

Press release



Prix Pictet and Paris Photo present *Far East, Far West* by 2008 laureate Benoit Aquin at an exclusive viewing of the Prix Pictet exhibition – *Earth* at the Passage de Retz in Paris

Prix Pictet and Paris Photo are pleased to announce a special event on Thursday 19 November 2009 at Passage de Retz in Paris. A private guided viewing and a reception, which are part of the VIP events of Paris Photo, will take place to celebrate the last week of the Prix Pictet 2009 – *Earth* exhibition at Passage de Retz, and the launch of Prix Pictet 2008 laureate Benoit Aquin's first book *Far East, Far West*. There will also be a special exhibition of photographs by Benoit Aquin featured in *Far East, Far West*.

The Prix Pictet is an annual search for photographs that communicate powerful messages of global environmental significance under a broad theme. This year that theme is 'earth'. At the Passage de Retz on 22 October 2009 **Kofi Annan**, Nobel Laureate and former Secretary General of the United Nations, awarded the 2009 Prix Pictet to British based photographer **Nadav Kander**. At the same time the Partners of Pictet & Cie awarded a photography commission to the American photographer **Ed Kashi**. To complete the Commission Ed Kashi will visit Madagascar where Pictet are supporting the work of the UK charity Azafady

Nadav Kander was nominated for his series of photos, *Yangtze, The Long River Series, 2006-07*, documenting the rapidly changing landscape and communities of China's Yangtze River, from its mouth to source. He was one of twelve outstanding photographers on the shortlist for this year's Prix Pictet. The other artists are Darren Almond, Christopher Anderson, Sammy Baloji, Edward Burtynsky, Andreas Gursky, Naoya Hatakeyama, Ed Kashi, Abbas Kowsari, Yao Lu, Edgar Martins and Chris Steele-Perkins. Their work is now show at Passage de Retz until 22 November.

Making the formal presentation at the opening of the exhibition, Kofi Annan, honorary president of the Prix Pictet said that the photographs were a compelling call for action to tackle climate change, the most serious humanitarian and environmental challenge facing the world today:

"Only weeks separate us from the decisive negotiations on climate change in Copenhagen. We are confronted with the vital need to prepare the political momentum necessary for a fair and effective post-Kyoto agreement. The images in front of us remind us of the fragility of our planet and the damage we have already done. When we see these photographs we cannot close our eyes and remain indifferent. Through our actions and voices, we must keep building the pressure to secure urgent action at Copenhagen and beyond."

The inaugural Prix Pictet was won by Benoit Aquin for his series of photographs on the *Chinese Dust Bowl*. These photographs form part of Benoit's new book *Far East, Far West* that will be launched on Thursday 19 November at Passage de Retz in Paris. *Far East, Far West* is a searing examination of one of the most critical environmental phenomena of our times: the inexorable desertification of Chinese territory. From Beijing to Kashgar, through the steppes of Inner Mongolia, Aquin has photographed desolate landscapes and captured the reality

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of people's daily lives amidst the tumultuous dust storms. At a time when the future of the environment is at stake, Aquin's work lends an equally dramatic and aesthetic perspective to the disasters and challenges that we will all have to face sooner or later.

Far East, Far West offers an insight into the measures taken by the Chinese State and the impact of such measures on various communities, notably the Uyghurs and Han in Xinjiang, affected by desertification. Benoit Aquin is renowned for his photo essays on the major humanitarian and environmental issues of our times. For many years he has collaborated with major international publications and is currently pursuing his career as artist and photographer. His work is featured in the permanent collections of several museums in Canada.

The journalist Patrick Alleyn has accompanied Benoit Aquin on his travels throughout China; his writing transports us to these infertile regions, clearly explaining the phenomenon and its humanitarian and environmental consequences. With his narrative and travel journal, the author conveys the reality of China today, vividly relating events, anecdotes, and personal observations made during his journeys to offer us a more intimate understanding of the subject. The preface of the book is written by Olivier Asselin, reputable independent filmmaker (*Un capitalisme sentimental*, *La liberté d'une statue*, *Le siège de l'âme*), and art history professor.

