

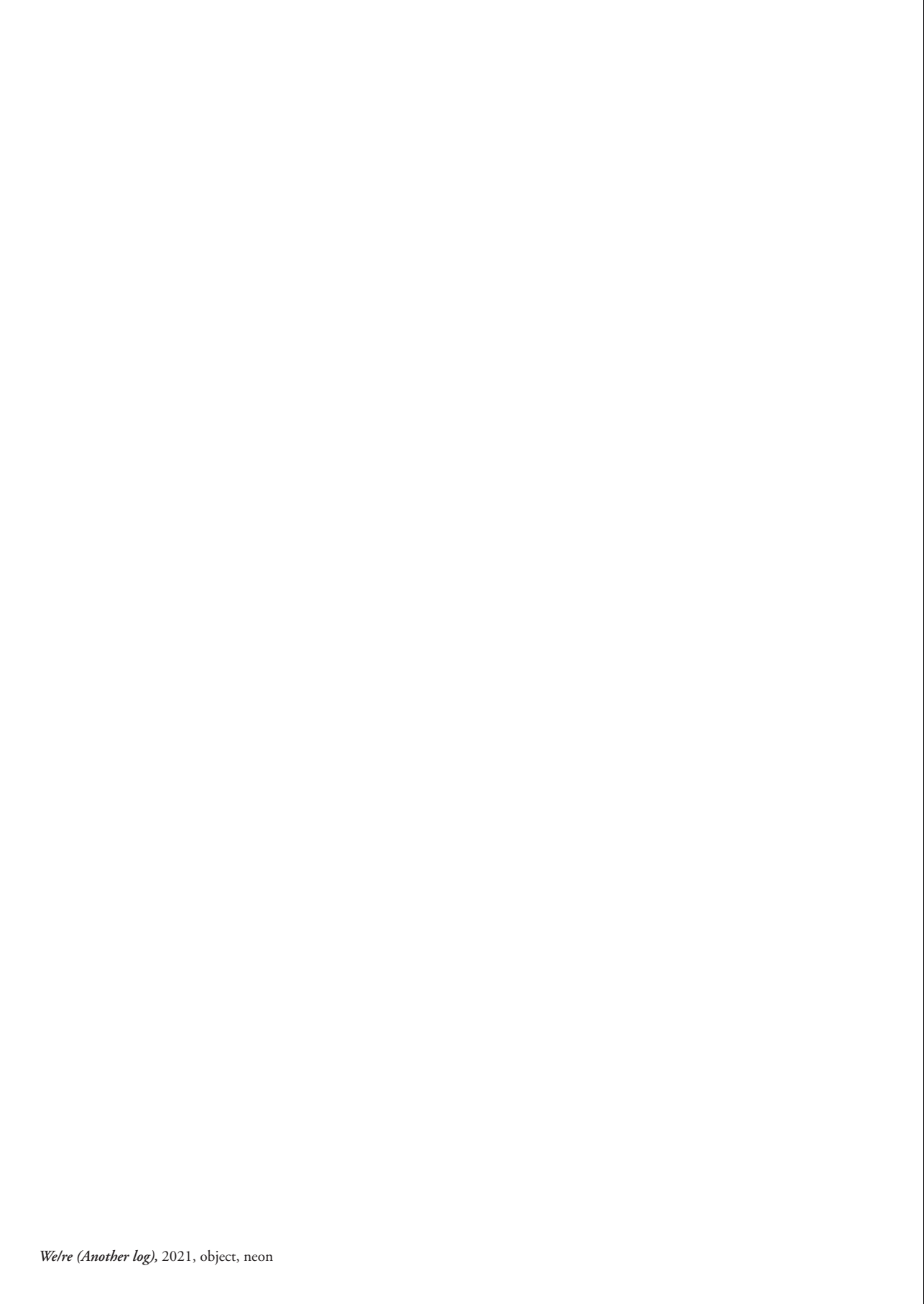
WE/RE NATURE

*BORJANA
VENTZISLAVOVA*



WE/RE NATURE

BORJANA VENTZISLAVOVA



We're (Another log), 2021, object, neon

"A TORMENTING THOUGHT: AS OF A CERTAIN POINT, HISTORY WAS NO LONGER REAL. WITHOUT NOTICING IT, ALL MANKIND SUDDENLY LEFT REALITY; EVERYTHING HAPPENING SINCE THEN WAS SUPPOSEDLY NOT TRUE; BUT WE SUPPOSEDLY DIDN'T NOTICE. OUR TASK WOULD NOW BE TO FIND THAT POINT, AND AS LONG AS WE DIDN'T HAVE IT, WE WOULD BE FORCED TO ABIDE IN OUR PRESENT DESTRUCTION."

