

All have the same breath

January 18-March 9, 2019



Artists: Leticia Bernaus | Stella Brown | Bochay Drum
Geissler/Sann | Robert Lundberg | Polen Ly | Cate Richards
Nicole Tu-Maung | Tamara Becerra Valdez | Ayub Wali

Research Collaborators: Dilcan Acer | Alize Arican
Ian G. Baird | Tarini Bedi | Paul Bick | Ralph Citron
Casey Corcoran | Charles Corwin | Molly Doane
Caitlyn Knecht Dye | W. Nathan Green | Peri Johnson
Ömür Harmanşah | Tannya Islas | Zhe Yu Lee
Haley LeRand | Javairia Shahid | Shivana Shrestha
David H. Wise

All have the same breath presents the work of a group of artists who give expression to the lived realities of those who are experiencing across the planet changing landscapes and a shifting climate. Moving beyond the usual rhetoric of climate change, the exhibition raises urgent questions about how the global environmental crisis is experienced and articulated by rural and urban communities. Exploring the ancient ghosts of the past and engaging with the politics of current ecologies, *All have the same breath* investigates and visualizes the material entanglements, debates, discourses, and intellectual engagements in a variety of urban and rural environments.

The artists in *All have the same breath* participated in the fieldwork of longstanding research projects that are led by faculty and graduate students and address a wide range of questions related to environmental politics. As part of the research groups, but removed from their broader aims and implications, the artists created artworks that make keen observations about our relationships to the land and how those relationships are influenced by outside forces. Several of the artists' work considers humanity's long-standing desire to control and define the earth. Geissler/Sann, for example, reference mankind's earliest map-making impulses that attempted to define and possess the world around them. Stella Brown, meanwhile, investigates the conditions of farming in Northern Illinois and efforts to make and keep the land of the region farmable. Other artists consider the nature and ethics of conducting research on the land and people. Leticia Bernaus' film reflects on the history of ethnography and the study of other cultures, while Tamara Becerra Valdez's work considers how research might be conducted *with* a group of people rather than *on* them. Likewise, Bochay Drum brings the experience of performing fieldwork to the gallery and explores how different actors in a landscape shape that landscape. Finally, other artists in the exhibition, such as Robert Lundberg, Polen Ly, Cate

Richards, and Nicole Tu-Maung, make visible the intangible experience of a changing climate. Responding to specific cultural histories and geographic locations, the artists in *All have the same breath* consider how climate change is experienced and understood across the world.

The exhibition's title signals the urgency of acknowledging that all things—human, animal, vegetable, and mineral—are dependent on the same ecosystem and, indeed, breathe the same air. The phrase *All have the same breath* is borrowed from the book *Ecclesiastes* (3:19) of the Old Testament, in which "breath" (*hebel* in Biblical Hebrew) both refers to "the air we breathe, vapor, wind" but also "nothingness, futility", a metaphor-rich double meaning that aptly characterizes the shared fortunes and misfortunes of living beings on the planet. Breathing, as the most fundamental, most intimate, and therefore perhaps the most poetic bodily function, unites all living beings in their sharing of the same air—the least valued substance of all earthly resources. A metaphor for both hope and vanity, air could in the ideal be imagined as an atmosphere of democracy or, conversely, stand in for the uselessness of human deeds.

All have the same breath is the product of a two-year interdisciplinary, collaborative, multi-sited research project titled *Political Ecology as Practice: A Regional Approach to the Anthropocene*. It has been suggested that the Anthropocene, our new geological epoch of large-scale human impact on the planet, is making us aware of the limitations of traditional research tools and disciplinary divisions. It urgently calls for new methodologies and new collaborations in researching the past, present, and future environments. Developing seven different site-specific projects in seven regions of the world, the project proposes alternative methodologies to address climate change and the ecological crisis.

Each of the seven field projects engaged with a distinct field site and its communities with their

local history, narratives, and circumstances: the settled farmers and glaciers of the Hunza valley in northern Pakistan; environmental refugees in the historic neighborhood of Tarlabaşı in Istanbul, Turkey; the conditions of water and agricultural production around Cochabamba, Bolivia; Bhutanese communities cultivating Chicago's neighborhood gardens; industrial row crop farmers in Northern Illinois; archaeological landscapes and current farming communities in Konya in west-central Turkey; and hydropower dams and tree plantations in northeastern Cambodia. This exhibition showcases the results of an unusual collaboration between artists and other researchers in thinking about care for the environment and its multi-species communities through field practice. The methodology is unorthodox because any collaboration between artists and academics from different fields in an active way and in the performance of the fieldwork is rare.

