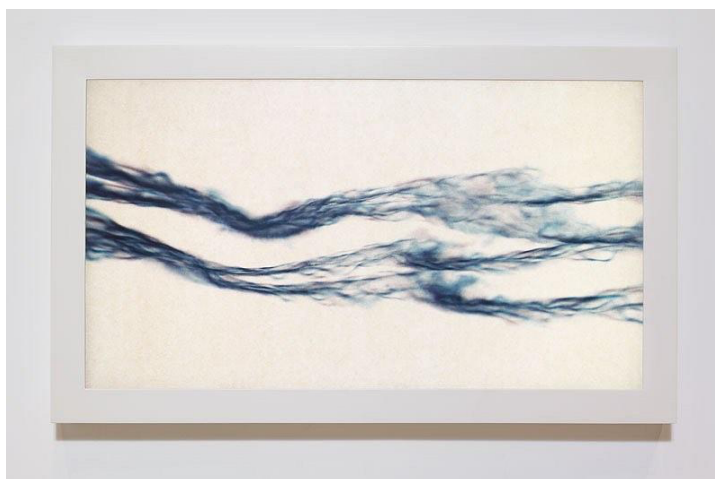
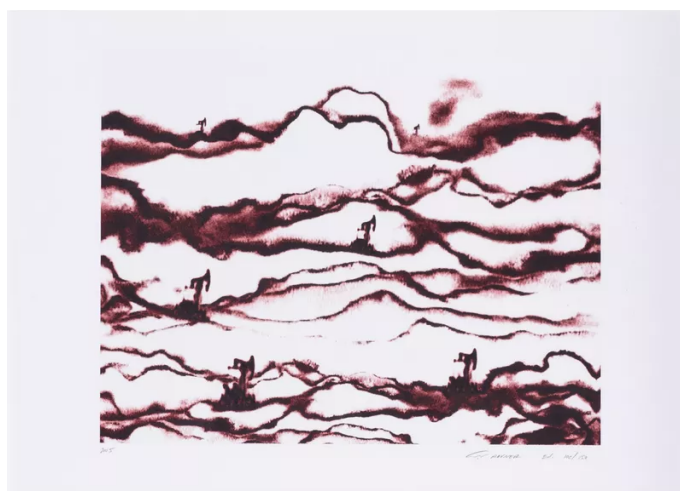


## Fire on Video

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Michal Rovner, *Current 1*, 2006. Wood-framed LCD screen, paper, computer, and digital video  
19 x 31 in (48.3 x 78.7 cm)



Michal Rovner, *Field of Fire*, 2005. Screenprint in colors on BFK paper Rives,  
27 x 31 in (69.4 x 80 cm)

Michal Rovner is an internationally known multi-media digital artist. Her method of large-scale projection using photos and videos is incredibly unique, and it's allowed for some amazing contemporary works of art published during the late 70s to the 21st century. Her works utilize drawing, printmaking, video, photography sculpture, and installation technology. Her art is best known for its innovative usage of space, often toying with the perspectives of the

audience and the available resources of the exhibition locations themselves. Rovner documents geographic locations to create poetic works of art that have personal, political, and social resonances. In *Current 1*, Rovner uses oil fires and digital videography/editing to reference her old works whilst also innovating her own art for a timely transforming public.

*Current 1* is a video work displayed on a rectangular LCD screen. The screen itself measures 19 by 31 inches (48.3 by 78.7 cm). The piece features a grainy and muted background, in an almost off-white, gray color. The center of the foreground possesses multiple lengthy, fluid spirals with dark blue outlines and entirely black fill-ins. The spirals originate from several key points to the far left of the frame. As we follow the thick lines as they emerge from their respective points, we see them expand and contort, folding in on themselves and then gradually unfolding. It is as if the lines have sentience and are in opposition to one another, repelling further and further apart. From those original black/blue bands emerge several other identically colored contortions with even more spaghetti-like implied texture. They continue to trail off and seem to almost evaporate as they appear thinner and thinner, whilst still expanding both up and down the frame. This is especially true for the entanglements on the top half of the frame, with the lines connecting to the far right of the frame being ultimately thinner than the pronounced lines we saw to the far left. For the blue and black vines at the bottom half, their expansion isn't nearly as wide, allowing them to reconnect into pronounced dye-like blotches that stream more interconnected tangles to the far right edge of the frame.

