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Climate change

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Climate worst-case scenarios may not go far enough, cloud data shows

Modelling suggests climate is considerably more sensitive to carbon emissions than thought

Jonathan Watts
@jonathanwatts
Sat 13 Jun 2020 07:00 BST

8693



▲ Experts say the projections have the potential to be 'incredibly alarming'. Photograph: Alamy

Worst-case global heating scenarios may need to be revised upwards in light of a better understanding of the role of clouds, scientists have said.

Recent modelling data suggests the climate is considerably more sensitive to

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Worst-case projections in excess of 5C have been generated by several of the world's leading climate research bodies, including the UK Met Office's Hadley Centre and the EU's Community Earth System Model.

Timothy Palmer, a professor in climate physics at Oxford University and a member of the Met Office's advisory board, said the high figure initially made scientists nervous. "It was way outside previous estimates. People asked whether there was a bug in the code," he said. "But it boiled down to relatively small changes in the way clouds are represented in the models."

The role of clouds is one of the most uncertain areas in climate science because they are hard to measure and, depending on altitude, droplet temperature and other factors, can play either a warming or a cooling role. For decades, this has been the focus of fierce academic disputes.

Previous IPCC reports tended to assume that clouds would have a neutral impact because the warming and cooling feedbacks would cancel each other out. But in the past year and a half, a body of evidence has been growing showing that the net effect will be warming. This is based on finer resolution computer models and advanced cloud microphysics.

"Clouds will determine humanity's fate - whether climate is an existential threat or an inconvenience that we will learn to live with," said Palmer. "Most recent models suggest clouds will make matters worse."

In a recent paper in the journal *Nature*, Palmer explains how the new Hadley Centre model that produced the 5+C figure on climate sensitivity was tested by assessing its accuracy in forecasting short-term weather. This testing technique had exposed flaws in previous models, but in the latest case, the

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STIEGLITZ SERIES » EQUIVALENTS

Equivalents

In the summer of 1922, Alfred Stieglitz began to take photographs of clouds, tilting his hand camera towards the sky to produce dizzying and abstract images of their ethereal forms. In an article the following year, Stieglitz maintained that these works were a culmination of everything he had learned about photography in the previous forty years: "Through clouds [I wanted] to put down my philosophy of life—to show that my photographs were not due to subject matter—not to special trees, or faces, or interiors, to special privileges, clouds were there for everyone—no tax as yet on them—free."^[1] Over the next eight years, he made some 350 cloud studies, largely produced as contact prints on gelatin silver postcard stock.

Stieglitz called these photographs *Equivalents*. More than describing the visible surfaces of things, the works could express pure emotion, paralleling the artist's own inner state. Stieglitz, along with many of the artists of his circle, argued that visual art could assume the same nonrepresentational, emotionally evocative qualities as music. Indeed, music was an inspiration for the *Equivalents*, and this is reflected in the early titles he gave them: *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs* (1922) and *Songs of the Sky* (1923). Stieglitz did not limit himself to clouds, or allusions to music, in these photographs: one notable work, *Spiritual America*, shows a close-up of the nether regions of a harnessed gelding (a castrated male horse), the image serving as a metaphor for the artist's impression of a diminished American culture in the same way that his depictions of clouds represented his emotions.

Stieglitz often presented the *Equivalents* in series or sets, recombining different groupings of prints for exhibition. Georgia O'Keeffe donated thirty of the works to the Art Institute of Chicago, including Set A, made up of eight photographs, and Set E, made up of three photographs printed from the same negative.

