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JOANIE LEMERCIER

LIGHTSCAPES

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JOANIE LEMERCIER. LIGHTSCAPES

COVER

Joanie Lemercier. *Fuji*, 2014
© Studio Joanie Lemercier

Joanie Lemercier.

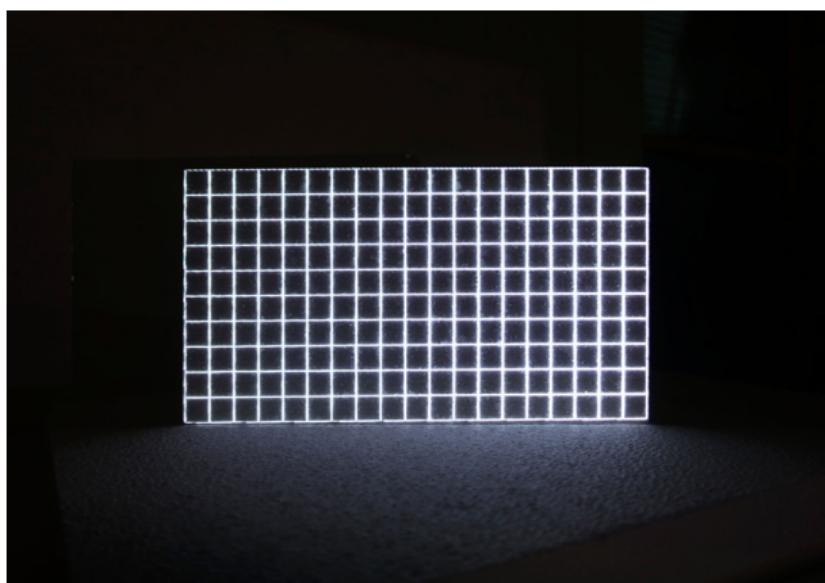
Lightscapes

Joanie Lemercier (Rennes, 1982) is a French visual artist whose work focuses on exploring and expanding the possibilities offered by the projection of light in space. A pioneer in the artistic use of video mapping and co-founder of the AntiVJ collective in 2008, Lemercier has based his personal research on the creation of pieces that use light to produce experiences that alter our perception. Through computer programming and the manipulation of devices, he has been able to turn projectors into a source of light capable of transforming the appearance of things, leading us to question our concept of reality. "Light as a medium, space as a canvas" is the underlying premise that has led many of his projects. With his concern for transcending the two-dimensionality of a flat screen, Lemercier has experimented with projection onto materials as varied as wood, glass, paper, and ceramics. In recent years, one of his most notable advances has been the dematerialisation of the projection surface, working with transparent materials and water droplets.

Curated by Juliette Bibasse, director of Studio Joanie Lemercier in Brussels, the exhibition highlights the importance of nature in Lemercier's practice and life, and reflects on the representation of the natural world through technology. In this exhibition, the artist's first major solo show, visitors embark on a journey through a series of landscapes that transport us from the contemplation of refined abstract lines and the fascination for majestic computer-generated mountains to the devastating reality of an overexploited environment.

The first part of the exhibition brings together various types of landscapes that reveal a particular paradox: the attempt to grasp the spectacular beauty of nature, which has not been captured by humans, through the use of digital tools. Thus, geometric views show a bewildering interplay of spaces, shadows and volumes. Such is the case of *Edges*, which introduces Lemercier's key elements of expression at the core

of his early years of practice – grids, geometries, and lines. While the landscapes we see throughout the exhibition progressively become even more complex and realistic, these essential elements remain. Thus, mathematics and code shall often form the basis of extremely elaborated computer-generated pieces.



Joanie Lemercier. *Edges*, 2020-2021 © Studio Joanie Lemercier

Further in the exhibition, we shall discover landscapes inspired by ancestral legends and personal experience, as well as imaginary geographies that stem from the collaboration between man and machine. In *Montagne, cent quatorze mille polygones* (Mountain, one hundred and fourteen thousand polygons), a piece depicting a large valley surrounded by mountain peaks created with an algorithm-distorted grid, Lemercier blurs the line between what we consider to be real and the simulation generated by mathematical functions. Meanwhile, *Eyjafjallajökull* and *Fuji* comprise two installations from the volcano series in which the idea of the Sublime, or the overwhelming grandeur of nature, begins to emerge in Lemercier's work. As Juliette Bibasse says, "at the heart of Lemercier's investigations lies the German Romantic school of painting that follows Immanuel Kant's theory of the interpretation of the Sublime. This "beauty blended with fear", in which the absolute transcends all sense of scale, inverts the established hierarchy between man and landscape. While beauty seems concrete and limited, the sensation

of sublimity takes us to towards the unlimited, which exceeds our capacity for representation and conceptualisation."

