

# ARTS CATALYST

74-76 Cromer Street  
London WC1H 8DR

+44 (0)20 7278 8373  
artscatalyst.org  
@TheArtsCatalyst

PRESS RELEASE

Friday 10 March 2017

## CONFLICT MINERALS

LISE AUTOGENA AND JOSHUA PORTWAY | NABIL AHMED

24 March – 22 April, Thursday – Saturday, 10am–6pm

Preview: 6:30–9pm, Thursday 23 March



Film still from 'Kuannersuit; Kvanefjeld' by Lise Autogena and Joshua Portway, a film project exploring the ongoing battle over uranium mining in Greenland; courtesy the artist

In a month-long exhibition and inquiry, Arts Catalyst looks at artists' practices that explore the nature of conflict in relation to the use of the Earth's geological natural resources.

Advances in technology – from atomic energy to the latest smartphones – are underpinned by a material reality that depends on extracting the planet's natural ores, driving a global mining industry. While the term "conflict minerals" is most frequently used to describe the situation in Congo, where the mining of valuable minerals fuels violence and armed conflict, across the globe many different types of conflict and tension are unfolding in countries and communities inextricably connected to mining and the minerals trade. How are artistic inquiry and the eco- and geo-political aesthetics of art and film contributing to our understanding of conflict – on varied scales – within countries and communities affected by large-scale Anthropocenic and geopolitical forces?

Showing throughout the month, **Lise Autogena and Joshua Portway's** film ***Kuannersuit; Kvanefjeld*** (2016) is a work in-progress, forming the first part of the artists' long-term

investigation into tensions and conflicts within the small, mostly indigenous, community of Narsaq near the Kvanefjeld plateau in southern Greenland; site of one of the richest rare earth mineral resources and uranium ore deposits in the world. The film portrays a community divided on the issue of uranium mining as a means of gaining autonomy, social progress and financial independence, in a region where traditional ways of living from the land and the sea are struggling to compete with big investments from foreign mining companies. It explores the difficult decisions and trade-offs faced by a culture seeking to escape a colonial past and define its own identity in a globalised world. *Kuannersuit; Kvanefjeld* was commissioned by Arts Catalyst.

Running concurrently, artist and researcher **Nabil Ahmed** presents maps, drawings and archival material from his project ***Inter-Pacific Ring Tribunal (INTERPRT)***, a three-year spatial investigation of the West Papua/Indonesia conflict towards a series of alternative tribunals on ecocide in the Pacific region. Papua is one of the most bio-diverse areas of the world, with 32 million hectares of tropical rainforest and mangroves, and rich marine reef environments. It is also the site of a long-term conflict between Indonesia and indigenous Papuans seeking self-determination. Central to the conflict is the Grasberg mine, which contains the planet's largest combined reserve of copper and gold. Ahmed's painstaking research contributes to building a case of ecocide against the Indonesian state, which includes Indonesian military campaigns of mass killings of indigenous Papuans, soil contamination and deforestation from the Grasberg mine, industrial land grabs and intentional forest fires that together show the deliberate destruction of Papuan social, cultural, and natural environments.

A series of discussions and study sessions accompanies the programme, with confirmed participants including exhibiting artists **Lise Autogena**, **Joshua Portway** and **Nabil Ahmed**, lawyer turned artist **Jack Tan**, writer and academic **Angus Cameron**, curator **Ele Carpenter**, artist **Melanie Jackson** and theorist **Jussi Parikka**. A visit to the **Institute of Making** with a guide to the Materials Library will explore some of the materials underpinning the minerals trade.

*Conflict Minerals* continues Arts Catalyst's ongoing inquiry into the planetary commons, in dialogue with the Nuclear Culture research programme, and highlights the role of Arts Catalyst's Centre for Art, Science & Technology as a space for research, thinking and discourse in cross-disciplinary art.