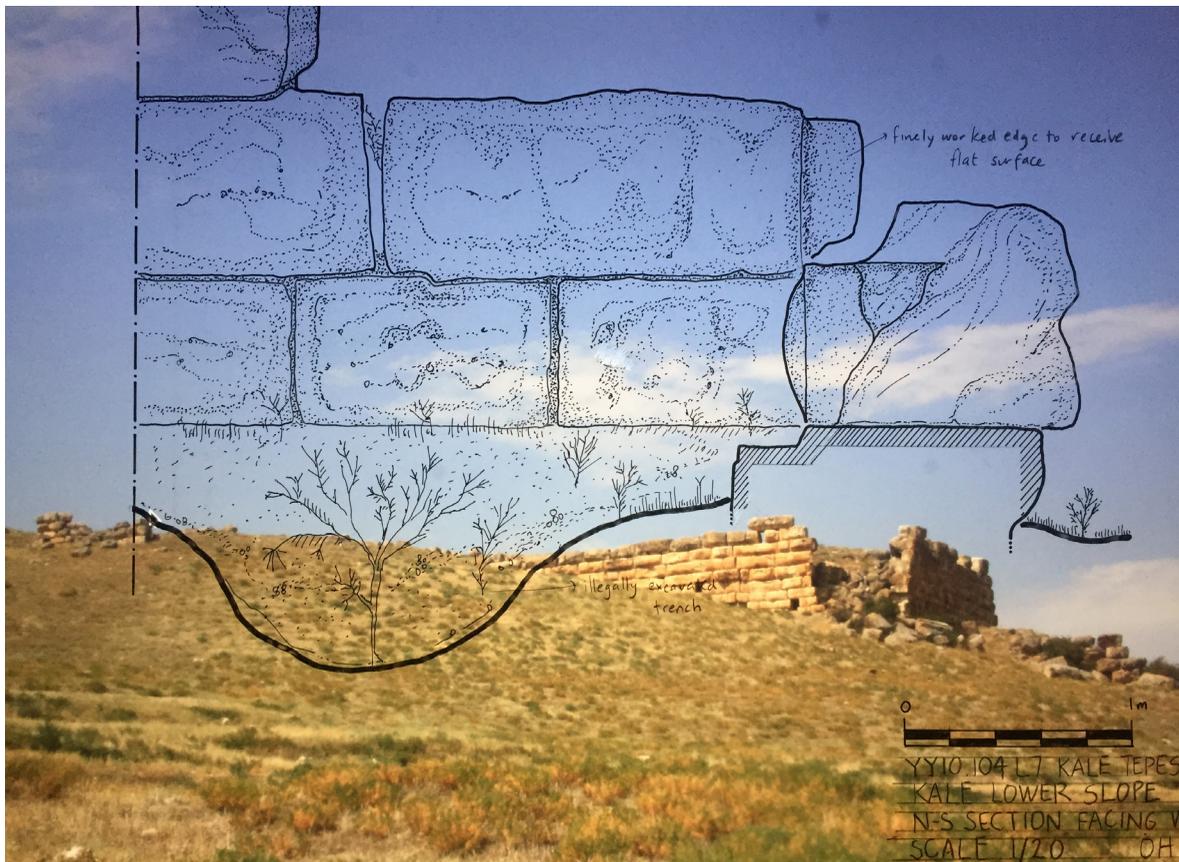
Fieldwork is a method of observation and data gathering shared among the natural and social sciences, and to a lesser extent the arts and humanities, using various tools and technologies of observation and documentation. As a creative, affective, and often performative act of engagement with local places and communities, it is central to environmental research and interdisciplinary collaborations such as this one. In the last two years, participants in this project carried out experimental, collaborative fieldwork in seven regions of the world, addressing the politics of the environment and how the changing climate is experienced by and negotiated among local communities. Doing so required unusual collaborations in the field: anthropologists, artists, geographers, art historians, literary theorists, and archaeologists worked side by side. Furthermore, in each of the projects, the fieldwork brought together the eyes of the lead researcher, who is familiar with the site based on previous research, with the fresh perspectives offered by the participants who arrived at the site for the first time. All fieldwork participants emphasized the emotional aspects of being

in the field, in effect recalling the remarkable mood change one finds in scientific fieldwork, for example, among environmental biologists, whose subjects of research continually vanish or go extinct during the course of their research. The fieldwork on climate change and ecology then constantly takes the form of mourning, pain, and frustration.

In summary, *All have the same breath* proposes a new kind of visibility for the Anthropocene. The field research carried out under the rubric of environmental ethnography, political ecology, landscape archaeology and eco-critical art practice, employed in this project, moves us away from the obsession with the singular object or the singular historical event through which stories of human "progress" are commonly told. In contrast, they move us closer to expanded visions of ecology, breathable atmospheres of shared life, interdependent lives of multispecies communities, their entangled bodies, and the deep time of the past and the future. This project proposes that we must change our lives and the way we tell our stories.

— Ömür Harmanşah

The exhibition is organized by Political Ecologies Working Group, (a.k.a. *Political Ecology: Platform Chicago*), an active group of faculty, graduate students, artists, and activists, and a platform of academic research, field practice, and debate on political ecology and environmental humanities. This working group, has been supported by the Institute for the Humanities of the University of Illinois at Chicago since 2015. This multi-disciplinary collaborative project engages faculty and graduate students from the departments of Anthropology, Art, Art History, Biological Sciences, English, Latin American and Latino Studies, Rhetoric, and Urban Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Department of Geography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Back Image: Bochay Drum, *We Don't Dig*, 2018, mixed media installation (detail). Courtesy the artist.

Front Image: Leticia Bernaus and Stella Brown, *Trajectories*, 2018, artist book (detail). Courtesy the artist.

Related Programs:

- > **Opening Reception**
Friday, January 18
5-8pm
- > **Forms and Features**
Poetry Workshop
Thursday, January 31
6-8pm
- > **Film Screening**
Curated by Robyn Mericle
Tuesday, February 5
6-8pm
- > **COPIES AND TRANSFERS**
Printmaking Workshop by
Tamara Becerra Valdez*
Saturday, February 16
1-3pm
- > **Voices from the Farm**
with Charlie Corwin and
Stella Brown
Saturday, February 23
2-4pm
- > **All have the same breath**
Symposium
Friday, March 1, 9-4pm
Saturday, March 2, 9-2pm

*Advance registration required

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