

WASTE

LAND

Industrial waste exposed.

Photography by
J Henry Fair



Museum of
Natural
History
University of Oxford



J Henry Fair
PHOTOGRAPHY

Oxford University Museum of Natural History

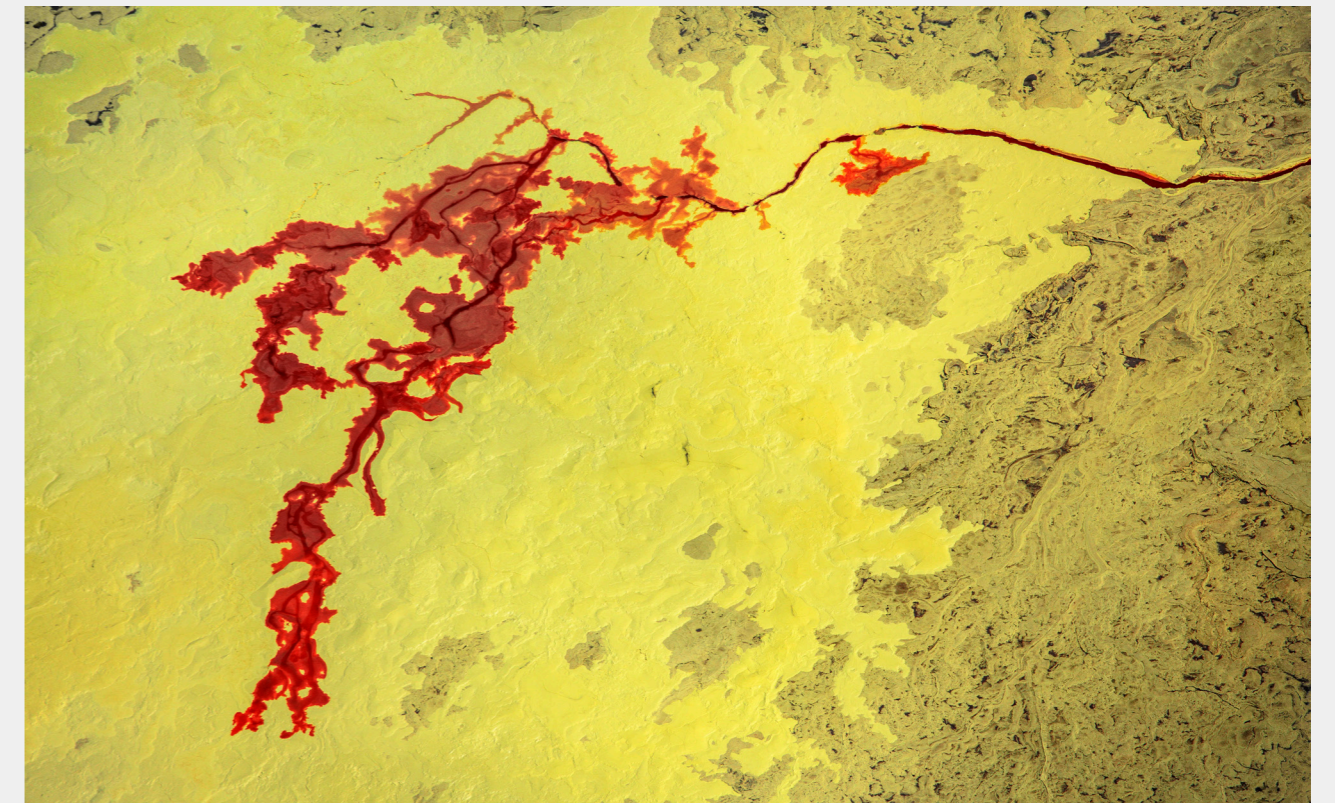
5 July to 20 November 2022

About the artist

J Henry Fair is a photographer and environmental activist best known for his 'chillingly beautiful' aerial photos of environmental scars. Born in Charleston, South Carolina (USA), J Henry Fair holds a degree in journalism from Fordham University. He is currently based in New York and Berlin.

