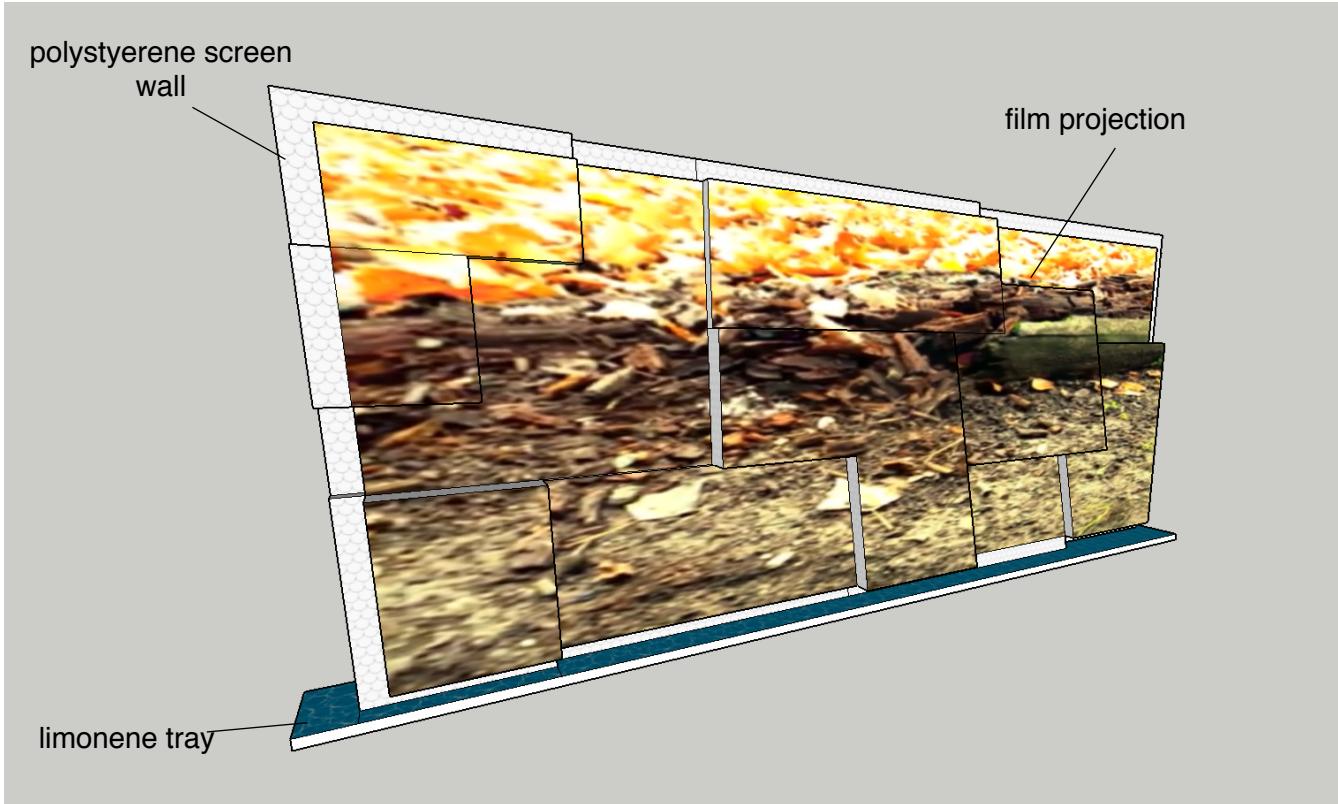


# THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

An immersive performance based artwork combining  
film, installation, sound, movement and smell

