

David Claerbout

Wildfire

November 7, 2020—January 23, 2021

Pedro Cera is pleased to present the first exhibition of David Claerbout at the gallery.

With its title derived from the central piece of the exhibition, Claerbout's latest video entitled *Wildfire* (meditation on fire), 2019-2020, the exhibition takes as its point of departure notions of optical truth, the theme of duration, and digital materiality to address the changes and consequences of our altered perception of time and reality within the present digital age.

Inspired by the artist's inquiry in the amount of power needed to simulate a very detailed digital "still life" of fire, that would in fact, as the artist later found out, most likely set the computer system on fire, the work brings together two traditionally opposed aspects of life; the biological and the digital. The biological here is introduced through the conflict of the depicted and its relation to the biological body's instinctive behavior, "programmed" to shield and seek refuge from fire. With the body's inability to contain the heat of fire, natural instinct makes the idea of meditation on fire physically impossible.

Challenging the naturally possible has been a reoccurring subject in Claerbout's practice, may it be exposing the retina to 93 000 lux or gazing directly into the sun. In these earlier works, the camera can be perceived as a prosthetic to the eye, a mechanical extension allowing us to encounter a reality that would otherwise be impossible to experience. While the camera in *Wildfire* (meditation on fire), like in many other of the artist's more recent works, has been removed and disintegrated into "Dark Optics", a numerical system of binary codes, the truthfulness of the image is compromised by the utter absence of the camera, the modern symbol of truth in pictorial depiction. We are confronted with an illusion of an image, a hallucination, and a visual construct of computing. The assumed artificiality of the image creates an immersive experience of an environment and a situation, in this case, a wildfire that never happened, challenging, thus our understanding of time, space, and reality.

By removing the human figure from the image, Claerbout shifts our attention to what would traditionally be considered a background of an image. Trees and bushes gradually consumed by flames of fire have been cast for the leading role, emphasizing the work's anti-anthropocentrism. Long shots of silenced fire appropriate the notion of biological breathing time. On the one hand, these images create an immersive and a meditative experience of the otherwise un-experienceable, while on the other, they actively challenge our present understanding of time as capital, where biological time is considered waste.

Despite its representational features, the roots of *Wildfire* are, in many ways, tied firmly with abstraction. The burning fire's abstract nature becomes a reference to the technological abstraction linked to its making, while suggesting of the increasingly abstract world we live in. The abstract and the digital nature of *Wildfire* (meditation on fire) take us back to the age of pre-photography. The so-called truthfulness of the image here has been lost. Works are based on concept, conversation, consensus, taking us back to the medium of painting, David Claerbout's point of departure as an artist. Materialized in the exhibition by a series of eight drawings of wildfire, all linked to shots from the video, these works allow for *Wildfire*'s material experience through the painterly process, echoing a somewhat romantic nostalgia of a pre-digital past. Their physical existence, haptic nature, and execution creates a material, a temporal, and a conceptual opposition to the digital, allowing for gauging what was gained and what is lost.

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David Claerbout has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions internationally, including: Kunst Museum, Winterthur; Gallery Rudolfinum, Prague; Kunsthaus Bregenz; Schaulager, Basel; MNAC, Barcelona; Städel Museum, Frankfurt; KINDL, Berlin, Marabouparken Konsthall, Sundbybert, Sweden; Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam; Kunsthalle Mainz, Mainz, Germany; Secession, Vienna, Austria; Tel Aviv Museum, Tel Aviv, Israel; Parasol unit, London; SFMOMA, San Francisco; WIELS, Brussels, Belgium; The De Pont museum of contemporary art, Tilburg, The Netherlands and; Pompidou Center, Paris, France; The Kunstmuseum, St. Gallen, Switzerland; and The Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands. His work is represented in major public collections worldwide.