



The group exhibition "When You Say We Belong to the Light We Belong to the Thunder" aimed to interrogate the sense of anxiety that currently pervades social and political life, with particular reference to the contradictions inherent in the rise of nationalism at a time when a global response

to the challenge of climate change is much needed yet remains elusive.

The exhibition opened with a loop of the video of Pat Benatar's 1984 pop song "We Belong," from which the show took its title. As the curatorial statement explains, the song's success in the West coincided with Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of perestroika, which eventually led to Estonians openly protesting against the Soviet Union, coalescing into a large ecological movement that later became the catalyst for Estonian independence. The piece introduced the show's interlinked themes of ecology and nationalism. Installed nearby, Edith Karlson's *Short Story*, 2019, presented the preserved skeleton of a seal found washed up on the Baltic coast alongside an empty transparent-plastic suit positioned as if standing up on a pair of black shoes, a sort of human husk of nonbiodegradable waste.

The next floor welcomed viewers with a wall-mounted display case by Tanel Rander. Titled *The Chronicle of Alienation from the Eastern Shores of the Baltic Sea*, 2019, it featured texts and images relating to the history of colonialism in Eastern Europe. One passage, written by the artist and referencing Frantz Fanon, asks why the figure in Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog), ca. 1817, seems somehow familiar. The text goes on to argue that Friedrich's wanderer is archetypal of the modern gaze, turned upon both nature and indigenous communities.

James T. Hong's video *Apologies*, 2012, is a montage of more than eighty minutes of official government apologies taken from news footage. Frequently relating to accidental civilian killings in theaters of war, the work presents humanitarian intervention as farcical when linked to acts of military aggression. The wholly inadequate condolences for such deaths expressed by, for example, the former commander of international forces in Afghanistan, General John R. Allen, make clear the failure of state military power to meet either human or environmental needs.

Maarten Vanden Eynde & Musasa's set of three painted banners, *Material Matters (Au79, Pb82, U92)*, 2018–19, depicts the respective symbols as well as the scientific and social associations of the elements uranium, lead, and gold: Uranium, for example, is linked to X-rays, power generation, and mass destruction. This work, along with others on display by further artists and researchers, pointed to the self-centeredness of the human gaze on nature, and its contribution to our capacity for destruction. The exhibition deftly explored the central problem of our time: the inability to conceive an ideology that encompasses human life, the nation-state, and the planet in one overarching schema.

— [Mike Watson](#)