

## OLIVER RESSLER

### A RISING TIDE SINKS SHIPS

16.01.19 > 08.03.19

Opening: 16.01.19. @ 7 PM

In his first solo exhibition at àngels barcelona, Oliver Ressler presents films and photographic works focused on social movements and forms of resistance that have emerged due to the wrecking of the Earth's climate – and the basis of human existence – by global capitalism.



The title *A Rising Tide Sinks Ships* refers to a catch-phrase of “trickle-down” market economics: “A rising tide lifts all boats”. However, history has proven this piece of neoliberal propaganda to be wholly wrong. The exhibition title inverts the phrase, but “rising tide” also has a double figurative sense. It evokes the physically rising sea level that is now close to “sinking” all human activity (“economic” or otherwise) and also the social tide that threatens to “sink” the “ships” of accumulation and military enforcement.

The large-scale photographic work **“The economy is wounded – let it die!” (2016)** shows container ships and other commercial vessels sinking at sea, a reference to an economic system that depends on global trade and produces ecological and social catastrophes on a daily basis. The work affirms a critical insight in the discussion of climate change: the argument that the catastrophic warming of the planet can be stopped only through a systemic change of a kind that would radically reduce the scale of the so-called “free trade” of goods across the world. The shipping of goods produced in the Global South over the oceans, for consumption in the North, using giant, diesel-burning container vessels, has increased total carbon emissions by six times the volume of emissions savings in the North.

The only way the ecologically disastrous “free trade” and the capital's dependency on fossil fuels can possibly be ended is through various forms of “climate insurgency” (Jeremy Brecher) on a massive and global scale. **The 4-channel video installation *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart (2016-2018)*** follows the beginning of a climate movement and its struggle to dismantle an economic system heavily dependent on fossil fuels. The work records key events for the climate movement, connecting many situations, contexts, voices and experiences.

In the first film, activists contest the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in 2015, where governments proved themselves incapable of commitment to any binding agreement that would curtail global warming. The film on the Ende Gelände action shifts the focus to a massive civil disobedience action at the Lusatia lignite coal fields (near Berlin), where 4,000 activists entered an open-cast mine. The film on the ZAD focuses on Europe's largest autonomous territory, which emerged from the struggle against a new airport at Nantes in France. The ZAD successfully exemplifies the necessity that resistance and the creation of alternatives must happen simultaneously. The film on *Code Rood* highlights a civil disobedience action in June 2017 at the port of Amsterdam, Europe's second-largest coal port.

These works are accompanied by a new cycle of photographs, ***How Is the Air Up There? (2018)***. This series was shot in April 2018 in Hambacher Forest, where Europe's longest lasting tree top occupation takes place. For 6 years, around 100-200 people have lived in this forest near Cologne (Germany), preventing the clear-cutting sought by energy company RWE for the extension of its Hambach open-cast mine. The situation has changed dramatically since September 13, 2018, when 3- 4,000 police were moved in to evict the occupation, tearing down barricades, tree houses and kitchen facilities in a nonstop, day-and-night assault lasting two weeks. This operation led to the death of a 27-year-old journalist and provoked heated debate on Germany's hypocritical climate policy.

On October 5, 2018 a German court ordered the suspension of the Hambach Forest clearance. It may take months or even years now for the court to decide whether RWE has the legal right to extract the coal beneath the forest as it intends. This huge victory demonstrates that people acting collectively with commitment are capable of protecting a forest, and that effective action against global heat death is possible.

The photographs in the series *How Is the Air Up There?* were taken from below, using a wide-angle lens directed towards the canopies. The protesters remain invisible in the photographs (as a precaution against repression and other unwanted consequences), but their tree houses, their rope bridges and the banners strung through the branches and leaves seem to constitute a visual representation of one of the slogans of the climate movement: “We are nature defending itself!”.

**The exhibition is complemented by a film program, curated by Oliver Ressler, in the gallery's Minicinema room, bringing together 5 artists' films dealing with ecological issues.**

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**BIO | Oliver Ressler** (Knittelfeld, Austria, 1970) Oliver Ressler lives and works in Vienna. As a politically involved artist and filmmaker Oliver Ressler is committed to doing on-site research in order to analyse economic conditions and forms of political organizing in different places in the world. Many of his works are concerned with forms of resistance, e.g. in the alter-globalization movement, global warming, or the Occupy movement. He typically pursues alternative approaches to the existing systems of power, presenting them as viable options in films, photographs and installations. Over the years, he has collaborated with the artists Zanny Begg (Sydney), Ines Doujak (Vienna), Martin Krenn (Vienna), Carlos Motta (New York), Gregory Sholette (New York), David Thorne (Los Angeles) and the political scientist Dario Azzellini (Ithaca, NY/Berlin). As the Italian curator Marco Scotini mentions: "Ressler is one of the new generation of artists operating in the 'gray area' that exists between art and politics, who develops projects on a variety of social themes using different media. But what particularly distinguishes Ressler's work compared to others, and has led him to his international renown is the role of policy activist he assumes through his documentary and social inquiries, through the production of slogans and publicizing campaigns that serve many and various types of political agitation and social conflict, and, finally, through conferences, publications, counter-information campaigns and exhibitions that gather together the results of his investigations."

Oliver Ressler has had solo exhibitions in Berkeley Art Museum, USA; SALT Galata, Istanbul, Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, Istanbul; Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade; CAAC, Sevilla; Centro Cultural Conde Duque, Madrid; Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum, Egypt; The Cube Project Space, Taipei; Wyspa Institute of Art, Gdansk and Lentos Kunstmuseum, Linz. Ressler has participated in more than 350 group exhibitions, including dOCUMENTA 14, Kassel, Reina Sofia Museum and La Casa Encendida, Madrid; EACC, Castellón; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; Castello di Rivoli, Torino; Maldives Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale; Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven; or the 4th Athens Biennial in 2013. A retrospective of his films took place at Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2013. Ressler is the first prize winner of the newly established Prix Thun for Art and Ethics Award, 2016.

#### **SCREENING PROGRAM at the Minicinema room during the exhibition:**

**Angela Anderson and Angela Melitopoulos: *Unearthing Disaster I*, 2013.** HD, 36 min DE

**Rosa Barba: *Somnium*, 2011,** 16 mm transferret to HD video, 18:20 min NL/DE

**Ursula Biemann: *Subatlantic*, 2015.** HD, 11 min CH

**Julia Lazarus in cooperation with N.F.D.: *Vive la Solidarité – La Z.A.D. est partout!*, 2017.** HD, 6 min DE

**Uriel Orlow: *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke*, 2017.** HD, 29 min UK/SA