

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PETROCHEMICAL AMERICA: *From Cancer Alley to Toxic Valley*

SPACE gallery

[812 Liberty Avenue](#)

September 27 – October 7

Beaver Station Cultural & Event Center

[250 East End Avenue](#)

October 15-20

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PITTSBURGH, Pa., (Sept. 14, 2017) – Will Pittsburgh forget the lessons learned from its toxic past in writing the next chapter for its future?

Organizations concerned about the region’s air quality, environment and future have come together to present a multimedia exhibition that draws on the parallels of the environmental degradation of Louisiana’s “Cancer Alley” – and that region’s reputation for having one of the highest rates of cancer in the country – and petrochemical development in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Allegheny County ranks third worst out of all 3200 counties nationally for cancer risk due to point source pollution. What happens when a new health-impacting industry adds to this heavy burden?

This exhibition draws on the book “*Petrochemical America*” by Richard Misrach and Kate Orff (New York: Aperture, 2012) and *Petrochemical America: Project Room*, an exhibition held at Aperture Foundation in New York City in 2012. The exhibit pairs the drawings of landscape architect Kate Orff of SCAPE Studio with images from the Photographers of the Marcellus Shale Documentary Project, audio recorded by Public Herald and a selection of documentary films that relate a unique narrative of the people who live in the midst of this polluting industry. Carnegie Mellon University's CREATE Lab will introduce interactive visualizations that will allow people to explore the EPA's National Air Toxics Assessment Toxic Release Inventory; this will assist in making tangible the breadth and scale of toxic chemicals and highlight known carcinogens from industrial sources in the U.S.

This show is curated by Sophie Riedel in collaboration with CMU's CREATE Lab, Clean Air Council, Beaver County Marcellus Shale Awareness Committee and PennFuture through the Air Quality Collaborative.

“I was deeply moved by the haunting photographs of the Louisiana bayou, the Ecological Atlas created by Kate Orff and the profound story they weave,” says Sophie Riedel, curator. “Our goal is to bring their analysis of this stretch of the Mississippi River into conversation with the development of possibly four to five cracker plants in the Ohio River Valley.”

The two-week exhibit will open in downtown Pittsburgh’s SPACE gallery, Sept. 27-Oct. 7, and move to the Beaver Station Cultural & Event Center for a second showing Oct. 16-20. Three events are planned in Pittsburgh and one is planned in Beaver, Pa.

September 27 – 5:00 to 8:00 pm

Opening Reception with Wilma Subra

October 4 – 3:30 to 6:00 pm

Regional Visioning Session. Elected officials and the public are invited to a conversation around a healthier economic future.

October 7 – 5:30 - 8:00 pm

Closing Reception with Gena Wirth of SCAPE Studio
Bus Tour of the Petrochemical Plant in Potter Township

October 16

Opening Cocktail Reception with Sandra Steingraber
Beaver Station Cultural & Events Center

Petrochemical America hopes to engage citizens of SWPA in a deeper conversation and actions around our right to clean air and water in Pennsylvania.

Please contact AQC to arrange for interviews with Ms. Riedel or the speakers.

Reservations for all events are required through Eventbrite:

<https://petrochemicalamericaaqc.eventbrite.com>

Facebook @PetrochemicalAmerica

About Sophie Riedel, Curator

Sophie Riedel has devoted her career to community activism and environmental justice issues. Her recent work has focused on the relationship between infrastructure and the social dynamics of landscape. A recent graduate of the School of Architecture at Carnegie Mellon University, she has collaborated with CMU's CREATE Lab and engaged with several regional environmental advocacy groups on campaigns. Regional projects include Re-Imagine Beaver County and the Public Herald's investigation of the DEP's handling of oil and gas industry complaints. Ms. Riedel is currently creating data visualizations on regional air quality for the Heinz Endowments. Her collaboration with StudioGRUBER

for the project "Hiding in Plain Sight," a public art piece, will be featured at Liberty and Wood Streets this fall.

About Wilma Subra, Scientist and Environmentalist

Wilma Subra is an environmentalist, chemist and president of the environmental consulting firm, Subra Company, based in Lafayette, La. She has spent more than 30 years helping ordinary citizens to understand, cope with and combat toxic chemicals in their communities. Dozens of toxic sites across the state of Louisiana have been cleaned up as a result of her activity. Subra works with families, nonprofit groups, universities, and government agencies to test soil and water, to interpret test data, and to advocate for political and regulatory reform. Among her many campaigns, she worked with citizens of Grand Bois, Louisiana, the EPA, and the Federal Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry to close an open, oil field waste dump that has compromised the health of local residents. Dr. Subra received a MacArthur Fellow "Genius Award" in 1999.

About Gena Wirth. SCAPE

Gena Wirth is Design Principal at SCAPE. Trained in landscape architecture, urban planning and horticulture, she draws from her interdisciplinary training to create ecologically rich and culturally relevant landscapes from the infrastructural scale to the site level.

About Sandra Steingraber, Author and Activist

Biologist, author, and cancer survivor, Sandra Steingraber, Ph.D., writes about climate change, ecology, and the links between human health and the environment. Steingraber's highly acclaimed book, *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment*, was the first to bring together data on toxic releases with data from U.S. cancer registries and was adapted for the screen in 2010. In 2012, she became the co-founder of New Yorkers Against Fracking, a statewide coalition of more than 280 grassroots organizations. Dr. Steingraber is currently a Distinguished Scholar in Residence at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York. She received The Heinz Award in 2011.

About the Photographers of the Marcellus Shale Documentary Project

Since 2012, the photographers of the Marcellus Shale Documentary Project – Noah Addis, Nina Berman, Brian Cohen, Scott Goldsmith, Lynn Johnson and Martha Rial – have aspired to tell the complex story of Marcellus Shale gas drilling in Pennsylvania. They have traveled across the Commonwealth, meeting people and listening to and visually recording their stories, reaching out to farmers, homeowners, and tenants; medical practitioners, engineers and legal professionals; casual protesters and full-blown activists; to people who feel they have benefited from gas drilling, and to those who feel they have been victimized; to people whose lives have been forever changed, for better and for worse. The exhibit has traveled widely and has been visited by well over 25,000 people. The project has been made possible with the support of The Sprout Fund, The Pittsburgh Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, The William Penn Foundation, The Donald and Sylvia Robinson Foundation, Josh Whetzel, Nancy Bernstein, and Cathy Raphael.

Films

The Petrochemical America event will include documentary film screenings:

Fenceline: A Company Town Divided: A modern David and Goliath story, the film shows how one small community and one large corporation have struggled to come to terms.

Living Downstream: Based on the acclaimed book by ecologist and cancer survivor [Sandra Steingraber, Ph.D.](#), the film follows Steingraber during one pivotal year as she travels across North America, working to break the silence about cancer and its environmental links.

Triple Divide: This film speaks to the controversial subject of fracking, addressing both sides of the issue. It features exclusive interviews with industry, experts and Americans suffering in the wake of shale gas development.

Images Attached:

*Photo: From Pipe to Plastic Bag, Petrochemical America by Richard Misrach and Kate Orff.
Exhibit Curator, Sophie Riedel*