

PLANET BOOK

la mostra

7th July - 24th October 2021
Orto botanico
University of Padua

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If wise and peaceful aliens one day come to visit us, the first thing they will ask is how we have taken care of our planet.

PLANET BOOK la mostra. The exhibition features a selection of the most significant photographs from Planet Book, the editorial project born from collaboration between **Contrasto** and the **University of Padua**, edited by Telmo Pievani and bringing together 200 photographs commented by a group of students from the University of Padua.

Leitmotif of the sixth edition of **Risvegli**, the cultural and scientific event promoted by the University of Padua, this collective project stems from a new shared awareness that could be defined as humanistic and scientific ecologism: **humanistic**, because the interests of nature and the human species coincide completely; **scientific**, because based on evidence and the

interpretation of experimental data quantifying the changes taking place.

Adopting the point of view of millennials and post-millennials, heirs to a heavy global environmental debt with increasingly devastating effects, as demonstrated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the book recounts our dependence on our host planet and at the same time the profound transformations we have inflicted on it. The photographs are grouped according to the four elements employed by ancient philosophers to understand the world: **water, earth, fire** and **air**. The **fifth element** is us in all our ambivalence, capable as we are of admirable creative impetus and destructive impulses.

FIFTH ELEMENT

The fifth element is no less natural than the other four: it is the product of the human brain. **Science**, innovation and new discoveries will make a difference to our survival, as long as their fruits are shared and put at the service of the fight against all **inequalities**. Green building, energy efficiency in homes and offices, low environmental impact heating and transport, ecotourism, environmentally friendly-banks, bioplastics, sustainable finance, conversion of intensive livestock farming, reduction of meat consumption, transition to **100% renewable energy**, agriculture with lower water and pesticide consumption, use of plants and natural or synthetic bacteria to rehabilitate environments devastated by pollution, bio-inspired technologies, reduction of food and water waste, the circular economy and health, in situ conservation of biodiversity. Utopian? No, **it is up to us**, the self-defined sapiens.



WATER

Only **5%** of the mass of planet Earth is water. Of this, only **2.5%** is **fresh water** that we can use for industrial, agricultural and domestic purposes. Against this precious rarity and its intolerable **waste**, during the last half century the world's growing population has tripled the amount of fresh water it takes. It is estimated that **more than half a billion people** in the world are without access to safe and nearby sources of water; **one billion** are without sanitation. **Eighty per cent** of both industrial and civil water discharges are emitted **directly into the environment** without any treatment. If we continue to dump plastics in the sea at the rate of recent years, **by 2050** there will be more plastic in our oceans than fish. Finally, we have global warming, with its burden of advancing desertification, ocean acidification, coral reef bleaching and extreme weather phenomena.

AIR

We owe our survival to a thin, **fragile film of gas**, just a few tens of kilometres thick. The delicate geophysical balance that holds our atmosphere together has maintained a relatively stable temperature on the planet's surface for **millions of years**, thanks to the greenhouse effect. Then for the last couple of centuries, we, the self-professed sapiens, have been burning **fossil fuels**, taking them from the interior of the planet and releasing excess **greenhouse gases**, forcing the climate to become warmer. Intensive and extensive livestock farming releases another foul-smelling dose of greenhouse gases. **Nitrogen** and **sulphur** oxides mix with water vapour and fall back to the ground as **acid rain**. Towards 2050, we will produce something like **3.4 billion** tonnes of waste. In the meantime, our plains and cities will become unliveable **heat islands**.



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FIRE

In Siberia, **4.3 million hectares of forest are burning**, releasing into the atmosphere enormous amounts of carbon dioxide and spreading soot over the Arctic. This darkens the ice and makes it less reflective, so it absorbs more heat and melts rapidly. Australia burns for weeks as far as the eye can see, then drowns

in the **floods** that sweep across the denuded land. The Amazon rainforest is being ravaged by **gigantic fires** set by human criminals. At this rate, its atmosphere will dry up and the whole of Brazil will become a splendid **South American savannah**. China and India are burning coal as if there were

no tomorrow. After all, a few kilometres above our heads there is an **icy yawning void** without oxygen, a few kilometres below our heads there is an ocean of **fiery magma**. In between, **it's up to us**.

EARTH

Due to human activities, more than **350 species** of terrestrial vertebrates have become extinct since the 16th century and many more are in the process of **extinction**. The populations of those that still survive are declining by an average of **30%**. And extinction is one way. **The damage is forever**. The concomitant

causes of this mass extinction of terrestrial biodiversity are well known: deforestation, the spread of invasive species, human population growth, pollution, global warming and intensive exploitation through indiscriminate hunting and fishing. We are running out of fertile land as a consequence of intensive agriculture using

pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers on a massive scale. We are ravaging primary forests with **mines** in search of rare metals to use in our mobile phones and batteries. In the meantime, in anticipation of hard times, **the richest** are hoarding cultivable land.



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