rice. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-orde

"The White Saboteur"

A Masterpiece of Ecological Caricature

Review by Refresh Team
October 15, 2026



rice. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-orde

rice. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-orde

A glacier vanishes under the gaze of the person who came to admire it. "The White Saboteur" an XR installation artists Barthélemy Antoine-Loeff and Hugo Arcier turns ecological concern into a trap: what if our appetite for "experiencing" the world is precisely what prevents us from relating to it?We do not need another artwork to tell us that glaciers are melting. Nor do we need the syrupy image of a lone polar bear drifting on its little raft of ice: ecological catastrophe packaged as instant heartbreak. The image arrives with its instructions already attached. Feel sad. Feel concerned. Keep scrolling.

The problem is not that the suffering is unreal. It is that the picture has become so predictable that it barely asks us to look. We recognise the symbol, perform the expected emotion and move on. Concern becomes another consumable moment. An awareness campaign might settle for that transaction. An artwork needs to unsettle it.

The White Saboteur does something sharper. It replaces the sentimental spectacle of a disappearing landscape with a dark caricature of the person consuming it. In this virtual-reality installation, the visitor's gaze contributes to the glacier's erasure. We come for the beautiful image; our appetite helps destroy it. Each encounter leaves an altered environment for the next person.

The target is no longer simply our indifference to ecological loss. It is a form of attention that mistakes visual possession for a relationship with the living world.

As a literal account of climate change, the mechanism would be nonsense. Looking does not melt glaciers. Nor does ecological destruction emerge from a population of equally guilty spectators. But as caricature, it is brutally effective. It exaggerates a familiar appetite until its absurdity becomes impossible to miss.

We want the landscape. We want the experience. We want the image that proves we were there. The encounter becomes something to acquire, then something to leave behind. Instagram compresses this sequence into an everyday gesture: capture, scroll, forget. The promise of connection becomes a habit of disposal.

The White Saboteur gives that habit a visible consequence. The more insistently we claim the image, the less of it remains.



Still from "The White Saboteur" (VR)

rice. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-orde

The obvious reading would make the glacier an endangered victim and the visitor an agent of harm. That reading is easy, emotionally efficient and not especially interesting.

The sharper reading concerns the relationship that makes those roles seem natural. A human subject stands before an available world. The subject acts; the world responds. Everything revolves around our capacity to perceive and intervene.

The installation turns this arrangement into an embarrassing spectacle. The visitor's centrality becomes excessive, almost grotesque. Even here, facing the disappearance of a landscape, we remain the protagonists.

There is a contradiction in that arrangement. The work reproduces the hierarchy it exposes. Its glacier cannot meaningfully redirect the encounter; it is organised around human input. This becomes productive when understood as deliberate exaggeration rather than a proposal for ecological participation. The installation stages a relationship we need to abandon. It does not claim to have built its replacement.

A glacier, meanwhile, is never merely a white monument awaiting destruction. It moves, fractures, stores and releases. It connects water, atmosphere, geology, organisms and distant human habitats. Its existence is relational before it is spectacular. Reducing it to an isolated object in distress already obscures much of what it is.

The biosphere is not an external "nature" awaiting our intervention. It is the plural, interconnected habitat within which we exist. The distinction matters: we are not spectators standing outside the conditions of life, however convincingly our screens arrange that illusion.

The work's scientific material therefore matters only insofar as it changes the artistic form. Research, photogrammetry and field recordings cannot certify an installation's importance. Their more compelling use is to construct a fiction that makes our simplifications visible: an intricate, moving environment reduced to a view we believe we can possess.

The glacier's disappearance is the immediate drama. Our inability to recognise it as anything other than scenery is the deeper problem.

The landscape must be desirable for the mechanism to bite. Beauty is not an unfortunate distraction from the work's argument. It recruits the visitor into it.

There is no clean separation here between aesthetic pleasure and damage. The visitor wants to look, and looking participates in the image's erosion. The installation does not ask us to reject beauty. It makes our claim upon it unstable.

Virtual reality offers no ethical shortcut. Immersion can intensify spectacle as readily as it can disturb it. The visitor remains physically safe, equipped to enter and leave. A medium is not an artistic argument, and a convincing experience is not evidence of changed behaviour.

Discomfort, too, can become a souvenir. One can leave feeling troubled and still have consumed the encounter exactly as intended: an intense experience, successfully completed. The work cannot rule out that response. Its credibility depends on leaving the uncertainty open rather than treating unease as a moral achievement.

Sound introduces another tension. It offers the possibility of attending to processes that cannot be gathered into a single view. Yet the use of transformed human voices raises an awkward question: must ice sound like us before we acknowledge its existence?

Personification can establish intimacy while keeping humanity at the centre. The more challenging possibility is polyphony: different materials, rhythms and timescales occupying the same field without becoming one reassuring voice. Listening would then mean attending to what does not resemble us, rather than discovering ourselves inside everything.