Fair's work is widely published, from The New York Times to the National Geographic, Vanity Fair, TIME, New York, Die Zeit, The Guardian, and Le Figaro. He has been featured on television networks in Germany and the US, and has had numerous exhibits in galleries and museums worldwide. J Henry Fair is the winner of the 2019 'Environmental Photographer of the Year' award

and the 2012 'Earth Through a Lens' award. In 2020, he was featured as one of the 12 most influential environmental photographers in the acclaimed book Human Nature. Among the 3 solo books Fair has published, he is best known for his Industrial Scars series. In the words of Roberta Smith (Chief Art Critic at The NY Times), "The vivid colour photographs of J Henry Fair lead an uneasy double life as potent records of environmental pollution and as ersatz evocations of abstract painting [...] [I]nformation and form work together, to devastating effect."



Molten sulfur from tar sands refinery pumped onto sulfur stack, Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada.



In numbers

118,160

visitors

13

artworks

1,781

QR code users

24,324

web views

56

event attendees

2

events

Waste Land

Waste Land was an exhibition of the aerial photography of American artist and climate activist, J Henry Fair. Featuring ground-breaking images of industrial waste, it exposed the environmental damage caused by mining, manufacturing, agriculture, and energy generation.

Did you know that iron and steel manufacturing is responsible for 25% of all industrial greenhouse gas emissions? Or that coal-fired power stations contributed to 40% of the increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide in 2021? Statistics like these reveal that just a handful of industries have a monopoly on global greenhouse gas emissions; threatening our planet with the devastating consequences of climate change. But carbon dioxide is not the only pollutant we should be concerned about. Industrial wastes like muds, slurries, wastewaters, and ashes are capable

of leaching toxins into the environment. Unless carefully managed, these toxins can contaminate wild ecosystems or threaten human health.

Many of us are unaware of the scale and repercussions of industrial waste generation. Sequestered away in landfills and storage sites, industrial wastes remain invisible to the public — at least until disaster strikes.

J Henry Fair's photography forces us to confront the environmental consequences of industrial waste. His arresting photographs capture our attention and bring into focus the uncomfortable consequences of manufacturing and mass consumption.

Highlights

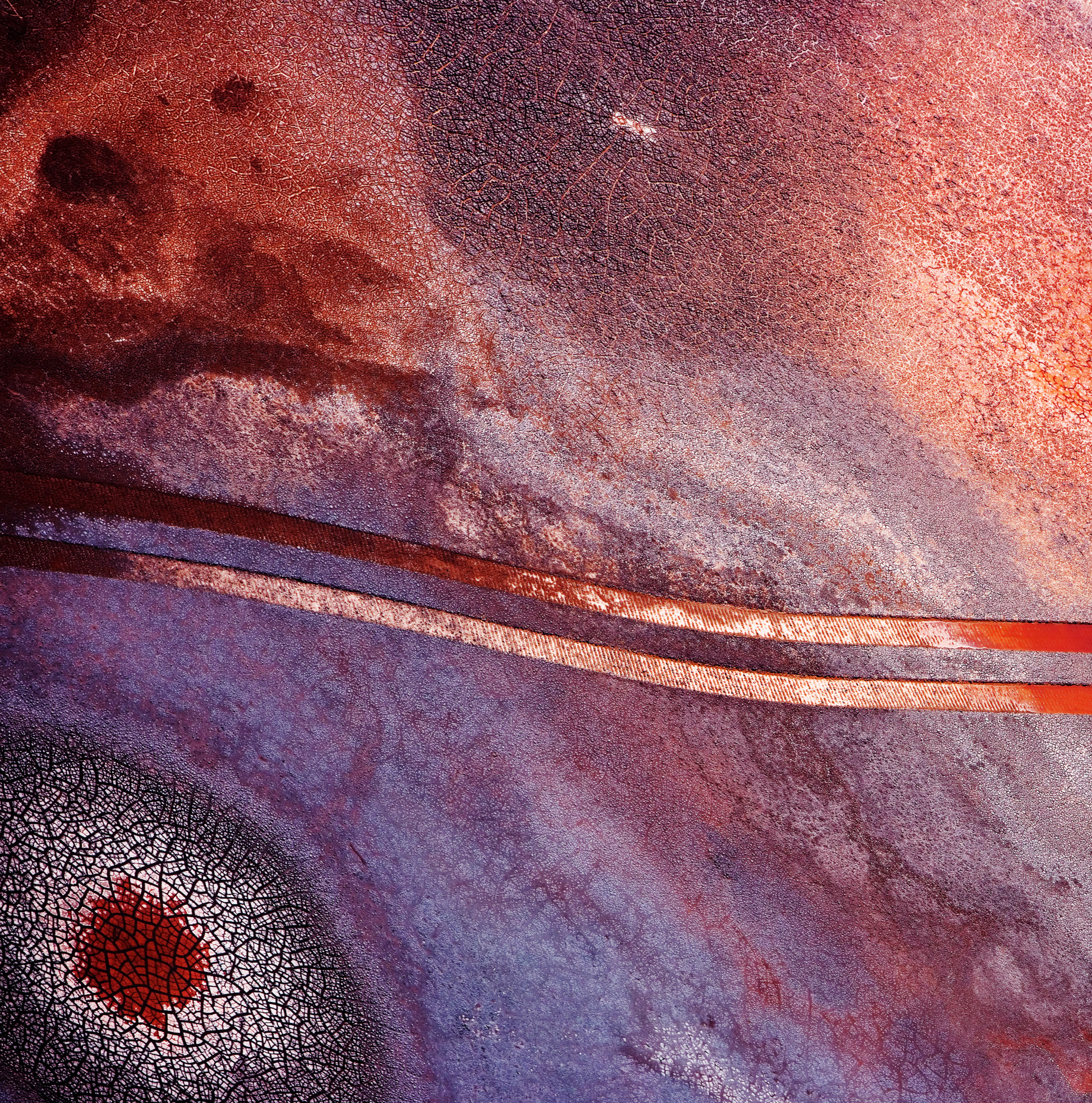
Waste impoundment at Arctic iron mine Kiruna, Sweden

