

# If the ice cap melts...

# Seven Metres

**An art happening by Jens Galschiot about migration, civilization breakdown, environment, the rising water, flashing lights and indigenous people**

**Background:** The global warming will cause great demographic changes, as part of the earth can't be inhabited by human beings, because of the drought and floods. This will cause millions to migration. How are we going to handle that? - When 300 refugees in Camp Sandholm already is looked upon as a problem.

If all of Greenland's ice melts, the seawater will rise 7 metres. It will take a long time. But to illustrate how it feels, when ones land becomes uninhabitable and you have to move, I have chosen to take a starting point in a 7 meter rise of the sea.

**Idea:** During the United Nations climate summit, thousands of red blinking diode-lamps (bike lights) will be put up all around Copenhagen to mark the surface of the ocean at a 7 meters water increase. At the same time civil citizens all over the globe are urged to participate in the art-manifestation by putting up blinking diode-lamps in their own cities and countries.

The blinking red lights will be an artistic visual warning about the impending disaster, if nothing is done about the climate.

The lights in Copenhagen will be put up on a series of strategically chosen buildings, light posts, trees and similar; in the centre of the city as well as at the Bella Center, where the summit is held. The height of the lights will be discerned by GPS measurements.

The simplicity and visibility will have a huge visual impact. It will reach all of the participants of the summit, the people of Copenhagen and all around the globe through the thousands of environmentally conscious citizens, who are expected to participate in the event and give the summit-participants a reminder.

**The goal is,** that project *Seven Metres* will be an eye opener for the citizens of the world for the issue of climate change, and the consequences. The event shall remind the world about, the crucial questions at stake at the summit, - that it is not only about the extermination of a lot of animal species, but that the climate changes will affect billions of people and have extreme consequences for everyone on the globe.

The goal is to make the symbol so famous, that a red blinking light under a meeting or a demonstration, will lead the thoughts onto the environment problem.

The project will not have any concrete guidelines on how an environment catastrophe can be avoided; we will leave that to other people. The goal is to urge for reflection and encourage to act both locally and globally.

**Art:** Danish sculptor Jens Galschiot is the initiator of the project *Seven Metres*. Galschiot views art as non-verbal communication and often uses his art to create international happenings, which focuses on the defence of a humanitarian view of humanity. Usually he uses sculptures in his art manifestations, but this time he has chosen an installation of light, the simplicity of which should enable it to spread across the globe.

Galschiot adds a few words to the project, *“In fact, this is not a truly a campaign, traditionally speaking. The event should work as a catalyst for a sort of wave of feeling, which will sweep across the world. The project has much more in common with poetry than it has with actual political activism. It is a global story, which tells itself. One could say that we are starting a battle over the interpretation of reality.”*

*In meteorology and physics you work with the ‘butterfly-effect’, that says that the world is so complex and coherent, that if a butterfly flaps its wings in China, it may cause a storm in California. The project ‘Seven Metres’ could be that butterfly,”* tells Jens Galschiot, and proceeds *“I will challenge and test the boundaries for the structural options we’re facing with the communication of the era of globalisation.”*

The project will, through its own dynamics, function as what Joseph Beuys called a ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ in which the distinction between the artist, the art itself and the viewer has become blurred. Everybody becomes part of the art event if they want it or not. By involving the land, that people live on, in this happening, the size of the catastrophe will stand clear for them. Many will support the campaign hanging up diode-lights in their local area. Others will try to ignore it, but the red insistent catastrophe-blinking will instigate a fear, about the land that will leave less and less space for the human being.

**Doomsday messages:** The message with the 7-metre-line can be criticized for being doomsday prophetic, while the risk of a total meltdown of the inland ice lies far off in the future. However, the argument is that it is necessary to focus on how wrong it can go – even though it is in the long term. The meltdown is going much faster than earlier thought, almost every month new and higher numbers come out for the expected water risings within this century.

You have to be aware of the fact that it isn’t a scientific project that is in question, but an artistic interpretation of the environmental problem. An interpretation which is intended for mass communication and for creating an up-to-the-minute account of what an eventual future could look like. A kind of poem in the public space, where it isn’t the concrete word, but the coherence and atmosphere that the whole poem creates that is interesting.

It isn't enough just to change to energy-saving bulbs! A change in attitude and consumption is needed, that reaches far, far further. It is quite simply a necessity to cut the issue out in water for the message to be received.

Anyway, a 7 metre water rise is relatively moderate. If the ice on Antarctica also melted, the rise would be 80 metres.

