



Photograph by Siro Micheroli

# RIGHTING HISTORY'S WRONGS

*You might recognise the name. You might even recall the achievements. But Louis Agassiz wasn't the scientific hero history has made him out to be and one artist is spearheading a project to reveal the truth about the Swiss researcher's work which has brought her all the way to our neck of the woods.*

When German geologist Julius Von Haast travelled to New Zealand in 1858, he was tasked with inspecting the country to discover whether it would be suitable for German emigrants. His work was instrumental in recording the makeup of the country's rugged landscapes and in traversing Godzone, he named areas after scientists who influenced him. One of those was Louis Agassiz. In fact, Agassiz's name adorns many locations and landmarks worldwide but Swiss-born, Finland-based artist Sasha Huber is leading the crusade to remove it from those places because of the famous scientist's oft-untold work championing racism.

"It is about shining light on the dark side of Louis Agassiz, who was not only a prominent zoologist, palaeontologist, and glaciologist, but also one of the most influential racists of the 19th century," Huber says of the long-running project entitled Demounting Louis Agassiz, which is drawing attention to two little-known areas on the West Coast of the South Island – the Agassiz glacier and Agassiz range.

As markers of Agassiz's legacy, these locations serve to pay tribute to the famed scientist's work, which may have predominantly centred on Earth's natural history and biology but also covered what is considered scientific racism. Agassiz was a vocal advocate for the idea of polygenism where races were created separately and thus some were superior to others.

While the Agassiz project has become a large part of the artist's work in recent years, she is certainly no stranger to the issue of historical prosecution, which provided the basis for what she considers her first art collection more than a decade ago. Born to a Swiss father and Haitian mother, Huber's interest in her multicultural background was what initially spurred her to delve deeper into her heritage, with her artwork series *Shooting Back – Reflections on Haitian Roots* serving as a reaction to being unable to visit the Caribbean country.

"I was not allowed to go to Haiti because of the political turmoil and the possibility that something could happen," she recalls.

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