

# FOSSIL FREE CULTURE NL

ANNUAL REPORT  
2018



# FOREWORD

We established the Fossil Free Culture NL Foundation in December 2017. Becoming a legal entity provided accountability for our undertakings and allowed us to secure the funds that enabled us to scale up our activities in 2018. That makes the report that is now before you our very first annual report.

And what a year it has been...

In the summer of 2018, following our two-year art campaign #DropShell, the Van Gogh Museum ended its sponsorship deal with Royal Dutch Shell. But it didn't stop there. Shortly after, in what appeared to be a coordinated event, Het Mauritshuis and Museon in The Hague followed suit and likewise cut their ties with the Dutch oil giant.

#DropShell consisted of a relentless series of performances, interventions, publications, parties and public presentations. It culminated in the 2018 'Art Storm' performance series, which finally convinced the Van Gogh Museum to choose to be on the right side of history.

In the wake of this campaign victory, our work and its results received massive media attention, both nationally and internationally. We were extremely

pleased to observe that the news was covered not only by the general press but by the specialised art press as well, mobilising the arts and art communities. The media attention contributed to firmly cementing the term 'artwashing' in the public consciousness while invigorating the debate on the unethical nature of fossil fuel sponsorship of the cultural sector. The number of cultural institutions accepting the ill-gained profits from the ecocidal fossil fuel industry is increasingly declining.

We can safely say that the cultural pillar of support for fossil fuel companies is wavering.

When the media storm subsided again, we took some time to collectively reflect, capture the lessons learned from the past art campaign and recalibrate strategy accordingly. We carefully explored new opportunities and selected our new target: Het Concertgebouw (Royal Concert Hall). We also examined our organisational structure, since it had become evident that we were operating under capacity. We are now designing and trying out a new organisational model based on the 'snowflake-model'. We are also engaging more and more in collaborations with other grassroots climate initiatives and progressive cultural organisations.

We are very excited about our next art campaign #FossilFreeMuseumplein, calling for a fossil-free Museum Square by 2020 in the heart of the city of Amsterdam, the Dutch capital city. We delivered a pre-announcement performance at the beginning of this year to let them know that we are coming.

The successes of 2018 have given rise to a vigorous, vibrant, and resilient Fossil Free Culture community in the Netherlands, with many artists and cultural institutions joining in the fight for climate justice. We cherish and nurture these connections, and together we will win.

"With the whole world at stake, the fossil fuel age must be brought to an immediate screeching halt".

# FOSSIL FREE CULTURE NL

We are a collective working at the intersection of art and activism. Through the creation of disobedient art performances in cultural institutions that accept fossil fuel funding, we aim to erode the public image of fossil fuel corporations.

Our goal is to establish oil and gas sponsorship as morally unacceptable for cultural institutions; parallel to tobacco but far exceeding its toxicity –undermining not only individual human health but degrading the collective future of all life on Earth.

## **Vision**

We envision a fossil free future based on the intersectional equality of all species and beings. We believe art has an essential role to play in realising this possible future, by sculpting its image into people's minds.

## **Mission**

Our mission is to terminally erode the fossil fuel industry's social license to operate. We believe that eradicating fossil fuel sponsorship from the cultural sector is a necessary step towards making space for, and concretely start building a fossil free future.

We embrace a vocal, vigorous, public, boundary-pushing role and responsibility as artists in the face of the climate crisis and consider it our duty to liberate the arts from the influence of profoundly unethical corporations.

## **Background**

Fossil Free Culture NL was founded in 2016 by a group of artists, activists, researchers and cultural workers committed to cutting the ties between fossil fuel companies and public cultural institutions.

In the two years to date, we created six disobedient art performances inside the Van Gogh Museum and three interventions in the public domain; all of which challenging the museum's acceptance of Shell sponsorship. At the same time, we worked to invigorate discussion in the Netherlands and beyond on the subject of unethical sponsorship, specifically on the concept of 'artwashing'.

# RESULTS 2018

In August 2018, the Van Gogh Museum dropped Shell as a sponsor after an 18-year partnership. In the weeks immediately following, and in apparent coordination, two further major cultural institutions in The Hague, Mauritshuis and Museon, severed their ties with Shell as well.

In the sum period that Fossil Free Culture NL has been active, several other cultural institutions also chose to quietly cut ties with fossil fuel companies: The Tropenmuseum and Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra both dropped Shell, while Rijksmuseum dropped Saudi Aramco.

Disobedient art is at the core of our work. However, we also engage in other activities that aim at:

Creating a vibrant community of artists, cultural workers and activists willing to participate in the disobedient performances and all other events.

Building a support network in the arts and cultural sector in the Netherlands and abroad. We collaborate with progressive cultural institutions to generate public debate on the subject of unethical fossil fuel sponsorship.

