

**Transcript Ep.57: Book Review Roundtable: Art & Climate Change**

[video playing] *What is worth more, art or life? Is it worth more than food? Worth more than justice? Are you more concerned about the protection of a painting or the protection of our planet and people? The cost of living crisis is part of the cost of oil crisis. Fuel is unaffordable to millions of cold hungry families. They can't even afford to heat a tin of soup!]*

[Nitin Bathla] You just heard an excerpt from the recent direct action by climate activists from the UK-based "Radical Climate Action Group, Just Stop Oil". The activists, 21 year old Phoebe Plummer and 20 years old Anna Holland threw a can of soup at a Van Gogh painting at the National Gallery in London to protest government inaction against climate change and the cost of living crisis in the UK. The relationship between art and climate change has been a tenacious one. Artists have often reflected on climate change and the deepening climate crisis in diverse and profound ways, exposing us to the hidden sensorium of climate change, and how, perhaps, we could one day learn to embrace the Anthropocene and find creative ways to live with it. In today's podcast, we will be discussing a recent book that explores the intersections between art and climate change. We will be joined by the authors of the book, Dr. Maja and Reuben Fowkes, art historians, curators, and co-directors of the Post Socialist Art Center, BACT, at the UCL Institute of Advanced Studies. And two brilliant interlocutors, Professor Debjani Bhattacharyya, who is a professor of the history of the Anthropocene at the University of Zurich, and Professor Tatjana Schneider, who's Professor of history and theory of architecture at the TU Braunschweig. I'm your host, Nitin Bhatla, and this is the Urban Political.

[intro] *The podcast on urban theory, research and activism.*

[Debjani Bhattacharyya] Okay. Okay. Thank you. Thank you so much for that very wonderful introduction, Nitin, and I would begin by thanking you for inviting me to this podcast, and Maja and Reuben Fowkes for sharing this rich and eye opening and field shifting work with me. And, you know, what a time to be reading about the relationship between art and climate change! Indeed, I would say there could be no better time for more than one reasons. You know, I read your book in the backdrop of the current discussion, especially at this time, when we've suddenly been befuddled by why climate activists are throwing soup on Van Gogh paintings or gluing themselves to Goya's paintings in Madrid. And sadly, instead of jolting us away, it has given way to a certain kind of reductionist mainstream media response, ranging from "throwing soup to save climate" to "how many Van Goghs is one earth worth". In many ways, *Art and Climate Change* prefigures some of the answers by collecting together a wide range of artistic practices and projects, expressions and, I would add, critiques of our responses or indifference to the current planetary crisis. Indeed, Maja and Reuben not only give us an account of the current planetary conditions and their local manifestation, but their accounting for is also a demand for accountability of state power, of corporate criminality, of inaction by global authorities. The artworks discussed over five parts, from Anthropocene through projects of reconfiguring the geosphere to the alternative understandings that emerge when we think through floral collectivism, animal solidarities, and concluding on a note of possibilities in the pre-reversal ecologies, threads the

planetary and the local in an evocative manner that is rarely seen when one (or should I just stick to my field and say, when we historians) work in these multiscalar archives, thrown up by Earth's deep pasts. Meshing scholarship from history, anthropology, geography, and art practices, the book offers a tour de force account of how artists across the world, especially those located in the global South, are responding to the current climate crisis by revealing the long processes of colonial capitalization of nature, be it in the Eastern side and the Western side, (and I loved your attention to both sides of the Cold War hemisphere), to corporate stripping of the earth's crust, to the suppression of indigenous epistemologies and racial violence. What they offer us is not simply an artist's recounting of the rampage upon the earth, but also stories of fighting back, documenting how people across the world living with the forest swarms, hills, fought back and thus offering us codes to make sense of the operations of power and giving us a rhetoric of insurgency that is needed in the current moment.