BEN JACK NASH

PRIX COAL 2021

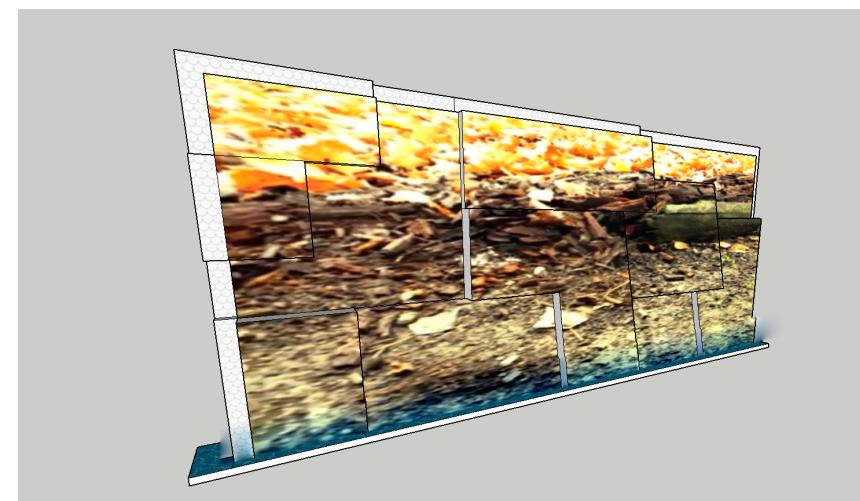


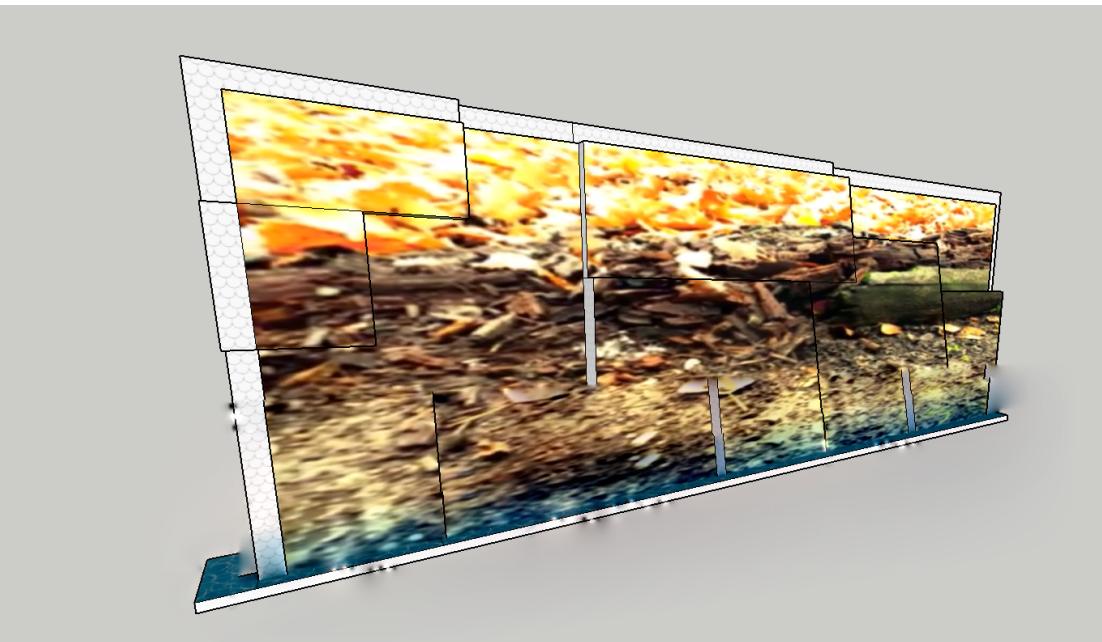
'The Forest for the Trees' is a performance based artwork that combines film, installation, sound and movement. It is designed for a medium to large inside space.

The title takes its name from the common expression '*unable to see the forest for the trees*' which describes a situation of being blinded by single mindedness causing a failure to see the whole picture. But it can also operate as a statement in its own right. Standing towards the back of the room is a large white wall. This is constructed from recuperated/ found polystyrene (styrofoam) which would otherwise be destined for rubbish tips and landfill. The wall serves as the support for a film projection.

The film, recorded by the artist, shows a slow motion shot of a fallen tree that lies horizontal on the ground. At one end, the tree appears weathered but solid. As the camera tracks towards the other end it becomes increasingly decaying and decomposed until merging completely and indistinguishably from the soil.

During the course of the film, the screen appears to slowly melt into the ground at the same rate that the camera appears to move along the length of the tree.



