Since the 1960s, numerous artists and art collectives around the world have made raising the awareness about climate issues the focus of their work. Their practices have been called land art, sustainable art, environmental art - to mention just a few terms used for their multimedia approaches. These artists also initiated collective actions and/or collaborations with scientists and researchers, activists and various social groups to create better understanding of nature and expose humanity’s imprint on environmental changes. In line with those continuous efforts to push the conversation about climate change to the forefront of local and global cultural and political discourses, Kristen Neville Taylor and Norwood Viviano investigate pressing environmental problems of our times that seem more urgent than ever. In their artistic research, both artists focus on the entanglements and interrelations between human, natural and artificial elements, that constitute our fragile and continuously changing ecosystem. While their artworks in glass and other media tell us the stories about underlying interdependency of all these components, they also create the opportunity for a dialog and call for critical rethinking of our current insufficient environmental policies and deeply flawed relationship to the natural environment.

Norwood Viviano investigates histories and transformation of places and landscapes, as well as land use in relation to economic shifts, trade and migrations. His work interrogates the impact of past and present industries on environmental crises and our future ways of living. While researching past, he keeps an active dialog with scientists from various fields such as historians, urban planners and climate scientists. Viviano’s installation *Cities Underwater* (2018-2022) consists of a series of sculptures - nesting glass cylinders, displayed on a shelf. The objects inside the cylinders represent several (mostly U.S. American) coastal cities. They show the projected loss of the cities’ land mass in the next 500 years to rising sea levels, due to global warming. The objects are accompanied by vinyl cut drawings and an animation that provides five centuries of sea level rise data projections in just a matter of minutes. With forty percent of Earth’s population living in coastal areas, this transformation will undoubtedly influence
significant migration and resettlement and reshape modes of living, economy and politics on local as well as national and global scales. For calculating and visualizing this striking loss of land, Viviano utilizes contemporary scientific research and the findings of most advanced technologies, such as lidar data (a technology which uses complex instruments, including a laser scanner on an aircraft, to produce high resolution models of ground elevation and the built environment). The artist’s research is then merged with 3D computer modeling along with glass blowing, to make small-scale visualizations of these large-scale events. The material of glass, with its inherent properties of fragility, metaphorically underlines the delicate, already irreversibly diminished balance of the Earth’s ecosystem. The cylinders - bell jars - encapsulating each city are reminiscent of wet bells, alluding to care and protection.

Several recent works by Kristen Neville Taylor, such as the video *End of Days* (2022), take the so-called blue holes of the Pine Barrens National reserve in New Jersey for its topic. The artist is interested in the ways our landscapes are continuously transformed by man-made activities and various industries (in this particular case, the glass industry followed by the leisure and real estate industries), as well as the local myths and legends developed along the way. Recognized for its high-quality silica sand, an ingredient for many products such as concrete and glass, the Pine Barrens area has been mined for centuries. Gradually, the pine woods in the area were destroyed, as the trees were cut to be used as fuel for glass manufacturing. According to local folklore, the deforestation caused the area to at one time resemble the surface of the moon. The large “blue holes” of the area, resembling lakes, are not a natural phenomenon but curious remnants of exploitive human activities. They are abandoned sand quarries that over time got filled with water, often containing industrial waste at their bottom. In the case of Pine Barrens, the blue holes support their own wild life system. The blue holes’ beautiful calm water surfaces are deceptive – they are highly dangerous to swim in due to their uneven sandy bottoms. And many mysteries revolve around them; probably the most popular one is that the area is the hideout of the legendary New Jersey Devil. All of these facts Neville Taylor intertwines in the contemplative narrative part of the video, accompanied by sublime, drone-recorded aerial shots of the locality.

