

# THE SHOW ROOM

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## **Oliver Ressler: Barricading the Ice Sheets**

19 April–24 June 2023

Open Wednesday–Saturday, 12–6pm

The Showroom presents *Barricading the Ice Sheets*, an exhibition by artist **Oliver Ressler** in the context of his eponymous research focused on climate justice movements.

The exhibition incorporates new and existing works in a contextually calibrated presentation of the wider research that constitutes *Barricading the Ice Sheets*. For Ressler this research materialises as films, photographic works, a conference and publications which have been unfolding through an iterative, international cycle of exhibitions across 2021–23, now culminating in London.

*Barricading the Ice Sheets* at The Showroom investigates climate breakdown, climate justice and activist movements, and the relation of the latter to the arts. The title refers, as Ressler explains, 'both to the scale of emergency that the climate justice movement faces and the scope of what it sets out to do. To barricade ice sheets as they melt is physically impossible, yet the movement is attempting something historically unprecedented, because in recorded human history the planet has never confronted such an absolute threat. When Arctic ice melts, sea levels rise everywhere; islands and cities sink; the global exploitation of agriculture and fisheries lurch off schedule.

### **Public programme:**

A public programme accompanies the exhibition, connecting with key London-based voices with a focus on the role of artists and cultural producers in the climate justice movement; as well as activist networks contributing to public demonstrations in the city over the duration of the exhibition, and local constituents in The Showroom neighbourhood.

### **Thursday 20 April, 6.30–8.30pm**

**Oliver Ressler** in conversation with artist and activist **Noel Douglas**, **Dr Antigoni Memou**, Art Historian and Senior Lecturer at the University of East London; and curator and writer **Lena Reisner**. A recording will be made available via The Showroom Library online.

### **Friday 21 April**

*THE BIG ONE* – placards from the exhibition were carried into central London as part of the nationwide climate and social justice coalition, 21–23 April 2023.

*Barricading the Ice Sheets* is a research endeavour by **Oliver Ressler** supported by **the Austrian Science Fund** (FWF: AR 526) and **Camera Austria**, Graz, where the first exhibition of the cycle was presented. Further configurations have taken place as solo exhibitions at **the Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb**, Croatia (30 November 2021–6 February 2022); **Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.)**, Berlin, Germany (4 June–31 July 2022); **Tallinn Art Hall**, Tallinn, Estonia (27 August–6 November 2022); and **LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial**, Gijón, Spain, (28 January–9 September 2023). A major new publication is due in Autumn 2023.

The exhibition at **The Showroom** is generously supported by **Phileas: The Austrian Office for Contemporary Art** and **BMKOES: The Austrian Ministry of the Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport**. The Showroom is supported using public funding by **Arts Council England**.

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**Oliver Ressler** is an artist and filmmaker based in Vienna who produces installations, projects in public space and films on issues encompassing economics, democracy, migration, the climate crisis, forms of resistance and social alternatives.

Ressler has presented solo exhibitions at the Berkeley Art Museum, USA; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade; Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum, Egypt; The Cube Project Space, Taipei; Kunsthaus Graz, Graz; Wyspa Institute of Art, Gdansk; Lentos Kunstmuseum, Linz; Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo – CAAC, Seville; SALT Galata, Istanbul; MNAC – National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest; and the Cultural Centre of Belgrade, Serbia. He has contributed to group exhibitions at Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid; Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven; MASSMOCA, North Adams, USA; and Centre Pompidou, Paris; and to biennials in Prague (2005), Seville (2006), Moscow (2007), Taipei (2008), Lyon (2009), Gyumri (2012), Venice (2013), Athens (2013, 2015), Quebec (2014), Helsinki (2014), Jeju (2017), Kyiv (2017), Gothenburg (2019) and Stavanger (2019); and documenta 14, Kassel, 2017.

