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Living/Leaving the Carbocene: On the Coal and Art of the Upper Silesia

Timothy James LeCain proposed an alternative term for the Anthropocene, emphasizing the dependence on burning black hydro-carbons. Defining the « Carbocene » as the age of coal and oil, he mentions the tremendous power of hydrocarbon fuel sources and the influence their excavation had on the environment. LeCain claims that “Coal shaped the humans who used it far more than humans shaped coal”, and this is especially visible in the Upper Silesia – a region that was built on coal at both material and mental levels. After the political transformation in Poland in 1989 many coal mines were closed, and the region faced its decline, struggling with economic, psychological, and social consequences of the transformation of industrial regions. I would argue that Upper Silesia can be viewed as a region that represents the limitations of our imagination and inability to think beyond coal, as it is still struggling to find a new (post-industrial) identity. In the lecture, I will present various Polish and Silesian artists working with coal and post-industrial identity.

Image detail: Diana Lelonek, "Barbórka" (project created in cooperation with Silesian Museum in Katowice), 2020, photo Andrea Veneri

Thursday, 14 September

In Person

5:15 pm FAB 2-20