There are two nuclear power plants in the vicinity of Vilnius: Ignalina (decommissioned) and Astravets (not yet operational). A third, and infamous other, is Chernobyl, eerily present following the effects of its catastrophic failure, and more recently via the popular television series that focuses on the disastrous consequences of lies and neglect. The exhibition Splitting the Atom offers insight into the different cultural contexts of these plants and their role in the global infrastructure of the nuclear cycle – from natural resource extraction to waste.

Nuclear technology was integral to the aesthetics of the Cold War; the scale and terror of the atomic bomb shaped a hypnotic image of a nuclear sublime where modern science and technology were perceived as omnipotent. By the beginning of the new millennium, evidence of everyday experience of radioactive contamination through nuclear testing, uranium mining, and colonial exploitation combined with the dangers of radioactive waste was better understood and radically influenced how artists consider nuclear aesthetics.

Today nuclear culture explores questions of deep time contamination, colonial nuclearity and radioactive waste management as well as the need to disarm. Practical concerns caused by aging technologies and radioactive waste become graver and increasingly urgent every day. While this work takes place, nuclear technologies continue to penetrate different aspects of our everyday life; and we know that radioactive fallout particles will remain across the surface of our planet forever.

Why is it so difficult to build trust in nuclear? What are the costs of energy created through nuclear fuels? What defines nuclear heritage, and what happens when radioactive waste becomes part of our culture? How are nuclear technologies part of colonial histories? These and other issues are explored in the exhibition by more than thirty artists from different countries working in the field of nuclear heritage.

Artists:

Splitting the Atom takes place at the Contemporary Art Centre and the Energy and Technology Museum in Vilnius.

Splitting the Atom was initiated by Eglė Rindzieniūtė as a parallel project to the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council networking project ‘Nuclear Cultural Heritage: From Knowledge to Practice’. The network’s partner project, ‘Atomic Heritage Goes Critical’, led by Anna Storm, will organise an international scientific conference on histories and cultures of atomic power in Vilnius and Ignalina in 2021.

The project has been developed by Virginija Januškevičiūtė and the Contemporary Art Centre in collaboration with the Energy and Technology Museum and the Nuclear Culture Research Group led by Ele Carpenter.

The essay ‘Splitting the Atom, Creating Trust’ by Paul Josephson (Colby College), Tatiana Kasperski (Pompeu Fabra University), Eglė Rindzieniūtė (Kingston University London), and Andrei Stsiapanau (Vytautas Magnus University) was commissioned as part of the project and published in collaboration with Echogonewrong.com and Artnews.lt.

Curators: Ele Carpenter and Virginija Januškevičiūtė

Exhibition architecture: Povilas Marozas
Graphic design: Vytautas Volbekas

For more details about the exhibition and daily film screenings please see the detailed exhibition guide, which you can download from both the Contemporary Art Centre’s website (cac.lt) and the project microsite splittingtheatom.cc, as well as the CAC Reading Room.

The exhibition is financed by the Lithuanian Council for Culture.
1. (Lobby) Lisi Raskin, Ignalina Heights Promotional Material, 2003/2020
2. (Knitwear for the staff) Augustas Serapinas, Yelena and Vera, 2020
3. Martin Howse, Three Day Exposure in Total Darkness, Uraninite Sample, 2016
4. Yelena Popova, One Too Many, 2018
5. Finger Pointing Worker, Pointing at Fukuichi Live Cam, 2011
6. Aimee Lax, Repository, 2020
7. Andrew Weir, Pazugoo for Deep Storage, 2018
8. Yelena Popova, Vieaginas Parquet RMBK-1500, 2020
10. Emilija Škarnulytė, Ungrounded Archive, 2020
11. Susan Schuppli, Delay Decay, 2016
15. David Mabb, Chernobyl, Ukraine; Ignalina, Lithuania; Astravets, Belarus, 2020
17. Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, Simulator/Archive, 2020
19. Erich Berger, Spectral Landscape, Kovela-REE, 2020
21. Yelena Popova, Wylfa and Sizewell (from the Petrochemical series), 2020
22. Gershom Garingarr, Jeremiah Garlingarr, Zaccheus Garlingarr, Jehosaphat Garlingarr, Bula Djang Paintings, 2016–2018
23. Alex Ressel & Kerri Meehan, Miamia Rock, 2020
24. Alex Ressel & Kerri Meehan, Living at Nabarlek, 2020
25. Alex Ressel & Kerri Meehan, Ranger Mine, 2020
26. (Atrium) Gabriella Hirst, How to Make a Bomb: Rose and Botanical Drawings, 2020
27. Screening room (in the CAC’s main gallery, the programme repeats daily:

12pm–5pm:  
Cécile Massart, Particles, 2005 (2 min 33 sec loop)

5pm–8pm:  
Ignas Krunglevičius & Siri Harr Steinvik, Is That All There Is, 2004 (8 min)
Sandra Lahire, Uranium Hex, 1987 (11 min)
Lise Autogena & Joshua Portway, Kuannersuit; Kvanefjeld, 2016 (29 min)
Mark Aerial Waller, Glow Boys, 1998 (14 min)
Mark Aerial Waller, Interview With a Nuclear Contract Worker, 1999 (9 min)
Susan Schuppli, Trace Evidence, 2016 (53 min)
Alex Ressel & Kerri Meehan, Bininj Birriyoy, 2020 (3 min 34 s)
Peter Watkins, The Journey (Resan), 1987 (14 hr film screened 45–55 min per day)
Cécile Massart, Particles, 2005 (2 min 33 s)
Energy and Technology Museum

10. Yelena Popova, *Townlet*, 2018
12. (Knitwear for the staff) Augustas Serapinas, *Yelena and Vera*, 2020