

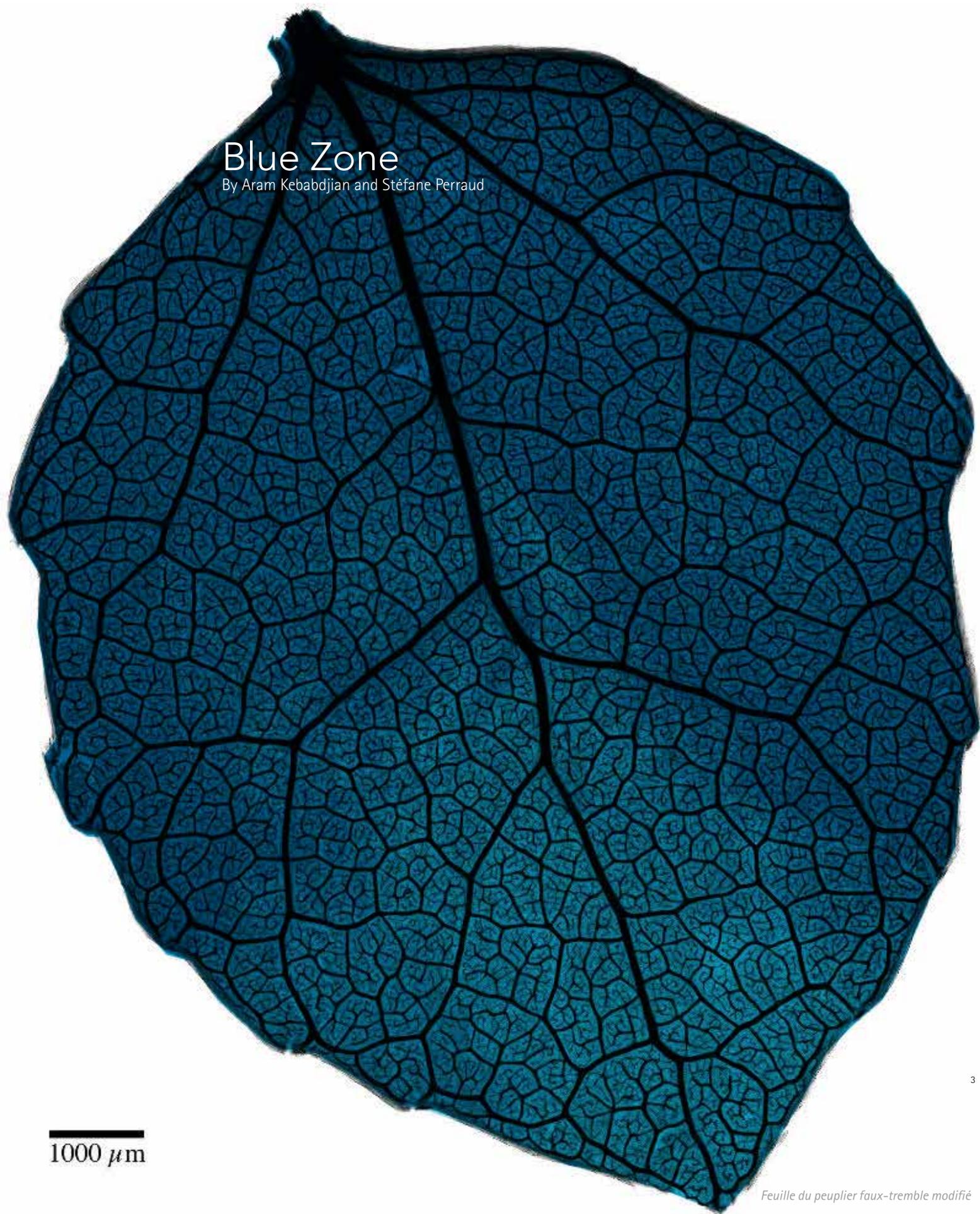


Blue Zone

By Aram Kebabdjian and Stéfane Perraud

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1000 μm

Feuille du peuplier faux-tremble modifié

Blue zone is a VR installation by Stéphane Perraud and Aram Kebedjian. At the foot of a radioactive waste package, we are invited to journey through the landscapes of ruins left by nuclear industry. Seen for the first time in Nantes from June to August 2021 as part of the Half-Life exhibition, this installation has since continued its own journey through time and space. Here is an overview of what has been said about it.

Reviews and Articles (2021–2030)

- I Press release, AFP, June 2021
- II Frédéric Joignot, 'Red alert on the Blue Zone', Le monde, 23rd July 2021
- III Juliette Ihler, 'In the shoes of a nuclear waste package', Télérama, September 2023
- IV Elise Gruau, 'In Bure, through the corridors of time' Une histoire particulière, France Culture, 6th and 7th of May 2025
- V Chantal Costes, 'An impossible return to nature', Etudes, November 2028
- VI Violaine Boutet de Monvel 'Blue Zone: an optical illusion', Art Press, March 2030
- VII Former mentions (2015–2020)
- VIII Team



I.

