

## Artist Josh Kline brings climate change home in a new Manhattan show

by Drew Zeiba  
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Pink soy wax sculptures—Consumer Fragility Meltdown and Professional Fragility Meltdown—slowly melt into their tables, their refuse collected below. (Photo: Joerg Lohse. Courtesy the artist and 47 Canal, New York)

In case you've missed it, [the world is ending](#). There's war, displacement, drought, famine, rising seas, [sinking cities](#), faster winds, and a frightening [U.N. report](#) suggests irrevocable, possibly humanity-ending results if we can't [reduce greenhouse gas emissions](#) by 100 percent of 2010 levels by 2050. Artist Josh Kline wants to give us a vision of this un-future. In [Climate Change: Part One](#), Kline has transformed Chinatown gallery 47 Canal in [Manhattan](#) into a dystopian funhouse, one that reflects and refracts our world—and its possible undoing—back at us for unnerving effect.

Through the first door, which features the stars of a mangled American flag peaking through plastered-on sand, you'll encounter an irregularly shaped green table mounted with a lit vitrine. Against the nearest wall are a series of large, whirring industrial freezers. The tarp floors make a slight, sticky sound underfoot. This table is one of three bearing names that read like euphemisms for the current state of catastrophe capitalism: Transnational

Finance, Technological Innovation. In this one, Representative Government, models of various seats of power—the White House, the Reichstag, rendered in Potomac River mud and placed against a satellite photo of Washington, D.C.—slowly drown under the water of melting miniature icebergs. The freezers sustain the chunks of ice just enough that the submergence is painfully slow, taking place over the month-and-a-half of the show's run. As we know, cooling a



small space puts out a [great deal of heat elsewhere](#), rendering the gallery quite warm. Other vitrines hold different building typologies, like skyscrapers rising together from an imaginary Manhattan made from all the world's tallest buildings. The Burj Khalifa and the Chrysler Building aren't in the same city, and there's no iceberg floating and melting in New York's Upper Bay, but you get the idea. The real-life ice may be far away, but water, and the planet, is a continuity. An ice shelf north of Greenland crashing into the sea has implications that reach far further than the Arctic Circle.

Through the doors there are other, unenclosed tables, with pink soy wax in the shape of insurance buildings and suburban homes melting down tubes that collect and direct the colored sludge into buckets below. Waste is not hidden, as everything is a system.

The doors, each named after a degrees Celsius, with a second parenthetical appellation, are themselves artworks, but also serve their usual purpose. Some rooms, arranged together like a cartoon hallway from a Scooby Doo villain's mansion, can only be entered through a singular door, some an array of doors. They present a false sense of choice, and all lead to the same room, each degree of difference still resulting in the same ruins.

The checklist is very clear about origins, at least for some of the more “natural” materials: beach sand from [New York City](#), Shenzhen, and California; desert sand from Texas and the Sahara; steel powder from China. The flags, too, have origin stories, however misleading they might be. We might imagine that the nylon flags desecrated and pasted onto the doors with paint and sand and kelp may represent [Germany](#), the U.S., [China](#), and so on, but they are likely to all be from somewhere else, maybe the same factory, possibly located in none of these countries. To the tentacles of global commerce, borders are long gone. For the refugees of climate disaster and resource wars, the same can’t yet be said.

The doors, with their disfigured flags, are meant to represent the dissolution of borders and nations that Kline predicts climate change and its cascading ramifications will bring about. They also represent our willful participation in the house of horrors-style drowning disasters shown in



While the buildings come from across the world, they are all placed on maps of major U.S. cities that sit on bodies of water—Washington, D.C., New York, and San Francisco. Each of these vitrines, as well as the other works in the exhibition, arose from a collaboration between Kline and [fabricators](#), map designers, 3D modelers, 3D printers, and CNC experts, and many other design and manufacturing pros, all credited on the checklist. (Joerg Lohse/Courtesy the artist and 47 Canal, New York)

each of the different rooms as we open and close them. Even when faced with three doors, the sense of choice is false: each opens to the same room. Whether our actions raise global average atmospheric temperatures by 2° C (Dutch, Belgian, French, and German flags, all compressed with Sahara Desert sand—a Colonial Chain Reaction) or 3° C (a mashup of the Union Jack and Japanese flags along with kelp and chlorella) or 5° C (American and Russian flags, Potomac River mud), we’ll still find ourselves in too deep, so to speak.

Particularly resonant are the banal and domestic scenes. Situated in hermetically sealed versions of the fume hoods from your college chemistry class painted in subdued, aesthetically-pleasing shades of urethane paints with lighting to match, are scenes with dollhouse miniatures,

submerged underwater (or really, cyanoacrylate glue and epoxy). They depict sorrily-stocked grocery stores, bland offices, and suburban home interiors, but their titles are not so bland: Erosion, Inundation, and Submersion.

Disintegration isn't loss, it's transformation. Even as rising water washes away the mud of the miniature buildings, that same dirt just is transported elsewhere, but formless. Matter is conserved, even if our environment is not. What once was just becomes something else, and with us gone, who will be there to name it or know the difference anyway? Things happen on scales too large for us to know, or to know to even ask questions about. Kline shows us this, plainly, perhaps even at first propagandistically. In this show alone, the interlocking problems of political power, globalization, financialization, housing, architecture, technology, and climate change are all put on display. But there's no real call to arms here, just a documentation of the future present. But it does make one have to ask: If this is Climate Change: Part One, what happens in part two?

*Climate Change: Part One*

47 Canal, 291 Grand Street, 2nd Floor, New York  
Through June 9, 2019