



THE EDGE OF THE EARTH

CLIMATE CHANGE IN PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO

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LISTEN TO THE LANDSCAPE



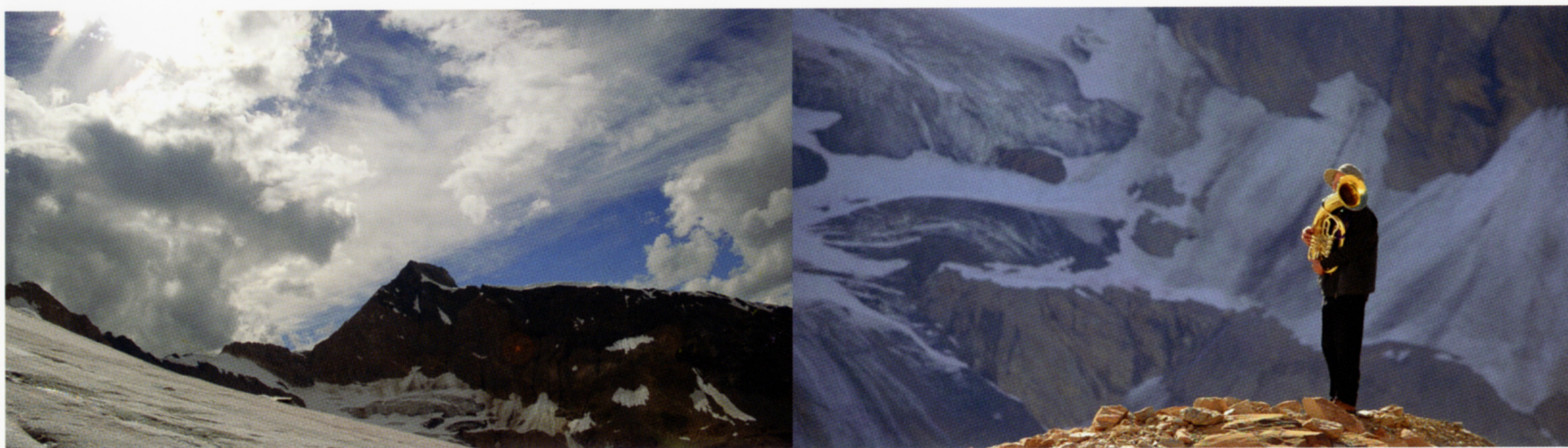
Documentation view of site specific performance for Paul Walde's *Requiem for a Glacier*
at Farnham Glacier, British Columbia, Canada, 27 July 2013



Paul Walde, *Requiem for a Glacier*, 2012–2014
still from 2-channel video installation with sound



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Since the late nineteenth century, landscape and expeditionary photographers have nailed their flag to the mast of the environmental cause. Subsequent narratives may sometimes have overrated the protective agency of images, but Carleton Watkins' 1861 views from the Yosemite Valley and William Henry Jackson's 1871 pictures from Yellowstone—to take two examples—successfully argued for their subjects' vulnerability, thus aiding political campaigns for their preservation by illustrating the need to put territories like these out of harm's way.

Paul Walde's video *Requiem for a Glacier* is the outcome of an expedition to Farnham Glacier (Qat'Muk) in British Columbia's Purcell Mountains, which the artist undertook alongside 50 musicians, singers and volunteers. At first sight *Requiem* appears rooted in a more romantic artistic tradition of rendering nature and the sublime; but in fact the feat reflects a more active agenda, ultimately closer to those of its illustrious American photographic forebears. Walde created a score by converting weather statistics and data from the glacier into musical notation, and in late July 2013 the participants in this extraordinary climbing venture performed the music out on the ice. The libretto is a Latin adaptation of a press release, announcing the provincial government's approval of an enormous resort project planned for nearby and seen by many as a threat to the site's fragile equilibrium. The four-movement oratorio lends a disturbing solemnity to the occasion, and an awesome quality residing less in the sublime hostility of the glacier than in the premonition of its inexorable disappearance. Unquestionably, images of such splendour now speak less of nature's resilience than of the fragility of a colossus with feet of clay. As a genre, classical landscape representations have weakened considerably as a method for endorsing the defense of the earth.

Walde conducted *Requiem for a Glacier* solely for the site itself, with no immediate audience and in a context of dramatic, ceremonial intimacy between the team and the setting. Resounding over this expanse of ice, so long considered eternal, the brass and percussion sections merge intensely, yet fleetingly, with the voice of soprano Veronika Hajdu. Since the 2013 performance, and with social network mobilization of the event and video by scientific circles, the public and advocates for the Jumbo Wild campaign, the resort project seems at this writing to be headed for shutdown. The cause needs powerful symbols, and this one—performers offering their art to the majesty of the glacier—is truly redoubtable.