

PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, Aug 1, 2024

AFTER NATURE PRIZE 2024

Laura Huertas Millán . Curanderxs
Sarker Protick . অঙ্গার . Awngar

C/O Berlin presents a double exhibition of the winners of the **After Nature . Ulrike Crespo Photography Prize: Laura Huertas Millán . Curanderxs** and **Sarker Protick . অঙ্গার . Awngar** from **Sep 14, 2024** until **Jan 22, 2025**. The **opening** is on **Fri, Sep 13, 2024** at **20:00** at C/O Berlin in Amerika Haus on Hardenbergstraße 22–24, 10623 Berlin.

In their prize-winning projects, Laura Huertas Millán (b. 1983, Colombia) and Sarker Protick (b. 1986, Bangladesh) explore from different perspectives and geographical contexts how colonial structures continue to shape our contemporary relationship to nature today. They share a profound interest in the history and origins of our relationships to the world. By melding the historical and the contemporary, they consider global contexts and help their viewers to see the visual mechanisms in play when ideas of nature in photography and visual media are expressed.

Laura Huertas Millán . Curanderxs

The coca plant is one of the world's most controversial plants. In the West, it is primarily associated with the recreational drug cocaine, which was first produced in Europe in the nineteenth century and has given rise to a violent system of drug trade and abuse. The plant's healing and stimulating properties have endowed it with cultural and spiritual significance for the indigenous population of the Andes region, yet this fact has gone rarely mentioned in history books, pointing to the Western hegemony of knowledge among other factors. Since 2018, Colombian filmmaker Laura Huertas Millán has examined the coca plant in her work.

Her exhibition, *Curanderxs* (Spanish for "healers"), includes the eponymous multi-channel projection newly produced in 2024 as part of the *After Nature Prize* as well as two further video installations. In her new work, Huertas Millán takes the initial prohibition of the coca plant by the Spanish while colonizing Latin America and develops a speculative narrative with a group of femmes who secretly distribute coca leaves in the seventeenth century. In response to the limited existing sources, the artist uses fiction as a strategy to imagine a fragmentary narrative about the colonialist appropriation of nature. Using an aesthetic of early silent films that references the archive's silence, bold actors emerge from the dark depths of underground landscapes, offering support to enslaved indigenous workers by secretly distributing coca leaves.

In *El Laberinto* (2018), Huertas Millán combines found footage and her own 16-mm films made in Colombia. The film traces the labyrinthine memories of Cristobal Gómez Abel, who worked for drug barons in the Colombian Amazon during the 1980s. It travels through the forest and the ruins of a narco villa which is modelled on the one shown in US 1980s soap opera *Dynasty*. The artist's visual language creates an immersive space to explore topics including trauma, salvation, and a search for identity.

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Finally, the two-channel installation *Para la Coca* (2024) examines contemporary ritual use of the coca plant in Colombia's indigenous community, beyond assigned colonialist meanings and criminalization. Once again made in collaboration with Gómez Abel, the film tells the myth of the Murui who see the coca plant as a deity in the form of a girl who teaches his community about how to ethically use the plant. The film underscores the importance of respecting and preserving these cultural practices.

With *Curanderxs*, C/O Berlin shows Laura Huertas Millán's first monographic exhibition in Germany, which is also bringing together her most recent works on the coca plant in a joint presentation.

Sarker Protick . অঙ্গার . Awngar

Bangladeshi photographer Sarker Protick also spans a range of temporalities in his exhibition *অঙ্গার . Awngar*. Protick reveals the connection between the history of colonization across the Indian subcontinent and the ongoing exploitation of the individuals and ecosystems of this region by exploring the historic region of Bengal, which includes Bangladesh and parts of present-day India.

In this, his photographic investigation resembles field research. Like many of his works, *অঙ্গার . Awngar* is a long-term project. The focus is the nineteenth-century establishment of a train network and the coal mining under the colonial domination of the British Empire. For *Awngar*, Protick embarked on journeys to sites in India and Bangladesh including Narayankuri, West Bengal, where one of India's oldest mines is located, and Hardinge Bridge, a 1.6 kilometer long railway bridge in Bangladesh. This hallmark project was constructed between 1910 and 1915, stretching across the Padma River. Even today, it is an essential part of the railway infrastructure and thus plays a significant role in transporting workers and export goods. At the same time, this infrastructure evokes the brutal history of the Partition of Bengal.