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Visitor information for Prix Pictet 2009

Exhibition: Prix Pictet 2009: Earth

Passage de Retz | 9 rue Charlot | 75003 Paris

23 October to 22 November 2009

Monday - Friday: 10am - 7pm | Saturday & Sunday: 10am - 8pm

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For details of 2010 international touring venues visit prixpictet.com

Notes to Editors

1. Far East, Far West

Prix Pictet 2008 laureate Benoit Aquin presents his first book *Far East, Far West*, a magnificent album on one the desertification of China. Aquin has photographed desolate landscapes and the populations who have to live in them. At a time when the future of the environment is at stake, Aquin's work lends an equally dramatic and aesthetic perspective to the disasters and challenges we will sooner or later have to face. *Far East, Far West* offers us subtle insight into the measures taken by the Chinese State and their consequences for the various communities, notably the Uyghurs and Han in Xinjiang, affected by desertification.

Benoit Aquin is renowned for his photo essays on the major humanitarian and environmental causes of our times. For many years he has collaborated with major international journals and is currently pursuing his career as a freelance photographer. His work belongs to the permanent collections of several museums in Canada. In 2008, he was the first winner of the Prix Pictet

Far East, Far West is published by Les Éditions du Passage It is 112 colour pages, in French and English, hardback, Euros 40.

2. Galerie Pangée

Benoit Aquin is represented by the Galerie Pangée. Located in Montreal, Canada, the Galerie Pangée is dedicated to showcasing Canadian and international contemporary artists. www.galeriepangee.com

3. Prix Pictet - History

Established in 2008 by Swiss private bank **Pictet & Cie**, the Prix Pictet is run by an independent company, Prix Pictet Ltd. The 2008 award generated entries from over 200 photographers from 43 countries. Prix Pictet's honorary president **Kofi Annan**, presented photographer, **Benoit Aquin**, with a prize of £60,000 in October 2008 for his series of photographs on desertification in China. **Munem Wasif** was awarded a commission to document an area of Bangladesh in which Prix Pictet's supported charity for 2008, **WaterAid**, was working. This work was first shown in London in March 2009. Exhibitions from the 2008 shortlist toured to Dubai, Thessaloniki, Hong Kong, Eindhoven, Dresden, Geneva and Bonn. The book, 'Water', is available from prixpictet.com and other outlets along with Munem Wasif's 'Saltwater Tears' and this year's book 'Earth'.

4. Prix Pictet 2009 – Earth

Prix Pictet 2009's theme is 'earth', which refers to the planet, the soil beneath our feet, the marks that man makes on the face of the land - directly through the creation of mines, toxic waste, broken urban waste lands, vast refuse dumps and blasted desert landscapes or indirectly, through the scars left by fire, flood or famine - natural disasters: earthquakes, landslides and volcanoes and the migration of displaced people. The theme last year's prize was 'water'.

5. Prix Pictet 2009 Commission

The Commission of the 2009 edition of the Prix Pictet was awarded to Azafady, an award winning registered charity in England & Wales number 1079121, partnered to an independently registered Malagasy Non-Governmental Organisation. They work on a wide range of projects in the Anosy and Androy regions of southeast Madagascar. Founded in 1994, they work with over 80 rural communities and within the urban centre of Fort Dauphin. Azafady is a development organisation that aims to: raise awareness about the plight of the Madagascan environment and the Malagasy people; to empower Malagasy people to improve their own lives and provide support to communities and threatened environments. The charity works for a better future for people, communities and the environments in which they live.

6. Prix Pictet – Executive and Secretariat - candlestar.co.uk

The Prix Pictet Secretariat is Stephen Barber, Group Managing Director, Pictet & Cie and Director, Prix Pictet and Michael Benson, Director, Candlestar – Prize Administration and Company Secretary Prix Pictet Ltd. The London based cultural consultancy **Candlestar Ltd** is the Secretariat for the Prix Pictet and the Prix Pictet Ltd. Candlestar manage the administrative, artistic, logistical and production aspects of the Prix Pictet award and its global tour. www.candlestar.co.uk

7. Prix Pictet 2009 – Jury

Benoit Aquin, photographer and winner of the Prix Pictet 2008

Jan Dalley, Financial Times, Arts Editor

Loa Haagen Pictet, Danish art historian and curator of the Pictet & Cie collection of Swiss art.

