World of Matter

Sep 10–Nov 1, 2014

Exhibition & Programs
World of Matter

The James Gallery
The Graduate Center, CUNY

365 Fifth Avenue at 35th Street
New York, NY 10016

centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery

Free and Open to the Public
Tue to Thu, 12–7pm
Fri and Sat, 12–6pm

Sep 10–Nov 1, 2014
Introduction

The world we inhabit is expanding. Global population growth, increased mobility, accelerated contacts, rising levels of production and consumption, and the new boom in natural resource extraction have all fuelled concerns about the impact of this development in environmental, social and psychological terms. Conflicts in post-colonial states, global ecological disasters and continuous news about the widespread consequences of climate change have cast serious doubts on the sustainability of the growth model. The ensuing waves of social realignment as well as rising support for a reorientation of ecological perspectives have often brought to the fore demands to recognize other voices, including those who had no voice before but also non-human actors and complex imbroglios of human components, man-made objects and ‘natural’ artefacts.

These changes coincide with changes in artistic practice. New forms of collaborative research and production have foregrounded the significance of fieldwork and the use of hybrid media to address, probe and sound out the ecological realities around us as well as those yet to come. These experiments animate an emergent notion of artistic global citizenship which seeks out an expansion of a different kind: To break up well-worn patterns of representation they aim for new dialogues by embracing a plethora of aesthetic, conceptual and interventionist engagements with ‘matter’.

A global collaborative project, World of Matter has been born out of these deep imbrications of social, technological and natural spheres. Its key strategy and concern is to suggest connections - between different sites, materials, processes, attitudes and agencies, in other words, between the ways in which human and non-human, tangible and less tangible things in the world matter. Drawing out unusual connections between works that derive from artistic practice, journalism, activism and other realms of research, the project provides a formation of commonality for new eco-logical imaginaries to arise. Its online platform - www.worldofmatter.org – as well as its various installations in exhibition spaces extend an invitation to seek out individual connections in the encountered assemblage of sites.

This publication, as well as the other manifestations of “World of Matter”, are the outcome of conversations taking place over a period of three years between a group of artists, journalists and theorists whose practices engage, in different ways, with the material world and the physical, historical, and political processes that constitute it. Many of the individual projects involved intensive, multiyear fieldwork in sites of heightened material significance, often in collaboration with indigenous communities, to whom the world is not merely a resource for human consumption that needs to be controlled. Rather, environmental forces surrounding us are perceived as a source of guidance in the search for sustainable ways of co-existence. Our research and mutual exchanges were further informed by the writings of philosophers and activists (e.g., Bruno Latour, Karen Barad, Michel Serres, Vandana Shiva, Graham Harman, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro) who ply the liminal zones between the human and natural sciences, and furthermore propose new human-nonhuman alliances. The non-anthropocentric materialism these thinkers are forging has inspired our own efforts to examine how the world matters physically, aesthetically, and ethically—something that is ever more pertinent, as humanity itself is newly understood to be a geophysical force that impacts life on the planetary scale.

During our sometimes week long, bi-annual gatherings, participants shared their research findings with one another, and dynamic discussions—regarding content, methodologies, aesthetic strategies, and theoretical relevances—unfolded. These interactions often involved intense negotiations, with different positions coming into contact, mutating, and/or co-existing in tension. World of Matter itself, in other words, forms a kind of lively ecology.

The human-natural contexts that our research engages are marked by deep imperialist and eco-imperialist histories. Violent geo-engineering schemes during the modern era (reflecting a tabula rasa mentality about both nature and people) left lasting marks on the land in the form
of industrial agriculture, dams, and other massive infrastructures. This only accelerated during the Cold War and world-scale restructuring programs of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Globalized neoliberal capitalism has now touched every part of the planet. The recent financial crisis and the consequent mass flight of global investors into safe commodity-rich economies over the last several years has unleashed a mad rush for minerals, fossil fuels, water reserves, and arable land. Neocolonial land grabs that swallow large areas in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere, the proliferation of extractive industries throughout the Amazon, the bio-engineering of seeds like rice and cotton (i.e., the privatization of life itself) by biotech companies)—these are some of many examples of the quickening primitive accumulation of global capital spanning the Earth's remotest depths, surfaces, and atmospheric altitudes. In parallel to the increasingly powerful means to reshape the Earth toward exclusively human desires and needs, there is growing awareness and concern about the absolute limits of certain resources required to feed the widening spiral of the capitalist. For millions of people, this is not merely a vague foreboding, but involves the very concrete experience of food and water shortages, acute impoverishment, and social turmoil. It is these circumstances that motivate and contextualize *World of Matter*.