“Visual Artist Stéphane Perraud and writer Aram Kebedjian, have been building narrative machines together for the past few years now. Blue Zone is one of their latest creations. The reproduction to scale of a nuclear waste package from which emerges four VR headsets. Through these, one ventures into a computer-generated forest, entirely modelled in 3D, and located above a nuclear waste repository site. Past the hours, the seasons and the centuries, four characters talk us through the story of this forest today, in the year 10 000. A futurist fiction, a machine that can travel through time and landscapes, between fear and vertigo, Blue Zone questions what Man will leave behind for the thousands of years to come. You can discover the installation as part of ‘Voyage à Nantes’ this summer.

Press release, AFP June 2021



II.

“The idea of burying nuclear waste isn’t new. For the past 20 years, France, like many other countries, has begun conducting research in an underground laboratory, located in the Meuse and Haute-Marne region. The aim of which is to bury, for the 100 000 years to come, thousands of tons of toxic waste produced by our nuclear power stations. But this solution still raises many questions. In 2017, the forest situated above the repository site that was being examined by the national agency for reprocessing of nuclear waste, saw violent confrontations between activists and law enforcement officers. Four years later, the tension is still high. Blue Zone emerged from this context. It is inspired by this nuclear repository project, the people who work there and those who oppose it, by the Bois-lejuc and what is studied there. Blue Zone however, is neither an activist nor documentary piece of work according to the artists. It is the transposition of this story, set in a forest of fiction, where the voices of those who live there and those who oppose it resonate. It immerses the viewer in the story of a landscape that will be marked by nuclear technology for thousands of years to come. A frightful show, tinged with melancholy, sometimes humour and irony, this digital drama unveils a possible future, both daunting and bewildering. You come out more grounded, aware of the importance of the issue, which each one of us needs to come to terms with and tackle before it’s too late. “

Frédéric Joignot, “*Alert on the Blue Zone*”; Le monde, 15 June 2021



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III.

The installation displays a replica of the 80 000 nuclear waste packages that the french government wants to store at 500 metres bellow ground level in 2040 in Bure. This replica is partly made of argillite - a 160 million year old rock commonly mined from the depths of the earth, in order to open the way to concrete, glass, steel and radioactive materials, and for the 100 000 years to come. Inside the installation, Stéphane Perraud and Aram Kebedjian have put computers linked to VR headsets through which one can see the Blue zone. A forest, at times dark, romantic, enchanting or ravishing, entirely modelled in 3D using the software of the game Unity. “It is more flexible and more efficient than conventional filming” tells us Stéphane Perraud, “it provides Blue Zone with an image that feels more unreal the more realistic it is. For its design, we took inspiration from the Bois-lejuc, Chernobyl, the red forest from the great war, but also Pando, a clonal colony of trees that have been growing in Utah for 80 000 years. We imagined that a forest of this kind could be used to mark a nuclear repository site over time. But first and foremost, this is for us, a way to stage the strangeness of such a place.” Because this toxic forest is blue, entirely blue.

“Blue like a fairy tale, says Kebedjian, blue like the sky and the water, blue like the Novalis flower or Werther’s blue coat, like cobalt and caesium, like Prussian blue (an antidote to radioactive caesium) or like the Cherenkov effect - when radioactivity travels at superluminal speed in the water tanks of reactors - our forest is both celestial and hellish.”

Juliette Ihler, *Blue Zone: In the shoes of a nuclear waste package*, Télérama, septembre 2025



IV

“Spring 2050, an activist opposed to the nuclear waste repository project wanders around an abandoned shack in the middle of the forest. She thinks back on her years of activism and imagines her final victory. Autumn 2070, the chief engineer of the nuclear waste repository project recalls his grand-mothers garden, just a few hours before the first package is due to start its descent into the depths of the Earth. Summer 3070, a naturalist thinks back on the few blissful days spent in the Blue Zone, attempting to grasp its overwhelming charm. Winter 10 070, a horde wanders through the Blue Zone: they tell us of their lives, their rites, their beliefs and of the long-standing imperative that forbids each man to open the ground. Four seasons, four stories, four forests, that the viewer delves into through the eyes and words of those who live in this forest. This ‘Blue zone’, just like an ecstatic phantom floating in an increasingly hallucinated forest, leaves us pondering over the slow decline of our nuclear civilisation.”

