

# *Melting Landscapes*

*Audio by Ludwig Berger and students of Zürich's Institute of Landscape Architecture*

*Concept of project by Ludwig Berger, Christophe Girot, Dennis Häusler, Johannes Rebsamen, Matthias Vollmer*

It opens with a rumble, turning to a roar, first you are transformed, exploded into an otherworldly space, underground .... underwater? Where am I? These are the questions you ask yourself when you are listening to the work of *Melting Landscapes* developed by Zürich's Institute of Landscape Architecture (ILA).

*Melting Landscapes* is a scientific journey to the Morteratsch Glacier in the Bündner Alps in Switzerland. The ILA took groups of students to the same location from 2015-2018. However far from it being a scientific trip this work creates a symbiotic relationship between science and art melding the two together effortlessly. Rather than recording graphs and hard statistics *Melting Landscapes* focuses on two recording forms; photography and audio.

The final work is a vinyl LP of 12 recordings as well as a book of 24 photographs taken at the Morteratsch Glacier. *Melting Landscapes* has also been exhibited as an audio and photographic work.



*Melting Landscapes* on display at The Institute of Landscape Architecture Zurich, 2018

The photographs created by the students at the Morterastsch Glacier were all taken with analogue cameras in black and white. Matthias Vollmer, Photography Supervisor of the trip talks about the significance of why such a decision was made in an interview by Pop Matters:

*“One important technical aspect of the pictures is that they are all taken with analogue large- or middle-format cameras and black-and-white film. What seems to be obsolete in today's digital world was actually very important for us. We wanted the students to focus on every picture they take. It took them a lot of time to decide on the subject, prepare the equipment and finally take the photo.”*

Matthias Vollmer, Photography Supervisor



*Black and white analogue photograph from Melting Landscapes*

On the audio side of the work Ludwig Berger firstly reached out to other sound artists who had worked with glacier recordings, in particular Jez Riley French. French had developed his

own contact microphones and hydrophones which were used by ILA students to record some of their work. Berger also worked with students to create their own waterproof contact microphones. These hydrophones were designed for the harsh conditions at the Morteratsch Glacier and were used in playful ways. Buried under deep snow, underneath iced over rivers and left to freeze in the glacier. The recordings are sonically sublime. They take us on a journey, with the benefit of time you are able to hear the change in seasons, the glacier and the landscape.

Starting with the track “Freezing” you hear the re-growth of the glacier fusing together. “Accumulation” on the other hand sounds like thousands of pebbles landing and compressing. “Drone” takes us to another world, something that must be from the Alien or Predator films. The softest tones of movement can be heard, but of what? “Wind” crackles and makes it feel like you are on a boy scout adventure, sat next to the campfire. The track “Bubbles” takes us under the ice, large pops pass by with rhythmic consistency almost like a beating drum. The recording “Milk” signifies the beginning of a change. It is clear this is the sound of a passing stream. Even faint footsteps in the snow can be heard in this track. Maybe the sound of the coming summer.

Side 2 of the album marks the change. It bursts into an angry powerful “River” raging with the glacier’s discharge. “Pond 1” and “Pond 2” are similar - each sparkling and bright. Droplets pop and click, almost sounding like the chirping of birds, although they too are in the background. “Crevasse” is full of surprises with unexpected thumps and crunching sounds. The wall of sound intensifies with “Sand” It is constantly moving, sheer mass is grinding, passing, forcing itself past another. Finally, “Ablation” ends the record, buzzing and grinding its way to the end before it peters out into the distance, ending the record.



Ludwig Berger recording for *Melting Landscapes*

The photos and sounds of *Melting Landscapes* on their own are each powerful. However, the beauty really comes when experiencing the two together. Instead of simply the visual we get this otherworldly sound, so unusual and alien, demonstrating the concealed world. This is beautifully summed up by one of the students of the project, Sonja Widmer.

*“In contrast to the initial visual impression, recording with contact microphones opened up a world beyond the visible surface. All sorts of sounds from deep within the body of ice exemplified the vast concealed dimensions and demonstrated the fact that the glacier is no rigid object.”*

Sonja Widmer, Student at ILA

Climate change and the current ecological insanity in the world are not thrust in your face by *Melting Landscapes*. In fact, *Melting Landscapes* deals with the polarising issue of climate change by letting the audience decide where it stands. *Melting Landscapes* is simply witness to what is going on in the world, leaving its audience with facts. However, these facts are presented in an accessible and engaging format, making *Melting Landscapes* stand out from climate change reports by the scientific community which fail to engage the masses about climate change.

Engaging with the masses about melting glaciers was successfully displayed by Olafur Eliasson in multiple works, recently with the work *Glacier Melt*, 1999-2019. Eliasson revisited the Icelandic glaciers in the same spots he had as a younger man. The exhibition displays the photographs side by side visually documenting the change over the last 20 years. However, Eliasson is perhaps more famously known for his work *Ice Watch*, 2014 where he transported icebergs that had come adrift from the Greenland ice sheet. These were then laid out in a clock formation and left to melt before our watchful eyes. The powerful outcome is engaging and accessible.

*Melting Landscapes* sounds like an electroacoustic recording. However, you must pinch yourself to remind you that these recordings are all natural; this is our world.

## Works Cited

<https://www.popmatters.com/melting-landscapes-institute-landscape-architecture-2633894613.html>

## Works Consulted

<https://www.greenpeace.ch/de/hintergrund/45312/the-sound-of-silence-den-klimawandel-akustisch-erfahren/>

<http://www.ludwigberger.com/index.php/01/melting-landscapes/>

<https://jezrileyfrench.co.uk/hydrophones.php>

<https://landscapearchitecture.bandcamp.com/album/melting-landscapes>

<https://acloserlisten.com/2018/05/13/institute-of-landscape-architecture-melting-landscapes/>

<https://www.popmatters.com/melting-landscapes-institute-landscape-architecture-2633894613.html>

<https://www.discogs.com/Institute-of-Landscape-Architecture-Ludwig-Berger-Melting-Landscapes/release/12971006>

<https://www.soundohm.com/product/melting-landscapes-lp-boo>

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2202077783140774>

<https://girot.arch.ethz.ch/events-conferences/melting-landscapes>

<https://girot.arch.ethz.ch/series-publications/books/melting-landscapes-2>

<https://girot.arch.ethz.ch/events-conferences/symposium-melting-landscapes>