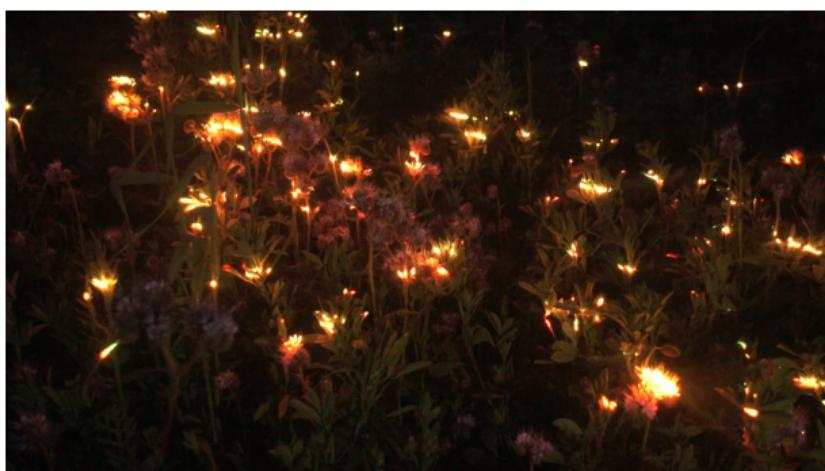


Joanie Lemercier. *Montagne, cent quatorze mille polygones*, 2016-2018
© Studio Joanie Lemercier

In contrast to the fascination created by digitally "manufactured" environments, the second part of the exhibition shows the reality of a nature full of scars caused by human overexploitation. Through a series of colossal images captured by drone, Lemercier leaves fiction behind to highlight the staggering and urgent need to safeguard our environment. In the words of Juliette Bibasse "humankind bestows on us the capacity to be moved by the infinite. However, this exaltation of the self has a critical reverse side that aspires to omnipotence: a conceptualisation of the world centred in man and our perpetual quest for dominion over nature. Anthropologist Philippe Descola has criticised our cultural relationship with the environment as if it were a "passive accompaniment that embellishes human activity", highlighting the urgent need to bring about a paradigm shift."

The Hambach Forest and the Technological Sublime arose from Lemercier's personal experience, when back in 2019 he visited Hambach, the largest coal mine in Europe less than 200 kilometres from Brussels, where he discovered a 12,000-year-old forest surrounding the site. Today, the Hambach

Forest has lost 90% of its former size due to the expansion of a mine that emits around 270,000 tonnes of CO₂ every day, becoming a symbol of the fight against climate change and the preservation of biodiversity. With this piece, Lemercier began a new creative stage in which his artistic work sought to reflect on sustainability and how to foster positive action to counter global warming. Contemplation would thus lead us to reactivate our ability to see the world and renew our commitment to it, understanding how art invites us to imagine and construct new realities.



Joanie Lemercier. *The Hambach Forest and the Technological Sublime*, 2019-2021 © Studio Joanie Lemercier



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Introduction

In his first major solo exhibition, Joanie Lemercier (Rennes, 1982) immerses the viewer in a journey through different landscapes that transport us from the contemplation of refined abstract lines and the fascination caused by magnificent computer-generated mountains to the disturbing reality of an overexploited nature.

A pioneer in the artistic use of video mapping and co-founder of the collective AntiVJ in 2008 Lemercier then established his own studio in 2009 (based in Brussels since 2015) to focus on creating pieces that use projected light to generate experiences that alter our visual perception. Through computer programming and the manipulation of devices, Lemercier manages to turn projectors into a light source capable of transforming the appearance of things and making us question our conception of reality. "Light as a medium, space as a canvas" is the premise on which this period's body of work is based.