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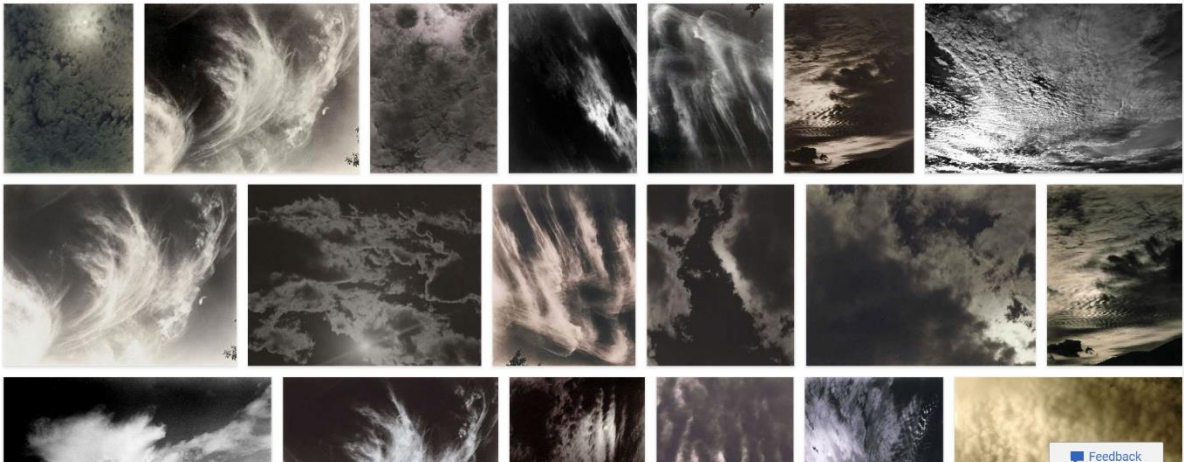
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Artist Nguyen Thi Kim Duc - A Vietnamese businesswoman who wants to see a green future and succeeded in captivating world leaders' attention on this issue at the 2019 UN Vesak festival




Called the "Cover of Future", Vietnamese artist Nguyen Thi Kim Duc used traditional Vietnamese silk, Van Gogh inspired water colors, soft but bold strokes, together with deep and lifeless colours to paint a dying tree, partly submerged in sea water. This painting depicts the devastating results of climate change - a world without green trees, animals and humans.

Using a simple painting style, Mrs. Nguyen wanted the artwork to pass from "heart to heart", relaying her love for the environment, like in Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu's words: "People rely on land, land relies on God, God relies on religion, religion relies on nature". She also wanted people to realize that the planet can only be saved if they change their wasteful and polluting habits.