The video, projected into the gallery floor, is surrounded by a wooden frame and sand. The shape of the whole installation
recalls a blue hole transferred into the gallery. It also brings to mind the late 1960’s works of the artist Robert Smithson, who often focused on overused landscapes and industrial remnants and whose work frequently revolved around the Pine Barrens area. Smithson coined the term “nonsite,” within his theory of indoor landscape works. For Smithson, the “site” is a real, physical location, and the “nonsite” is a range of samples (rocks, sand, drawings, man-made objects etc.) representing that reality as a metaphor in the gallery context – a subjective take on the objective world that might serve as a “map” for visiting the “site” itself. This reading could also be applied to the adjacent work Who Owns the Moon? (2022). Acting as an intersection of history and fiction, the piece takes the form of a black lightbox featuring a composition of various archival materials – architectural drawings and renderings of Pine Barrens area from the 1960s, testimonies of various attempts of developments in the region that the locals stood against, ultimately resulting in the ultimate legal preservation of its large area. Sitting nearby are what the artist calls “witch jugs”, the mysterious vessels alluding to moonshine production, blindness and human folly in relation to making profit from land.

Neville Taylor’s preoccupations with the ideas of sustainability, respect for nature and ambiguous takes on future prospects in the midst of climate crisis are expressed in short text form on several aluminum foil prints. For the artist, aluminum foil aesthetically holds a futuristic quality while its functionality of maintaining cooler or warmer temperatures metaphorically speaks about pursuit of comfort and control. Mounted on the gallery walls, the aluminum foil holds a subtly printed font bringing quotes appropriated from various eras; The Moon Cannot be Stolen (2022) recalls one of the famous stories of the 18th century Japanese Zen Master Ryokan, focused on critique of materialism, while We Believed in the Future Then (2022) and It’s Nice to Believe in Something (2022) are the dialog excerpts taken from Ingmar Bergmann’s acclaimed TV series “Scenes from a Marriage” (1973). The installation After Nature (2022), on the other hand, is the artist’s playful test of particular research by the MIT scientists, who discovered that the water could be filtered by sapwoods of pine or cedar. By making her own version of the filtering system, the artist demonstrates its functionality in producing clear water, while also inserting a wooden diving rod, used for finding water on land, into the composition.

They Told Us Earth Was Mother But It Is In Fact Sun (2019)
contemplates on human perception and measurement of time in the past as well as present. The object is a playful rendition of a sundial using various symbolic imagery that casts shadows onto surrounding surfaces depending on the light source. It consists of a matte white circular pedestal onto which a glass arch is mounted. Atop of the arch there are twelve enigmatic symbols instead of numbers, made in flameworked glass and referencing life itself, some figurative such as a hand, a snake, a branch, a question mark and others in more abstract shapes. Below the arch structure there are three glass sunflowers – a reference to a design by Athanasius Kircher, a 17th century German scholar and scientist. In order to illustrate the times of day, Kircher would put sunflowers in water and then the flowers would turn towards the sun, as the sun moved across the sky. This work’s counterpart, titled *Let Us Stay Home* (2022), also features flowers, this time made from black glass. Onto these objects a video animation is projected; numbers, symbols and letters (made from glass letters, then scanned and animated) flow and metamorphose into one another, spiraling around the flowers in infinity-shaped path. Considering eras before the wide adoption of mechanical time (a switch related to the rise of modern science and turning away from natural rhythms towards mechanical regulation and control of daily activities in the industrialized society), the artist refers to her own childhood activities of remembering chores through a particular artifact or sketches. Furthermore, she reflects on her own usage of time in the role of a mother – a personal attempt to imagine alternative, more sustainable and slower-paced ways of being in the world, and to call for nurturing contemplation and connection over alienation, convenience and productivity.

**Zeljka Himbele** is a curator based in New York City and the 2022 UrbanGlass Curator-at-Large. Originally from Croatia, where she worked for several years at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, she graduated from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, US. From 2008-2010 she worked at the Contemporary Art Department of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI, working on a series of solo and group exhibitions for New Media Gallery. She frequently collaborates with numerous national and international exhibition venues.