Zaha Hadid, Founding Partner of Zaha Hadid Architects

Francis Hodgson, Photography Critic, Financial Times and former Head of Photography, Sotheby's

Sir David King, former Chief Scientific Adviser to the UK Government and Director of the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, Oxford University

Fumio Nanjo, Director, The Mori Art Museum

The 2009 Prix Pictet Short list

Darren Almond (UK, 1971)

Nominated for Fullmoon, 2008–09

Almond uses the moon as his only source of light and an extensive exposure time of 15 minutes or more, to turn night into day. He creates meditative landscapes that have a unique and mysterious quality and often depicts remote geographical locations. For this series, he was especially drawn to the Yellow Mountain range, known as Xihai or Huang Shan in the Anhui province of China. The region has magnificent peaks and canyons, as well as extraordinary natural sites of Chinese spiritualism. Almond is a London-based international artist who was nominated for The Turner Prize in 2005 and is represented by the White Cube, London.

Christopher Anderson (Canada, 1970)

Nominated for Capitolio, 2008

Anderson explores the cycle of consumption, destruction, violence and political turmoil that ebbs and flows with the price of oil in Venezuela where the entire economy is built around the ever-expanding exploitation of the earth's resources. However, there is little local food available to most of the population and while a few get rich the majority are desperately poor. Anderson began his career as a war photographer. His work appears in publications as diverse as National Geographic and the fashion magazine, V. Anderson has won a Robert Capa Gold Medal and received a Pulitzer Prize nomination. He joined Magnum Photos in 2005 and is based in New York.

Sammy Baloji (Democratic Republic of Congo, 1978)

Nominated for Memory, 2006

Baloji superimposes colonial black and white archive photos, from the once Belgian run mines of Katanga in Congo, with his own colour images of today's mines and neglected infrastructure. The work references the lucrative industrial past of the area that benefited the Belgian colonizers, while its people were forced into slavery. Merging past and present Baloji exposes the cruelty of the colonial years as well as current abuses both of power and of the earth's natural resources. In 2008, Baloji participated in PICTHA! (meaning 'image' in Swahili), a project that facilitated local communities' understanding of their history through archive images and contemporary photos.

Edward Burtynsky (Canada, 1955)

Nominated for Quarries, 1991-2006

Burtynsky looks at landscape as architecture in a series of active and abandoned quarries across America, Europe and India. We are surrounded by consumer goods, and yet we are profoundly detached from their sources. Our lifestyles are made possible by industries all around the world that we take for granted and that become merely background to our existence. Burtynsky aims to show those places that are normally outside our experience but very much a part of our everyday lives. Edward Burtynsky is one of Canada's most distinguished photographers. His remarkable depictions of global industrial landscapes are in the collections of over fifty major museums.

Andreas Gursky (Germany, 1955)

Nominated for Untitled XIII, 2002

Gursky confronts the viewer with an apparently infinite landscape of garbage. From a distance this work appears abstract and colourful recalling a Jackson Pollock drip painting. Closer inspection reveals small figures desperately searching a dump in Chimalhuacán, Mexico City. Gursky often concentrates on sites of commerce and tourism, making work that draws attention to today's burgeoning high-tech industry and global markets. His subject matter ranges from the vast, anonymous architecture of modern day hotel lobbies, apartment buildings and warehouses to stock exchanges and parliaments across the globe. In contrast the people in these images eek out a living from their finds in order to survive each day. Andreas Gursky is a major artist of international standing.

