

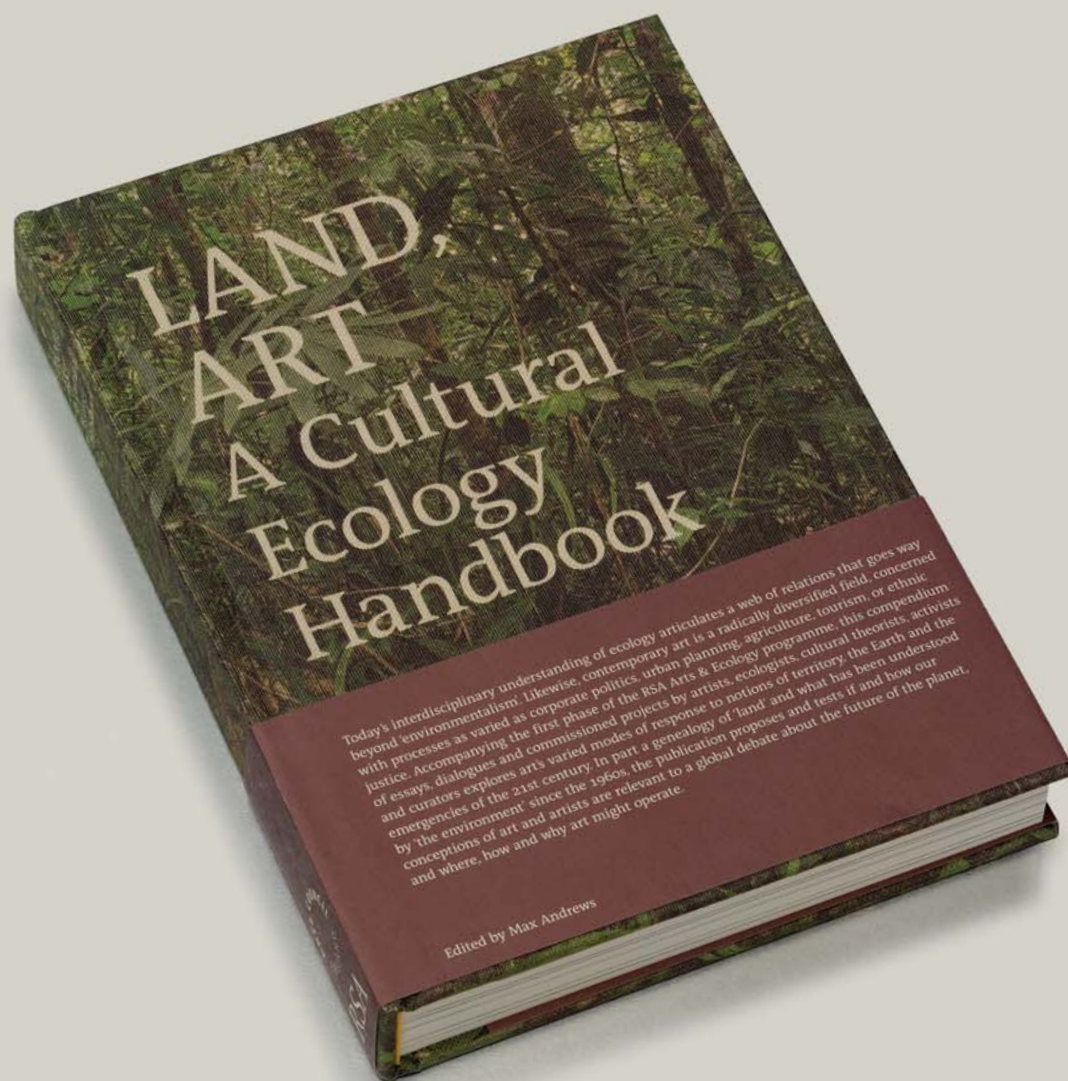
HELLO

THIS INTERVIEW MARKS THE SECOND IN HELLO, A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY ADAM CARR THAT SET OUT TO EXAMINE DIFFERENT MODELS OF CURATORIAL WORK. EACH INTERVIEW, PUBLISHED IN CONSECUTIVE ISSUES, WILL FOCUS ON THE WORK OF CURATORIAL PRACTITIONERS, CONCENTRATING ON A SINGLE EXHIBITION OR INVESTIGATING A LARGER SPAN OF WORK. IN DOING SO, THE SERIES INTENDS TO REVISIT AND RETHINK A PARTICULAR EXHIBITION, EXAMINE THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE CURATOR AND PROVIDE A PLATFORM FOR A YOUNGER GENERATION OF CURATORS.

AN INTERVIEW WITH LATITUDES

BY ADAM CARR





ADAM CARR: I would like to start by asking you about your beginnings – what were you both doing before establishing Latitudes?

LATITUDES: We met in 2002 in London while on a two-year MA Curatorial programme and then both worked in large/x-large art institutions over the next two years; Mariana in London and Max in the Paris-of-the-Prairies, Minneapolis, and then back in London. In April 2005, before moving to Barcelona, we were invited to curate a public commission for the 'Arts & Ecology' programme initiated by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and this was the first Latitudes project. Before all of this Max was working for a contemporary art magazine (again in London) after studying art practice and critical theory and Mariana studied Art History in Barcelona and had worked in New York and Venice.

AC: I'm interested to know what were your reasons for deciding to work together as oppose to separately and do you, in addition, curate exhibitions separately?

LATITUDES: Working as a duo comprises a constant state of questioning and mistrust of consistency; Latitudes is by definition a partnership.

AC: Why mistrust consistency?

LATITUDES: Consistency is good, but it has to be challenged before you get to agree. To clarify: something we very much admire in the practice of Fischli & Weiss is their ability to be consistently inconsistent. And their *How to work better* (1991), (based on a found text) is the most generous artwork – gentle nuggets of advice