The videos, artworks, writings, and cartographies produced in the context of *World of Matter* adopt a variety of strategies to delve into these constitutive relations between humans and the world, be it through an exploration of historical narratives, scientific laboratory research, community collaborations, visualization technologies, or activist organization. The assemblage of these projects doesn't coagulate into one universalizing world that fits snugly in the globe as pictured by satellites gazing from the orbit onto the Blue Planet. The "world" in *World of Matter* is fragile, plural, ragged, and full of holes, yet somehow aggregated by the muddiness of the planet itself. These works engage with the worldwide world of things, as Michel Serres would call it, referring to the entire nonhuman sphere that is excluded from the social contracts regulating the global community and that he argues must be re-addressed in terms of nonhuman subjects with rights, lest more damage be made to the Earth.

In light of the acute problems resulting from human-induced transformations of the Earth and its systems, it is easy to strike a dramatic tone. However, we believe the perspective of crisis also calls upon us to reconsider—at a profound level, and in ways that are slow, subtle, and unspectacular—how we understand and interact with the world of things around us. How to engage when humans and nonhumans are equal actors in a shared world? What forms of action acknowledge that our knowledge of the world has limits? The participants of *World of Matter* draw upon the methodologies of journalism and the social and natural sciences, but also, poetics and aesthetics, to scrutinize zones of geopolitical-ecological upheaval. Our intention is not to create more facts, or to critically debunk existing assumptions, but rather, to offer an arena to assemble and, in the words of Latour, to care.

— World of Matter

**Exhibition**

How many ways are there to picture geopolitical impact on the environment? Given the array of images we have access to, how does this shifted our expectations of nature and of images themselves since the Enlightenment? Today materialism that recognizes the power of human labor, combined with new materialism that no longer forecloses the life of things, provides a rich apparatus for creating knowledge and deploying embodied practices. As nature is still perpetuated as a construction of culture, the demands that we place on images to "bear witness" and to provide measurable data may continue to foster a dynamic that is out of balance.

The exhibition of *World of Matter* at the James Gallery provides a focused assessment of images about the complex ecologies of raw materials. Raising issues about the material nature of images themselves, these projects have been generated through intensive field research and very different methods from filmmaking to installation, video, conceptual text, mapping, documentation for legal cases, and photojournalism.

This month as the United Nations convenes a major session on climate change and the People's Climate March will culminate just blocks from The Graduate Center in midtown Manhattan, "World of Matter" investigates the human relationships with natural resources from regions including Ecuador, Egypt, The Netherlands, Brazil, and India. Because the research of World of Matter is communicated in such varied approaches to image-making, the specificity of each story that is told and its material character are of utmost importance. Encountering the enormity of these projects in the tight span of this first exhibition of this work in the United States, after an expansive installation in HMKV Dortmund, opens a relationship between the mobility of images and regimens of scarcity to imagine new types of value for the image as a resource.

— Katherine Carl
Exhibition Checklist

1. Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan
   In collaboration with the fishing community of Urk
   *Episode of the Sea*, 2013
   1-channel video projection

2. Ursula Biemann
   *Egyptian Chemistry*, 2012
   Part 1: Agro-Sciences, 13 min.
   Part 2: Land Reforms, 13 min.
   Multi-channel video installation, water laboratory, wall drawing, and videos

3. Mabe Bethônico
   part 2: Mineral Exploitation
   photograph, handout and slideshow with audio
   *O fim das vendas*, 2014
   Concept, text and voice: Mabe Bethônico
   Photos and montage: Mabe Bethônico and Joerg Bader
   Sound: Jalver Bethônico
   Technical assistance: Ralph Pavões

4. Peter Mörtenböck & Helge Mooshammer
   *A World of Matter*, 2014
   Wall paper, collection of archive material, texts, photographs, and video

5. Uwe H. Martin
   video installation

6. Uwe H. Martin & Frauke Huber
   Ipad presentation

7. Paulo Tavares
   *Non-Human Rights*, 2012
   Map and 2 videos

8. Mabe Bethônico
   part 1: Mineral Practices
   Images and words on adhesive, text, video
   part 3: Museum of Public Concerns
   Video, handout, poster
World of Matter

Mabo Bethônico, Ursula Biemann, Uwe H. Martin & Frauke Huber, Helge Mooshammer & Peter Mörtenböck, Emily Eliza Scott, Paulo Tavares, Lonnie van Brummen & Siebren de Haan.