Thus moving beyond narrow bourgeois environmentalisms of conservation and greening, what we get here is how to re-epistemologize knowledges in the plants and animal worlds. How do we, for instance, understand planetary jurisprudence and cosmopolitan justice in more-than-human frames? And how finally, (and this one stuck with me a lot) the new electronic colonialism and digital species can be made visible by following the hyper modern undersea cables, along their route, which follows the violent roots of colonialism and the shipping lanes of Atlantic slavery?

Indeed, this book asks us to account for centuries of cultivated indifference that allowed *business as usual* to loot the planet and its most disenfranchised population in order to enrich a few in the global north. As a teacher, a history teacher trying to teach about the colonial conquest of nature and its terrifying post-colonial afterlives, I read the book pedagogically too. It is rich in that way. It instructs through examples of artistic practices, which is able to hold together the contradictions that define our "modern" lives on this planet. I will definitely be using the book and the artists you have introduced me to in my teaching. It is a very rich book brimming with original insights, and I cannot do justice to it through this discussion. It is visually rich and evocative book. It has to be held, pored over. I spent time with the images, thought about them, felt sometimes really petrified by them, always deeply saddened, but also found some answers and some hope. In order to give our listeners a sense of the work we are dealing with, let me take up, take us to one small section on page 66-67, where they discussed artist Minerva Cuevas' project **Bittersweet Hershey's 2015**. Sitting here in Zurich, in the land of Lindt and chocolate, this project drew me in. It shows a Hershey's label with its crumpled silver foil and melted chocolate in it. These words are printed in another corner. *"an evil power, which roams the earth, crippling the bodies of men and women, luring nations to destruction by visions of unarmed wealth and the opportunity to enslave and exploit"*.

Her installation included a contraption that drips chocolate at an interval of 3.6 seconds. Replicating the rate at which someone in the world dies of starvation. As the pandemic deepens the hunger crisis in the world with a projected 12,000 people dying of hunger by the end of this year, it is important to pause at these two pages where Reuben and Maja discuss food as a tool to question current forms of power exchange across the planet. Revealing his histories as often deeply embedded, to use their word, in commodity racism. What better way to think about the planetary crisis that perhaps begins in our pantries and our kitchens? What better way to connect the hyper local to the planetary? Cuevas art projects, they point out, problematizes the cultivation of cacao crops in her native Mexico, an industry that sustained European colonialism. Her work consists of prints made using cacao powder, found objects and artifacts covered with chocolate to show how Granorrial, a high end variety of cacao grown in the Chiapas, now available only in places like Belgium and Switzerland, has made the Chiapas a place of widespread hunger, dispossession, and exploitative labour practices.



I just wanted to share this really small sliver here today, so that you get a texture of the work and see how each page is brimming with insights of this manner. To close, or to open up the discussion, I will raise two questions.

And I want to ask first, what does it mean to work through art in these times of crisis? After reading your work, I think there could be no better persons to illuminate the role of art in the face of climate crisis than the two of you. I asked this broad question precisely because I read the book in the cacophony of the activist action by Stop Oil and Future of Vegetal, and found the current discussion either reductive or simply having reached a dead end. And this book, *Art and Climate Change* actually gives us a sense of the possibilities; if we not only heard the accounts that these artists are documenting on the stories they are trying to tell, but also, if we took seriously the accounting of responsibilities your work is demanding. So, I wanted you to talk a bit about how you see the relation between art and the contemporary transformations that are undergoing as we understand climate every day on you. What possibilities of communicating climate open up when we think through the scientific graphs, historical data, meteorological simulation rendered through art practices that you do?

Second, the beautiful, (and these are just two questions to open up, I have tons and tons of questions) but the beautiful fifth section of the book ends with a chapter on *reparative histories*. And now you know there was a historian reading this book. And in that section you write that the damage done to the Earth can only be remedied by unlearning imperialism that hold the potential for ecological and social transformation of terrestrial life. And I thought, wow, what a concept “unlearning imperialism” and what a difficult concept to really grapple with. Where does even one begin? And I like it so much better than the term decolonize in some ways. So I was wondering if you can help us grapple with this concept a little bit and tell our audience about it. Thank you so much for writing this beautiful book and putting all these art projects into conversation. I'm just so honoured to be here in this discussion today.

