

reasonable & senseless: a technical disaster

A technical disaster is commonly called an "accident", yet in 20/20 hindsight we can see it as the product of desire, foolish hope and misplaced facts. Or human fallibility and our lack of foresight turns it into an almost magical event, as if a rational and eternal system has suddenly lurched out of control. In the exhibition, *reasonable & senseless*, three artists from across Canada confront the seduction and terror of technological disasters, pharmacological madness, and ecological mayhem. Rather than geopolitical despair, they offer a fool's hope.

In the installation *Dairy*, seven ordinary plastic milk jugs appear to emit a sinister and mysterious glow. This work was inspired by a rather suspicious fluorescing residue in milk jug, during an 'orange alert' period in the United States.



For the installation *Fear [landscape]* and *Fear [portrait]*, the artist created a dynamic screen-based artwork that searches for the frequency that technical disasters are reported in the online news.

Fear [landscape] represents the resulting data in an animated visual display symbolizing each kind of disaster (i.e. the butterfly for genetic engineering). It is also represented as numbers across the bottom of the screen. These numbers echo stock exchange statistics. *Fear [portrait]* dynamically changes the volume of audio samples, which symbolize each of the possible disasters.

About the artist: K.D. Thornton is a Canadian artist, currently teaching at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. She has a BFA (honours) from the University of Manitoba and an MFA (Art + Technology) from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her sculptural and installation works have been exhibited in Europe, Canada and the United States, as well as interactive works online, since 1994.

reasonable & senseless is a 20 channel video installation presented on miniature LCD monitors. The video images portray a range of human caused disasters from the Hindenburg's explosion to chemically treated food crops. The footage is from Prelinger Archives, a source of free, downloadable historical footage (www.archives.org).



About the artist: Donna Szoke holds a BFA from SFU and a BA from the University of Winnipeg. She is currently based in Vancouver, and is a graduate student working in interdisciplinary practices. She teaches video production and post production. Donna has collaborated with numerous artists in various capacities on work shown nationally, and internationally. Her art practice includes sculpture, kinetics, installation, media and video.

MELT is an interactive video installation that explores the potential 'environmental disaster' of global warming and more specifically the climate and environmental changes that have already taken place in the western Canadian Arctic region. A recent report from the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment shows this region to have the highest degree of weather change on the planet, causing the shrinkage of sea ice that threatens wildlife from walrus to polar bears. Melt-water from disappearing glaciers is disrupting ocean currents that govern climate



around the world. Scientists and environmentalists have warned the public about the effects of our ongoing 'series of steps' of environmental degradation - we can now see a prototype in northern Canada that conforms to many of the earliest environmental predictions.

MELT includes a video loop of archived imagery from a satellite that uses radar to take images for monitoring environmental and climate change; a vitrine housing a micro 'global warming' environment, camera and small monitor; a projection of a time-lapse photography piece. The gallery participant, viewing the model in the vitrine, will be recorded and mixed into the RADARSAT imagery. When projected onto the TechLab floor, participants experience a 'satellite's-eye' perspective that temporarily merges their likeness into the topography.



Some of the images sequentially illustrate the cracking and melting of the Ward Hunt Ice Shelf, the largest ice cap in the arctic. A tragic consequence of the ice shelf's rupture was the loss of all the freshwater from the northern hemisphere's largest epishelf lake, which contained a unique biological community, consisting of both freshwater and marine species of plankton.

In an era when anyone accessing Google satellite views can zoom into remote areas and witness the results of excess greenhouse gas emissions on Earth's topography, the threat of an encroaching ecological disaster becomes abstract and visually mesmerizing. Although technology facilitates our geospatial knowledge, the 'disaster' is perceived as something separate from 'here', as though only imagined. With *MELT* the artist's intention is to transport the viewer into a space where 'there' and 'here' converge.

About the artist: Michael Alstad is a Toronto based artist and curator working in installation and digital media. He is a founding member of the Canadian artist collectives Year Zero One and Symbiosis. Alstad has co-coordinated several site-specific projects in Toronto including *The Bank of Symbiosis* (97), *The Hoarding Project* (98), the *Transmedia* video billboard exhibitions (00, 02) and *Teletaxi* (03) and in Montreal *Teletaxi* (05).

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