

Esther Schipper

Christoph Keller
Future Archeologists
June 8 – July 6, 2023



Image, film still: Christoph Keller, **Future Archeologists**, 2023, three channel 4K HD video installation, dimensions variable

Esther Schipper is pleased to announce a special presentation by Christoph Keller who since joining in 1997 has had six solo exhibitions with the gallery. On view will be **Future Archeologists**, a new three-channel video installation.

With **Future Archeologists** Christoph Keller revisits the subjects of his own past as a trained hydrologist. The three-channel video installation presents an artistic survey into the environmental conditions in the Owens Valley on the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada in California.

Point of departure and formal center of Keller's video installation are three filmic perspectives shot over the vast landscape of the now desiccated Owens Lake.

The Owen Valley and the surroundings of the lake was once flourishing, and its indigenous Paiute people maintained complex irrigation systems. In 1913, an aqueduct to provide for the city of Los Angeles was constructed, diverting Owens valley's waters and letting the lake dry out in just 15 years. Subsequently, the area became infamous as a source of dust pollution. In the early 2000s an extensive landscape transformation program was launched in some parts of the former lakebed, seeking to alleviate the development of toxic dust clouds traveling as far as Los Angeles. This dust mitigation project is in the focus of Keller's filmic inquiry.

Keller's three-channel video installation presents the Owens Lake landscape from an aerial viewpoint. The video on the right channel moves in spiraling sweeps across the landscape, the central video relentlessly follows along the main supply road of the dust mitigation project, while the footage on the right channel moves in steadily sweeping movements toward the center of the former lake with disconcertingly beautiful vistas of mountainous terrain surrounding the dry lake's plain. As the camera travels across the mesmerizing landscape,

we hear a conversation between Keller and a geologist, accompanied by a constant digitally generated glissando music, carefully calibrated to create a mixture of aesthetic detachment and dystopian realism. The images of the ecological desolation are subtly compounded by the dialogue which reveals the breath-taking futility of a monumental industrialized process developed to contain the effects of an environmental destruction in perpetuity.

Keller's work carefully draws from a dialectical aggregate of wide-ranging references: literary and pictorial representations, science and science fiction, colonial histories and community politics, timelessness and timefulness of the landscape.

Christoph Keller's practice constitutes an examination of the history of science and of the way in which knowledge is gathered and organized and how this organization in turn influences our thinking. For **Future Archeologists**, the artist's training in hydrology constitutes the subtext for Keller's continued exploration of specific areas of scientific inquiries and their consequences in wider cultural and philosophical contexts as well as the real-life repercussions such discourses can entail.

The video footage for the project was filmed during Christoph Keller's fellowship at the Villa Aurora in Pacific Palisades, Los Angeles, California in 2019. The artist wishes to thank Claudia Gordon and Friedel Schmoranzer and the Villa Aurora & Thomas Mann House e. V. for their support.

Christoph Keller was born in 1967 in Freiburg, Germany. The artist lives and works in Berlin.

Christoph Keller studied Mathematics, Physics and Hydrology in Freiburg, Berlin and Santiago de Chile, followed by Liberal Arts studies at the Berlin University of the Arts (with Katharina Sieverding) and attended the Postgraduate Study Program for Film and Art at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne.

He has received numerous awards and grants for his work, among them: the Berlin Artistic Research Grant for 2020/2021, the "Rome Price" at the Deutsche Akademie Villa Massimo in Rome in 2017, the Capacete Residency São Paulo in 2012, the Berlin Senate Residency in Istanbul in 2008, the Goethe Institute project residency in Mexico City in 2009, the Bremen Award for Video Art in 2006, P.S.1 Residency Program in New York in 2002, and Ars Viva Art Award in 2000.

Among Keller's solo exhibitions are **Data Error – Roma Antichità**, Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History, Rome (2023); **Grey Magic**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2015); **Small Survey on Nothingness**, Schering Stiftung, Berlin (2014); **Expedition Bus-Shaman Travel**, single presentation at abc Berlin, Station Berlin (2012); **Æther – between Cosmology and Consciousness**, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2011); **Voyages Extraordinaires**, CRAC Alsace Lorraine, Altkirch (2010); **Observatorium**, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braunschweig (2008), and **Encyclopaedia Cinematographica**, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Berlin (2001).