ELIAS CANETTI





Ghostlights (Dead End), 2021, photography

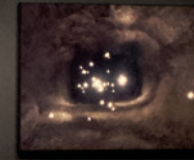


Ghostlights (Dark Water), 2021, photography

*There are many stories in this world.
Some of them are sad, some funny.
Some of them are stories of madness,
of violence and destruction.
Some are ordinary...*







Along all other things, I am a log.

*Behind all things, there are reasons.
Reasons can even explain the absurd.
Indeed, your own absurdity.*

*A log is life, that your power-saw severed.
Life that continues to live, despite everything.
My log says, it feels the aimless nature of
your restlessness. The anger. The suffering.*



*I am not speaking to you,
nor am I speaking for you.*

*I mean, I care for you.
I care as much as I care for all
living AND non-living things.*

I am speaking through you.





We The Nature, 2021, HD, video still

A Sense Of Mystery.

On Borjana Ventzislavova's exhibition *We/re nature*

Lisa Ortner-Kreil

*There are many stories in this world.
Some of them are sad, some funny.
Some of them are stories of madness,
of violence and destruction.
Some, are ordinary..
Yet, they all have in common, a sense of mystery.*

Thus begins Borjana Ventzislavova's film *We The Nature*, which premieres as part of the exhibition *We/re nature* in the tesor of the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien. Who is this mysterious speaker? Who is addressing whom from the off? Visually, the film strings together sequences of mostly deserted landscape shots from the USA, Canada, Bulgaria, Thailand and the Canary Islands, among other places, which the artist has collected over more than ten years. Some places are known, others remain unknown and could be anywhere in the world. What the photographs have in common, however, is that they were all taken at specific interfaces between man and nature, between civilization and wilderness.

"Transition", written in black felt-tip pen on silver adhesive tape, I read the word on the occasion of a visit to Borjana Ventzislavova's studio. Transition, translation, transformation: these seem to be important parameters in the artist's work. Borjana Ventzislavova does not only move permanently from one to the other by means of the media she uses. Moments of transition also determine her motifs and content-related concerns. Entering the exhibition *We/re nature*, one steps into a black box and initially looks spellbound



We The Nature, 2021, HD, video still

at the filmic work described at the beginning. The (often only apparent) calm that lies in the images of this film is counteracted by the spoken text, whereby it is not so much the neutral voice and tone that cause this turmoil, but rather the message.

When I am sick, you are sick too. (...)

You need to change, to stop exploitation, abuse, corporations.

Burn your game cards in the healing fire. (...)

Where there is darkness, there can be light. All life is sacred.

For you to survive I need my rights:

“We the nature, must exist, flourish, regenerate, and evolve.”

Nature itself is given an androgynous voice here and quietly but emphatically proclaims its message, for which the artist was inspired, among other texts, by a speech held by Russell Means, member of the Oglala Lakota, which the activist and

founding figure of the American Indian Movement delivered before thousands of people in July 1980.¹ Borjana Ventzislavova developed the text, which is both poetic and political, in collaboration with the Austrian-Romanian author Ovid Pop.² Nature addresses the audience directly and insists on its fundamental rights, calling on the people to change the way they treat the environment and its resources once and for all, before it is too late.

The film, which is undoubtedly the center of the exhibition project, is flanked by photographic and installation works. *We're nature* is a mixed media exhibition project that includes video, photography, object and light installation and is typical of Borjana Ventzislavova in that the artist always works across media and in a formally aesthetically opulent way. However, it is always also about a clear political message, which, especially in recent years, has become charged with strongly ecologically critical content, revolving primarily around the connection and relationship between man and nature.