To date Ressler has completed forty-one films, which have been screened in events as part of social movements, at art institutions and film festivals worldwide. A retrospective of his films took place at Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève in 2013. In 2002 he won first prize at the International Media Art Award, ZKM in Karlsruhe; and received the Prix Thun for Art and Ethics Award in 2016. For the Taipei Biennale 2008 he curated *A World Where Many Worlds Fit*, an exhibition on the counter-globalisation movement. A travelling show on the financial crisis, *It's the Political Economy, Stupid*, co-curated with Gregory Sholette, has toured to nine venues internationally (2011–2016). [www.ressler.at](http://www.ressler.at)

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Special thanks to **Oliver Ressler**, and to contributors to the public programme **Noel Douglas**, **Antigoni Memou** and **Lena Reisner**. The exhibition installation has been realised with technicians **Jack Felgate**, **Peter Rizal Zwingli Hall**, **Duncan Morris** and **Kenji Takahashi**. The Showroom core team are **Gabriela Salgado**, Director; **Joyce Cronin**, Managing Director; **Lily Hall**, Curator and **Oana Damir**, Assistant Curator: Communications and Engagement. The Showroom Gallery Assistant team are **Vanya Cantone**, **Campbell McConnell** and **Corie McGowan**. This collaboration with **Oliver Ressler** was initially opened up by **Elvira Dyangani Ose** as Director of The Showroom, 2019–21. Further thanks to **Omar El-Fassi**, **Margherita Huntley**, **Seema Manchanda**, **Peter Greeney**, **Radka Yovcheva** and to **Pelham Communications**.

1. *Not Sinking, Swarming*, 2021  
37 Minutes, looped

*Not Sinking, Swarming* was shot during a four-hour assembly held in Madrid in October 2019, where delegates from various environmental groups gathered to prepare an act of civil disobedience.

The groups – *Ecologistas en Acción*, *Alternativa Antimilitarista MOC*, *Legal Sol*, *Extinction Rebellion*, *Climacció*, *Fridays for Future* and *Greenpeace* – are part of the platform *By 2020 We Rise up*, which is active throughout Europe and seeks to foster climate rebellion. We learn how the network is structured around multiple working groups, with responsibility for communication, training, food, logistics, strategy, legal support, interaction with the police, care and finance.

Distinctions are drawn between the sovereign body in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) and the disobedient bodies of the assembly. Because the Spanish state could consider the assembly members to be organisers of an unlawful or unapproved demonstration, it is mutually agreed at the time of filming that the faces of everyone present are pixelated to conceal their identities. Their anonymity is preserved as a precaution against repression, and the use of pixilation gives the film its unique visual appearance.

*Not Sinking, Swarming* includes footage from the civil disobedience on 7 October 2020, which became the most significant action planned by the assembly. Hundreds of activists used a boat to block a busy motorway near the *Nuevos Ministerios* [*New Ministries*], a government complex in central Madrid, in an occupation constituting one part of an international week of rebellion for climate justice.

This film is one of a small number of existing, publicly available documents that offer an insight into internal processes of self-organisation within the climate movement.

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Director and producer: **Oliver Ressler**  
Cinematography: **Daniel Gómez, Jose S. Gutiérrez, Oliver Ressler**  
Location sound: **Pablo Estrella**  
Editing: **Lisbeth Kovačič, Oliver Ressler**  
Sound editing, colour correction: **Rudolf Gottsberger**  
Sound design and music: **Vinzenz Schwab**  
Visual effects: **Lisbeth Kovačič**  
Title design: **Nils Olger**  
Text: **Oliver Ressler, Matthew Hyland**  
Translation: **Silvia Martínez Rocher**  
Copy editing: **Joe Keady**

Special thanks to all members of the assembly; and to **Emilio Alvarez, Miguel Amado, Brandon Bauer, Reinhard Braun, Pablo Chamorro Ortiz, Luisa Espino, Roberto Farneti, Matthew Hyland, Lisbeth Kovačič, Silvia Martínez Rocher, Massimiliano Mollona, Amila Puzić, Gerald Raunig** and **Mike Watson**.