that are very germane to any form of productive action, collaboration or creative partnership: '1. DO ONE THING AT A TIME; 2. KNOW THE PROBLEM, 3. LEARN TO LISTEN; 4. LEARN TO ASK QUESTIONS; 5. DISTINGUISH SENSE FROM NONSENSE; 6. ACCEPT CHANGE AS INEVITABLE; 7. ADMIT MISTAKES, 8. SAY IT SIMPLE; 9. BE CALM; 10. SMILE'. Actually, we are developing a project about the very phenomena of creative partnerships, though it has yet to see the light of day ...

AC: Would you not say that focusing on one particular area of research pertains to a form of consistency? Please tell me more about the project...

LATITUDES: Yes, you could say that but we have several focus points of research. We are interested in looking a little closer at the emergence of artistic partnerships as a historical phenomenon, and the specificities of the overlapping of personal and professional modes, and so on. Of course the double act is a well-established and enduring format in everything from comedy (Laurel & Hardy) to philosophy (Deleuze & Guattari) and the ampersand is a powerful symbol.

AC: Do you find it easier sustaining yourself economically as a creative partnership, and did this perhaps constitute one of the reasons for forging an alliance?

L: It's hard to know as we cannot compare like for like – as fully-fledged freelancers we have always been two. But as you will doubtlessly know yourself, independent curating is hardly a lucrative business.

AC: What made you choose Barcelona as your operational base?

LATITUDES: Curiously for us, this is a question we get asked very frequently, so we have a broad range of well rehearsed responses which are more-or-less true but none definitive. 1. Compared to London, the city offers a more affordable economic base for living and for sustaining a nascent freelance practice; 2. The scale of the city and its art communities means there is greater transparency and less dilution; 3. Mariana grew up here; 4. Boqueria market vs Tesco Old Kent Road is no contest ...

AC: Could you elaborate on the public commission you described earlier and how this fostered setting up for what seems to be a form of agency?