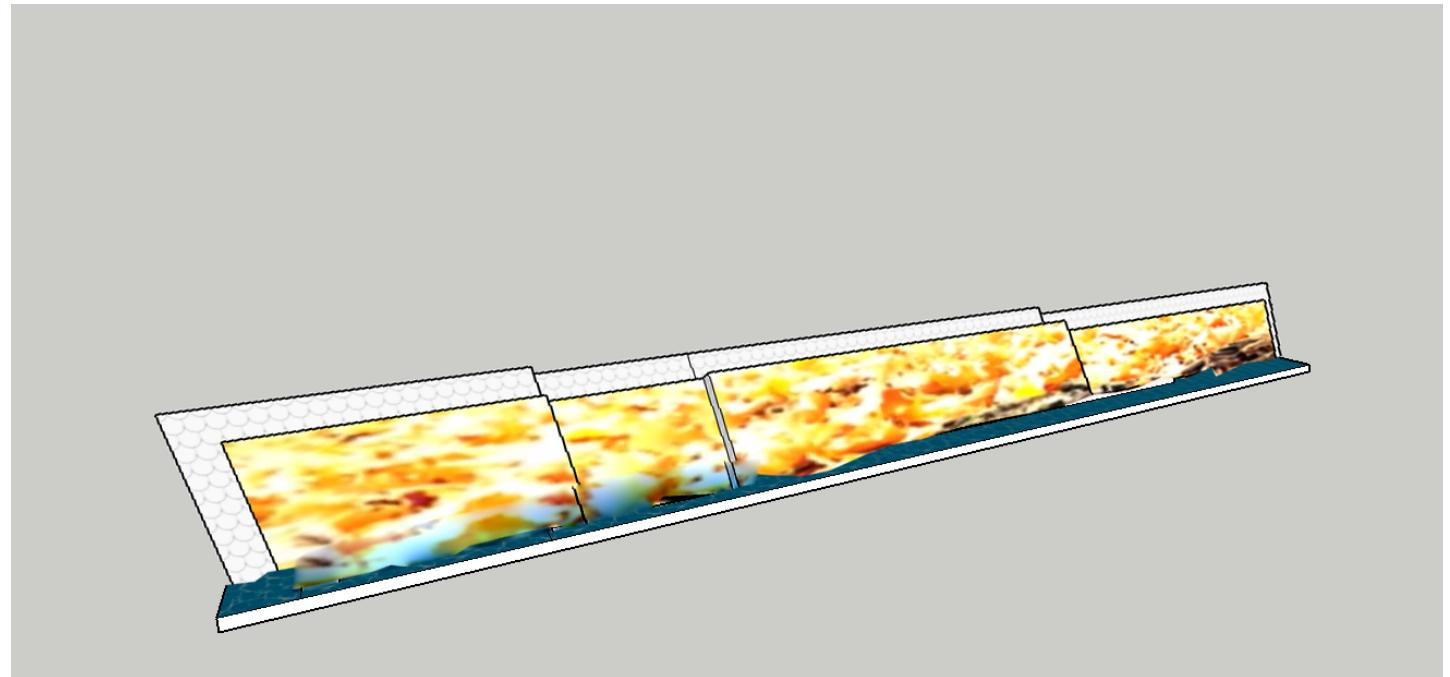


**Community involvement:** Polystyrene to be recuperated from pupils bringing it in from local schools and shops.

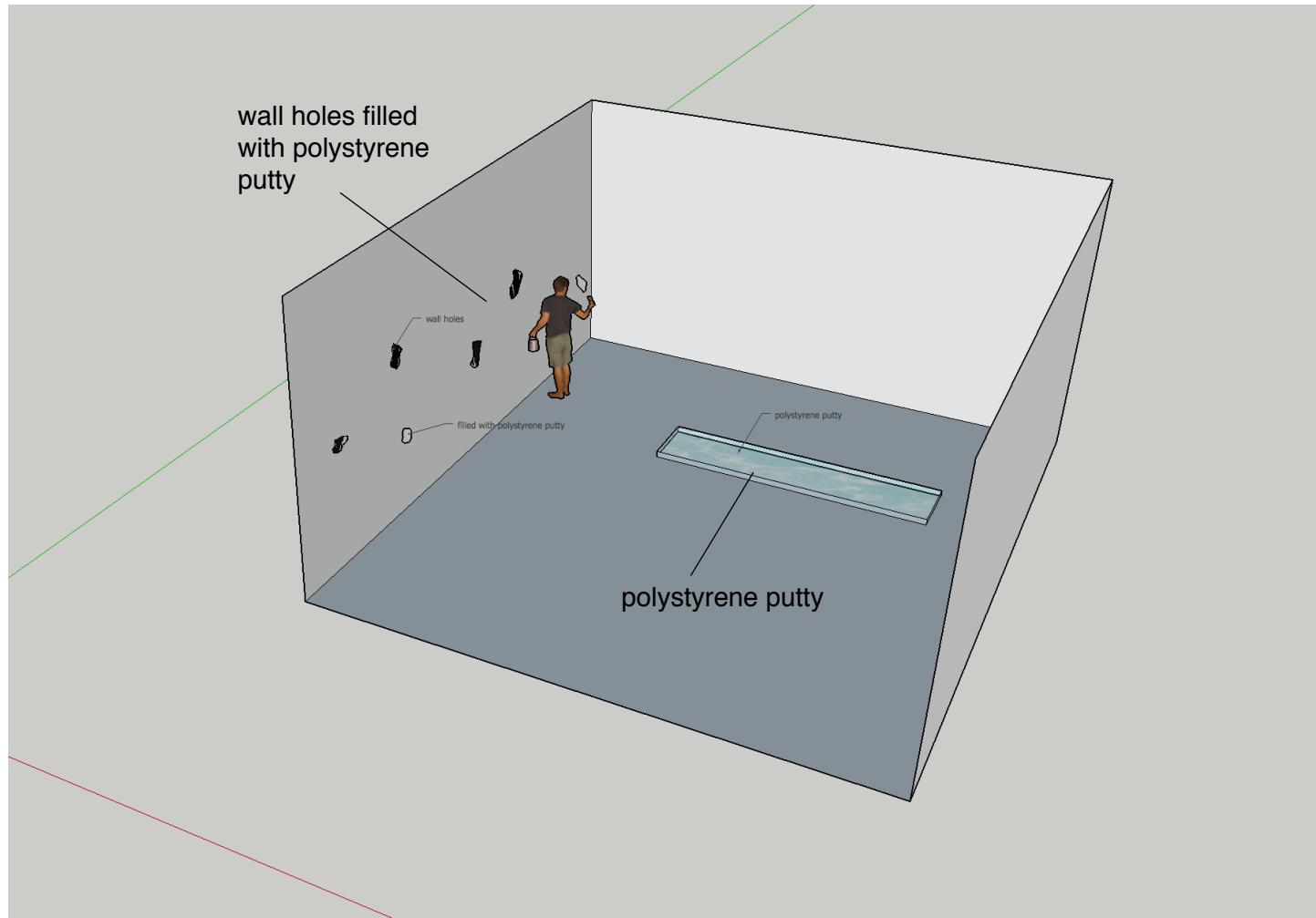
**Sound:** Microphones pick up the distorted 'fizzing' sound produced by the process.

As with the tree and the soil, by the end, the screen has completely dissolved into the floor.

**Possibility to explore:**  
coordinating the rate of the melting according to rate of forest destruction based on real time statistics. Eg through making the limonene more/ less concentrated.



Pre-prepared holes and dents are visible in the walls of the exhibition space.



The screen and the image disintegrate before the film can end.

The polystyrene forms a soft sticky putty when it is dissolved in limonene. A performer(s) removes this from the tray and uses it to fill in the holes in the wall and paints over it.

The process is irreversible. Matter has shifted its identity from a material to an abstract state. In this state it merges indistinguishably from its surroundings. It becomes the environment.

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Film stills (not final cut but for illustration only)

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Running time in accordance with screen melt rate. Expected approximately 20 mins.



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## Conceptual basis and Forests theme

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The distance from the edge of space to the Earth's core is 7 000 km. The biosphere, the only region known in the universe able to sustain life, is just 0.14% of this. We live on and off a wafer thin membrane, a layer of silk or a screen between the material of solid rock below and the abstract of gaseous atmospheres above. The project serves not only as documentation and metaphor but goes beyond this proposing an alternative visions on which to establish a relationship with our planet, one that is framed in terms of material and abstract identities and relationships. The project forms part of the idea that we have been witnessing AAA - an accelerated age of abstraction. An age whereby some of the most fundamental phenomena shaping existence have moved from a material to abstract state at breakneck speed. We see this with the planet, technology, communication, cultural values and working habits as well as across time and space.