## 2. *Barricade Cultures of the Future*, 2021

38 minutes, looped

*Barricade Cultures of the Future* presents a conversation between internationally respected climate movement protagonists working between art and activism, as they discuss the role of artists and cultural producers in the movement. While their practices and approaches differ, they share direct involvement in eco-social struggles as organisers. They each see environmental matters as inseparable from socio-political and economic frameworks of injustice.

**Nnimmo Bassey**, **Jay Jordan**, **Steve Lyons**, **Marta Moreno Muñoz** and **Aka Niviâna** address movements, methods and purposes, past and future; each speaking from the perspective of the fields in which they are personally active. Interspersed are passages of film footage from the movement internationally that resonate with their discussion.

Performance artist **Marta Moreno Muñoz** is engaged with *Extinction Rebellion* in Spain and advocates for XR's agenda of "globally disrupting state capitals". **Jay Jordan** from *The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination* points to the necessity of taking a diversity of activist tactics, with "some enacting non-violent resistance and [...] others engaging in more aggressive forms"; he encourages artists to involve themselves in the movement. **Nnimmo Bassey** of the *Nigerian Health of Mother Earth Foundation* believes that art plays "a fundamental part in any movement" and that the best way forward is "to coordinate between different struggles". Inuk poet **Aka Niviâna** emphasises the need to "move as a collective community", and sees advantages to the way in which taking a poetic approach to issues can be less paternalistic than other forms of political polemic. **Steve Lyons** from the traveling pop-up museum *The Natural History Museum* argues that "building an anti-imperialist movement as opposed to a climate movement" might help to ensure that intersectional resistance is built across multiple marginalisations.

By bringing together artists involved across activist practices in this way, *Barricade Cultures of the Future* questions the widespread habit of treating art and activism as distinct categories, when in practice they often overlap and cannot be separated. The documentation of this conversation took place in the context of a two-day conference on 28 & 29 February 2020 at **Camera Austria** in Graz, the research institution within which *Barricading the Ice Sheets* was first hosted. Recordings of the conference and full presentations by each contributor can be watched online here: [www.ressler.at/barricading\\_the\\_ice\\_sheets](http://www.ressler.at/barricading_the_ice_sheets)

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Director and producer: **Oliver Ressler**

Participants in the discussion: **Nnimmo Bassey**, **Jay Jordan**, **Steve Lyons**, **Marta Moreno Muñoz**, **Aka Niviâna**

Cinematography: **Thomas Parb**, **Rudolf Gottsberger**

Editing: **Janina Herhoffer**, **Lisbeth Kovačič**, **Oliver Ressler**

Sound, sound editing, colour correction: **Rudolf Gottsberger**

Sound design and music: **Vinzenz Schwab**

Title design: **Nils Olger**

Footage: **Jean-François Castell**, **Lisbeth Kovačič**, **Jamie Lowe**, **Thomas Parb**, **Oliver Ressler**, **Michael Toledano**, **Youth and Environmental Advocacy Centre – YEAC**

Special thanks to the speakers for sharing insight into their practice, and to **Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri**, **Reinhard Braun**, **TJ Demos**, **Noel Douglas**, **Elisabeth Hajek**, **Matthew Hyland**, **Lisbeth Kovačič**, **Margarethe Makovec**, **Angelika Maierhofer** and **Julia Ramírez**.

### 3. *Overturn the Present, Barricade the Future*, 2021

10 minutes, looped

This short film acts as a footnote to *Barricade Cultures of the Future*, where **Nnimmo Bassey, Jay Jordan, Steve Lyons, Marta Moreno Muñoz** and **Aka Niviâna** discuss the role of artists and cultural producers in the climate justice movement. They situate and describe intersecting conditions of extractive practice within artistic, institutional and ecological contexts. They also position their personal commitments and underscore the importance of using language with precision when articulating contemporary imperatives beyond global warming and climate change, to climate emergency, climate breakdown, climate catastrophe and justice.