[Maja Fowkes] Thank you so much for your response. It's absolutely amazing to hear. And this is exactly what we wanted to achieve when we wrote the book, to have someone deeply engaged and to understand that working with contemporary art and climate change means engaging on all these levels you mentioned, from local to planetary histories, from deep histories to troubling histories of the recent past and working with the futures, working with all the questions of politics and economy and justice and so on. And I'm really glad that you picked up on all of these various aspects of the book. So thanks so much.

[Reuben Fowkes] Yeah. And you know, maybe to move to the questions that you posed as well... You know, this question about what does it mean to work through art in a time of climate crisis and to think about these issues in this moment of climate crisis. And I think one thing is about the way the artists have taken on a special role in connecting different knowledges and approaches which offer an alternative to this mainstream view that you spoke about, this reaction to the actions of the climate activist actions in in the museum with the spilling of paint on Van Gogh work, but you know, just the way that artists have find a way of connecting indigenous epistemologies and also the latest scientific thinking, which is the way it's moving beyond that and coming full circle and connecting with traditional and indigenous knowledges as well. And I think that artists seem to be occupying a particular position in this transformation of knowledge and maybe it's something about their openness to thinking across boundaries and thinking through different geographies and different contexts as well that puts research based art practices in that position especially. So, you know, maybe I would stress this role in bringing

new knowledges and transforming the epistemologies at the moment, decolonizing them, but also bringing out more ecological epistemologies as well.

[Maja Fowkes] And also when we were thinking about the artists in the book, we really very much wanted to bring this wealth of approaches the artists are dealing with when they think about climate change, and they really approach it from so many perspectives and so many science standpoints and, well, not just geographically, but also whether they're thinking on the ground scale of infrastructures and economies. Or they go to micro scales of microbes, literally. And thinking of the other species or plants or animals or natural entities and elements, everything that is interconnected and working together on this planetary kind of playing field and they really are addressing it in all these very complex ways. And they're really pointing exactly opposite to what the media wants climate activism to be, by pointing out the complexity and interconnectedness of the crisis that are happening on the planet. And this is one of the main aspects of the book that we want to achieve, to go beyond understanding climate change as one issue and the single thing of carbon emissions, which obviously is something that is driving the climatic changes on the planet. But we really wanted to show how it is very much interconnected to all the other aspects of extinctions of biodiversity loss. Of climate migrations and all the other processes which are happening, biochemical processes that are happening on the planet, which are affecting the life, not just of humans, but all of terrestrials at the same time.

[Reuben Fowkes] And yeah, I mean also this question about what artists are offering, what they can do, and I think it is about complexity and asking difficult questions and they're not really offering simple solutions to the problem. So, you know, if people go to artists expecting them just to offer a very kind of like, positive, affirmative, hopeful vision of how everything's going to be solved... They're not doing that. They really are going into the depth of the problems and only somehow in certain areas, hinting or modelling possible potential ways to remedy the situation. And I think that we did try to convey that. Also, I mean, you mentioned the last chapter, the one on the perverse ecologies. We did try not to show them like offering a complete manifesto or program of how things could be solved because it's not really possible to do that, but just to show where there are areas where we could help think, as you mentioned, like unlearning imperialism or finding more localized solutions or connecting the planetary in the local in different ways in which artists were able to contribute to that discussion that is ongoing on how to respond to the climate crisis.

