

## 180221 - ARTEFACT SYMPOSIUM - INTRO



Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning and **welcome** to the Artefact symposium “Transitioning to a low-carbon economy. The Social License to Operate for Mining and Recycling of Critical Metals”.

This symposium is **one of the highlights of Artefact**, an exhibition and festival on the crossroads of contemporary visual arts, current events and societal challenges. Artefact presents contemporary art practices that engage with complex topics that unite or divide us, such as raw earth materials.

This year’s edition of Artefact, the “rare-earth metals edition”, is **in line with our ambition to make the province of Flemish Brabant climate neutral**: to reduce the carbon dioxide emissions with 80 to 95% by 2040.

To achieve this, we support, among others, **climate projects** of citizens, enterprises, schools and civil society organizations with 500.000 euro each year. Till now, we supported 48 such climate projects for a total amount of 2,4 million euro and we’re still counting. These climate projects contribute to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions in our province and raise awareness and fuel the debate on climate issues. Till now, with these climate projects, we reduced up to 4.000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions and we reached out to 70.000 citizens in Flemish-Brabant.

This edition of Artefact is one of those climate projects that we support with 75.000 euro. Artefact is a **unique climate project**, as it is the only project that focuses on **rare-earth**

**metals** on the one hand and **feeds the debate from the perspective of the arts** on the other hand.

We believe that **the perspective of the arts is essential/indispensable** in the debate on the transition to a low-carbon economy and on rare-earth metals in particular. Artists are like seismometers. They keep us alert. They sense trends, predict them and question us. Thanks to art, we can intrigue, grasp and reflect differently on rare earth metals and the sustainability issue. Art invites us to act in an alternative way.

The artwork ***Future Fossil Spaces*** made by Julian Charrière demonstrates this very clearly. The work consists of stacks of salt bricks from the Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia, one of the largest salt pans in the world. The Salar de Uyuni attracts not only thousands of tourists every year, it holds one-third of the Earth's lithium reserves and remains largely unexploited. It is likely that this place will become the main production site of this precious element as our dependence on lithium-based technology keeps growing. Most car manufacturers for example prefer lithium-ion batteries for their hybrid and electric cars because of the high energy density and compactness. The use of electric cars on a large scale is likely to affect the beautiful Salar de Uyuni. **The artwork of Julian Charrière questions and asks for critical thinking about cleantech solutions like electric cars.**

To make the transition to a climate neutral province by 2040, we are constantly looking for cleantech solutions: solutions based on mineral raw materials. We encourage f.e. the installation of wind turbines and the use of electric cars. **Permanent magnets are essential for most electric cars and for some types of wind turbines.** The strongest commercially available magnets are permanent magnets based on rare earths. The demand for rare earths used in permanent magnets will increase, maybe even by more than 10% per year. And that throws a whole new light on wind energy and alternative mobility, doesn't it?

The examples of the *lithium-ion batteries* and the *permanent magnets* **demonstrate the importance of constantly, critically questioning and evaluating our actions**, our steps towards a low-carbon economy and our search for cleantech solutions. **They highlights the need for profound, recurring academic discussions and public debates on this topic.** And that's exactly why we are here today and what this symposium aims for. **Discussions.**

**Discussions and a critical attitude are even more necessary when realizing that raw materials are not renewable and that recycling and recovering raw materials are not the Holy Grail.** Raw materials are not renewable, but we can **recycle** them, can't we? Yes, we can. But unfortunately, recycling of several critical raw materials is economically not profitable yet. Moreover, only recycling raw materials doesn't meet the actual demand for raw materials. Recycling can therefore not completely replace **primary mining**, especially for those metals that have only recently been massively used in new (cleantech) applications. And what about **recovery**, one could ask? Recovery of metals from industrial process residues is a lesser known potential source of critical metals, but the social license to operate for recovery is also often missing.

**The social licence to operate.** What about the social license to operate for primary mining, recycling and recovering? In the North, but also in the global South, on the other side of the world? How do we ensure win-win-situations for all stakeholders/people involved?

**This is a difficult question.** And we have to be honest. Many of us worry about health and environmental effects when they affect ourselves and our environment. Most likely we don't pay attention to the health and environmental effects of our actions on people and environments on the other side of the world.

The materials used in our smartphones are a good example. One of the art works at the Artefact exhibition is ***The Congo Tribunal***. The installation involves the full-length 25h30m screenings of a tribunal in Bukavu and Berlin. It brings to us the testimonies of people involved in the civil war in Congo, a war that is based on the hunt for critical raw materials which are essential for the 21<sup>st</sup> century's technology. This installation is an eye opener, it makes us realize that the hunt for 21<sup>st</sup> century's technology affects the lives of people on the other side of the world. **Let's take their perspective and reality with us in our discussions and let's worry about their health and environment as well.**

I made my point I guess. We must keep on reflecting. We must have a critical attitude to what we are doing. We must keep the debate alive. Therefore I'm **very happy that this symposium takes place** in the context of Artefact. I would like **to thank the different partners** involved: STUK, KU Leuven, I-Cleantech Vlaanderen, EIT RawMaterials, METGrow and Leuven 2030. Thank you for joining forces today and I invite you all to keep the discussion alive after this symposium.

I wish you all a lovely and very inspiring day.

(Maybe some of you already visited the art exhibition. For those of you who didn't, you will get the chance to experience the unique, rare-earth related artwork exhibited this afternoon.)

#### **Key videos & documents Artefact Symposium (February 21, 2018)**

**Artefact Symposium testimonial video**, which integrates a large number of testimonials and diverse perspectives from the European Commission, academia, industry and civil society: [view here](#)

**All Presentations** and **> 100 photographs** (credits: Nicolas Herbots) can be downloaded through the [Artefact Symposium event page](#)