LATITUDES: The RSA (which might now be described as a think-tank, though its pedigree goes back to the 1700s) was looking for a way of involving contemporary artists from the very earliest stage of this new programme initiative and as part of a process of open research around how to address the global issues of our time: so-called 'environmental-issues' such as waste and recycling, but also broader fields such as global citizenship and sustainable communities. We structured a commission brief and a series of site visits which attempted to look at London itself as an ecosystem and to germinate possibilities for artistic intervention within that remit. So rather than having a particular venue in mind from the beginning (there is no exhibition space per se at the RSA) we imagined a context defined by the metropolis itself, suggested perhaps by the way that it embraces a river, a transportation and waste network, human and non-human habitats, for example. The process was geared toward generating research but also focusing on how to bring this to a conclusion with a publicly visible result. So we have been working since October 2005 with Tue Greenfort and by necessity it has morphed into a long-term initiative which is still ongoing with a definitive conclusion has yet to be reached.

In the meantime climate change has surged into the headlines, with the 'Stern Report', Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* (which seems to have been mentioned in almost every interview in this *UOVO* that has come in so far!) and so on, where once there was comparatively little interest, and now the question of artistic agency is increasingly under the spotlight. As far as our curatorial practice is concerned – and this is nothing particularly innovative – we always understood that with Latitudes we wanted to operate in a way that was more than hanging pictures on walls, and that pursued a kind of cautious internationalism or a suspicion of the relentless pace with which projects and artists are assimilated. So this project also suggested a way of working in which we would foster a bandwidth of activities, speeds and frequencies.

Within this our engagement with ecological issues is both one strand and an operating principle of diversity, contextual sensitivity and interconnectivity.



DETAIL OF 'THERE, NOW: FROM ROBERT SMITHSON TO GUANTÁNAMO' BY JEFFREY KASTNER WITH INSERTS FROM THE WORLDWATCH INSTITUTE'S 'VITAL SIGNS'. 'LAND, ART: A CULTURAL ECOLOGY HANDBOOK'



DETAIL OF PAUL SCHMELZER INTERVIEW WITH RIRKRIT TIRAVANAJA IN 'LAND, ART: A CULTURAL ECOLOGY HANDBOOK'



DETAIL OF ALEKSANDRA MIR'S 'FIRST WOMAN ON THE MOON' IN 'LAND, ART: A CULTURAL ECOLOGY HANDBOOK'



DETAIL OF FERNANDO BRYCE'S 'WORK IN PROGRESS' IN 'LAND, ART: A CULTURAL ECOLOGY HANDBOOK'

AC: You mentioned a long term project commitment with one particular artist, which is in contrast and uncommon – even anomalous – to how independent curators usually operate, but something necessary to the manner in which an artist such as Tue Greenfort works. I'm interested in knowing more about how the work with his project has developed thus far. Additionally, do you see this as something ongoing for the foreseeable future – not only with Tue, but also setting up conditions for a long term endeavor with other artists?

LATITUDES: You're right – long term projects are somehow not endemic to the independent sector. There is an inbuilt short-termism in the project-based economy (something that the editor and designer Christoph Keller mentions in his interview in this issue) that we feel is healthy to counteract, or at least make an effort to address with different speeds and slownesses of work wherever possible. Of course, it's not a case of deliberately stalling, but rather allowing for the conditions to mature in the right way. With Tue the length of the project emerged by necessity as well as by design. As we mentioned, the RSA doesn't have an exhibition space and the context was London itself.

Coupled with the very broad possibilities concerning what the commission could be 'about' in terms of ecology, this inevitably meant favouring a situation where an approach could emerge rather than coming to a rapid consensus.

This is ostensibly a 'public art' commission, and though understood in the broadest sense of 'publicness' or 'the public realm' – not sculptures on roundabouts – this was not something that Tue had undertaken before and so it needed a degree of getting used to, as did the scale and physicality of the city itself. So we began by organising a broad range of visits and meetings. For example, we met Dusty Gedge who is an expert in the world of 'living roofs' and he took us to the top of a tower in Canary Wharf where there is an effort to 'green' the space.