This exhibition, curated by Juliette Bibasse, addresses the importance of nature in Lemercier's life and artistic practice, and reflects on the representation of the natural environment through technology. The first part of the exhibition brings together different types of landscapes that reveal a particular paradox: the attempt to grasp the spectacular beauty of nature, which has not been captured by humans, through the use of digital tools. These include, first of all, geometric views that show a bewildering interplay of spaces, shadows and volumes. Further on, we discover landscapes inspired by natural sites, ancestral legends or personal experiences, but also imaginary geographies born from the collaboration between man and machine.

In contrast to the fascination generated by digitally "fabricated" environments, the second part of the exhibition reveals the reality of a nature full of scars



caused by human overexploitation. Through colossal images captured by drone, in the hope of reawakening our ability to see the world and commit ourselves to it, Lemercier abandons fiction to confront us with the overwhelming urgency of safeguarding our environment. He thus initiates a new creative stage, in which contemplation can become the preliminary step towards action and in which art has the capacity to lead us to the construction of new realities.



1 Edges

2020 - 2021

Visual installation. Video projection on three surfaces
5'

Edges fuses a simple architectural structure with minimalist geometries of projected light. Joanie Lemercier explores a dehumanized technological landscape, where interconnections and dense networks create confined panoramas. The visual vocabulary is made of simple geometries and shadows organized to play with our perception of space, creating sometimes three-dimensional sensations and dynamic planes.

Edges introduces the visitor to Lemercier's key elements of expression: wireframes, grids, geometries, thin lines, all of them ingredients at the core of his early years of practice. Walking through the exhibition, visitors will discover even more complex landscapes and realistic textures, while basic elements remain rather similar. Thus, simple code and mathematics shall often form the basis of extremely elaborated computer-generated artworks.

Production: Juliette Bibasse

Exhibition
texts



2

Montagne, cent quatorze mille polygones

Mountain, one hundred and fourteen thousand polygons

2016 - 2018

Visual installation. Digital print on paper and video projection 5'

This piece depicts a large valley surrounded by mountain peaks. In fact, what we really see is just a grid mesh distorted by an algorithm. The procedural landscape questions the connection between nature and code: what if our reality could be recreated and simulated with mathematical functions? A layer of projected light creates an illusion of depth and blurs our sense of distance. A cycle of day, night, and different seasons bring life to the wallpaper landscape, distorting our perception of time and space.

Conceived in July 2016 for a group show in Brussels, Lemercier got invited to present *Montagne, cent quatorze mille polygones* in Tokyo in February 2018. The piece was exhibited in a skyscraper on the same floor as the Tokyo Observatory, which offers a 360-degree view of the city with Mount Fuji 100 kilometres away. Once on site, Lemercier got inspired by the harsh Japanese winter and decided to add the snowstorm as part of the piece. Some of his artworks would evolve in time, not as pure in situ creations but as an attempt to reflect a specific moment, mood or atmosphere.

Production: Juliette Bibasse

Montagne was created for LaMontagne group show in LaVallée, Brussels, in July 2016. Curated by Gwenaëlle de Spa, Benjamin Ottoz and Julien Paci



3

Eyjafjallajökull

2010

Audiovisual installation. Drawing, video projection and music
16' 40"

Inspired by the famous Icelandic volcano, which wreaked havoc on air traffic across western and northern Europe during the spring of 2010, *Eyjafjallajökull* is the first of Joanie Lemercier's volcano series. A wireframe topography, drawn directly on two perpendicular walls, transports the visitor to the scenery of the massive explosion that led one of Iceland's largest volcanoes to produce an immense ash plume.

At the time of the eruption, Joanie Lemercier was supposed to travel to his first artist residency in the United States at EMPAC New York. Unfortunately, the event forced him to delay his departure and limit his stay there. Initially stuck in Bristol where he was based, he ended up totally obsessed by this volcanic phenomenon that was constantly being broadcasted on all news channels. As a result, he spent hours sketching the silhouette of Eyjafjallajökull and studying the eruption. When he finally got on site, he conceived this piece quite naturally as a personal transcription of what had just happened. Later on, in September 2019, Joanie Lemercier and Juliette Bibasse spent six weeks in Iceland for an artist residency, during which he took an eight-hour hiking route on the slopes of Eyjafjallajökull.