Michal Rovner was born in Israel on November 7, 1957. She's had a long and wide-ranged career spanning numerous decades, with her earliest compilation book, *Fields*, being released in 1987. *Current 1* was released in 2006, one year after one of her most creative projects, *Fields of Fire*. These two works are quite similar, and they're the only two instances of

this wave-like formation in her entire catalog. The inspiration for *Fields of Fire* came to Rovner from the oil fires happening in Kazakhstan. These fires spanned miles, both vertically and across wide, leveled terrain. Rovner decided to take several photographs as well as carefully document the behaviors and movements of these flames. These carefully constructed reports were used to create *Fields of Fire*, with Rovner digitally combining and manipulating the flame patterns to form one lengthy horizontal current that spanned from left to right. The same technique was used for *Current 1*, a year after the production and presentation of *Fields of Fire*. Rovner does these follow-up pieces quite frequently, especially when it comes to her architectural/engineered works. This is likely due to the amount of time it takes to complete each project, so the time between two pieces of art that belong to the same series can be quite lengthy.

The most apparent and essential themes in *Current 1* and *Field of Fire* are progressive destruction and the residuum of human interaction with their environment. Firstly, Rovner herself has spoken openly about the importance of displaying the aftermath of an event, rather than the climactic nature of the event itself. Her artist statement reads, “but more with the residue of things, the left-over of things on the mind—not with something that’s occurred, but with the mark it’s left. It’s about stripping down the image to its most essential elements.” M. Rovner (2005, *Fields of Fire*). Rovner took every photograph, video, and the documented piece she could find regarding the oil fires in Kazakhstan and used only the most essential bits of each. She then created a collage of these pieces and made them resemble the horizontal fiery flow seen in her works after 2005. She never documented the oil mining and violent thrashing of the natural formations under the oil fires which gradually sparked the violent flames; instead only the flames themselves. Only the scene of the crime committed, but not the crime itself. With the idea of progressive destruction, the digital nature of *Current 1* allows us to perceive the ongoing activity

of the fire she archived. It encourages the audience to describe the flow as ongoing and never-ending, as the footage only continues to loop at the end of each cycle. As if the piece itself will outlast the experiences of the viewers, and continue to exist in the space that is provided to it. This implies that the ruination related to the fire is incessant, with no true end in sight.

Rovner's instinct to elaborate on *Fields of Fire* with *Current 1* reflects her personal connection to the importance of the theme of humanity's relationship with nature and their environment. In a video interview about one of her installations in 2012 also called *Current*, she discusses both the ideas of what makes a current so relevant and subjective, as well as her usage of fire photography to create meaningful works of art. She discusses how a current could attain to a political, social, personal or natural cycle in a person's life. The essentiality of a work like *Fields of Fire* was so grand to Rovner that she felt she should recreate it in an all-digital space. The product of that decision is now *Current 1*, and both of these pieces have given Rovner the ability to spread the same central connection between humanity and nature much further than a single copy of *Fields of Fire* ever would have.

Rovner's decision to present such a violent topic in such a simple way may be a bit confusing at first, as she's essentially condensing a massive environmental and geopolitical crisis into an uncomplicated flow. But overall I really love the way she connects all the important pieces of her previous works to create something inherently modern. The color scheme of the piece is also quite enticing, as the dark blues and black complement one another perfectly against the muted background. Furthermore, the story behind the piece and its relationship with a more frequently discussed installation was a very captivating rabbit hole to fall into. It's as if *Current 1* came with its own complete backstory with side characters and a central motivation behind it all.

Rovner delves deeply into themes about environmental exploitation, ever-lasting violence against nature, and the unjust relationship between humanity and the natural world. Rovner photographs oil blazes in Kazakhstan and documents their relentless movement in order to capture these flames in her artistic productions, seen in both *Fields of Fire* as well as *Current 1*. The tragedy behind her honorable transformation of *Fields of Fire* into *Current 1* is that she needed to reintroduce the themes of her work at all. The transformation itself is very respectable, as she granted a wider range of audiences to view two distinctive pieces that still share a central concern. Regardless, nothing changed in Kazakhstan, even with her faithful demonstration of how violently the issue had been growing. This introduces an entirely new discussion about the future of the artistic world if both the audience and the creators don't cooperate to confront governmental figures and the affluent people in power. Perhaps it would be more advantageous to create more work concerning the culpable billionaires and politicians instead of solely discussing the problematic seeds they've dug into society. Regardless of how art and the mediums used to express it advance over time, the themes and issues that artists incorporate into their work won't change until we collectively decide to address and detangle the severity of those issues. In other words, artists and their audiences shouldn't be afraid to "get political" or directly call attention to the people who have reinforced systematic concerns, and should no longer continue to hopelessly address the problems that need solutions; not awareness. Otherwise, art will stay in a thematic bubble, never expanding or evolving, slowly drying itself out.

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