



Anne de Carbuccia photographing one of her staged "TimeShrines" on the receding Morteratsch Glacier in Switzerland.

This Fragile Land

From Antarctica to the Amazon, photographer Anne de Carbuccia creates beautiful and unsettling portraits of the planet's most endangered places.

by Austin Merrill

EARLY ONE MORNING in September 2013, the environmental artist Anne de Carbuccia arrived at the northern end of Lake Powell, in Utah, armed with a camera, an hourglass, and a model of a human skull. She collected some flowers, shells, driftwood, and a cow skull and arranged them with the other items to create a shrine at the lake's edge. She made a photograph of the scene, with the watermarks on the sandstone shore in the background showing how low the lake had gotten because of drought.

Soon after, de Carbuccia traveled to the Amazon and Antarctica to make images of similar shrines, each meant to deliver a warning about the precarious

state of our natural environment. "When I came back I realized I had a story," she says. "I felt like I had some sort of mission."

This was the start of *One Planet One Future*, de Carbuccia's ongoing series of photographs made to raise awareness of the many threats that humans pose to our environment and to our own existence. De Carbuccia, who had focused on video work before expanding into still photography, has documented starfish in the Tobago Cays Marine Park in the southern Grenadines, sun bears in the Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center in Cambodia, a snow

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leopard at the Center for Species Survival at Parco Faunistico La Torbiera in Italy, and more. For each photo she arranged a temporary shrine—she refers to these installations as “TimeShrines.” The story told by each striking picture is of a man-made march toward destruction.

De Carbuccia’s technique borrows heavily from *vanitas*, an art genre that was popular in the 17th century in Europe. Typical *vanitas* still-life paintings featured musical instruments, goblets, jewelry, time pieces, and skulls—objects intended to represent the arts, pleasure, and wealth, along with the ephemeral nature of these pursuits and of life itself.

Pulling these antique symbols into the age of digital photography means getting away from paintings that give viewers the impression of having sneaked into the dusty study of an intellectual, where melted candles, crumpled books, clocks, and violins are piled together in a disheveled heap and left to their actual and symbolic decay. The hourglasses and skulls in the photographs have clearly been arranged with painstaking care and stand in stark relief to their natural surroundings. De Carbuccia, who is French-American and lives in Milan and New York

The photographer and her work *Guardian Penguins* in her studio and gallery space in New York’s Greenwich Village.

City, says that her photography is “not made to please you. It’s made to seduce you—that’s the only way forward. It’s a symbol of choice between a positive, concerted life and a vain life.”

De Carbuccia is resolute in her belief that small communities are best positioned to inspire us to action in the face of the looming catastrophic collapse of our environment. She was inspired by the townspeople she met in Mexico on a trip late last year—regular people upon whom climate change is exacting an immediate and devastating toll, even as they work tirelessly to fortify their natural surroundings and fight for the health of their environment. She has taken to calling people like this “earth protectors.” She meets them on all her expeditions, and her work is an attempt to amplify those local movements the world over.

In the Yucatán, she donned her scuba gear to photograph a pregnant bull shark swimming toward the shrine she had built. She also made an image of sargassum seaweed, which had overwhelmed the beaches around Tulum, posing a threat to the local economy and marine life all at once. Many experts attribute the influx of the algae to rising ocean temperatures and pollutants in the water.

“It’s killing the dolphins, it’s killing the turtles, it’s asphyxiating the reef because no light can get through,” she says.

Last year she screened *One Ocean*, a related short documentary she made, at the 75th Venice International Film Festival. In June, some of her work will be exhibited in Florence during Pitti Immagine Uomo, the international menswear show. De Carbuccia sells framed prints for up to \$26,000 each from her studio and gallery space on the western edge of Greenwich Village.

“No guns or drones or walls are going to protect one part of the planet from the other. We’re going to have to find solutions, and we’re not doing that, for the moment,” she says. “I want to be, in my own little way, part of the systemic change. To get to a higher consciousness. Because as a species we will have choices to make on what direction we want to take.”