

**Text by Vania Djelani commissioned by Skol for the exhibition Catalogue des ruines (Catalog of Ruins)**

*Catalog of Ruins* brings together the works of a group of artists whose practices navigate around archives, raw material, and the Anthropocene. With a key emphasis on territorial retrieval, ecological awareness and the aesthetics of accumulation, the exhibition presents various encounters with elements and material residue that encompasses our environmental relations. Underlining human entanglement with non-human or animal agents, this multidisciplinary installation featuring **Samuel Bernier Cormier**, **Lauren Chipeur**, **Kuh Del Rosario**, **Xavier Orssaud**, and **Elise Rasmussen** presents a spectacular site of material extraction.

As the Anthropocene can be defined as a geological time frame that marks the long standing effects of human activity on a planetary scale, confronting the realities of environmental pollution and climate crisis is often met with an overwhelming feeling of apathy or abjection. By alluding to ecosystems of material abundance and exploitation that we've created, the exhibition transforms the gallery space into a melancholic environment where things, and objects, become less certain. Every item in *Catalog of Ruins* presents its own temporality that begins to address the terrifying reality of deep time<sup>1</sup> as we find ourselves faced in an era of ecological crisis.

Composing a wall of textured vastness, **Lauren Chipeur's** tinted paper tiles draw attention to the material realities we inhabit. Dyed using onion skins, Chipeur's paper prompts us to reflect on sulfur and the complex journeys this particular mineral undergoes. As an essential life sustaining element, sulfur is naturally occurring and can be found among living and non living things alike. In addition to being a byproduct of oil and gas extraction, sulfur is a key element for the production of metal alloys and a common ingredient in creating fertilizers and pesticides. Essential for meeting the global food demand, and embodied by the household staple of the onion, Chipeur's work underlines complex material structures that associate sulfur with notions of profit and progress.

While Chipeur provides the material vocabulary to trace an understanding of our surroundings, **Samuel Bernier Cormier's** *Thinking about the sea* (2021) reflects on how we can more intimately view the world we live in. Created over the span of a 14 day quarantine, Cormier's seascapes address a sensory gap that can exist in the way we record natural data. Inkjet prints of the ocean are paired with pigmented swatches that allow us to contemplate the colour of the sea. As photographs hint at other sensory information, like the sounds of waves crashing or the brush of a salty sea breeze, Cormier's series rely on memory as the site of extraction.

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In further conjuring the ocean, **Kuh Del Rosario**'s practice makes use of both organic and inorganic materials to create structures that examine the way things transform over time. Opening up a dialogue around climate instability, as plastic refuse fills our oceans, the accumulated residue in Del Rosario's *Stunt Double* (2022) speculates the future of our material waste stream. Under an era of accumulation, the use of everyday household and consumer discard, seeming weathered by the elements, articulates the precarity of our material reality. Undergoing physical transformation that is equally informed by the artist's sensorial memory of the Philippines, Del Rosario's reconstructed material assemblages bring together geological features with diasporic experiences.

Through exploring imagined geographies, **Xavier Orssaud**'s practice delves into our changing relationship to the land and its various representations. Recalling the aesthetics of the Romantic era, Orssaud's *Ideal Landscape* layers a collection of 16th to 19th century paintings with landscape photography to create his own allegorical prints. While presenting a sense of harmony commonly associated with pastoral landscapes, his prints follow the history of celebrating the triumph of mankind over nature that is then obstructed by the more violent geological traces of human intervention on land. In juxtaposing imagined geographies against real technical lands<sup>2</sup>, Orssaud creates speculative images that address our long standing habit of claiming the planet as spaces of operation.

The final component of *Catalog of Ruins* features **Elise Rasmussen**'s video *In the Valley of the Moon* (2022), in which the artist investigates the seemingly separate, yet entangled, realities that have contributed to scientific developments around food production, chemical warfare, and the mining industry. Linking the collapse of the nitrate supply industry at Atacama Desert with the discovery of the Haber-Bosch method that allowed for the creation of fertilizers—and eventual development of poisonous gasses during the First World War—Rasmussen comments on the effects of living under an extractive capital on an already fragile ecosystem.

Representing a time of urgency and apocalyptic possibilities, the multitude of objects, of real and imagined artifacts, in *Catalog of Ruins* demand attention to the infrastructures we've created that have contributed to a toxic world. Through a constant dialogue between past, present and future, the exhibition calls for the need to organize and reexamine our picture of the Anthropocene. In combining anthropology, artistic practices, geology, and various human endeavors, *Catalog of Ruins* reveals the unintentional, and sometimes devastating, consequences of our journey towards technological progress.

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- **Vania Djelani** is a writer and researcher based in Tiohtiá:ke (Montréal). Her practice focuses on expressions of care, hospitality and reciprocity to explore the concept of placemaking within contemporary landscapes.

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1. Referring to John McPhee's expression, that applies to the concept of geological time.

2. Referring to Peter L. Galison's concept of "technical lands".

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