

Bringing to Light Alchemyverse

A geological impulse permeates the practice of Alchemyverse and their installation at ISCP, *Messa in Luce*, is a prime specimen for study. The work developed out of a 2022 trip to the Atacama desert in Chile, a location that geologists, climate scientists, and geoengineers treat as a specimen itself. The Atacama has the least rainfall, the most cloudless days, making it the driest, sunniest, clearest sky site on the globe. Here scientists study rocks for comparison with life on Mars, astronomers build their observatories, solar engineers build energy farms, and the mining industry extracts widely-used elemental metals such as copper and lithium which we depend on for electrical conductivity and battery power.

The duo's pairing of ceramics and acoustics—initially seeming an odd match—act as two lenses that when combined provide a fuller understanding of deep time that exceeds simple addition, akin to the clarity of binocular vision. Clay conjures messiness, the artisanal, and weight, and sound practice contrarily evokes the immaterial, technological, and fleeting. Alchemyverse roots each practice in research-based field work, the most basic element of geology, thus connecting them. However, these two media, one of the oldest human technologies and one rapidly advancing and relentlessly upgrading its equipment, both uniquely record geological events.

Messa in Luce's tablets, made from clay dug from a river in the driest place on Earth, fired in another excavated hole, become models of the geologic process of deposition, sedimentation, and erosion—compressed in time and scale. Mountains are worn away over the millenia by wind and water, dispersed and transported by particles that fall from suspension to rest. The particles settle into their new home, say a riverbed, and are buried, compressed, heated and hardened. Eventually, they are pushed back up by the force of tectonic plates, eroded again, or pulled back into the ocean and conveyed into a subduction zone, heated and melted into molten rock in the earth's depths, waiting to erupt to the surface in volcanic activity. Either way, the land's particles cycle: they move and disperse with water, compress and harden with heat, and then crumble and wear away again. Alchemyverse's ceramic process accelerates and narrows this geologic sequence, aligning it with human time and scale, mapping it along a desert journey.

The Atacama region's major forces of erosion, wind and water, travel in visible waves, which Alchemyverse captures through acoustic recordings. They weave together the babbling of a stream, humming wind, the clink of a metal on crystal salt, and buzz of solar activity into a multisensory flow. Vibrating through the suspended tablets, like ancient bells, and through an elevated floor, the sounds, acoustic and haptic, remind us of the earth's constant motion. Most of this oscillation occurs beyond human perception—in wavelengths outside the visible spectrum and frequencies above and below our audible range. *Messa in Luce* draws the focus downward, to a literally shifting ground whose rate of movement is imperceptible to human senses, save the errant earthquake, an event that marks both the land and our historical record.

Significantly, their installation is accompanied here by supplemental material, photographs and writing, that document their research and offers glimpses of their process. Here, in a departure from much of the Land Art of the 60's and 70's, local and Indigenous guides are named and cited as facilitators and knowledge bearers. Alchemyverse's practice also includes drawings, prints, photo collage, and the newer technology of photogrammetry (the use of photo data to create a three dimensional model) which provide not only scientific context but social and historical grounding. Future displays of this material will likely shed more light on Alchemyverse's engagements with natural history, the history of science, and environmental activist practices. This iteration of *Messa in Luce* can be considered a surface sample that belies the complexity of the depths below, which will surely be unearthed with time.

Informed by scientific research and fieldwork, *Messa in Luce* can be considered an implicit rather than explicit form of environmental activism. Alchemyverse foregrounds observation and slowness not only as scientific and aesthetic methodology, but also as a holistic way of being in the world and facing the calamity of contemporary social and environmental conditions. Their work's pace and focus on deep time resonates with a "politics of patience" that anthropologist Arjun Appadurai describes in his analysis of deep democracy, a process that accounts for compromise, accommodation, and accumulative gains in the face of the current neoliberal global order and its accompanying climate crisis. The way to break the current cycle and trajectory of our colonialist capitalist-fueled global calamity is not a quick fix. It will be sustained and slow. So take a seat and spend some time thinking about it, being with that knowledge, listening to the Earth's vibrations.¹

Jess Wilcox, exhibition curator, June 2023

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¹Scientists are studying synchronicities between human heart rates, brain waves and electromagnetic frequencies in the Earth's atmosphere. The Schumann Resonances are regular low frequency waves that correspond with lightning strikes throughout the globe and are sometimes referred to as the earth's "heartbeat." Perhaps then "tuning in" to the Earth's pulse can help regulate human emotions and behavior.