Protick's photographs show the dystopic coalfields hulled in debris and dust clouds, disused dead-end railroad lines, and ruins and relics of late capitalism that recollect once-flourishing industries. His meticulously composed, minimalist compositions sensitize the eye for spaces and landscapes emptied of human presence. He works primarily with natural light sources, creating delicate pastel tones that evoke a poetic, seemingly timeless atmosphere. When depicting other subjects such as the imposing Hardinge Bride, he makes use of an abstract black-and-white graphic aesthetic.

Seemingly effortlessly, Protick succeeds in uniting apparent contradictions, such as the loss of resources and livelihoods in capitalism's constant hunt for growth. In Bengali, *অঙ্গার* (*Awngar*) not only denotes coal as a material, but also references the material as a constant in the Earth's depths, which glows from within and can smolder eternally beneath the surface. In this, the term symbolizes the colonial history of the British Empire as well as the capitalist structures reinforced today by privatized construction companies and large corporations. The artist's precise and atmospheric visual language presents the global, geopolitical, and historical dimensions of imperialism and its effect on the climate crisis.

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With অঙ্গার . *Awngar*, C/O Berlin shows Sarker Protick's first monographic exhibition in Germany. The double exhibition is curated by Katharina Täschner, junior curator at C/O Berlin. The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication from Hartmann Books.

The **After Nature . Ulrike Crespo Photography Prize** is a joint project of the C/O Berlin Foundation and the Crespo Foundation. Every year, the prize enables the realization of two research-intensive projects and honors artists or groups over the age of 35 who explore new concepts of nature in photography and visual media through their work. The prize carries a cash award of 40,000 euros for each winner as well as an exhibition at C/O Berlin with an accompanying publication. The exhibitions then travel to the Open Space of the Crespo Foundation in Frankfurt am Main.

Laura Huertas Millán (b. 1983, Colombia) is an artist and filmmaker. She holds a PhD from Université PSL (SACRe-Programm) in Paris and conducted research at Harvard's Sensory Ethnography Lab as part of her studies. Her films have been shown at leading festivals including the Locarno film festival, FIDMarseille, Doclisboa in Lisbon, and Videobrasil in São Paulo. MASP São Paulo, Maison des Arts de Malakoff, and Museum of Modern Art in Medellín have mounted solo exhibitions of her work. Moreover, her work has been shown at Centre Pompidou and Jeu de Paume in Paris, Guggenheim Museum in New York, Times Art Center Berlin, Liverpool Biennale, FRONT International – Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art, Videonale in Bonn, and Sharjah Biennale. She lives and works in France.

Sarker Protick (b. 1986, Bangladesh) is a photographer, lecturer, and curator. He studied at South Asian Media Institute – Pathshala in Dhaka and is currently director of their international program. He is also co-curator of the Chobi Mela Festival, the longest-running photography festival in Asia. His works often thematize the transience of time and focus on Bangladesh and the historic region of Bengal. His work has frequently been shown in international exhibitions as well as winning several fellowships and prizes. Protick was a Foam Talent and received a Magnum Foundation grant. He lives and works in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

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Exhibition	Sep 14, 2024 – Jan 22, 2025
Press Tour	Sep 13, 2024 . 11:00
Opening	Sep 13, 2024 . 20:00
Opening Hours	Daily . 11:00–20:00
Admission	12/6 euro
Organizer	C/O Berlin Foundation Amerika Haus . Hardenbergstraße 22–24 . 10623 Berlin Tel +49.30.284 44 16-0 . www.co-berlin.org www.facebook.com/coberlinphoto www.instagram.com/coberlin www.twitter.com/coberlin #coberlin #afternatureprize #sarkerprotickcoberlin #laurahuertasmillancoberlin
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As part of	Berlin Art Week 2024