Naoya Hatakeyama (Japan, 1958)

Nominated for three series: Blast, River and Tunnel

Hatakeyama's submission for Prix Pictet features underground waterways in Paris and Tokyo and a Japanese lime works. He examines the city, its past, present and future, in order to reflect on the relationship between people and their environment. In many of the works he shows hidden city spaces that are alien to most city-dwellers. By capturing the symmetry of angular reflections in dirty water, he makes the waterways beneath and on the edge of the city seem beautiful. Hatakeyama, a student of Kiyoji Otsuji, graduated from Tsukuba University in 1984. As well as participating in numerous solo and group exhibitions, Hatakeyama's photographs are found in public collections from the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo to the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Nadav Kander (Israel, 1961)

Nominated for Yangtze, The Long River Series, 2006-07

Kander has documented the rapidly changing landscape and communities of China's Yangtze River, from its mouth to source. More people live on the river's 6500km of banks than in America. However, China's current programme of development is also destroying the country's heritage and displacing many of its people. Kander is a regular contributor to many international publications, including The New York Times Magazine, for whom he recently documented 'Obama's People'. His many international awards and nominations include most recently the Silver Photographer of the Year Award at the Lianzhou International Photo Festival 08 in China.

Ed Kashi (USA, 1957)

Nominated for Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta, 2004-06

Kashi presents a graphic look at the profound cost of oil exploitation in West Africa. His work traces the fifty-year impact of Nigeria's relationship to oil and the resulting environmental degradation and community conflicts that have plagued the region. Kashi is a photojournalist, filmmaker and educator dedicated to documenting the social and political issues that define our times. Kashi's complex imagery has been recognized for its compelling rendering of the human condition, revealing his sensitive eye and an intimate relationship to his subjects.

Abbas Kowsari (Iran, 1970)

Nominated for Shade of Earth, 2007-08

Kowsari documents the annual New Year (Noruz) pilgrimage of hundreds of thousands of Iranians to the fronts of the eight-year long Iran-Iraq war. The pilgrims, often family members of the half a million soldiers who died, travel by bus from all over the country to where the fighting was the heaviest, a journey known as Rahian-e Noor or Caravan of Light. Kowsari is the senior photo editor for E'temad newspaper in Tehran. He has worked for over ten Iranian leading newspapers since graduating. Most have been closed down by the authorities and banned from publishing again. His work has appeared in several international publications including Paris Match and Der Spiegel and he has exhibited in Tehran and the French Embassy in Damascus.

Yao Lu (China, 1967)

Nominated for Mountain and Water, 2006-07

Lu's images of lush mountainous vistas swamped in mist and surrounded by sea are not what they seem. The peaks rising from the water that dwarf the tiny speck-sized boats are in fact gargantuan piles of rubbish and construction waste, by-products of China's building development, shrouded in miles of green netting. Lu uses photography to both distort the truth and represent reality while also taking the viewer back in time to when the landscape was a fertile and untouched area. Lu studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing and received a Masters of Visual Arts in photography at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia in 2000.

Edgar Martins (Portugal, 1977)

Nominated for The Diminishing Present, 2005 & 2008

In this series of photographs, Martins captures the progress of advancing forest fires in Portugal. The beautiful, painterly images show the vivid greens of vegetation about to be consumed by flames and the charred land left in their wake. The fires of 2005 and 2008 followed an extended period of drought and extreme heat that many believed to be a result of global climate change. They were also considered evidence of environmental mismanagement; much of the forest was eucalyptus, a fast-growing but extremely flammable tree that is frequently planted in reforestation projects. Martins studied photography and fine art at the Royal College of Art. He has exhibited extensively throughout Asia, America and Europe and received awards for photography and writing.

Chris Steele-Perkins (Burma, 1947)

Nominated for Mount Fuji, 2000-01

Perkins has spent much of the decade documenting Mount Fuji, an iconic symbol of Japan that has inspired many Japanese artists, most notably Utagawa Hiroshige, for his iconic series of woodblocks, *36 Views of Mount Fuji*. Mount Fuji is a national park but the surrounding area is now dominated by golf courses, resorts and scrap yards and has been used as a military testing ground. The work can be seen as a commentary on modern Japan and the erosion of natural beauty in the name of progress. Steele-Perkins is a documentary photographer who has worked in the developing world and in Britain for nearly 40 years, focusing on areas of urban poverty or sub-culture.