The world we inhabit is expanding. Global population growth, increased mobility, rising levels of production and consumption, and the expansion of natural resource extraction have had a significant impact on environmental, social, and psychological terms. What forms of interaction with the material world take account of the fact that there are limits to what we, as humans, might know and control?

Participants in World of Matter draw upon methodologies from the social and natural sciences, journalism, and also politics and aesthetics, to scrutinize zones of geopolitical-ecological upheaval. The research conducted by the artists, journalists, and theorists in World of Matter coheres around a sensitive reconsideration of the planet’s “resources.” Their projects adopt a variety of formats and strategies to delve into relations between humans and the world, in some cases by way of historical narratives, in others, through scientific laboratory research, community collaboration, visualization technologies, or activist organization. These experiments animate an emerging notion of artistic global citizenship, breaking up well-worn patterns of representation by embracing a plethora of aesthetic, conceptual, and interventionist engagements with “matter.”

The James Gallery

Radical Materialism: Making the World Matter

Images and words can be reportage, witness, representation, and simultaneously also constructive, connective, material reality. How does the particular ability of images and words to hold all of these qualities act in a reconsideration of the earth’s resources? Continuing the James Gallery’s ongoing investigations into “things” and “objects,” this conference will open discussion on fossil fuel imaginaries, embodied research, postcolonial ecologies and eco-aesthetics and the material/non-human turn with visual artists, literary scholars, art historians, designers, geographers, activists, and writers of literature and philosophy. Held in tandem with the exhibition World of Matter, the conference examines the creation of political worlds of words and images by approaching environmental crisis as a material question with deep roots and profound opportunities for the changing life of the earth.

see list on back cover and centerforthehumanities.org for participants.

The Skylight Room (9100)

Cosponsored by The Center for Place, Culture, and Politics; the PhD Program in English; the Speculative Realism and Accelerationism Seminar in the Humanities. Made possible in part by Austrian Cultural Forum and Pro Helvetia.

Prelude: Resource Room

Chloé Bass, artist

In cooperation with Martin E. Segal Theatre’s 2014 Prelude performance festival, the James Gallery will present Resource Room, a project by artist Chloé Bass. Over the three days of ongoing performance an archive will be built around the meanings of the term “resource room.” As well as a new way to engage with “resources” of images and nature in relation to the World of Matter exhibition, the project will reflect on the uses for resource rooms historically as a site for remedial education and also for intelligence reprogramming strategies during the Cold War era. Bass will formulate a space that holds the social fabric of the Prelude performance festival, allowing the audience to move in and out of the gallery between other performances.

Cosponsored by the Martin E. Segal Theatre.
Rare Earth

Elizabeth Knafo, artist

From the Mojave desert, to the Pacific seabed, to the surface of the moon, the rush for rare earth minerals is afoot. Rare Earth explores the re-opening of an historically toxic rare earth mine in the California desert, and the intensifying land rush for the high tech minerals across the world. The film is a portrait of changing desert landscapes and the residents who grapple with the impacts of industrial mining. Rare Earth traces the toxic and transformative legacy of treasure hunting in the American West—a legacy of speculation, produced scarcity and the social violence of resource extraction—deepening in our era of global climate change. Join us for a screening of the film and a discussion with the filmmaker Elizabeth Knafo, in conjunction with World of Matter, on view at the James Gallery.

The James Gallery

Rare Earth Catalog Workshop

Jesse Goldstein, Sociology, Virginia Commonwealth University; Elizabeth Knafo, artist.

Rare Earth Catalog: Tools for Rocking with the Anthropocene, will be a repository of tools: from the critical, to the conceptual, to the practical, that can help us resist, rework, redefine, and remember the interconnections of our socio-ecological present. Created by Jesse Goldstein and Elizabeth Knafo in pursuit of new ways of seeing, and ultimately, more sound and just ways of life, the project seeks to describe who and what have produced this particular moment on earth, and why this moment matters. Goldstein and Knafo named their catalog after rare earth minerals, not to single out the extraction of this one resource as somehow worse than others, but to foreground narratives of manufactured scarcity as crucial to the maintenance—and resistance—of the existing economic order. Join the artists for a workshop to discuss the catalogue and envision how a second issue can take shape.

The James Gallery

The Infiltrators

Anthony Alessandri, English, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY; Chelsea Haines, Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Christopher Robbins, artist, Ghana Think Tank; Maayan Sheleff, curator.