Shifts between material and abstract identities lie at the heart of all matter. It decomposes, renews and decomposes again. This process is natural and necessary. Once material or abstract matter has shifted its identity into the other how it is no longer recognisable or familiar from its previous existence. The tree becomes soil - food and nourishment for other plants to benefit. The screen turns to putty and also merges with its surroundings as part of the gallery walls.

The operative question however is at what rate and on what scale this process occurs? The operative answer is one which has become excessive and is no longer sustainable - a contrast reinforced by the slow moving film, prevented from reaching the end of its natural cycle by the faster rate of the self-destructing screen. Deforestation represents a dramatic shift from a material to abstract state; one where it no longer identifiable from its previous form, no longer functional in the same way but integrated seamlessly with its environment to the point whereby the two become one.

As suggested by the fast melting rate of the screen, the rate of abstractification, brought about by human impact takes place at a rate which nature can no longer keep up. Few materials conjure artificiality as much as polystyrene. An irrepressible man made plastic that is designed to protect the goods we consume on mass and insulate our homes from the outside. Here, it does little to protect the ecology or the fallen tree projected onto its surface. On the contrary, rather than protect it pollutes. The smell of limonene\* in the air is indicative of this as well as suggesting the impact of deforestation on the atmosphere and climate. New research is revealing how similar to the oceans, the impact of micro-plastics pollution has on the forests affecting its soil, organisms and wildlife. Due to its low density, easily carried on the wind and high fragmentation polystyrene is one of the biggest offenders (Song, 2015).

\*Limonene acid is extracted from oranges. Brazil is the largest global producer of oranges which is responsible for mass deforestation of the Amazon rain forest to clear land for orange groves.

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## **Presentation & Technical considerations**

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The artwork can either work as a one off performance and elements left in situ for the remainder of the exhibition. Alternatively, multiple screens can be fabricated and numerous performances can be scheduled on daily basis.

Polystyrene screen: Pieced together using recuperated polystyrene working together with local schools and businesses. Can be constructed on a large cinematic scale depending on dimensions of the exhibition space.

Limonene: Limonene is a natural citrus acid that is present in oranges and is easily made. A very small amount is required to dissolve a large quantity of polystyrene. The concentration of the acid will determine the rate that the screen dissolves. It is intended to use discarded oranges and orange skins working with local shops, markets and supermarkets.

Film location: Alsace, France

Fabrication of elements: Atelier with technical assistance

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## Budget

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Item	Cost (euros)
Film production	3 500
Materials	800
Equipment hire for film and sound	1 500
Transport	250
Technical assistance	1 500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7050</b>

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**Curriculum Vitae**

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Lives and works in Strasbourg  
Represented by Gallery Radial, Strasbourg

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**Education**

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- 2002 MA University of Nottingham, UK
- 2001 MA Political Science, IEP Lille, France
- 2000 BA Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

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**Solo Shows/ Commissions**

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- 2021 Karlsruhe Art Fair, Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2019 Galerie Radial, Strasbourg, France
- 2018 Leftover from the Void, Reichshoffen, France
- 2016 Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France
- 2014 Standby, Zwingenberg public art gallery, Alsbach, Germany
- 2013 Kayserguet (Kartier Nord), Pavillion Henri-Louis Kayser, Strasbourg, France
- 2013 Nour Festival of Arts and Culture, Chelsea Old Town Hall, installation for launch of festival; Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London
- 2012 Sculpted Colour, Galerie Planet Theatre, Strasbourg, France
- 2012 Jeunes Artistes, Galerie Quédar (now Galerie Art'Course), Strasbourg, France
- 2012 Book jacket, 'Islamic Veiling in Legal Discourse', Routledge publishers
- 2012 The Council of Europe, wall installation, Strasbourg, France

