

# Tadej Droljc

## MELTING BORDERS

9 December 2022–7 January 2023

MMC KIBLA / KiBela

We spent this year's extremely warm October sitting in the gentle rays of the sun and marveling at the warm, sometimes almost summer-like weather. We were not prepared to say goodbye to the summer, albeit extremely hot, because the pleasant natural warmth evoked the feeling of comfort; however, this feeling was soon mixed with an eerie feeling of discomfort and growing anxiety caused by the awareness of the magnitude of the devastating consequences of climate change (»ecological anxiety« or »eco-anxiety« or »climate anxiety«),<sup>1</sup> – especially at the sight of the noticeable changes in our environment and the news of melting glaciers, droughts and fires.

It is now well known that the temperature of the Earth's atmosphere has been rising since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution because of human activities. Despite all the scientific evidence, however, we are still witnessing intense propaganda denying environmental change, so it is necessary to state a few facts once again: the fastest and most intense warming of the atmosphere has been since 1975, when, according to NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, the atmosphere warmed by an average of somewhere between 0.15 and 0.20 degrees per decade. But according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), temperatures in Europe have risen twice as much as the global average over the last 30 years, with the physical consequences being mainly the visible melting of glaciers in the Alps, long-lasting heat waves and droughts, and widespread forest fires. The fires that have been consuming the Amazon rainforest, Australia, parts of the United States and Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Alaska and Siberia with increasing intensity and menace in recent years are certainly the result of a confluence of human activities driven by capital.

On Earth, something *is always burning*. In his latest installation, Tadej Droljc takes up this statement in both its literal and metaphorical sense. The fires, which are started by a laser on a large-scale panel or in an abstracted »global landscape«, simulate the fires that have spread across the globe in the last twenty years (data taken from NASA Earth Observatory). Roughly speaking, these fires can be divided into natural fires, which are mainly the result of global warming and other kinds of climate change in recent decades, and deliberate fires: on the one hand, controlled burns of arable farmland, and on the other hand, those resulting from the exploitation of natural resources, deforestation (think of the fires in the Amazon rainforest and the viral campaign »The wrong Amazon is burning«)<sup>2</sup> and terraforming done by international corporations and individual countries. »Welcome to the Pyrocene, the geological age of fire, matched by the overwhelming affects of fear and dread, and complicated by the

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Opening hours: Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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<sup>1</sup> »Ecological anxiety« is a chronic fear of environmental doom, also defined by the American Psychological Association. Clayton, Susan; Manning, Christie; Krygsman, Kirra; Speiser, Meighen), *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance* (PDF), March 2017, American Psychological Association, Available at: <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/03/mental-health-climate.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Libbing Barrera-Perez, Silvia, *The Wrong Amazon is Burning*, Tufts Observer, 30 September 2019. Available at: <https://tuftsobserver.org/the-wrong-amazon-is-burning/>.

very incomprehensibility of responsibility,«<sup>3</sup> writes art historian and cultural critic T. J. Demos, summarizing a term coined in 2015 by Stephen Pyne, environmental historian and professor emeritus at Arizona State University. Pyne's academic career has been devoted to the study of the history of fires and the relationship between humans and fire. He argues that the Pyrocene offers a new and more precise discursive framework for exploring our cause-and-effect relationship to the »overheated planet«, as it marks a historical period in which humans are creating hell on Earth through the use of fire, particularly through the extraction and burning of fossil fuels. The Pyrocene offers a »fire-centric« perspective through which we analyze the impact of humans on the environment, and, according to Pyne, appropriately redefines the term Anthropocene, a controversial but widely accepted term to refer to the youngest geological unit marked by human alteration of the Earth's atmospheric, geological, hydrological, biospheric and other earthly processes. The Pyrocene thus offers a slightly different perspective on climate and biogeographic change, the sixth extinction, changes in the chemical composition of the oceans and sea level rise, and the characteristics and impact of human presence on Earth. And, as Pyne says, like fire, the Pyrocene captures its environment: geographical, historical, institutional and intellectual.<sup>4</sup>

Just as devastating wildfires have spread across the globe, images of them have flooded the media and social networks from every corner of the world. To paraphrase T. J. Demos, despite all the images of devastation that circulate online with each new fire, we are always confronted with the inadequacy of images that, while they undoubtedly testify to the physical devastation of a particular locality, fail to capture and depict the far-reaching consequences of loss, suffering and the financial and bureaucratic fallout.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, these images, the media and corporations most often portray fires as isolated events, often removed from a broader cause-and-effect context. On the contrary, in his new installation, artist Tadej Droljc offers insight into the global scale, frequency and the unprecedented number of fires. The visually abstracted »landscape« actually represents a highly simplified earth structure where »fires« spread and transform it. In the exhibition, a laser beam, a symbol of human destructiveness, operates on a predetermined algorithm and »lights« all the registered fires that have raged across the Earth over the last two decades, and consequently reshapes and melts the »Earth's surface« into a kind of post-apocalyptic landscape.

It is not only forests and other ecosystems that are burning – in the Capitalocene, the »burning issues« are continuous crises – humanitarian, ecological, economic and social. Inherently linked, they are transforming the world and its borders as we know them.

- Živa Kleindienst

# BIOGRAPHY

Website



**Tadej Droljc** is a Slovenian intermedia artist and creative programmer who works at the intersection of sound, image and light. Tadej has received the Lumen Prize Student Award for his solo work, the Dennis Smalley scholarship for electroacoustic music and the Most Promising Video Artist Award at the Madatac festival. His audiovisual research at the CeReNeM Centre for New Music Research won the Outstanding Doctoral Thesis Award, his *Synspecies* project won the Edigma Semibreve Award and was shortlisted for the Lumen Prize. Tadej has performed and exhibited at festivals such as Paris Biennale NEMO, Ars Electronica, L. E.V. Festival, Brighton Digital Festival, Semibreve, Lunchmeat, Node, Sonica Glasgow, etc. As part of his collaboration with Ars Electronica's Futurelab department on the *Immersify* project, his work has been presented at events such as the Marché du Film – Festival de Cannes, Inter BEE Tokyo or IBC Amsterdam.

<sup>3</sup> Demos, T.J., *The Agency of Fire: Burning Aesthetics*, e-flux (št. 8), February 2019. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/98/256882/the-agency-of-fire-burning-aesthetics/>.

<sup>4</sup> Pyne, Stephen J., *Welcome to the Pyrocene*, Grist, 18 August 2021. Available at: <https://grist.org/wildfires/welcome-to-the-pyrocene/>.

<sup>5</sup> Demos, T.J., *The Agency of Fire: Burning Aesthetics*, e-flux (no. 8), February 2019. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/98/256882/the-agency-of-fire-burning-aesthetics/>.