From ships and cars to machinery and buildings, steel is a staple of our modern world. Used widely in manufacturing and construction, this strong metal is made by combining iron with small amounts of carbon. The production of steel therefore relies on the mining of rocks and minerals known as iron ores. The extraction of iron from iron ores leaves behind vast quantities of waste rock and tailings — fine mineral particles which are difficult to store and contain. These tailings often contain heavy metals, like copper and mercury, and radioactive elements.

Without proper waste management, these fine particles can easily disperse and infiltrate wild ecosystems.

In China, the third largest producer of iron ore worldwide, for every one tonne of iron ore concentrate produced, around three tonnes of waste is discharged.





Highlights

Excavator tracks in bauxite waste at aluminium refinery Gramercy, Louisiana, USA

Aluminium is used in an array of products including electronic devices, food packages, drinks cans, and cars. The production of aluminium requires the use of bauxite ore — a naturally occurring rock with a distinctive red tinge. The mining of bauxite leaves behind huge quantities of residue known as red mud. The storage of this waste product takes up large areas of land, and its high pH makes it capable of wreaking environmental havoc. With plant and animal life only able to survive within a narrow pH range, the leakage of red mud can endanger organisms in local habitats.

On average, it takes five tonnes of bauxite to produce one tonne of aluminium, resulting in three tonnes of red mud.

Programming

Highlights

Waste Land: In conversation with J Henry Fair

Celebrating the opening of the exhibition, American photographer and climate activist J Henry Fair reflected on the ideas behind *Waste Land*, including consumption habits, the climate crisis, and environmental damage. The talk was followed by an opportunity to view the exhibition prior to its official public opening.

Panel discussion: Are we headed for a wasteland?

Researchers from across the University of Oxford discussed the current problems of industrial waste within the energy, transport and building sectors, as well as initiatives to reduce waste, introduce new technologies and change consumer behaviours.



Digital

A digital version of the exhibition was made available via QR codes and a digital interactive in the exhibition, as well as on the Museum's website. This online accompaniment provided further interpretation on each of the artworks, exploring the industries behind the photographs, and the consequences of industrial waste. It also provided real life case studies of environmental damage as a result of these industries. The online exhibition continues to provide an ongoing digital legacy for the exhibition.

The exhibition was promoted on the Museum's social media accounts, with over 7,300 views of *Waste Land* related content.



Acknowledgements

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