Elise Gruau, *In Bure, in the corridors of time*

Une histoire particulière, France Culture, 6th and 7th of May 2025



V

The purpose of Blue Zone, is in some way, to play with the spectrum of things which radioactivity is most commonly associated. To go from feelings of catastrophism, or optimism, to more complex feelings, such as the one theorised by english and german philosophers towards the end of the XVIII century: the sublime. Violent and contrasting, this aesthetic feeling combines the fear of disappearing in the object of ones contemplation with the feeling of morally dominating this chaos by forming a representation. At a time where a return to nature seems more and more implausible, to show these landscapes of ruins, both frightful and fascinating, crossed by travellers of the Nuclear age, could be a way to reactivate this category to the point of vertigo and nausea. Immersed in this strange digital forest, entirely synthesised by virtual reality, the viewer watches the landscapes pass by, without having to move. He can see them, sense them, but his body is not present. Unable to touch, this derealisation of romantic landscapes, without mentioning its sadness, delves the viewer in an inevitable vertigo, a sign that the piece is at work.”

Chantal Costes, *An impossible return to nature*, from the magazine Etudes, Novembre 2028



VI

“Since the Renaissance, and especially since the start of our contemporary era, the scopic drive of westerners has been indulged by an invention that has never ceased to evolve until the arrival of cinema: the optical theatre or Peep show (Mondo nuovo in Italian, Gukkasten in German). At fairs of all kinds, encouraged by a hawker, people would lean in to look through a whole and see unfold, a sultan’s palace, cities from afar, or the eruption of mount Vesuvius - all these marvellous places that one could only imagine - or see through the peephole of a box. Blue Zone is one of those landscapes. Invisible landscape, unresolved landscapes, impossible landscapes - something that exceeds the threshold of imagination and that a theatre of perspectives, in order to captivate the eyes of our century, presents to us with such astonishing clarity.”

Violaine Boutet de Monvel, *Blue Zone: an optical illusion*, Art Press, March 2030

VII

Expositions :

Half-Life/Nuclear Horizons June–August 2021, Lieu Unique, Nantes

Pure Waste Biennale 1.618, at the Carreau du Temple, 31st May – 3rd June

Curated by COAL (projetcoal.fr) Lauranne Germond, Phoebe-Lin Elnan

<http://www.projetcoal.org/coal/2018/05/15/pure-waste-salon-1-618-le-carreau-du-temple/>

http://www.1618-paris.com/campaign/2018/biennale/05/FR_DossierDePresse-LaBiennale1.618_28mai.pdf

In case of emergency, Dublin Science Gallery, 13 octobre 2017–4 février 2018

<https://dublin.sciencegallery.com/2017>

Parutions/diffusion :

Laurent Diouf, *L'art du nucléaire : La beauté cachée de la radioactivité*, AS Actualité de la scénographie, 1st February 2020

Frédéric Joignot, *Cimetière radioactif à Bure, comment prévenir nos descendants ?*

Le Monde, 21st October 2017

http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/10/21/memorial-nucleaire_5204103_3232.html

Violaine Boutet de Monvel, *Paranoïa Critique : La fiction nucléaire de Stéphane Perraud et Aram Kebedjian*, presented as part of the Festival d'Histoire de l'art, Le Cyclop, Milly la Forêt, 3rd June 2017

<http://violaineboutetdemonvel.com/paranoia-critique-la-fiction-nucleaire-de-stefane-perraud-aram-kebedjian/>

Radioactiv Art, presented by Gordon Young and produced by Beatrice Pickup

2 mars 2017, sur BBC 4,

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08g7tv3>

Lauranne Germond, COAL, organised as part of the Rencontre Culture et développement durable, at the Palais de la porte dorée, 10th March 2017, p. 28

http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/content/download/166495/1864168/version/1/file/Rencon-tre%20Culture%20et%20DD_EPPPD-100317.pdf

Chelsea Sundiang, "Reading the signs", 6th January 2017, PBS

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/reading-the-signs/>

"Une "Zone bleue pour parler à nos successeurs", Les Arpenteurs :

<http://lesarpenteurs.fr/une-zone-bleue-pour-parler-a-nos-succeesseurs/>

Allison Meyer, *A Nuclear Warning designed to last 10 000 Years*

Hyperallergic, 21st July 2016

<https://hyperallergic.com/312318/a-nuclear-warning-designed-to-last-10000-years>

Michael Stothard, "Nuclear waste : keep out for 100,000 years",

Financial Times Magazine, 14th July 2016,

<https://www.ft.com/content/db87c16c-4947-11e6-b387-64ab0a67014c>

Mathilde de Buenerd : *Stéphane Perraud and Aram Kebedjian, La zone bleue*", Blog Resonate 17

<http://blog.mathildebuenerd.fr/tag/resonate17/>

VIII

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Mathieu Farnarier, Sound

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