

TAXED TO THE MAX

...at least you are not afraid to live life on the brink of chaos

26th Noorderlicht International Photography Festival

5 October - 1 December 2019

TAXED TO THE MAX, the 26th edition of the International Photography Festival of Noorderlicht, takes place during October and November 2019 in Groningen, the Netherlands. **TAXED TO THE MAX** examines the societal tensions created by international conglomerates with their vast accumulations of capital and their influence on national and global politics. **TAXED TO THE MAX** asks: how does the increasingly perfected entanglement of corporatism, finance capital and modern government affect the lives of regular people?

TAXED TO THE MAX deals with the increasing political weight and capital of transnational corporations and the resulting pressure on political, public and private spheres. It aims to triangulate these power relations as they impact every level of the individual lives of people. Entire branches of industry are colloquially referred to as 'big oil', 'big pharma', 'big agro', 'big data', or 'big money', to indicate their collective clout. They are seemingly unshakeable strongholds with market shares exceeding the national budget of entire countries. Yet the relative stability and prosperity that it affords the Global North is directly dependent on the ever cheaper labour models multinational corporations leverage wherever they can, both abroad and at home, hollowing out the middle classes. Additionally, the globalisation of neoliberal policies has created a complex of different, competing tax regimes that enable money to choose the path of least resistance towards profit maximisation and tax minimisation.

To what extent are elected political bodies still sufficiently empowered to supervise or curtail the global transactions of business entities that are not bound by state borders and jurisdiction? And what role can and do citizens still play within these dynamics? Every year, more capital ends up in the hands of fewer people. This growing inequality is generally considered an issue of great urgency. The mantra that 'from now on things must be done differently', is repeated ad infinitum, but we consistently fail to deliver real change. How does this unrestrained prioritisation of short term economic interests relate to the question of 'moral' conduct? And if life on earth is to be preserved, how can the real, long term consequences of limitless wealth and resource extractions for people and the environment be mitigated?

OPEN CALL & Travel Grant

TAXED TO THE MAX seeks out photographers and artists whose work reveals the costs of widespread acceptance towards the effects of a governance catering to rather than scrutinising the interests of the privileged elites. We specifically invite submissions that focus on the unseen, unspoken, hidden, or ignored social, political and human consequences of neoliberal and corporatist policies. We aim to foreground the narratives of ordinary people grappling with political and economical movements that remain largely invisible or out of reach, yet who are facing the direct consequences in their daily lives and are constantly asked to 'do the right thing'. What happens to a person and their individuality at a time when surveillance economies and management of the masses are the directing forces?

Last not least: Capitalist and state forces control the reach, voice and evolution of

photography and others in the media industry. How can photography expose the forces it depends on for its very existence? And even if you manage to raise a voice, the persistence of cognitive bubbles makes them almost impossible to penetrate. How can one reach an audience that refuses to hear or insists to misread what you are saying out loud? Can a visual festival with a broad audience such as this act as a platform for and a place of exchange between artists, activists and open-minded citizenry?

In addition to the open call, Noorderlicht has established a travel grant, allowing 2-3 participants to attend the opening weekend and give a personal presentation of their work. See details below.

Examples of topics to engage with

- 'Follow the money'. Topics can include capital accumulation, international banking, tax evasion, but also tax justice movements, whistle blowers, Panama & Paradise papers, informal economies as prevalent in the *Global South*, including hawala banking and the emergence of micro payment systems aimed at the poorest populations.
- The increasing privatisation of national resources and land, ranging from the gentrification of cities to the disappearing commons in the UK, from the stealing of beaches for construction industries to acts of massive land-grabbing in Eastern Europe, Africa and Russia by wealthy state actors wreaking havoc on local subsistence farming, all at unknown environmental costs.
- Transport and logistics, which enable economies to function as seemingly frictionless as they do, are at the same time tools by which power can be disseminated and consolidated across continents and sea straits. Included can be the Chinese *Belt and Road Initiative*, and the rise of free economic zones in which labor can be exploited at no peril, and where taxes can be suspended indefinitely.
- The (corporate) agents and forces driving perpetual war and the ongoing military build ups to secure the survival of the state above all other pursuits. The surplus of the war economy used to increase the powers of police and intelligence agencies, and the concurrent rise of 'surveillance capitalism' based on the rapid, uncritical adoption of Big Data, artificial intelligence, algorithmic influencing and bot armies.
- The textile / palm oil / rare metals / waste industry, as case studies of an international production chain in which the (added) value of each production step and the profits extracted from the labourers can be traced from beginning to end.
- The medical industry, as an example of monopolism in intellectual property. Patent owning medical companies which are able to increase prices without regulation, are increasingly called out for the high costs of medicines, which can imperil and cost the lives of patients.
- Activists opposing the appropriation of ecosystems, cultural territories and indigenous knowledge, particularly in the Global South. Citizen initiatives newly organised to fight the rise of right wing extremism in their countries and governments; world wide protest movements to protect the climate; a return to union activism, and all other forms in which citizens and non-citizens create the possibility for political leverage outside the arena of actual politics.

Submissions

TAXED TO THE MAX is curated by Hester Keijser in close collaboration with the Noorderlicht team. As always, the festival will encompass a mix of research carried out by Noorderlicht and open submissions. **TAXED TO THE MAX** speaks of global issues that affect everyone. Therefore,

Noorderlicht welcomes proposals from photographers, affiliated artists and curators from any part of the world, of any age and nationality. Relevant subjects not mentioned here or contrasting perspectives on the festival theme are equally welcome. Neighbouring lens based art forms such as digital media, video or VR are also emphatically in the picture.

Travel Grant

This year, Noorderlicht has created a travel grant, which funds the travel costs of 2-3 participating artists within Europe to the festival. The recipients of this grant, to be selected from the open call, will be invited to present their work in person during the opening weekend. The grant covers tickets and accommodation for one night in Groningen. Please indicate in your submission if you want to be eligible for this program.

Deadline

Proposals can be submitted until **May 15, 2019**.

Submission guidelines

Submissions to the open call are free. Selected artists will receive a fee according to the Dutch guidelines for artists fees. Noorderlicht endorses the *Fair Practice Code* of conduct for work in art, culture and creative industries.

Entries can be submitted to pandora@noorderlicht.com. Please send large files via a file transfer service such as WeTransfer. Submissions should include visual material in the form of separate JPG image files with a size of at least 1500 pixels in length, a clear description of the project plus a synopsis of ± 100-150 words why you feel it fits the theme, a CV, a short bio, and additional background information where necessary. If possible, include examples of previous instances of exhibitions and installations of the work submitted or comparable presentations of your work.

Please read the **Exhibition FAQ** before filing your submission to understand the selection procedure and the conditions for the production of your work.

Contributors will receive a confirmation of their entry and later on news about the selection. Please send questions you may have preceding your entry to Hester Keijser: hester@noorderlicht.com.