[Maja Fowkes] And I mean, one of the reasons the book is the way it is, is because of the format and the edition of the book which comes in this World of Art series, which has a limited number of words and limited number of pages and illustrations. And in that way, we had to set kind of parameters within which we had to work. And that's why we gave precedent to the artist's practices themselves, rather than going through a theoretical background of each practice, the way it could be connected to other kind of fields of interest. And we only hinted or provided this kind of a skeleton of theoretical and historical backgrounds that are necessary for understanding of the practices themselves. So in that way it's kind of...

[Reuben Fowkes] and we also resisted those temptations to sort of [going] beyond the visual arts and contemporary art practices to look at, for example, architecture or, you know, other sorts of adjacent

fields, which obviously... there's such a wealth of work done by other creatives or literature or, you know, multitude of other fields as well. But we kept it fairly focused on contemporary art and also on art produced in the last few years. So really on contemporary art in the last decade or the last five years, most recent contemporary artistic engagements. And I think that there is... it's not sort of a historical book about the engagements with art and ecology going back, you know, even since the sixties, it's not that at all. It really is dealing with the moment we're at now and how artists are approaching and responding to the real, acute nature of the climate crisis. And the fact that it can't really be called climate change as such, but really you have to say climate breakdown or climate catastrophe, or, you know, there are always new ways of people trying to express the magnitude of the current moment. And I think that's something about these contemporary artistic engagements with the problems that there really are... they're taking it seriously on such a level because of the seriousness of the problem. And that's somehow different to earlier engagement, say, with art and ecology, which somehow could either be a kind of niche interest or it was, it could be environmental history, but rather not dealing with the central issue of climate change as such.

[Tatjana Schneider] When you mentioned the format being given almost by the publisher, it just made me wonder about the book you would have done if you did not have the requirements by the publishers, the number of pages, the sort of the focus on the artist or something like that, you know, but maybe we can discuss that afterwards... I am an architect by training and I do look with a certain envy on this immense collection of practices that you have put together. I mean Debjani already mentioned this in a way: it's absolutely immense to see it in this sheer scale and number of practices that that have been... And I think it's been talked about, the stories about fighting back or unravelling also the complexities of the world that we live in, and it's sometimes it's overwhelming and you go on and you read and think, oh, gosh, there's another one. And there's another one. And there must be many, many, many, many more at this as well. So I find that incredibly enriching and also sort of... it almost sort of gave me... I was sitting there thinking, gosh, this is maybe the tip of the iceberg. Let's hope it's the tip of the iceberg! We could dig and dig. And there's maybe much more hope than I... At times and already in the beginning, you mentioned *Stop Oil* and other things. We could also talk about Cop27, which has just opened yesterday in Egypt and... and there's so much coming from architecture. There's so much lip-service and greenwashing being done about many of these things that I at times really do wonder where things go. I wonder whether you could talk a little bit about, you know, the people and practices and your way of organizing and bringing together really rich array of really inspiring practices.

[Maja Fowkes] The book was actually written during lockdown as it happened and we just got our contract I think like a week before the lockdown started in 2020 in the UK. And it was a real kind of... it changed the way we were thinking of how to approach the book because we were thinking more of doing different type of research than we in the end ended up working [on]. However, the artists that are in the book, we have chosen [them] partly because they're based on our lectures that we were giving during the teaching on Art and Visual Cultures of Anthropocene that we were teaching for years and the work with contemporary artists, and we knew we wanted to base it on the certain artist practices and artworks that we got so emotionally attached to by teaching them and thinking about them and having students writing about them and so on.

But at the same time, there were all these other practices that we also wanted to write about as well. But rather than thinking: Oh, there's all this massive amount of artists, perhaps, like you said, the tip

top of an iceberg, we really wanted to focus in the book on the themes themselves and subject that we wanted to address. And again, we limit ourselves to certain issues that we wanted to address in the beginning of the book. And then we divided it in five chapters and each had five sub-chapters. And in the first one, we really wanted to bring out the issues that are major causes of the climate change and climate disaster. So we focused on those practices. In the second part, we were thinking about other entities and elements of the natural world affected by the climate change. Then we had the chapter, which we thought was very important: thinking about the plants. And there's a big field in contemporary art as well as in contemporary science of thinking about what can the plants bring to the discussion, how they play a major role in climate change, by mitigating climate change and causing it in some way. So it's really an important field that we wanted to address and we... so plants and animals and finally, we're addressing the position of the Human within this bigger planetary whole. And each chapter is quite a short way of writing. This is a lockdown writing. Two and a half thousand words is what we could manage. And at the time, it was really thinking about who are the artists which discuss these issues at most depth, perhaps, you know, that really are catching our attention.