We explored the bizarre and desolate Greenwich peninsula around the Millennium Dome, all built of course on contaminated land, and had arranged a tour of one of the largest glass recycling facilities in the country nearby.

Greenwich was also a good place to check out some of the latest government initiatives to make sustainable housing estates, and to appreciate the industrial use of the Thames. Among other research, we also met with officials in the department of transportation as Tue was particularly interested in finding out about light pollution, so-called 'silent asphalt' and the congestion charge. Tue was living in London for the three months preceding December 2006, and that has moved the ideas on to another stage.

AC: You recently organised an exhibition in Barcelona that set out to investigate notions of risk. What were your concerns in this field of research and how were they manifested on the stage of the show?

LATITUDES: The exhibition was titled *Rendición Extraordinaria / Extraordinary Rendition* and it proposed an exploration of ideas around risk and abstraction with works by nine artists. As a historical-conceptual background we were interested in the present societal preeminence of risk and immaterial exchange and how this has evolved alongside other phenomena such as insurance.

The wonderful paintings by Christopher Knowles based on the US Department of Homeland Security's notorious colour-coded threat level system *Untitled (Alert Paintings)* (2004) were in our minds from the start, and we allowed this depiction of such a hysterical attempt to render, manipulate and orchestrate abstract perceptions of massively complex global security to draw other works around it.

Mariana Castillo Deball showed a series of lithographs revisiting a popular legend around the looting and transportation of the colossal stone statue of Tláloc to the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. These were presented alongside a series of interviews with antiques and antiquities dealers which she made in Amsterdam, and a few new ones that she did in Barcelona. So this addressed other systems of value and uncertainty related to the markets of cultural goods, which was itself a factored into the setting of the exhibition in a commercial gallery, Nogueras Blanchard. On a different register, there were also works such as Wilfredo Prieto's *Grease, Soap and Banana* (2006) (materials self-explanatory) which actually posed a direct threat to the visitors. So the exhibition was also legible on an experiential level with this, or with Carsten Höller's *220 Volts* (1992) in which an electrical cable is baited with Kinder chocolates.





AC: This brings me to ask about spaces and, as aforementioned, the issue of speeds and frequencies. I wondered if there is a preferred context for which you work – outside of more controlled and structured environments such as gallery spaces for instance – or, are you always striving to question and react toward a given invitation and context?

LATITUDES: No, we don't really have a preferred context per se. For us, so-called public space can be a highly controlled environment in itself, and private contexts such as commercial galleries can offer a considerable degree of freedom.

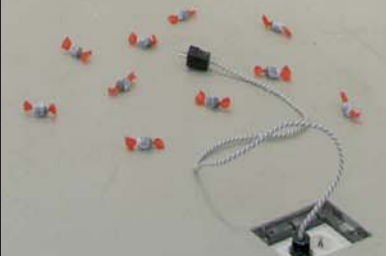
AC: Through inviting curators to conduct interviews and suggesting artists along the way, what is the purpose of this issue and what issues are you hoping to raise?

LATITUDES: The invitation process varied – in some cases we approached artists and then talked with them about who they thought would be most appropriate to have a conversation with, in other cases the interviewees were proposed by a writer/curator we had initially approached, or were natural partners, and others we conducted ourselves. The purpose for this issue is to provoke a series of conversations, soundings, texts and visuals more-or-less around the words 'green', 'ecology', 'luxury' and 'degradation'. It is quite an open structure in that it is not 'themed' – the conversations are autonomous. As with the book that we edited *LAND, ART: A Cultural Ecology Handbook*, we would like to explore the post-environmental, but there is no thesis or argument that we are proposing. In some ways the issue has become a natural transition from the book as some artists have collaborated in both though in very different ways.