Shifting the public opinion about oil-sponsorship in the arts by generating media attention. In 2018, [The New York Times](#), [The Art Newspaper](#), [El Pais](#), [Volkskrant](#) and [Het Parool](#) published articles about us. Art magazines, including [Hyperallergic](#) and [Artforum](#), widely covered the news about the end of Shell sponsorship by the Van Gogh Museum further igniting the public debate around unethical oil and gas sponsorship within the international cultural sector.

We have developed a holistic methodology consisting of interconnected activities that include performances, interventions, leaflets, videos, photographs, objects, texts, etc.

In the following pages, we will outline the work we made in 2018.



# SHELL'S DIRTY HANDS

May 3, 2018  
The Van Gogh Museum  
Performance

A mournful line of black-clad performers walked towards the entrance of The Van Gogh Museum. One by one, they placed their oil-black handprints on the glass facade to make Shell's dirty grip on our culture visible.

The museum easily removed these marks from its façade, while Shell's enduring stains on the planet still remain present.

This performance marked the start of the 'Art Storm' series of three performances .







# SHELLS EVERYWHERE

May 15, 2018  
The Van Gogh Museum  
Intervention

Fossil Free Culture NL installed four hundred eleven scallop shells in the Van Gogh Museum. Each one marked with a hand-painted 'carbon-black' stain. Four hundred eleven shells symbolised the average concentration of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere that day, which in April 2018 topped 411 parts per million; 61 more than our planet and our life support systems can sustain. A dark stain is spreading on our future.

By hiding these stained shells inside the museum, Fossil Free Culture NL denounced Shell's responsibility in causing climate change, and the complicit role of the Van Gogh Museum for sanitising Shell's public image.







# END THE FOSSIL FUEL AGE NOW

June 9, 2018  
The Van Gogh Museum  
Typographic installation, performance

A female performer positioned herself on the monumental staircase of the Van Gogh Museum's main building, ready to declaim the collective's newly penned manifesto. As her words rang out, others hung long paper banners from the balustrades one by one. Only after the declamation was complete, was the full text legible: END THE FOSSIL FUEL AGE NOW.

The typographic work of artists such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer inspired the presentation of the manifesto. At the same time, a 'banner drop' technique was applied to reveal the work.

This performance marked the closure of the "Art Storm" series, which led to the termination of Shell sponsorship by the Van Gogh Museum.





Terug naar de basis  
Back to Basics



# MANIFESTO

We, Fossil Free Culture NL, call upon every cultural institution that accepts fossil fuel sponsorship to immediately cut their ties with this catastrophic industry.

The climate crisis is the biggest existential challenge humanity has ever consciously had to face. Its likelihood has been cemented by decades of climate denial; paid for and promoted by fossil fuel companies. Artists, critics and cultural institutions must recognise and act upon the fact that the planet and its life support systems are collapsing all around us in the hands of unrestrained fossil capital.

We are extremely fucking angry. And deeply scared.

The climate crisis fuels and aggravates myriad other structural crises, deepening inequality, injustice, racism, and exploitation. With the whole world at stake, the fossil fuel age must be brought to an immediate screeching halt.

1. We believe in the transformative power of art. Artists have the capacity to envision other worlds and to devise the tactics that can make those worlds a reality.

2. We believe artists, cultural workers and institutions must respond with courage to the situation at hand. Our role is core to exposing and countering the very real possibility of climate collapse.

3. We must resist the appropriation of cultural heritage by oil and gas corporations to decorate the name of their profit addicted death cult.

4. We call for eradication of all opportunities for the fossil fuel industry to pimp their image using their toxic profits. Banning art-washing and all other image sanitising strategies is crucial to dismantling fossil power.

5. We commit to eroding the social license that fossil fuel corporations rely on to criminally prolong their catastrophic business practices, annihilating our future in the process.

6. We commit to jamming closed the revolving door that fossil fuel lobbyists use to move between business, political and cultural sectors, pedalling their poisonous influence.

7. We call upon our cultural institutions to choose for the right side of history; to cut all ties now with fossil fuel corporations, or be branded accomplices and share their lasting guilt.

Cultural institutions that fail to liberate themselves from the influence of this ecocidal industry shall receive a relentless series of reputation corroding performances on the subject, wherever and whenever they may cause the most embarrassment.

We're not joking.

# SUBVERTISING

2017-2018

Leaflets (selection)

For each of our performances, we subvertise the printed communication of the institution we target, producing alternate versions of these materials to distribute during performances and at art events. By copying their design, we find another creative way to insert our story into the official one and thereby questioning it.





# THE CLOSING PARTY

September, 2018  
The Van Gogh Museum  
Performative finissage of the 'Drop Shell' art campaign



In August 2018, the Van Gogh Museum ended Shell sponsorship. We celebrated this victory in front of the museum with a performative party and the following statement:

“Two years ago, in this museum, on this day, Fossil Free Culture NL gave their first un-announced performance: ‘On the Verge of Insanity, Van Gogh Museum and its illness’. Today, we are gathered to celebrate that the museum has been cured! It has purged itself of its toxic parasite Royal Dutch Shell!