When we were discussing monocultures in agriculture, obviously we knew some artists we wanted to bring in, such as Ilona Németh's work on Eastern sugar and the problem of sugar production that she addresses. And here is one aspect where we do have our architecture present in the book, and that is through the residue of architecture through ruins, and this is Socialist Ruins and Pre-social ruins. And what has Neo-Colonial or Neo-Feudal, if you like, a way of working in this territories, supposed socialism brought to the natural and urban environment and to this kind of built environment. And she's really much, very much addressing that.

[Reuben Fowkes] And also maybe to circle back to this question around the reparative histories... So that's also that, you know, we didn't really address it yet. So this idea of unlearning imperialism. So, the idea that we looked at in the book and also in an exhibition, *Potential Agrarianism*, the sort of thing like Azoulay's idea that unlearning imperialism is to rewind history to the moment before colonialism happened or to the moment when the tragedy happened and then to go forward differently and we would want to think about how that could also be done with environmental history as well. So if things, environmental history went a certain way, we also think how that could also be thought differently and perhaps think about potential other routes that maybe it didn't have to go through. You know, the carbon intensive economy and form of agriculture, that agriculture could have been different. There was nothing particularly wrong with it. It worked well. And there are a lot of attempts to return to some of those ways of organizing nature that are non-capitalist in nature. So that was somehow the idea of also taking this idea of unlearning imperialism and thinking about it in an environmental and ecological context as well, in terms of that question.

And I mean, just on this idea of limits, it's quite good when you have a structure. So I think it's quite good when you work within it. So I think that although we had a certain word limit, a certain number of images and so on that we could work with, that was actually quite helpful when you're working towards something and it turned out to be quite a productive and expansive way of working as well, within that limit. It sort of obliges you to be quite concise and to make connections and to make something which works well, we hope, as a whole.

[Nitin Bathla] And I think, just to that point, I feel that that's something quite envious because it's really hard to pick a favourite chapter in the book. I mean, all of them were my favourite and they're all

treated so similarly, like it's almost like a flat reading through the book. And I really enjoyed that form of writing.

[Maja Fowkes] Yes. I mean it's also built on our previous work as curators and art historians. So we had a big project on Don river, [so] we knew we wanted to have a chapter on rivers. We worked with invasive species and invasive plants and the politics around them as we knew we wanted to have a chapter on that. We also are bird watchers, we love going and seeing the birds. So political ornithology was something that we definitely wanted to have in the book. Because once you engage in these projects, you know, all the artists that are working in the field, you want to present that aspect as well. So somehow the chapters came together in a very kind of organic way for us and based on the previous practice. But the reason that, on the one hand, perhaps we could manage them for us writing these sections, but on the other hand, is also understanding that our readership is mostly going to be the students or the artists of the youngest generation which are working and reading in this very technological world where there is not much attention span to read actual books. And I think reading a chapter is okay, you know, you can jump, you don't have to start from the beginning to end. You can jump wherever you like and catch up with the work where you feel like it's most relevant to you. And this is also intentionally so that it's not kind of like they have to sit through and work page by page, but really be more eclectic about the way you enter and how do you want to approach the book.

