

NEWS RELEASE

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‘Force Majeure: Wildfire and Wheat’ Opens at NAS

WASHINGTON – Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences announces “Force Majeure: Wildfire and Wheat.” This exhibition features sculptures, drawings, and prints by California-based artist Adrien Segal. It opens today, Feb. 18, and will be on view through July 15, 2020.

The term *force majeure* translates to “superior force.” It also refers to a common clause used in contract law to account for extraordinary events such as a natural disaster, an “Act of God,” or any other unforeseeable circumstance that is a result of the elements of nature, as opposed to one caused by human activities such as war. In the 21st century, natural systems have been so drastically affected by human activity that wildfires, floods, and many other extraordinary events, previously identified as natural disasters, can no longer be so neatly categorized. With her *Wildfire Progression* and *Wheat Mandala* series, Segal explores the connections and blurring distinctions between the natural and human-caused forces that are changing ecosystems around the world.

Based on the Cedar, Rim, and Camp Fires in California, Segal created the bronze sculptures and related drawings in the exhibition using data about the shape of the wildfires as they expanded geographically over time. Wildfire is a natural phenomenon that is a necessary process for a healthy forest ecosystem. We might think of wildfires as natural disasters, but in reality, as many as 90% of wildfires are caused by human activity, the result of campfires left unattended, the burning of debris, downed power lines, discarded cigarettes, and arson. The remaining 10% are caused by chance occurrences such as lightning strikes. The size and severity of the fires are being exacerbated by persistent heat and drought.

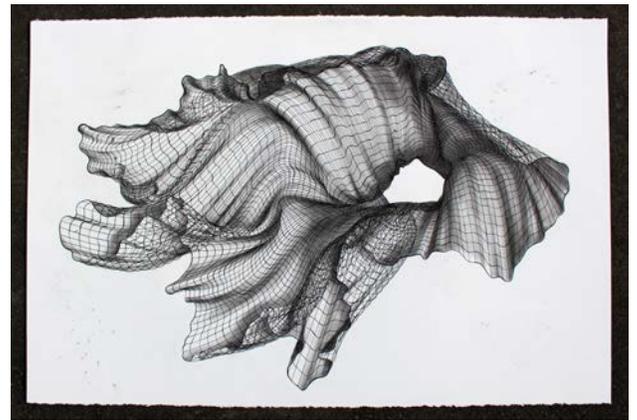
In her *Wheat Mandala* series, Segal explores narratives that convey the complex and tenuous history of wheat cultivation and its long-term impacts on society. Themes explored include agricultural pathogens and genetic modification, famines and the complex human failures that caused them, and significant cultural contributions that were in part the result of the volcanic eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815. Through extensive research, Segal compiled an archive of wheat related imagery, which she composed into a geometric configuration of symbols. The mandala format draws attention to the historic shift from religion and divine intervention to scientific inquiry, and offers a sense of stability and introspection.

Based in Oakland, California, Segal works across disciplines and media, drawing upon history, narrative, emotion, and perception. Her artwork synthesizes information from scientific research in an attempt to bridge the disconnect between scientific rationality and the emotional nature of human experience.

“Force Majeure: Wildfire and Wheat” is on exhibit at the National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. The galleries are open weekdays between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. A photo ID is required and there is no charge. Segal will speak at the D.C. Art Science Evening Rendezvous on March 19. Watch a short video about the exhibit at <https://youtu.be/wocaQWfXsAw>. For more information, visit www.cpnas.org.

Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences sponsors exhibitions, the D.C. Art Science Evening Rendezvous salon, theatrical readings, and other events that explore relationships among the arts and sciences. The National Academy of Sciences is a private, nonprofit institution that recognizes achievement in science by election to membership, and -- with the National Academy of Engineering and the National Academy of Medicine -- provides science, technology, and health policy advice to the federal government and other organizations. **(Continues on page 2)**

Press images:



Left to right from upper left: *Man-Made Famine*, *Wheat Mandala Series*, 2018, digital print on acrylic, 40 inch diameter; *Cedar Fire*, *Wildfire Progression Series*, 2016, India ink and charcoal on paper, 26 x 40 inches; *The Year Without a Summer*, *Wheat Mandala Series*, 2018, digital print on acrylic, 40 inch diameter; *Cedar Fire*, *Wildfire Progression Series*, 2016, cast bronze, 30 x 24 x 14 inches.

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