Many people aren't aware of the part humans play in the climatic changes. A current poll shows that four in ten Danes don't believe in a man-made greenhouse effect. A poll from the opinion-research institute Synovate Vilstrup shows that 62 % think that climate changes primarily is man-made. The remaining 38 % explains the climate changes as natural fluctuations or answer "don't know". (Source: the newspaper Politiken, 30 November 2008).

## **Symbolism**

The symbolism of an art happening will always be open to manifold interpretations with various layers. Here just some suggestions:

- Red flashing lamps symbolize danger; in this case the danger is about climate change.
- The marking of a 7 metres water line in a big city symbolize the expropriation of land and livelihood caused by the climate change. Many will see the line almost as the materialisation of an intrusion threatening their possession and their lives.
- The 7 metres line will go through some of the most fashionable houses that are often placed along the waterline. The line will make a thought-provoking show of the material losses caused by the climate change for individuals as well as the society.
- The 7 metres line will illustrate that not just an imaginary nature will suffer, but humans are not separated from nature, and therefore the climate changes will trigger enormous challenges for our civilisation.
- The 7 metres line is symbol of the dire consequences that can be expected. Not all people will be affected by floods, some will be suffering drought. But the consequences will be the same; the population has to be resettled in another place.

## **Publication**

It's an essential aim of the project to make it a conspicuous public event during the climate summit in Copenhagen and even get it boosted to a global manifestation. To achieve this, a PR budget of billions of EURO would normally be needed. But we will take advantage of the millions of committed citizens caring for our environment. We have made the experience that these people can be mobilised through targeted expanding campaigns on the Internet.

## **Internet**

We'll make use of Jens Galschiot's network (AIDOH - Art In Defence Of Humanism) with about 100,000 contacts to the media, NGOs, art circles etc. all over the world. We'll inform about the happening and encourage everybody to forward our message to their own network. We'll constantly be briefing the network about the course of events.

We'll establish various profiles, newsgroups, debate forums etc. on the Internet, including Facebook and similar networks. We'll invite the bloggers to promote the event.

**Websites:** The Internet-domain 'Seven-Metres.net' (**Note. not decided yet**) will work as an interactive (web2) pivotal point and catalyst for the event. Here the press and interested can find inspiration, background and suggestions on how to use the red diode-lights in a creative way, in relation to the environment summit (COP15) in Copenhagen December 2009.

The website will contain:

- Support lists of those who supports the project, and will put up the blinking diode-lights in their country relation to COP15. One can also join directly on the website and write about what you have planned and what you think about the event.
- Comment-blog, where you can write what you think about the project, COP15 and the environment.
- There will be made an e-mailing-list, for those who want to be updated about the project.
- Interactive mailing system to forward the *Seven Metres* idea to your own mailing list.
- The website will also be used to the dissemination of news to the press, about how the actions proceeds and you can download photos and background articles about the event and the environment issue.
- Directions of how one can use the idea. There is simply going to be a manual about, how you as an individual, as an organization or as a grassroots movement can be a part of the event.

## Google Earth

We are hoping to establish a co-operation with Google Earth, so it will be possible for citizens all over the world to see where the 7 metres line runs through in their local area.

There is already a website where you, all over the globe, can see the areas that will be flooded in different places. It's a very frightening sight. All of the isle of Amager and big parts of Copenhagen will be flooded by a 7 metre rise of the sea, but already at 2 metres, as some scientists foresee can be a reality in this century, 2/3 of Amager and many areas by the coast and canals will be flooded. See for yourself the consequences in your area: <http://flood.firetree.net> (Can only be opened with Internet Explorer).

**Printed materials:** In connection with the event there will be published an over sized A3 folder, which, in unfolded form, can be used as a poster. The poster will be of good artistic quality and it will be made in a way, so it also works as the COP15 meeting 'grass root poster'. It is our experience that this type of folders/posters will be taken home as a kind of souvenir from the meeting.

The folder contains information about the project, about the purpose and a link to website of the project.

**Contact to the media:** During the event as well as before and after we will give high priority to the media coverage. We expect the media to take interest not only in the event itself, but also in the underlying questions, such as climate research and climate change. As an organisational backdrop we'll establish a network of contact persons who can promote the project in the media.

**Umbrella project:** *Seven Metres* is a sort of umbrella project enabling NGOs and individuals to highlight their causes. It will not launch its own agenda, but as a poignant art manifestation it will accentuate that something is completely wrong about our environment and that humanity will face fatal problems if the climate question is neglected. Due to the open agenda many environmental NGOs can use the project to draw attention to their perspectives for the future. We have made use of a similar strategy during the event *TheColorOrange* where a wide range of apparently highly diverging NGOs used the colour orange to denounce the human rights violations in China during the Olympics. A gymnastics club in southern France used the colour in a big meeting, Tibetans made orange pullovers, an artist placed orange flags on Mount Blanc, in Hong Kong sculptures were painted orange, and in a small Danish town a group of elderly women hung up plenty of orange strips all over the centre – just to mention a few examples. We expect *Seven Metres* to be run in a similar way, as the possibilities for displaying red flashing lamps are equally manifold.