In the development process of the exhibition, the photographs were in the first place, these also show exclusively landscapes. All photographs were taken at night, but the darkness is broken by mysterious points of light. The photographs were processed using the Chromaluxe technique, a sublimation print on aluminum that particularly expresses the strong light-dark contrasts. Long exposure times and randomized use of the flash, which were in the hand of the photographed persons, who are no longer visible in the final image, or only in the form of the points of light, were constant companions in the production process. A jungle or a motorcycle parking lot in Thailand serve as a setting, as does a dune landscape in Greece, a forest in Lower Austria, or various locations in Vienna where criticism of civilization is ignited (such



We The Nature, 2021, HD, video still

as an ammunition store or a gas station). While the artist was initially behind the camera and the points of light in the beginning followed the outlines of the human body, Borjana Ventzislavova also performed in front of the camera in the course of the work, the distribution of the points of light thus becoming increasingly free and detached from the outlines of the human figure. The mysterious energy emanating from the points of light, which buzz like ghosts through the most diverse places, seems on the one hand to refer to the original meaning of “photography” (the term is composed of the two ancient Greek words *photós*, light, and *graphein*, to write, paint, draw). Making light a direct motif has a centuries-old tradition in the art history, from Baroque ceiling frescoes in which sunlight breaks through the sky, to the light moods of Impressionism to Egon Schiele, who said he painted nothing but “the light that surrounds people,” to artists like James Turrell, who make (neon) light both medium and motif, giving the

public an immersive experience of art. In Borjana Ventzislavova’s work, however, light, which equally determines our vision and the ability and possibility of imaging, also becomes a representative of mankind, the sun, which simultaneously nourishes and burns. In the form of a cold light it also stands for the technical devices that surround us every day and that has so permanently alienated us from nature. The light in *We’re nature*, one could summarize, reveals itself as a highly ambivalent medium.

Borjana Ventzislavova works with cold light in the object installations: Fruits, vegetables and plants occupy a wall of the exhibition, fennel, banana and a plant bulb are pinned directly on the black wall. Stones, branches and sand are also being displayed in the exhibition space. The artist counteracts these exhibits with neon light tracks that attract (by illuminating) and repel (by making evident the discrepancy between naturalness and artificiality) the objects taken directly from nature. Spread throughout the exhibition space, the light and object installations engage in a dialogue with the film and the photographic works, and at times seem to fall out of them, creating a moment of amazement for the audience.

The exhibition title *We’re nature* is based on the idea that time is a deeply relative quantity in the face of nature. The slash signals that Present and Past Tense collide here, and that both *We are nature* and *We were nature* are permissible readings. The organic objects exhibited also pay tribute to the transience of life and the eternal cycle: their withering reveals a process and a changing character. The moment of visiting the exhibition and experiencing these unusual “things” taken from nature in their respective stages of maturity provide visitors with an individual understanding of the fragile structure of nature and culture. The darkness and the deliberately exaggerated, dramatic lightning of the exhibition



We The Nature, 2021, HD, video still

space, on the other hand, evoke an artificiality that contrasts with the organic exhibits and also the visual content that the film and the photographs hold in store.

If since the 18th century it has been a matter of “conquering” nature and “taming a dangerous enemy,” then with the beginning of the 21st century at the latest we must face the fact that the taming of the forces of nature and making nature serviceable to mankind has already passed its peak and that we can only do damage limitation by urgently rethinking from the bottom up our actions towards nature’s resources.³ For this insight, which has been a widely discussed and a constantly present topic in the media since the “Fridays for Future” demonstrations, it is sufficient to look away from occidental traditions of thought and into the past: In religions such as Buddhism, non-hierarchical thinking has been a central conviction for more than 2500 years.

The images of *We're nature* borrow heavily from the cinematic aesthetics of the late 1980s and early 1990s, with representatives such as David Lynch or Jim Jarmusch, and radiate a certain sense of artificiality and mystery. *We're nature* pleads for an encounter at eye level between mankind and nature⁴ and represents a visually compelling, highly political statement by an artist who formulates a forceful manifesto for the rights of nature with images and words alike.

That such a plea cannot, of course, do without threat and bitterness is also evident in the conclusion of the text passage from *We The Nature* already quoted at the beginning:

*This mystery will end. At least for you.
You think, that's a joke?*

¹ For the entire speech, see <https://www.filmsforaction.org/news/revolution-and-american-indians-marxism-is-as-alien-to-my-culture-as-capitalism/>, accessed May 6, 2021 at 9:25 AM. One of the central passages of this speech is: “All European tradition, Marxism included, has conspired to defy the natural order of all things. Mother Earth has been abused, the powers have been abused, and this cannot go on forever. No theory can alter that simple fact. Mother Earth will retaliate, the whole environment will retaliate, and the abusers will be eliminated. Things come full circle, back to where they started.” Russell Means died in 2012.

² Borjana Venzislavova and Ovid Pop have previously collaborated on the film *And the sky clears up (Magic Resistance)*, shown as part of the exhibition of the same name at the Salzburger Kunstverein in 2019, and on the video project *I DEAL, YOU DEAL, WE ALL DEAL WITH THE nEU NEW DEAL* for Soho in Ottakring, 2020.