[Reuben Fowkes] I think that also this kind of curatorial approach as well... I mean, you mentioned us also being curators, although it is a book and an act of writing and research. Also we did, because we're quite connected with some of the artists and you sort of also approach working with contemporary art and contemporary artists also from a curatorial perspective, which often is about care towards the artist, towards the artworks and working with... rather than just sort of looking at from a distance at the artist, there's a sort of element of collaboration as well in curating. So somehow I think that that enabled us to be quite close to what we were writing about to the artists and the practices and the situations. And it's a sort of relationship which is also ongoing and continuing. So also some of the artists that we discovered through writing about them, we also hope to also or even start working with them on other projects, [and to] from a curatorial basis. So hopefully it's quite a sort of a live connection of collaboration with the artists.

[Maja Fowkes] And it's a form of an exhibition as well in the book, and you know the way we had to do it in the book rather than a biennial or different kind of exhibition that would be also very nice thing to kind of try to approach it in that way.

[Debjani Bhattacharyya] And I think you've begun to answer a question I had, which was about (again very boring academic question) perhaps a bit about method. But I think I was struck by how your discussion of one artwork moves it to another one and how you would draw conclusion, link it up. I thought it was beautiful, you know, and one thing I want to comment, and I think this is a good place to talk about it... so whenever I go to exhibitions on the Anthropocene or the current climate crisis, sometimes I'm slightly disturbed, but also deeply attracted to the aesthetics, especially when it comes to, you know, showing ravaged landscapes. So like Niger Delta or mines, it's so beautiful that it also almost terrifies me and disturbs me, like what is the aesthetics of this beauty doing, when I don't really

see the miners or the workers in the mines? And you know, when I came to your soil chapter, I was like, there are other ways of doing art because that was a very rich chapter that spoke about how we are stripping the richness of the soil and what artists are responding, but none of them have that aestheticization of apocalypse or aestheticization of disaster. And I really appreciated that, I must say, because it really did strike a very different... And that brought me to the question about, you know, methods in the sense you said it's a curatorial practice. You're brought to it. You also said this was a product of the pandemic: you had a set limit. You had to do it within those. But if you could tell us a little bit about the methods and the choices you made, some artists tended, some didn't. That would be, I think, wonderful to hear.

[Maja Fowkes] Okay I think it's a really interesting point about this is something that was very important to us. So a lot of artists engaged with art and climate change, art and Anthropocene, environmental issues, and most museums, galleries, art venues are exhibiting artists like that because that is what is of the time. So there is an enormous amount of shows going on with art on that. And there is a whole stream of art production, which is going towards illustrating on the one hand science itself. So the artists are bringing visuals to the scientific results. And there are very well known artists which are masterful in this kind of transferring the research into visuals in a very interesting ways, but this is something that we didn't go for in our book necessarily because it's a form of illustration which doesn't have all the dimensions that contemporary art can have that can affect you in more than one way, more than just a kind of intellectual way. And I think that the practices that we discussed do have these other dimensions as well. And the other way is perhaps aestheticizing the disasters. And this is where we want to stay clear. And this is another whole field of incredible artistic practice which goes for this kind of a photographic and really amazing scenes of the disaster and catastrophe art aestheticism, which we also really tried to avoid in the book. And it wasn't that difficult, but you know, if you don't read everything [and] just judge the images, you could really be mistaken that we give a lot of precedent to the aesthetics itself, but really it's about these practices. [They] are so engaged and they do it in so many different ways, they're so embodied and embedded and localized and really thinking through their methods and their visual expression. And that's why it's such a variety of practices that we have presented: from installations to community work to documenting actions or working together on something. And I think that really shows the richness of the material and the practice. This is what artists are doing. And I really wanted to have this kind of more complex way of thinking about natural crisis that is happening than just illustrating it.