**Engaging the civil society:** It's of paramount importance that ordinary citizens – residents in Copenhagen during the summit as well as people worldwide – get some opportunities of activism. So they will be able to send an impulse to the climate summit. Thousand of citizens will be engaged in the project as individuals or by joining a local group. The design of *Seven Metres* will enable people with different styles of activism to back the event, here just some suggestions:

- During the climate summit a huge amount of activists will join our event. The lamps are to be hung up and taken down again. We envisage the organisation of networks to cope with this big task.
- Plenty of people will be engaged in the organisation of the happening, setting up websites, translating, issuing press releases, taking contact to activists, NGOs, sponsors, etc. etc.
- We expect a fruitful co-operation with lots of NGOs who use the event to highlight their particular view on the climate issue.
- In Denmark and abroad we'll use the Internet to establish local groups. The activists will launch local events on environmental issues using *Seven Metres* as a pivotal point.
- We'll provide a flashing red line that can be downloaded from the Internet and used as a logo of the happening on websites, blogs, press releases, etc. This poignant logo will be used to highlight the happening, environmental issues and the climate summit in Copenhagen.
- Activists can hang up rows of red flashing lamps on remarkable sites in their local area.
- Red flashing lamps can be used in demonstrations and rallies to accentuate that in this very moment climate negotiations are going on in Copenhagen the results of which may be decisive for our future.
- In stead of the Christmas decorations usually displayed in December a line of flashing red lights could be used to highlight the climate summit is going on in Copenhagen ahead of Christmas, 7 – 18 December 2009.

**The initiator of the happening:** Sculptor Jens Galschiot is probably one of the most experienced event makers in Denmark. Plenty of international art manifestations have emanated from his workshop in Odense. The projects have spread all over the world – in Nairobi, Mexico, Hong Kong, Europe, and locally in Denmark. Of projects corresponding *Seven Metres* we can refer to the 'TheColorOrange.net' project about China which had over 450,000 visitors on the website ([www.TheColorOrange.net](http://www.TheColorOrange.net))

Examples of other comprehensive activities made by the artist can be seen on [www.aidoh.dk](http://www.aidoh.dk).

## Sponsors and collaborators to the project

This event is secured a huge visibility in Denmark as well as worldwide during an extended period of time. You can even imagine that *Seven Metres* will be reused at other environment top meetings. We are looking for sponsors and collaborators who want to support the project. The exact role of the collaborators in connection to the project must be clarified through discussion. However we think the starting point will be a noticeable function on all printed and electronic materials which are issued in connection to the project.

The project contains great possibilities for NGO organisations which would like to participate and raise their profiles in the public debate in connection to the COP15 meeting. Through the cooperation with a few significant organisations we hope to provide the solid foundation of knowledge that is needed to launch a serious public debate.

We have made a collection of links about environmental issues:

<http://www.aidoh.dk/Eco>

Obvious partners would be organisations representing people who will be victimised by even a small water rising. For example Bangladesh and the indigenous population on the islands in the Pacific Ocean, who will be some of the first affected.

To the extend the collaborator wants it we will strive to make use of the media contact to ensure the partner access to the media in connection to the event.

We would like cooperation with private companies, who will be ready to sponsor the project, in cash or by logistic contribution, e.g. the production of the many diode lamps. Undoubtedly the connection to such a remarkable event with an unambiguous message crucial for the future of mankind will have a strong impact for boosting the image of a company.

## Schedule

1<sup>st</sup> stage until February 2009

Raising financial foundation for the event

2<sup>nd</sup> stage from February - September 2009

Organizing, planning and arrangement

3<sup>rd</sup> stage from September to November 2009

Final preparation

4<sup>th</sup> stage from November - December 2009

Completion and evaluation on the event

# Carrying out the project

As mentioned the idea is to mark long line at seven metres level on several public buildings etc. in Copenhagen with red flashing lights.

The mounting of the lamps will primary be the result of helping hands from volunteers who will be activated through the website, the grass-roots movements, NGO's etc.

The lamps are mounted with rubber bands made of nature latex which is environmental sustainable. The actual light forces will probably be cycle lamps. We are looking for a producer to make them as sustainable as possible, Ikea for instance. The lamps will be gathered as needed.

Through the work of planning we will clarify how many buildings, trees etc. will be involved in the event.

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