### 4. *The Desert Lives*, 2022

55 minutes, looped

On 6 September 2021 in Vienna, Austria, major road-building machinery was blockaded by climate activists outside the city's Hausfeldstraße metro station in a bid to stop construction of a new motorway that would cut through the Lobau – a floodplain of the river Danube South-East of Vienna and an area designated by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve – and the Stadtstraße [city road] that was being planned in conjunction with it.

Austria's environment minister Leonore Gewessler subsequently ordered the cancellation of the Lobau project, but Vienna City Council opted to go ahead with the city road project anyway. In response, wooden structures were erected on the construction site to enable the activists' occupation to continue through the winter. This film follows the occupation of that so-called 'desert' over five months. *The Desert Lives* is structured around three on-camera discussions held in October 2021, December 2021 and January 2022, in which participants debate the status and prospects of the occupation. The first discussion addresses the history of the occupation, collaborations between the various political groups involved and organisational issues. The next, filmed on 9 December 2021, is an emergency plenary meeting that was called immediately after police declared the occupation legally dissolved.

The third discussion took place in January 2022 in a three-floor wooden pyramid, which became an iconic structure for the resistance. The *Lobau bleibt* [Lobau stays] occupation had been subjected to multiple forms of repression by this point, as is clear from the conversation in the pyramid. Jarolim, a law firm representing Vienna City Council, had sent threatening legal letters individually to fifty people in an attempt to silence voices critical of the new city freeway.

All of the buildings appearing in the film, including the pyramid, were evicted and destroyed by police on 1 February 2022. Forty-eight activists were arrested, and the felling of hundreds of trees began. Despite all of this, the climate movement remains as active as ever in Vienna. The struggle against climate-destroying infrastructure goes on.

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Director and producer: **Oliver Ressler**

Contributors to the conversations (in order of appearance): **Mira, Conny, Malve, Flo, Stefan, Elena, Alex, Merle, Georg, Juro, Lena, Sascha, Oliver, Lucia**

Cinematography: **Thomas Parb, Lisbeth Kovačič, Oliver Ressler, Rudolf Gottsberger**

Footage: **Christoph Schwarz, Victor Kössl**

Editing: **Janina Herhoffer, Lisbeth Kovačič, Oliver Ressler**

Colour correction: **Rudolf Gottsberger**  
Sound and sound design: **Vinzenz Schwab**  
Music: **Fänge (Daniel Lercher, Vinzenz Schwab, David Schweighart)**  
Title design: **Nils Olger**  
Photomontage: **Mateusz Niechoda**

Many thanks to *Lobau bleibt* for the hope and inspiration they bring in times of isolation and destruction; and to **Reinhard Braun, Matthew Hyland, Mira Kapfinger** and **Lisbeth Kovačič**.

## Placards

These placards with digital prints by **Oliver Ressler** are intended as tools for use during public climate actions over the duration of the exhibition. This started with an organised gathering of cultural workers and climate activists as part of *The Big One* on **Friday 21 April 2023**, a major moment of climate and social justice coalition in the UK. Email [welcome@theshowroom.org](mailto:welcome@theshowroom.org) for more information.

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

Digital print on cardboard placard, 2019/23

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

Digital print on cardboard placard, 2021/23

*Last time there was as much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere as there is today, humans didn't exist*

Digital print on cardboard placard, 2020/23

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

Digital print on cardboard placard, 2020/23

*Arctic Permafrost is less permanent than its name suggests*

Digital print on cardboard placard, 2019/23

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

Digital print on cardboard placard, 2022/23

*We're fossil fuels in the making*

Digital print on cardboard placard, 2022/23

*Violence in the Air*

Digital print on cardboard placard, 2022/23

*The Terminal Tower*

Digital print on cardboard placard, 2023

*Property will cost us the earth*

Digital print on cardboard placard, 2021/23

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

Digital print on cardboard placard, 2023