We Fossil Free Culture call here and now on every cultural institution that accepts fossil fuel sponsorship to immediately cut ties with this catastrophic industry. We call for courage -from artists, cultural workers, and institutions alike- to work together, and boot the fossil fuel industry out of the arts.

It's time to take an ethical stand and choose for the right side of history. Today, we celebrate this victory; tomorrow, we continue to fight for our future. Together we will win!”







# THE CALLING CARD

November, 2018

Intervention across the Netherlands

After the sudden news of the ending of Shell sponsorship by the Van Gogh Museum, Mauritshuis and Museum, we visited all cultural institutions in the Netherlands that still accept Shell sponsorship:

Groninger Museum

Het Concertgebouw Amsterdam

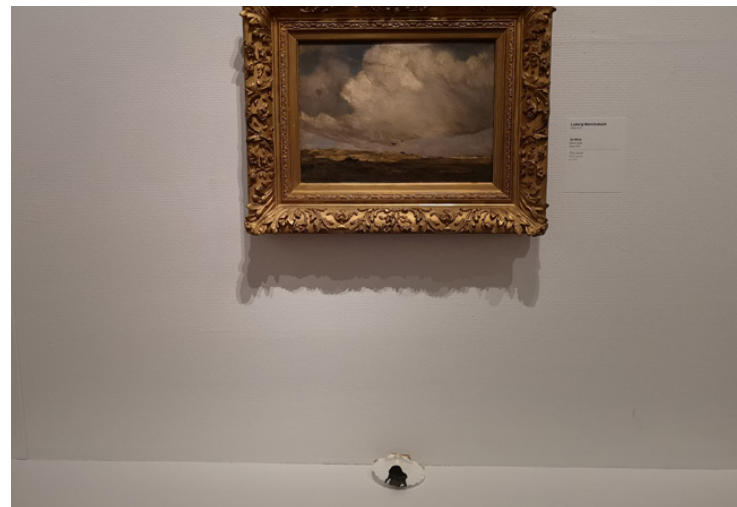
Rijksmuseum Boerhaave

Drents Museum

NEMO Science Museum

We delivered our calling card: oil-stained scallop shells to expose Shell's influence on these public institutions and to firmly request the immediate end of fossil fuel sponsorship.

This intervention accompanied formal letters of request to all institutions mentioned above.









# DIY DISOBEDIENT KIT

December, 2019  
Mixed media

The DIY Disobedience KIT was created for This Art Fair 2018 and is a collection of residues from Fossil Free Culture NL's Art Storm, three performances created in the spring of 2018; the disobedient weather event that finally ousted Shell from their prized perch at the Van Gogh Museum in August of the same year.

These performances were translated into objects that call on all people to take up their responsibility and make effective use of the lever of DIY disobedience to avert climate collapse. The objects transfer the possibility of future disobedient performances to their respective owners and are thereby augmenting the impact of our performances.





DIY  
DISOBEDIENCE KIT  
1.





## OTHER ACTIVITIES

### Public Presentations and Talks

Dansmakers, Amsterdam  
 Our Fossil Fabric, Leeuwarden  
 Artistic Climate Summit, Leeuwarden  
 Royal Academy of Art (KABK),  
 The Hague  
 Framer Framed, Amsterdam  
 Het X-Y Actiefonds, Amsterdam  
 VOX-POP, University of Amsterdam  
 Code Rood, Groningen  
 Occupy Museums, Free University,  
 Amsterdam  
 This Art Fair, Amsterdam  
 Patagonia, Amsterdam

### Collaborations

Within the Dutch climate movement,  
 we collaborate regularly with Fossilvrij  
 Nederland and Code Rood.

We increasingly collaborate with  
 international partners:  
 BP or not BP? (UK)  
 Culture Unstained (UK)  
 Libérons le Louvre (FR)  
 Art not Oil (UK)  
 Stopp oljesponsing av Norsk Kulturliv  
 (NO)



### Workshops

Code Rood, Groningen  
 Framed Framer, Amsterdam

# ORGANISA- TION

## **Board**

We established the Fossil Free Culture NL Foundation in December 2017 to support the activities of the collective.

The board is composed by:  
Merel Willemsen – Chairwoman  
Independent art historian, researcher and curator.  
Liset Meddens – Secretary  
Director Fossielvrij NL.  
Hugo Suidgeest – Treasurer  
Independent accountant.

## **Core team and network**

We are a core team of five women working with Fossil Free Culture NL.

We identify as an intersectional, queer, feminist collective that comes from migrant and sexual minority backgrounds. We are committed to working towards climate justice.

Additionally, we work with a network of volunteers of roughly 150 people, formed by activists, artists, cultural workers and anyone willing to participate in our performances.

# CONTACT

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