Musician, writer and curator David Toop contributed to the book with a text, and to this issue with a curated CD. He has gathered an extraordinary list of collaborators from all over the world and brought together an examination of fieldrecording and the 'eco-soundscape'. We hope that the contributions will be a resource to divine for some new directions for research in this area. For instance, there seem to be a number of instances of science-fiction, which is quite intriguing in this context, and also a running thread concerning down-sizing or slowing down. We also wanted to look at the art world itself in terms of an ecology, and not only in relation to practice – and at artists, curators, writers, etc., as individuals of the predominant species on the planet.

Yesterday we went to an event billed as an 'ecology fair', which turned out to be completely drowning in 'mind, body and spirit' stands – reiki, crystal healing, energetic massages, etc. – as well as abandoned-pet and anti-meat-eating campaigns.

This worryingly bland, egocentric, humanistic definition of ecology in a regressive and mystical mode is seriously out of step with progressive ecological thinking.



(LEFT TO RIGHT): CHRISTOPHER KNOWLES, *UNTITLED (ALERT PAINTINGS)*, 2004; WILFREDO PRIETO, *GRASA, JABÓN, PLÁTANO*, 2006; GARDAR EIDE EINARSSON, *WE'LL MAKE THE WORLD YOU LIVE*, 2005; CARSTEN HÖLLER, *220 VOLT*, 1992. INSTALLATION VIEW, *EXTRAORDINARY RENDITION*, NOGUERASBLANCHARD, BARCELONA (22 MARCH – 19 MAY 2007). COURTESY: LATITUDES, WWW.LTTDS.ORG / PHOTO: ROBERT JUSTAMANTE.



(LEFT TO RIGHT): GARDAR EIDE EINARSSON, *WE'LL MAKE THE WORLD YOU LIVE*, 2005; CARSTEN HÖLLER, *220 VOLT*, 1992; NATASCHA SADR HAGHIGHIAN, *EMBARGO EMBARGO*, 2003; JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER, *REST IN PEACE*, 2004; MARIANA CASTILLO DEBALL, *IT RISES OR FALLS DEPENDING ON WHETHER YOU'RE COMING OR GOING. IF YOU ARE LEAVING, IT'S UPHILL; BUT AS YOU ARRIVE IT'S DOWNHILL*, 2006. INSTALLATION VIEW, *EXTRAORDINARY RENDITION*, NOGUERASBLANCHARD, BARCELONA (22 MARCH – 19 MAY 2007). COURTESY: LATITUDES, WWW.LTTDS.ORG / PHOTO: ROBERT JUSTAMANTE.

AC: What you described just then, of course, typifies the ecological cliché. I just wondered who you believe lay the foundations and whose work propagated issues of ecology in an interesting way, while eschewing the dead-end of so-called eco-art ...

LATITUDES: If that is the general perception of what pertains to ecology then we probably need another new word! Artists: Hans Haacke's early 'systems' works, and of course Robert Smithson. One could doubtless argue for many other much earlier artists being relevant, from a tradition of landscape painting for example, but that's beyond our area of expertise.