That would be a genuine reversal of the visual appetite the installation caricatures. Not another way of bringing the world under our command, but an opportunity to encounter processes that neither need to imitate us nor exist to address us.

rice. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-orde

Unmute

"video extract"

The installation's darkest joke is the equipment itself. A visitor uses a device inseparable from Silicon Valley's technological imaginary to complete the disappearance of a virtual glacier. The apparatus that promises to bring the world closer supplies the means of erasing it.

That contradiction should not be tidied away with a defensive argument about whether the technology is justified. It belongs at the centre of the work. The promise of frictionless experience depends on a material world of extraction, manufacturing, water, energy and global supply chains. The glacier may be virtual. The apparatus is not.

Making those conditions transparent is necessary. It is not absolution. A favourable carbon calculation cannot make an artwork innocent, any more than an uncomfortable visitor automatically becomes an ethical one.

But the argument also needs to resist the comforting arithmetic of individual guilt. One visitor, one headset, one exhibition: none of these units adequately describes the systems organising ecological destruction. Responsibilities are unequal, and power is not distributed evenly. The metaphor loses precision if every gaze becomes an equivalent contribution to catastrophe.

Collective change requires more than consumers adjusting their conduct. It concerns infrastructures, industrial practices, public policy, institutions and the distribution of resources and power. An artwork can interrupt the assumptions sustaining those arrangements. It cannot claim that interruption as their transformation.

Likewise, a shared final projection does not automatically create collective action. Seeing the consequences together is not the same as deliberating, cooperating or repairing. The ending exposes a gap rather than closes it. We can readily picture a world disappearing. A different relationship with that world remains harder to imagine.

disconnection.

e work's political force is therefore that of a critical interruption, not a solution. It makes a familiar arrangement difficult to inhabit without noticing it. Human here, nature there. Observer here, world there. Everything available, everything convertible into experience.

What needs defending is not a planet waiting for humanity to save it, but the conditions of shared life. Reconnection does not mean returning to some lost, harmonious whole. It means relinquishing the fantasy that the living world is an external resource and that humans are the sole authors of what comes next.

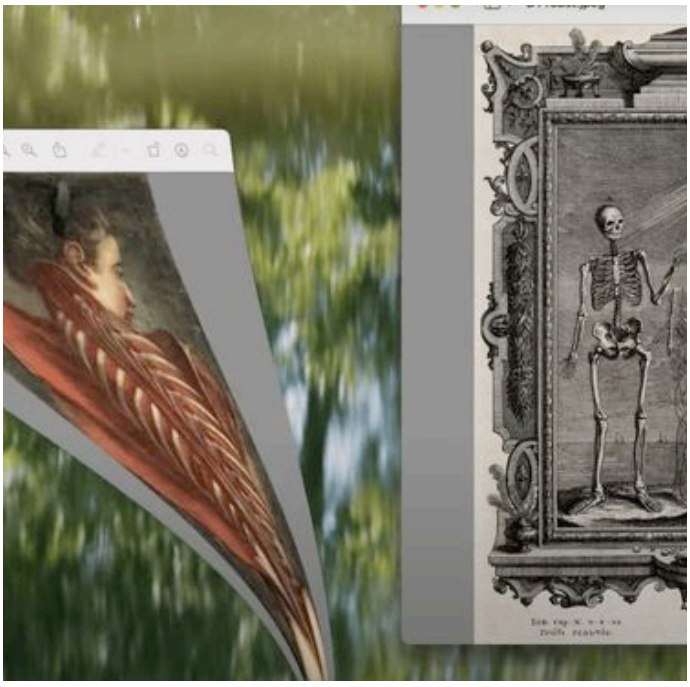
The installation does not enact that alternative. It gives the obstructing fantasy an exceptionally clear form.

Its achievement is not a lesson about melting ice. It is a masterpiece of ecological caricature: seductive, merciless and implicated in its own joke. We arrive wanting an image of the world. We use the machinery of unlimited access to consume it. Then we stand before its disappearance, wondering why connection still eludes us.

The polar bear on its little ice raft asks us to feel sorry. *The White Saboteur* asks what, exactly, we think we are doing.

Artists Barthélemy Antoine-Loeff and Hugo Arcier - The artwork was premiered at Venice Biennale 2026 - Venice Immersive

Review



Refresh Team

Entanglement
The Rhythm of Being

Review



Refresh Team

"The World Is Sleepwalking"
Scroll, Repeat, Collapse

Review

rice. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-orde



Refresh Team

sā Ladakh Biennale 2026
Regeneration at Altitude



Refresh Team

OFFSCREEN Paris 2026
The Aesthetics of Resistance

See Reviews

Your email

Subscribe to our newsletter →

rice. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-order now. November delivery- "The Protestation of ILove" Print #2 launching price. Pre-orde

Home
Statement of Intent
Contributors
Agenda
Archive
Glossary

Artists
Essays
Focus
Interviews
Reviews
Themes

Instagram
WhatsApp
Bluesky
Contact us
Submission
Advertiser

Credits
Terms & Conditions
Imprint