Production: Juliette Bibasse

Music: Paul Jebanasam and Robert Henke (*Oomoo*, excerpt of "Signal to Noise II")

The early version of the project was initially commissioned by onedotzero, during an artist residency at EMPAC in April 2010, and produced in collaboration with the visual label AntiVJ



4

Fuji (不死)

2014

Audiovisual installation. Drawing, video projection and music
14' 30"

Fuji is part of Joanie Lemercier's ongoing artwork series on volcanoes. It is comprised of a large-scale hand-drawn landscape depicting Mount Fuji, augmented by a layer of projected light. The abstract narratives are inspired by *The Legend of Kaguya Hime*, a folk tale from the 10th century and a key element in Japanese culture, which provides an imaginary and poetic framework for this immersive environment.

Lemercier was invited to Japan for the first time to present his piece *Eyjafjallajökull*. While on the plane, he realized he would get to see Mount Fuji and decided to create a new installation based on this famous volcano. Ultimately, with this work the artist conveys his fascination with volcanoes for representing the fearsome forces of nature at a geological scale while being understandable from a human perspective. When creating the piece in 2014, he was able to get to the first half of Mount Fuji, but he had to wait until another trip to Japan in 2016 to finally make it to the top.

Production: Juliette Bibasse

Música: Paul Jebanasam

The piece was conceived and premiered at the projection mapping exhibition in Takamatsu in 2014, in the art islands district of Japan

Exhibition
texts



5

Paysages Possibles

Possible Landscapes

2016 - 2021

Installation. Drawing machine, paper, pens and computer

For many years, Lemercier has obsessively drawn complex landscapes and highly detailed repetitive patterns. In fact, one of his early gallery pieces is *LC4*, a tiny planet drawn by hand and made up of thousands of dots. Later on he began experimenting with plotter machines very much inspired by Hungarian-French pioneer computer artist Vera Molnar.

The machine acts as an extension of his arm, drawing tirelessly with great precision and allowing iterations in the execution of intricate panoramas. Despite its machine-nature, glitches and other unpredictable events take place during the process, making every drawing unique. As a result, a kind of "collaboration" is forged between the man and the machine. What Lemercier offers the visitor is a peek inside his own personal universe of mountains created by simple code with the use of different types of software and computer tools. Thus, the drawings are displayed as infinite "windows" offering multiple views to highly detailed topographies.

The various plotters used by Lemercier have helped him to better comprehend and refine his relationship with landscapes as the main subject of his work. In this way, his interest relies mostly on the representation of the Sublime, and more specifically, of those forces that shape our universe.

Production: Juliette Bibasse

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texts



6

The Hambach Forest and the Technological Sublime

2019 - 2021

Multi-screen audiovisual installation.

Video projection, music and silkscreen prints

177 kilometres east of Brussels, just past the Belgian border, lays the Hambach Forest. Estimated to be 12,000 years old and a regional beacon of biodiversity, it is the last remnant of an ancient woodland ecosystem that has occupied this part of the Rhine River plain since the end of the last ice age. Today, this natural treasure is only 10% of its former size. The rest has been cleared to make room for the Hambach surface mine, the largest of its kind in Europe.

Covering an area of 50 square kilometres and operated by Germany's biggest power producer, the Hambach surface mine exploits a massive lignite deposit, the dirtiest coal variant. Every day, it emits around 270,000 tons of CO₂, making it the largest single source of greenhouse gases in Europe. As it stands, extraction is set to continue for another 18 years, erasing the Hambach Forest entirely along with several villages during the process.

Joanie Lemercier first heard about the mine in 2019. Shocked at the scale of destruction he decided to see it for himself. What he found was otherworldly: resembling a giant impact crater, the mine's pit stretched as far as the eye could see. In it, tearing through ancient sediment layers, were the largest machines ever built. Just above the horizon, plumes of fine ash rising from the smokestacks of four power plants that burn the extracted coal offsite, 100 million tons per year.



Hambach is a symbol for the front lines in the global climate crisis and for citizens fighting back. With *The Hambach Forest and the Technological Sublime*, Lemercier brings one of Europe's worst environmental atrocities into the public eye. Translating hours of drone footage and projection work into an immersive installation, he confronts viewers with scenes of unspeakable climate injustice, shielded by corporate and political powers working hand in hand. But the work also highlights personal agency, the importance of solidarity, and that the future is ours to make. Thanks to growing public pressure, the last patch of the Hambach Forest may indeed be saved.