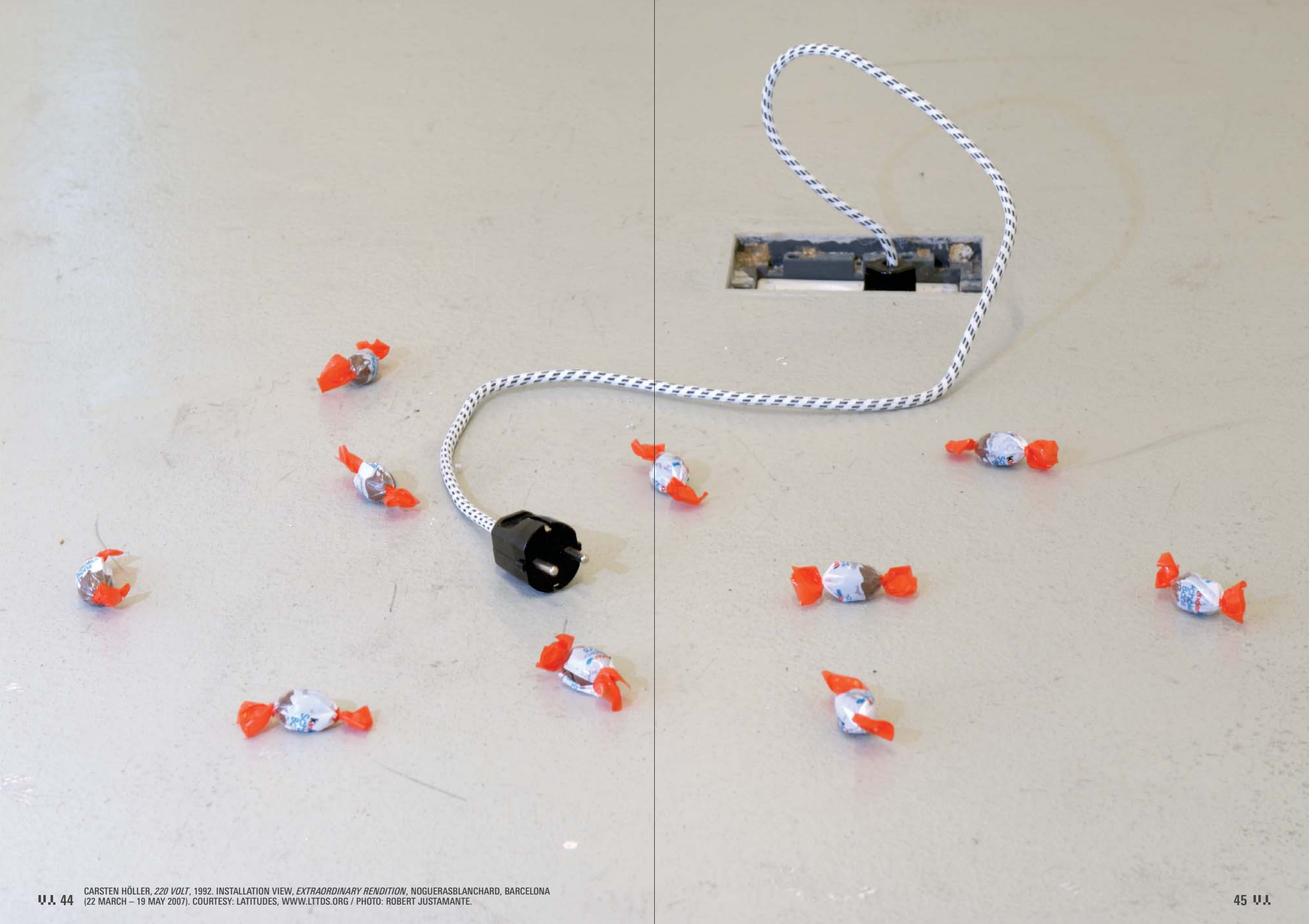
AC: Just going back to something you previously mentioned – how do ideas of degradation and luxury tie in and fit into place with the issue's overall premise?

LATITUDES: Well, with the addition of 'Luxury and Degradation' to 'Ecology', we hope to prompt a whole span of responses and allusions, from an acknowledgment of the now widely-predicted planetary decimation, systemic shutdown, resource wars and population nosedive that seem to be the consequence of continuing inaction on global warming, through to a questioning of what we consider valuable or what might be taken on as a 'hair shirt' response to shifting awareness. 'Luxury and Degradation' is a direct borrowing from Jeff Koons' 1986 series of the same name. This is the group of works that feature chromed cocktail accessories and repurposed liquor advertisements.

It's a phrase that serves both alcohol and ecological futures.

AC: As it seems one of the most under-discussed issues and somewhat unexplored in the visual art field, I'm curious to know more about how you became interested in ecological issues, and, moreover, how this became one of your principle points of investigation within your curatorial practice. Was there a catalyst or a particular turning point?