[Tatjana Schneider] Yeah, I pick up maybe on, now you're talking so intensely also and with so much affection also about the artists that you put into the book. And you're talking about the practices that are so engaged as well, no? And in a way, we've been talking about the limits of a chapter and this and that and the other. At times I wish, and this is not something that is maybe taking anything away from the book, but I do wish at times that I could immerse myself more into each individual piece, right? Because so many of these pieces I think were made for a particular moment or for a particular installation or for a particular exhibition. And I wonder whether there is also something in this collection. I would almost want, I almost wish for permanent collection. What hinders us from creating that archive, maybe, of these kind of works that are then also available to everyone who would want to look at them in more detail?

[Maja Fowkes] And it's a good question. It's a different ways of thinking about your question. One is: how do we read today? And often people read together with internet and you can always go on the internet and find out more about each practice. And people, artists have websites, there are exhibitions that are indexed, so you can find out more about it in that way. And the other is... I mean, it would be amazing to go to an... even if it was not a permanent collection, but like, even if it was a yearlong exhibition display, it would be amazing to have all these practices together. But on the other hand, one has to ask [themselves]: do we really need that? Do we really need to collect that and archive that? And especially turn it into something that is in a physical form, because it's a huge question about the sustainability of the Art World itself, the sustainability of exhibition making and who would it be for and how would it function? And it's a huge, huge question, which would open another whole field of the things which we haven't discussed because we didn't really want to go into the question of institutions and institutional functioning of the art world and the art market and all the questions which are related around exhibition making, institution functioning and so on. So in this way, we could just go straight to the practices themselves. And we have artists from South America, from Papua New Guinea, from Arctic Circle and to just to think about these practices brought together in some kind of physical place... I think it would be just...

[Reuben Fowkes] I think that the practices in the book are quite decentred. So it is kind of a vision of a Global Art, of Art and climate change, which is quite dissented, which isn't organized around the current criteria of big museums and even canonical accounts of art and ecology and art and climate. So I'm not even sure that if you went to a different part of the world or... where are we speaking from anyway? You know, I think that the book shows that as well, that there are incredibly complex and interesting and globally relevant works and art practices happening all over the world simultaneously. So you could zoom in anywhere. You could zoom in on Papua New Guinea and all these questions can open up around extraction and around infrastructure and so on through that geography through that example and through artists there and, and, you know, tens and maybe hundreds of artists that we have not covered in the book, you could discover and find out about their work. So in a way, this kind of permanent collective work of contemporary art engaging with climate issues is happening anywhere. It doesn't need walls. It doesn't need a museum. And we've given a little snap to a few guidance to some of the tips of the iceberg, as you said, happening in different localities around the world. It's happening everywhere. And you could dive in anywhere into the actual real world and find artists who are doing it in those places, I would think.

[Maja Fowkes] Yes, but it's always more complex. And it's really thinking about who are these artists that are speaking a contemporary art language that we can understand despite their situatedness, and they still can speak to each other. But we really wanted to say that it was important to think also in geographies, which are very much bringing, on the one hand the fact that climate disasters are happening across the whole of the... on the planetary scale, and we also wanted to show how it is affecting not, you know, all different communities in so many ways. So we have South African, South American artists and also artists from other parts of the world, Indian artists and so on. Everyone is facing a crisis from their perspective, Philippines and so on. But these works do speak to each other in a contemporary language and they could be in an exhibition because most of the artists have already exhibited in one way or the other in the constellation of various curatorial practices as well. And it was also important to us to bring the other stream of our work, which is the post-socialist, socialist, East European perspective, which very often gets lost in the discussions about imperialisms, colonialisms and other grand narratives, which we addressed in the reparative histories themselves because it's



largely a white area as well. It doesn't necessarily picture in this complex relationship, but with current political developments, I think that are happening in that part of the world, there is more and more understanding of the complex and the exploitative relationships within the countries and nations in this part of the world as well. And we wanted to bring that aspect of the 20th century histories, which were not just the histories of capitalism, which is so often discussed in terms of Anthropocene but also the socialist side, which existed throughout the 20th century. And which is somehow overstated.