³ A good cultural-historical overview of the “conquest of nature” by man is provided by David Blackburn, *The Conquest of Nature. A History of the German Landscape*, Munich 2007.

⁴ The concept of interbeing and mindfulness was formulated by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk and writer Thich Nhat Hanh; it has recently been discussed in more detail by, among others, the U.S. cultural philosopher Charles Eisenstein in his book *Climate. A New Perspective*, Munich 2019.







We're (A rock), 2021, object, neon

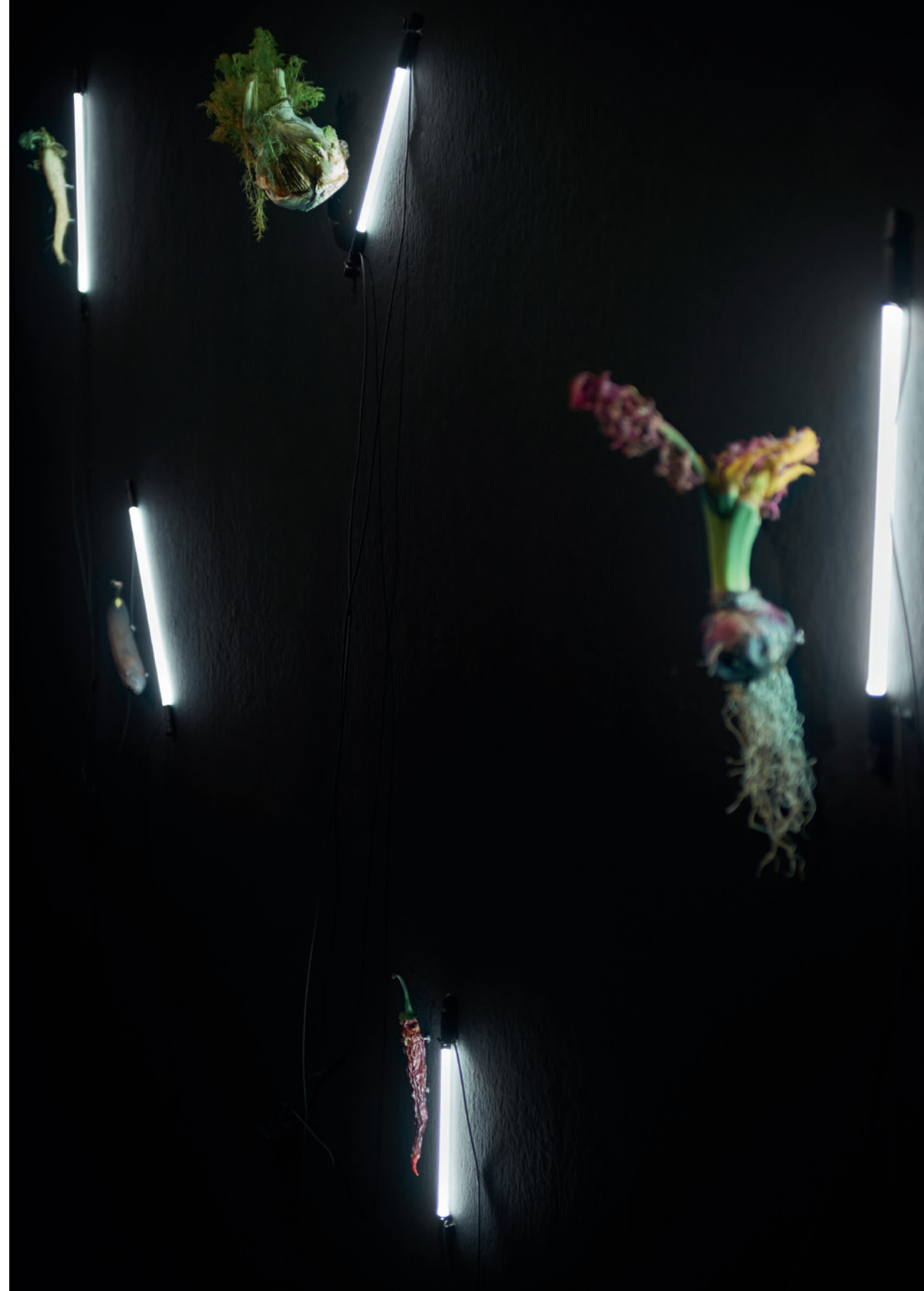




Ghostlights (Trough The Cave), 2021, photography



We/re, 2021, object and neon



¹ Für die gesamte Rede siehe <https://www.filmsfraction.org/news/revolution-and-american-indians-marxism-is-as-alien-to-my-culture-as-capitalism/>, abgerufen am 6. Mai 2021 um 9.25 Uhr. Eine der zentralen Stellen dieser Rede lautet: „All European tradition, Marxism included, has conspired to defy the natural order of all things. Mother Earth has been abused, the powers have been abused, and this cannot go on forever. No theory can alter that simple fact. Mother Earth will retaliate, the whole environment will retaliate, and the abusers will be eliminated. Things come full circle, back to where they started.“ Russell Means verstarb 2012.

² Borjana Ventzislavova und Ovid Pop haben zuvor bereits für den Film *Und der Himmel klärt sich auf* (*Magic Resistance*), der im Zuge der gleichnamigen Ausstellung im Salzburger Kunstverein 2019 gezeigt wurde, und beim Video-Projekt *I DEAL, YOU DEAL, WE ALL DEAL WITH THE nEU NEW DEAL* für Soho in Ottakring, 2020 kollaboriert.

³ Einen guten kulturhistorischen Überblick zur „Eroberung der Natur“ durch den Menschen liefert etwa David Blackburn, *Die Eroberung der Natur. Eine Geschichte der deutschen Landschaft*, München 2007.

⁴ Das Konzept von Interbeing und Achtsamkeit formulierte der vietnamesische buddhistische Mönch und Schriftsteller Thich Nhat Hanh, es wurde in letzter Zeit detaillierter unter anderem vom US-amerikanischen Kulturphilosophen Charles Eisenstein in seinem Buch *Klima. Eine neue Perspektive*, München 2019 besprochen.





Ghostlights (Pink Sky), 2021, photography



Ghostlights (Jungle), 2021, photography



Ghostlights (Helenen), 2021, photography



Ghostlights (Pathway), 2021, photography



Ghostlights (Waffen), 2021, photography