## Selected Group Shows

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- 2021 Emotions, Populism and Polarisation, HEPP, Univ. of Helsinki - FL  
2020 St-Art art fair, Strasbourg (postponed to 2021)  
2020 Culturgest, Anthropocene Campus Lisboa: Parallax with HKW Berlin - PGL  
2020 Aesthetics of Decay, LCIR, St. Anne's college, Univ. of Oxford - UK  
2019 ...lieratelierat..., Bastion XIV, Strasbourg - FR  
2019 Summer exhibition, Galerie Radial, Strasbourg, FR  
2019 A la base de Ping Pong, Bastion XIV, Strasbourg, FR  
2018 Hyperconscience, Shadok, Strasbourg, FR  
2016 Regionale 17, Cargo, Basel, SZ  
2016 Arte Laguna, Arsenale, Venice, IT  
2015 Creekside Open (curated by Richard Deacon), APT Gallery, London, UK  
2015 The Open West, The Wilson Contemporary, Cheltenham, UK  
2014 [In]visible, Shape Gallery, London, UK  
2014 Wells Art Contemporary (curated by Richard Wentworth) Wells Museum, UK  
2014 Verve Sculpture Prize, Loud and Western, London, UK  
2014 Showcase, Nesta Headquarters, London, UK  
2013 Je Crise, Tu Crise, Nous Luttons; Jarnis Médiathèque, Moselle, FR  
2013 Aesthetica Art Prize, York St. Mary's, York, UK  
2013 Borders, Iranian Culture Festival, The Art's Complex Gallery, Edinburgh, UK  
2012 Hybrid Identities, Gallery Scoletta di San Giovanni Battista, Venice, IT  
2012 Global Village, Bronden Strand Centrum, Copenhagen, DK  
2012 Backlash, Soho20 Gallery, New York, US  
2012 Hidden cities, Hotel Ripa, Rome, IT  
2012 Kodina, Arbeit Gallery, London, UK  
2012 Global Village, Château de Sully, Borgogne, FR  
2012 Global Village, Projekt 72, Alkmaar, NL  
2012 Cultural Identity, Palazzo Albrizzi Gallery, Venice, IT

## Prizes & Awards

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- 2021 25. Karlsruher Künstlermesse 2021, finalist GER
- 2017 La Dînée, Accélérateur de Particules, Strasbourg , project winner FR
- 2016 Arte Laguna, Venice, installation and sculpture, finalist IT
- 2016 IEAA, Dubai (art fair), shortlist
- 2015 Bloom Award, Cologne, nominee GER
- 2015 Xerxes Sculpture Prize, Serpentine Gallery, London, selected finalist UK
- 2014 Shape Open, London, finalist (juried by Yinka Shonibare) UK
- 2014 WAC, Somerset, finalist UK
- 2014 Verve Sculpture Prize, London, runner-up UK
- 2013 Aesthetica Magazine Art Prize, three dimensional design & sculpture, finalist UK
- 2013 Design and Artists Copyright Society award UK
- 2012 Aesthetica Creative Works Competition, finalist UK
- 2012 Winner, Young Artists' Prize, Galerie Quédar, Strasbourg, FR

## Talks and Lectures

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- 2021 An artist in Macron's cabinet? Ateliers Ouverts, Bastion XIV, Strasbourg - FR
- 2021 Democracy and Populism (in the age of covid), CAPPE, Univ. of Brighton - UK
- 2020 In other times, Max Planck Inst./ Comenius Garden, Berlin - GER
- 2020 Multidisciplinary Approaches to Political Discourse, Univ. of Liverpool - UK
- 2020 Cultural Literacy in Europe, Birckbeck, London - UK
- 2020 Aesthetics of Decay, LCIR, St. Anne's college, Univ. of Oxford - UK
- 2020 Culturgest, Anthropocene Lisboa: Parallax (CIUHCT/Max Planck Inst./ HKW)
- 2019 Politicisation of Europe, Euroacademia (8th ed.), Ghent, Belgium

## Public Collections & Grants

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Arts Council UK  
Salomon Foundation;  
Passions Alsace Foundation;  
Région Grand Est  
Accélérateur des Particules;  
Région des Parc des Vosges du Nord;  
CIBR  
DRAC

## Publications/ Reviews

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- Book chapter 'Just a matter of time or just timing the matter?', In Other Times, Proceedings, Max Planck Institute for History of Science, Edition Open Access (due 2021)

Jewish Renaissance (UK)  
Aesthetica Magazine (UK)  
Aesthetica Magazine Anthology "100 Contemporary Artists" (UK)  
Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace (FR)  
Routledge UK  
Bergsträsser Anzieger (GER)  
Coze magazine (FR);  
Point contemporain (Fr)  
Nesta UK  
Gaze of a Parisiennse (FR)

