so much. I agree with this and I would like decision-makers and legislators to create more opportunities for the emergence of solutions other than those rooted in the free market. There are many artists ready and interested in cooperation on designing solutions for society, but their great creative potential is often limited to the final stages, such as decoration or promotion.

7. Tone

The tone of communication is just as important as the content. There are many strategies for communicating information about a catastrophe, but intuitively we reach for the most effective tool, i.e. intensification of the tone. There is nothing wrong with that, I respect the alarmist attitude a lot, although I understand that it cannot be maintained for a very long time. This is why it seems very important to me to be able to come up with a tone that will keep the tension without causing burnout. There is probably no special scenario here and everyone should develop it in their own way.

8. Fire

In Naomi Klein's latest book *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal*, we read about the three types of fire that we are currently experiencing. The first is the fire of burnt fossil fuels, the second consumes the earth, and the third is a metaphor for the growth of social movements that fight for a fair chance of survival for all people on a degraded planet.

I see cultural institutions as the natural allies of this faction.







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