The Hambach Forest and the Technological Sublime marks a pivotal point in Lemercier's practice. Since his first visit, Lemercier has joined countless other protests and regularly assists environmental groups with creative means of intervention. Drawing on years of computational explorations, Lemercier has begun to leverage his artistic practice to drive conversations around sustainability and inspire climate action.

Production: Juliette Bibasse

Music: Used by permission from Multiverse Media Publishing and Subtext Recordings, music by Roly Porter, Ellen Arkbro and Cevdet Erek

Music mix: James Ginzburg

Additional images: Arne Müseler

Activism images filmed during Ende Gelände actions in June 2019 and September 2020



Here once stood a forest

The Hambach Forest is a 12,000-year-old forest located between Cologne and Aachen in Germany. It is rich in biodiversity and home to 142 species regarded as important for conservation. The forest has been called “the last remnant of a sylvan ecosystem that has occupied this part of the Rhine River plain since the end of the last ice age”.

Over the past forty years, 90% of the forest has been hewed for coal extraction. In reaction, some people have joined together to save what is left of the forest. A group of activists has even settled in tree houses in an attempt to protect the trees from their destruction.

A ray of light reveals the beauty of flowers, leaves, and trees, now cut down and destroyed for the expansion of the mine. Visitors are invited to contemplate the forest at night while a laser lights up even the smallest details of the surrounding nature, revealing all its structural beauty. Thus, by using technological tools, Joanie Lemercier enhances the Sublime in nature, “capturing” the immediate and vanishing magic.



Slow violence

This part of the installation shares the staggering fascination provoked by facing these uniquely huge and mesmerizing machines. They slowly and endlessly scrape the earth while becoming ambassadors of what can be called the “Technological Sublime”.

Excavator “Bagger 290” is the biggest man-made machine on Earth. It can extract 240,000 tons of coal every day, entailing a daily emission of over 480,000 tons of CO₂. The destruction is therefore limitless, affecting even the cultural heritage of the region. This is the case of the cathedral of Immerath, built in 1891 and demolished in January 2018 to allow the expansion of the mine.

While everything revolves around destruction, this part is slow, contemplative, almost peaceful, like a suspended moment where one can easily imagine the continuity of what the artist is witnessing. Environmental wipeout at a large scale occurs over a broader time frame: it takes 40 years for CO₂ emissions to impact the atmosphere of our planet, making climate change so difficult to comprehend on an individual level. This is what is called “slow violence” by Rob Nixon, professor at Princeton University.



With action, comes hope

So, instead of looking for hope, look for action
Greta Thunberg, 2018

Since action revives us
Extinction Rebellion

Over the last years, the site has become a hotspot for environmental activism that has seen protestors temporarily shut down mining operations by mass trespassing and protect the forest through occupation. Lemercier has joined them on numerous occasions, documenting their struggle against both law enforcement and merciless destruction.

Confronting both “sides” of the story, we are witnessing the actors of coal mining versus the eco-activists and individuals protecting the environment. Like a swarm of insects, these people become a fluid, organic entity inside the immensity of the mine. To conclude, the experience on a human scope is a way to engage the viewer with the aim to raise awareness tools and become part of the story.



Point clouds

Joanie Lemercier has always been captivated by the simple beauty of clouds. They embed an entire world of imagination, as calm and quiet sculptural forms floating above us. In this series of silkscreen prints, Lemercier connects their light, luminous grace with the gloomy smoke produced by several power plants surrounding the mine, making it impossible to unravel the natural from the polluted.



7

Desirable Futures

2020 - 2021

Visual installation. Video projection and photography

In this space for contemplation and reflection, Lemercier invites visitors to ponder our present moment and to imagine any possible futures. So much of our reasoning is based on cultural narratives and political ideologies, all of them entrenched worldviews that define the current possibility space. Today, Western delusions of infinite growth, individualism, and superiority have proved to limit our capacity to solve the climate crisis and to transition to more sustainable practices on a global scale. On the other hand, artists have always helped to expand our imagination, empower people, and push the conversation forward. Thus, by sharing his latest research, prototypes and experiments Joanie Lemercier hopes to inspire visitors to think creatively about the future and to put those new ideas into action.

Extra pictures of activists protecting Dannenrod Forest ("Danni"):
Jannis Grosse, Lukas Georgi, Ivan Furlan Cano, Sitara Thalia Ambrosio, Tim Wagner

Exhibition
texts



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