This discussion examines the current state of border-crossing in Israel by asylum seekers and refugees through the lens of recent artist projects and curatorial interventions in that region. In Israel, the term “infiltrators” is used to describe the transgression of the country’s political borders in order to commit a terrorist act, while the more general meaning of this term describes the hostile crossing of enemy lines. At present, this term is also commonly used in Israel to refer to Africans who have crossed the border from Africa into Israel; alongside additional terms such as “refugees,” “asylum seekers,” and “immigrant workers,” it plays an important role in the discussion of the status and future of these groups. This panel discussion examines this current situation of “infiltration” through the framework of artistic practice and exhibition making, analyzing what (if any) impact participatory artistic gestures may have in the face of Israel’s fraught political realities.

The Skylight Room (9100)

Malign Velocities

Benjamin Noys, English, University of Chichester. Respondent: David Joselit, Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Are we living too fast? Are we yielding to increasing demands that we produce, innovate, and consume more and more quickly? Or are we not yet moving fast enough? Join Benjamin Noys in conversation on his new book, Malign Velocities, in which he explores the argument for embracing the increasing tempo of capitalist production. Noys tracks this “accelerationism” as a symptom of the misery and pain of labor under capitalism. Retracing a series of historical moments of accelerationism, Noys suggests the need for a new politics that truly challenges the supposed pleasures of speed.

The James Gallery

Cosponsored by the Accelerationism and Speculative Realism Seminar in the Humanities.
Mabe Bethônico's artistic practice involves long-term research projects resulting in visual and sound pieces, installations, lectures, publications, and websites, using documentary sources and field recordings. Her work has been exhibited at Centro Cultural São Paulo, in collaboration with Anselm Jappe (2012), in La Revanche de L'Arche Photographique, Centre de Photographie, Geneva (2010); Trienal Poli/Gráfica de San Juan, Puerto Rico (2009); the 26th Biennial of São Paulo (2008); the 27th Biennial of São Paulo (2006); Subversiones Diarias – MALBA, Buenos Aires; Panorama da Arte Brasileira, MAM Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo; Telling Histories, Kunsthalle, Munich (2003). She is Professor in Fine Arts at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. In 2013 she developed a project at the Museum of Ethnography of Geneva with support from ONPq—the National Research Council of Brazil. She has organized the event Provisões: Uma Conferência Visual [World of Matter] at Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte, and the book of the same title (2013). Bethônico holds a MA and PhD in Fine Arts from the Royal College of Art, London (2000).

Ursula Biemann is an artist, writer and video essayist. Her artistic practice is strongly research oriented and involves fieldwork in remote locations where she investigates the political ecologies of oil and water. Biemann’s pluralistic practice spans a range of media including experimental video, interview, text, cartography and materials, which converge in highly formalized spatial installations. Her work also adopts the forms of publications, lectures, and curatorial, as well as collaborative research projects. Biemann has had retrospective exhibitions at the Bildmuseet Umeå, Sweden; Nikolaj Contemporary Art, Copenhagen; Helmhaus, Zurich; Lento Musem, Linz; Neuer Berliner Kunstverein m.b.b., and at numerous film festivals. Her work also contributed to major exhibitions e.g. at the Arnolfini, Bristol; Tapies Foundation, Barcelona; Museum of Fine Arts, Bern; LACE, Los Angeles, San Francisco Art Institute; Kunsthalle Brandt Odense; Kunsthalle, Hamburg; the Biennials in Guangji, Shanghai, Liverpool, Bamako, Istanbul, Montreal, and Sevilla. Biemann studied first at the Bellas Artes in Mexico, then in New York at the School of Visual Arts (BFA, 1986), and the Whitney Independent Study Program (1988). She is based in Zurich. Biemann is appointed Doctor honoris causa in Humanities by the Swedish University Umeå (2008) and received the 2009 Prix Meret Oppenheim, the Swiss national Art Award.

Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber are documentary photographers and visual storytellers working on long-term, in-depth, documentary photographic projects that combine photography with documentary film, text and sound. Currently they are partnering on a set of multimedia documentaries about the global common water, seed, and land. In 2010, they founded Aggreys Dream, a project supporting a school in a slum in Mombasa, Kenya which became the blueprint for the establishing of the Freileine Foundation. Huber studied economics at the LMU Munich and the Christian-Albrechts-University in Kiel. Martin teaches photography and multimedia storytelling at the Camera Arts program at Lucerne University, the Henri-Nannen-Schule and Akademie für Publizistik in Hamburg, the Freelens Multimedia Workshops, the Fachhochschule Bielefeld, and the University for the Arts in Bremen. They are based in Hamburg.