Ghostlights (Die Tankstelle), 2021, photography



Ghostlights (Parking Lot), 2021, photography



Ghostlights (The Church), 2021, photography





*As a matter of fact, I can do very well
without you. I don't really need you.
It is you, who needs me.*

Your future depends on me.

*In fact you are only 0.01% of all my
biomass. Did you know that?*

Business as usual cannot continue!

*That isn't the source of true wealth.
You few, you happy well-ill beings,
you, band of brothers, who are
pumping cash-flows, and reaping
money from the old, battle ground.*

*True wealth lies in the fact that
we are all in this together.*





*If you want to keep breathing, stop
the killing, stop adding fuel to the fire.
And the fire I speak of, is not a kind fire.*

*There is sadness in this world,
for you are ignorant of many things.
Yes – you are ignorant of many beautiful
things. Things like the truth.
The water. The air. The soil, and the seeds.*

*I grow you food.
Nutrition is crucial.
And do you know what are you eating?*

*Balance is the key to many things.
Do we understand balance?*





Savages! You used to say... they are the ones, who protect you! And me!

Yes, they are stewards of critical ecosystems. They watch over my well being. The wretched of the earth are the offspring of my salvation. They do not see me as a prey, they keep me clean.

In this twisted world of yours the most unprotected are the ones that protect me... and will eventually protect you.





For you to survive I need my rights:

***“WE, THE NATURE, MUST EXIST,
FLOURISH, REGENERATE,
AND EVOLVE”.***

*There will always be light.
A chance to see
To breathe in and out
I will walk with you.*

CREDITS

We The Nature

27 min, HD, Color, Stereo

Concept, Camera, Editing, Production: Borjana Ventzislavova

Text and Adaption: Ovid Pop, Borjana Ventzislavova

Sound Design: Sebastian Meyer

2nd Camera: Maximilian Pramatarov, Iv Penev-Ventzislavov, Erin Turney

Post-Production, Visual Effects: Mladen Penev, Borjana Ventzislavova

Voiceover: Anat Stainberg

English Text Editing: Graham Parkes

German Translation: Ovid Pop, Lisa Ortner-Kreil

Text Quotes and Inspiration:

Elias Canetti (*The Human Province*)

David Lynch, Mark Frost (*Twin Peaks*, Season 1)

Universal Declaration Of The Rights Of Mother Earth

Bolivia Grants Nature Historic *Bill Of Rights*

Silvia Federici (*Feminism And Ecological Struggles*)

Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin (*The Climate Crisis And The Global Green New Deal*)

Graham Parkes (*How To Think About The Climate Crisis – A Philosophical Guide To Saner Ways Of Living*)

Russell Means (*Revolution And American Indians: “Marxism Is As Alien To My Culture As Capitalism”*)

Thich Nhat Hanh

Ghostlights

Performer: Borjana Ventzislavova, Iv Penev-Ventzislavov, Mladen Penev

Camera Assistance: Maximilian Pramatarov, Mladen Penev

Post-Production: Mladen Penev

ABOUT THE ARTIST

BORJANA VENTZISLAVOVA is a Vienna based and Sofia born artist and filmmaker. She studied Informatics in Sofia and Vienna and holds a master in visual media arts from the University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria.

Borjana works in the fields of film/video, installation, photography, performative and media art. Her prize-winning cross-disciplinary works have been exhibited internationally in numerous solo and group shows as well as at media art and film festivals such as, Belvedere 21, MAK Vienna, MAK Los Angeles, Lentos Linz, Salzburger Kunstverein, Museum of Modern Art Salzburg, Museum of Modern Art Carinthia, Museum of Modern Art - Esterházy Foundation, MUSA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sofia City Art Gallery, National Art Gallery Sofia, Landesgalerie Linz, Kunstverein Baden, Essl Museum, k/haus, quartier21, Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, Austrian Cultural Forum Washington DC and London, ICA London, ICA Sofia, Art Today Plovdiv, Hunt gallery, St. Louis, US, Cologne Conference, IDFA, Diagonale, Graz, EMAF, Osnabrück, transmediale, Berlin, filmwinter, Stuttgart, Rencontres Internationales, Berwick Film and Media Arts Fest., Moscow Int. Filmfest., Int. Short Film Fest. Istanbul, Split Film Fest., etc.

Borjana's work was granted many awards and she received a number of international scholarships such as the promotion award by the City of Vienna 2017, the Austrian State Scholarship for Fine Art 2013, Start Scholarship for Fine Art 2009, winner of Top Ten Nonfiction film Award at Cologne Conference 2006, Otto Prutscher Fonds Award 2006, Susmannstiftung Award 2005, recognitions at Art in Motion 2002, Los Angeles, Ars Electronica, 2002, Linz, CYNETart 2001, Dresden.

She was artist in residence in London (ACF), Rom (BKA), Newcastle (ISIS Arts/ D6), Berkeley (CEC Artslink), Los Angeles (MAK Schindler), Chicago (BKA), Athens (Snehta), Banff Center (BKA), NYC (ISCP / BKA). Her works are part of private and public collections (i.a. Belvedere21, Austrian federal collection, Arthotek, MUSA, Estherhazy, Angerlehner Collections, Essl/ Albertina, Lentos, The National Gallery in Sofia, etc.).

She has been granted honorable Austrian citizenship for her achievements in the visual arts.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

LISA ORTNER-KREIL studied Comparative Literature, Art History and Romance Studies in Vienna, Innsbruck and Rome. After working at the Museumsquartier and the Albertina, Vienna, and the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels, she has been curator at the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien since 2013. In addition to teaching at the University of Vienna and the University of Applied Arts Vienna, she regularly publishes on modern and contemporary art and is a jury member for the annual Bank Austria Art Prize Carinthia. In 2020, together with Barbara Horvath, she founded the art initiative art hoc projects, which brings international successful contemporary art to atypical locations.

IMPRESSUM

Publisher: Borjana Ventzislavova

Cover: Video still from *We The Nature*

Translation English: Lisa Ortner-Kreil

Proof reading / English: Michael Hall

Image editing: Mladen Penev

Graphic design: Borjana Ventzislavova

All images © Borjana Ventzislavova

Text © Lisa Ortner-Kreil

Borjana Ventzislavova thanks: Angela Althaler, Ingrid Brugger, Annja Krautgasser, Lisa Ortner-Kreil, Claudia Slanar, Veronika Chambas-Wolf, family, participants and the nature

On the occasion of the exhibition *We/re nature* curated by Lisa Ortner-Kreil
March 21th – June 27th, 2021 at Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien.

© Borjana Ventzislavova
Vienna 2021

abo Verlag
Straußengasse 13/2
1050 Wien
www.aboverlag.at

borjana.net

ISBN 978-3-9504385-9-8

with the kind support of:

 **Kunstforum Wien**

 **Bundesministerium**
Kunst, Kultur,
öffentlicher Dienst und Sport