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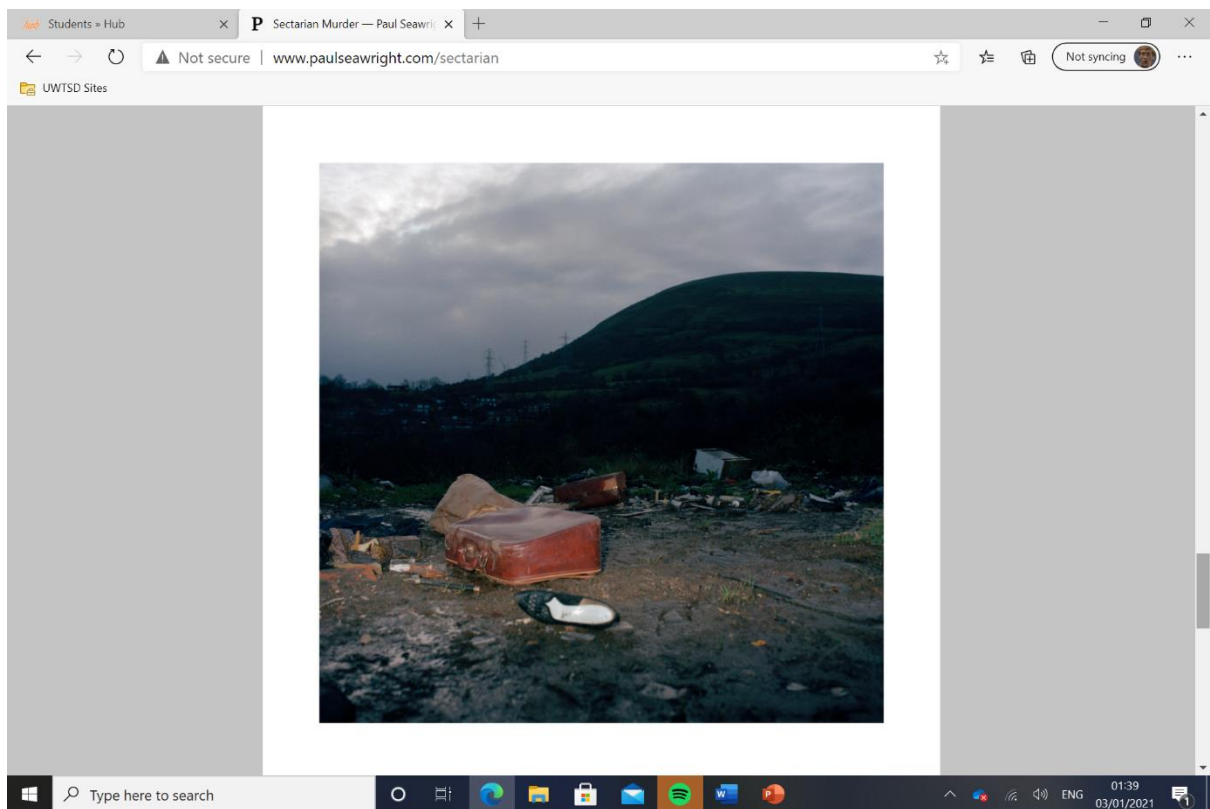
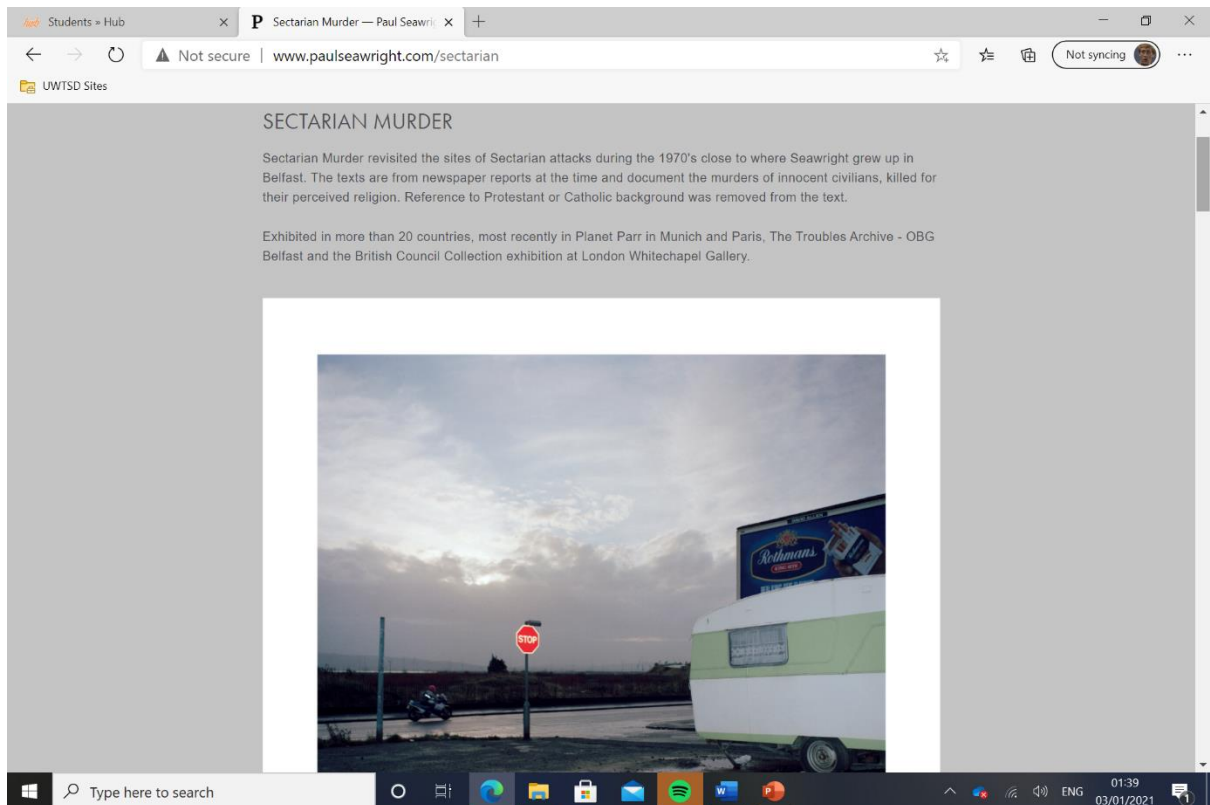
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(Image: Greta Thunberg, credit: BBC)

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