Helge Mooshammer is director of the international research projects Relational Architecture and Other Markets (www.othemarkets.org), Senior Researcher at Vienna University of Technology, and Research Fellow in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. His research is concerned with changing forms of urban cultures, processes of transnationalisation, and newly emerging regimes of governance.

Peter Mörtenböck is Professor of Visual Culture at Vienna University of Technology, and Research Fellow in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London, where he initiated the Networked Cultures project, a platform for global research on collaborative art practices (www.networkedcultures.org). His research focuses on urban social movements, informal economies and the visual culture of resource ecologies.


Emily Eliza Scott is a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zürich), where she is co-editing a volume on contemporary art and land use politics, forthcoming from University of California Press. Scott teaches seminars about the concept of “post-nature,” and the emergent spatialities, temporalities, and representational crises triggered by climate change, among other topics. Her recent writings have appeared in American Art, Art Journal, Third Text, Cultural Geographies, and anthologies such as Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974 (Preest) and Retracing the Expanded Field: Encounters Between Art and Architecture (MIT Press). She co-founded the Los Angeles Urban Rangers, a group that develops tours and tools for creative explorations of everyday habitats. She earned a PhD in art history from University of California, Los Angeles.
Architect, urbanist, and researcher Paulo Tavares' work has been exhibited in insert 2014, New Delhi; Animism, Beirut (2013); and Taipei Biennial (2012). He teaches design studio and critical spatial theory at the School of Architecture, Design and Arts of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador. Between 2008 and 2012, Tavares taught at the Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths, University of London. He previously held teaching posts at the Architecture and Spatial Design Department of the London Metropolitan University and the Visual Lab of the MA in Contemporary Art Theory, also at at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is a fellow Researcher at the project Forensic Architecture (2010-2014) and is currently completing a PhD on the violence of planning and the politics of ecology in Amazonia at the Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths, University of London. Tavares is based in Quito/São Paulo.

Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan produce film works, essays, and an occasional sculpture or collage that explore cultural and geopolitical landscapes like Europe's borders, sites of resource production and global trade, and the (non) sites of cultural heritage. They are currently preparing a monument for the forest in collaboration with diverse forest people from Surinam. Their work has been shown at Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Kunsthaua Zürich; Argos, Brussels; Project Arts Centre, Dublin; SMBA and De Appel Amsterdam; OCA Vilnius; the Shanghai and Guangju Biennials; IAC Villeurbanne, France. Their works are included in the public collections of Kunsthaua Zürich; Les Abattoirs, Toulouse; MUDAM Luxembourg; FRAC Marseille; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf; Hoffmann Sammlung, Berlin; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Van Brummelen and de Haan studied art and philosophy at Rietveld Academy, Rijksakademie, and University of Amsterdam, where Van Brummelen currently works as a PhD researcher at the department of Media Studies and MAHKU. They live and work in Amsterdam.
The Amie and Tony James Gallery is located in midtown Manhattan at the nexus of the academy, contemporary art, and the city brings a range of pertinent discourses into the exhibition space through innovative formats. While some exhibitions remain on view for extended contemplation, other activities such as performances, workshops, reading groups, roundtable discussions, salons, and screenings have a short duration. As a space for artistic and discursive activities, the gallery works with scholars, students, artists, and the public to explore working methods that may lie outside usual disciplinary practices.

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Gallery Curator: Katherine Carl
Gallery Exhibitions Coordinator: Jennifer Wilkinson
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Design: MTWTF
The James Gallery

Sep 9
Mabe Bethônico
Ursula Biemann
Siebren de Haan
Frauke Huber
Uwe H. Martin
Helge Mooshammer
Peter Mörttenböck
Emily Eliza Scott
Paulo Tavares
Lonnie van Brummelen

Sep 10
Stacey Balkan
Ursula Biemann
Morgan Buck
D. Graham Burnett
Omar Dahbour
Ashley Dawson
T.J. Demos
Elizabeth Ellsworth
David Joselit
Sean M. Kennedy
Jamie Kruse
Uwe H. Martin
Helge Mooshammer
Peter Mörttenböck
Rafael Mutis
Kate Orff
Michéal Rumore
Emily Eliza Scott
Elizabeth Sibilia
Lonnie van Brummelen
Jennifer Wenzel

Oct 8–10
Chloé Bass

Oct 16
Elizabeth Knafo

Oct 17
Jesse Goldstein
Elizabeth Knafo

Oct 28
Anthony Alessandrini
Chelsea Haines
Christopher Robbins
Maayan Sheleff

Oct 30
David Joselit
Benjamin Noys