LATITUDES: There was no Damascene moment that suddenly turned us to this strand of research, rather there has been a slow accumulation and convergence, boosted of course by partnering with RSA Arts & Ecology and developing *LAND, ART: A Cultural Ecology Handbook*. The seeming lack of engagement with ecology in visual arts relates as much to the visibility and effectiveness of different lineages of practice as much as anything else. So-called 'eco-art' is a prolific and historically-definable discipline, but it has effectively marginalised itself – by the very fact of limiting itself as 'environmental art' rather than art first and foremost, it is now stuck in a discursive deadend – much like 'net art'. So as a curatorial or editorial practice, we saw that there could or should be a way of talking about a much broader set of concerns, in much the same way that society at large is realising that segregating what we know as an 'environmental issue' is rather unhelpful for everyone.





MARIANA CASTILLO DEBALL, *IT RISES OR FALLS DEPENDING ON WHETHER YOU'RE COMING OR GOING. IF YOU ARE LEAVING, IT'S UPHILL; BUT AS YOU ARRIVE IT'S DOWNHILL*, 2006. INSTALLATION VIEW, *EXTRAORDINARY RENDITION*, NOGUERASBLANCHARD, BARCELONA (22 MARCH – 19 MAY 2007). COURTESY: LATITUDES, WWW.LTTDS.ORG / PHOTO: ROBERT JUSTAMANTE.

AC: From your extensive research, where would you say Land Art starts and stops? What are the parameters that define this term? Do you find it problematic like most art-historical and ahistorical definitions?

L: For us, Land Art is a specific artistic phenomena associated with particular monumental works by Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, James Turrell, Robert Morris, and so on. And arguably certain works by Europeans such as Richard Long. That's it. Even this use of the term is contested. Much like 'Conceptual art', it was never accepted as such a useful term by artists and the practices it is said to cover are only superficially similar. You could declare Stonehenge to be a work of Land Art if you wanted, or Rirkrit Tiravanija's and Kamin Lertchaiprasert's *the land foundation* project in northern Thailand. But in both these cases the term necessarily designates something beyond an art-historical label – so that's why the title of the book *LAND, ART ...* has that obstinate comma: it wasn't really about extending the usefulness of 'Land Art' as a critical lineage. But in one sense, we did attempt to characterize an even broader fiction around 'land' within practice. Much like the Center for Land Use Interpretation, Land Art works could become one category of knowledge within a wider field. So the parameters certainly extend beyond aesthetics – i.e. landscapes – into a more throughgoing consideration of territory, the social and the political – land grabs, land reforms, landlords, etc. – or resources, habitats, agriculture, urban planning, and so on (landfills, wastelands, etc.).

AC: What are your plans for the future?

L: We're looking forward to enjoying the summer events in this particularly loaded year (Venice, Basel, Münster, Documenta), it's always stimulating to see what happens in such landmark events and it's of course a good excuse to reunite with friends and meet new people. Also we are looking forward to a well-deserved break in August when the whole of southern Europe shuts down anyway. We haven't really stopped in the last two years.

At the moment we are developing a programme around Land Art and its legacy in film and video which will be presented in the Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, in the Spring of 2008 and would like to tour it here and there. Also we will deliver a non-monumental project we've been developing with Lawrence Weiner for the city of Barcelona and Tue's project in London.

ADAM CARR is an independent curator and writer based in London. Among the exhibitions he has recently curated are, *Some Time Waiting*, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris (2007); *The Show Will Be Open When The Show Will Be Closed*, STORE gallery and various locations, London (2006); and *EN ROUTE: VIA ANOTHER ROUTE*, trans-Siberian train, Moscow to Beijing (2005). Upcoming exhibitions he is curating will take place in Berlin, New York and Paris.

LATITUDES are guest editors of this issue of *UOVO*.