Arts Catalyst's programme is supported by Arts Council England. *Kuannersuit; Kvanefjeld* is supported by the National Academies of Science Keck Futures Initiative, Danish Art Council, Sheffield Hallam University and Arts Council England and British Council's Artists' International Development Fund. Nabil Ahmed's work is supported by Akademie Schloss Solitude, TBA21 Academy and Forensic Architecture.

*Conflict Minerals* is part of an exchange programme with Z33, Belgium. Autogena and Portway's *Kuannersuit; Kvanefjeld* is currently showing as part of *Perpetual Uncertainty*, at Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden, curated by Ele Carpenter, Arts Catalyst Associate Curator.

Interviews and images available on request.

Contact details:

Poppy Cockburn, Communications Officer

E: [poppy.cockburn@artscatalyst.org](mailto:poppy.cockburn@artscatalyst.org)

T: +44 (0)20 7278 8373

Claudia Lastra, Programme Manager

E: [claudia.lastra@artscatalyst.org](mailto:claudia.lastra@artscatalyst.org)

[www.artscatalyst.org](http://www.artscatalyst.org)

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Notes to Editors:

1) **Arts Catalyst** is one of the UK's most distinctive arts organisations, distinguished by ambitious art commissions and its unique take on art-science practice. Funded by Arts Council England as one of its National Portfolio organisations, over 22 years, it has commissioned more than 125 UK and international artists' projects, often at pivotal moments in artists' careers, including major projects by Tomás Saraceno, Aleksandra Mir, Agnes Meyer-Brandis, Carey Young, Jan Fabre and the Otolith Group. Arts Catalyst works with artists and scientists to create artworks and generate new ideas exploring science and its role in society and culture: from the nature of air to environmental change, interspecies communication to the future of the moon. It aims to give audiences distinctive, thought-provoking experiences and to play a leading role in the dialogue around interdisciplinary artistic practice through collaborations with world-class galleries, museums, universities, arts organisations, science institutions and research centres.

2) **Lise Autogena and Joshua Portway** have worked together since the early nineties, developing large-scale multimedia installations, site-specific works and performances. Using custom-built technologies, data visualisations and video, their recent projects have explored uranium mining in Greenland (*Kuannersuit; Kvanefjeld*, Bildmuseet, 2016), the regulatory systems of plant growth applied to city planning (*Growing Cities Like Plants*: Cambridge University, Sainsbury Plant Laboratory, 2016), financial belief systems and the naturalisation of finance: (*Black Shoals; Dark Matter*: Somerset House, ArtScience Museum Singapore, 2016 and *Black Shoals Stock Market Planetarium*: Nikolaj Kunsthal, 2004, Tate Britain, 2000) and the changing perceptions of the sky space in the context of climate change: (*Most Blue Skies I + II*: Domaine de Chamarande, 2012, Arts Catalyst, 2011, Tensta Kunsthal, 2010, Nikolaj Kunsthal/COP15, 2009 and Gwangju Biennial, 2006). In 2013 Autogena and Portway developed *Foghorn Requiem*, a requiem for a disappearing sound, performed by Souter Lighthouse foghorn, three brass bands and fifty ships on the North Sea. Lise Autogena is an artist and a professor of Cross-Disciplinary Art at the Cultural Communication and Computing Research Institute (C3RI) at Sheffield Hallam University. Joshua Portway is an artist and computer programmer. [www.autogena.org](http://www.autogena.org).

3) **Nabil Ahmed** is an artist and researcher working on environmental violence and forensic architecture. His writings have appeared in academic journals, magazines, and various art, science and architecture publications such as *Third Text*, *Scientific Reports*, *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, and *South Magazine - Documenta 14*. He has been part of the *Anthropocene Project* at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin and the 2016 Oslo Architecture Triennial. He is co-founder of *Call and Response*, a sound art organization in London. He holds a PhD from the Centre for Research Architecture. He lives and works in London.

[www.callandresponse.org.uk](http://www.callandresponse.org.uk); [www.forensic-architecture.org](http://www.forensic-architecture.org)