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TBA21 PRESENTS "AFTER NATURE" CLAUDIA COMTE AT MUSEO NACIONAL THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA



Installation view: After Nature, Claudia Comte, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain, 2021. Photo: Stefan Altenburger/ TBA21

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Madrid, May 10, 2021 – The Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Foundation (TBA21) presents the exhibition *After Nature*, by Swiss artist Claudia Comte (May 11–August 22, 2021), curated by Chus Martínez and co-organized with the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

In the words of Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, founder and president of TBA21, "*After Nature* speaks brilliantly of the extraordinary life forms that are corals, and Claudia Comte (who is one of my favorite diving partners) has created for this exhibition a work inspired by these extremely complex creatures by giving them the organic and unmistakable form of corals. The three-year journey that brought us to the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza began during a TBA21–Academy expedition to New Zealand, *The Current #2*, led by Chus Martínez. This was followed by a residency at Alligator Head Foundation in Jamaica, an ocean conservation haven and Academy's scientific partner. There Claudia's deep dedication to her art became apparent when she undertook a project inspired by the foundation's coral regeneration program, working with wood with her chainsaw, often on the side of a road or on a beach, and collaborating with local sculptors and woodworkers such as Eric Samuels and Weston Panton, involving them throughout the process."

The Exhibition

Reaching the seabed is a difficult feat, even more so when the ocean is far away; this exhibition does not wish to emulate the bottom of the sea, but to bring us closer to it. Comte has created an environment of forms and images with which we can open ourselves to the underwater world, asking: What is a coral? Can our eyes really capture the multiple light signals emitted by the animals on the seabed? Why do corals disappear and what are the consequences?

The artist has divided the exhibition space into two worlds: the world of light, of corals and reefs; and the world of night, where our eyes can barely mitigate the circumstances. A large wall painting unifies these two worlds, like waters in the sea. Ripples resembling waves, as well as the frequencies of wind and ocean currents, circumscribe the exhibition. Their vivid, almost artificial colours are inspired by the bioluminescent signals that many forms of marine life emit to communicate.

In the first room, the light illuminates a series of corals carved in wood, wood from fallen trees collected on the island of Jamaica where the artist was in residency to understand the complex process of coral regeneration. Comte has always been interested in wood. In her native Vallis, Switzerland, she works with trees and their memories. It was in Jamaica that she decided to unify for the first time her passion for forests with her fascination for the 'jungles of the sea', coral reefs. The wooden corals speak of the beauty of their forms, of their diversity. They also allude to the interconnectedness of everything that makes up a biotope. In the second room representing the seabed, corals reemerge translated into a digital animation, into a technical and meticulous study of their forms.

"Comte's site-specific installation brings together characteristic aspects of his work: mural painting as a method to disorient the senses in space and wooden sculptures; it also introduces the intelligence of underwater life, such as the way fish use bioluminescence to send signals through their skin, and the presence of corals as a wake-up call for humans to learn to respect the ocean," explains Chus Martínez, curator of the exhibition.

Furthermore a video is projected in the second room, described by Martínez as "a new family of digitally animated corals, they form and un-form, offering us, mischievously, a new image of their morphology. These corals are the characters of a story they would like to tell the world." This exhibition is the result of TBA21–Academy's invitation for Claudia Comte to undertake a residency at Alligator Head Foundation in 2019. The foundation manages the East Portland Fish Sanctuary, one of Jamaica's largest ocean conservation spaces, housing a major coral research and regeneration center. There, Comte began developing this series of sculptures as well as an underwater sculpture garden. During the residency, she collaborated with coral specialist Colin Foord of Miami's Coral Morphologic of Miami renowned marine biologist Dr. David Gruber professor at Baruch College CUNY, New York. Claudia has also collaborated with the Computer Science Department of the University of Freiburg, Germany to create the animation that is represented on the dark room.

This new series of wooden corals originates from her time on the island, where sculptors from the local Portland community contributed to their sanding and polishing. Comte's work focuses on corals, one of the most spectacular life forms in existence, the result of a symbiotic relationship that generates great quantities of oxygen, and whose extinction would have a profound impact on all planetary life.

The exhibition is completed with a new digital piece by Claudia Comte that will be premiered on the digital platform [st_age](#).

Notes to Editors:

Claudia Comte

Claudia Comte (b. 1983) is a Swiss artist who works in a variety of media, including sculpture and painting. Her approach is defined by her interest in the memory of materials and by a careful observation of how the hand relates to different technologies. Solo and group exhibitions include: *Jungle and Corals*, König Galerie, Berlin (2020), *How to Grow and Still Stay the Same Shape*, Castello di Rivoli (2019), Copenhagen Contemporary, Copenhagen (2019); "Zigzags and Diagonals," MOCA Cleveland (2018); "Swiss Performance Now," Kunsthalle Basel (2018); "KölnSkulpture #9," Köln (2017); "La Ligne Claire," Basement Roma (2017); "NOW I WON," Messeplatz, Art Basel (2017); "10 Rooms, 40 Walls, 1059 m²," Kunstmuseum Luzern (2017); *Desert X*, Palm Springs (2017); "The Language of Things," Public Art Fund, New York (2016); "Easy Heavy

III,” Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2014); “Sharp Sharp, If I were a rabbit, where would I keep my gloves?,” BolteLang (2013); and Elevation 1049, Gstaad (2013). Prior to her Alligator Head residency, Comte took part in a TBA 21–Academy expedition to New Zealand , in the summer of 2018, led by Chus Martínez together with a crew of fellow artists. Comte also presented a performance at TBA21-Academy’s Ocean Space in Venice in September 2018.

TBA21

Founded in 2002 by Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza in Vienna, the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) represents the fourth generation of the Thyssen family committed to art. The objective of TBA21 is to diffuse interdisciplinary art projects that defy traditional categorization, including large-scale installations, sound compositions, performances and contemporary architecture. TBA21 believes that art has the ability to be a transformative force and to explore new modes of production and artistic representations that provoke and inspire changes.

TBA21 signed in 2019 a four-year agreement with the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza to present a series of contemporary art exhibitions from the TBA21 Collection and Commissions at the museum to reinforce contemporary art and environmental values and attract new audiences. Complementing the two exhibitions a year, a generous series of talks and performances will be programmed based on the eighteen year experience of TBA21 worldwide, as well as an ongoing educational activity program in collaboration with EducaThyssen.

TBA21–Academy

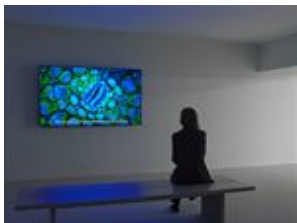
TBA21–Academy is a contemporary art organization and cultural ecosystem fostering a deeper relationship to the Ocean through the lens of art to inspire care and action. For a decade, we have been an incubator for collaborative research, artistic production, and new forms of understanding by combining art, science and other knowledge systems, intertwining imagination and possibility in regenerative relationships, resulting in exhibitions, research, and policy interventions.

Media



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