[Reuben Fowkes] And looking forward from the book or things that have grown are growing out of the book as well. So also we have a project on the socialist scene in the visual arts that we're just beginning now. And that also could be related to some of the things that we discovered in our attempts to think through the socialist side of the story of on climate change and thinking about the Anthropocene from not just in terms of a capital scene but that there was also socialist histories of the Anthropocene and that's something that is present in the book a little bit, but which we are developing more and will be doing so over the next few years as well.

[Nitin Bathla] I just wanted to maybe circle back to what Debjani also earlier said, and Tatjana also hinted at, is the extraordinary curation that you've done of artists in this book because none of them irritated me. Usually artists, some of the artists irritate me in the sense of this aestheticization, including myself... artists from the book or the project from the book that I really liked was the centre for living things, which is so wonderful and bringing the perceived, conceived and lived worlds together. And that's the real potential of art in a very lefebvrian sense now that it sort of brings these worlds together and allows us to think of potentials and possibilities beyond. I think in that sense, the book is very successful. So thanks a lot again for this wonderful work. So would any of you have any last remarks?

[Debjani Bhattacharyya] What's next? I'm curious. What are we going to see? So I know socialist Anthropocene. I like the idea very much. For a long time, I've been teaching this essay by Kate Brown called *gridded lives, why Montana and Kazakhstan look the same*. And I think it's such a textual essay, I would love something like that, something different to teach with... but generally what's next?

[Maja Fowkes] Exactly, we're planning to go to Kazakhstan.

[Reuben Fowkes] For research, yeah. We're like poring over artist books and the documentary materials about Kazakh art of the 30s and so on. So we're looking into that, exactly.

[Maja Fowkes] We want to also, because we also are historians and for us sometimes looking at the historical artworks is a way of thinking about these histories and really looking at, even at socialist realism and art that was produced in this kind of very propaganda style, political art of the time also holds key to understanding the kind of environmental histories that were embedded in this projects of also progress and mastery of nature, but also doing it in a different way than perhaps capitalist way of working for profit. And in this kind of history, so more thinking about how it could be done in a different



way, even if it's just in the theory of working for more equal and classless way of producing and creating goods. So it's kind of interesting and challenging at the same time to think about different histories and unlearning this problematic histories and thinking them in a new way.

[Reuben Fowkes] That's also, then if you think about unlearning, it's unlearning this kind of Cold War paradigms, which are still quite powerful in how we think about those socialist histories of the 20th century. And it's also going again to think about this histories, which are not just geographically bound to Europe and Asia, but also thinking about the socialist histories of Africa and Cuba and other parts where such engagements existed and are documented in the artworks themselves. So we'll be working from an art historical perspective at the sort of historical artistic material which gives insights into those transformations of the socialist Anthropocene and also at the same time working with contemporary artists over an extended period to see how they research and articulate those issues through their work, which will also be produced as a part of the project. So this has both those aspects of the contemporary and also the art, historical as well.

[Debjani Bhattacharyya] Look forward to it.

[Reuben Fowkes] Yeah. Sorry. And just to say it's been really marvellous to have the experience and thank you for your really deep engagement and for the fact that you've taken the time to read our book and to reflect on it and such generosity in your words and your reflections on what we've done. It's very encouraging and it gives us the energy to carry on with this kind of work as well.

[Maja Fowkes] and we really admire that Tatjana, you went for a mayor and trying to change things. We want to hear, we presume it was the Green Party, but we don't know for sure.

[Tatjana Schneider] It's probably a different story. I'll tell you all about it. Right.

[Nitin Bathla] Thanks a lot for joining everyone.

[Reuben Fowkes] Thank you Nitin and of course, also for the invitation to do this and for the efforts to make it happen. So thank you. Thank you so much for your work and also your kind invitation to do the podcast.

[Debjani Bhattacharyya] Yeah. very much. This was an excellent discussion.

[Outro] *Thanks to you for listening. For more information visit our website urbanpolitical.podigee.io Please subscribe and follow us on Twitter.*