



## Joan Jonas: Moving Off the Land II

25 February to 18 May 2020

Curator: Stefanie Hessler

The Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) are presenting *Joan Jonas: Moving Off the Land II*, an exhibition commissioned by TBA21-Academy which concludes three years of research on aquariums around the world and on the waters off Jamaica by this New York-born artist. First installed at Ocean Space in Venice in March 2019, the exhibition focuses on the role the ocean has played in cultures over the course of history as a totemic, spiritual and cultural reference. It features sculptures, drawings, sound and new video productions. Furthermore, it is accompanied by a staged performance by the artist that will take place on 26 February 2020 at the Museo Nacional del Prado.

Joan Jonas (born New York, 1936) is one of the most important artists of her generation. Since the 1960s she has been known for experiments undertaken in areas such as performance, video art and conceptual art which continue to be crucial for the evolution of many contemporary artistic genres. At a time when art was starting to transcend the limits of the gallery space, Jonas created a type of work that combined dance, music and theatre. She soon began to focus on the relation between human beings and the environment, while a defence of the oceans became a recurring theme in her output.

The origins of this exhibition lie in the performance *Moving Off the Land*, which combines literature and mythology with sketches and notes on the sea by the artist. Commissioned in 2016 as a lecture-demonstration by TBA21-Academy - TBA21's platform that promotes the conservation of the oceans through interdisciplinary artistic projects - the work has evolved to become a true avant-garde action that has been presented in cities such as Vienna, Reykjavik, New York, London, San Francisco and Venice. In the performance, projected underwater images alternate with a voice-over that recites extracts from *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville (1819-1891), *The Soul of an Octopus* by naturalist Sy Montgomery (born Frankfurt, 1958) and the essay *Undersea* (1937) by the marine biologist Rachael Carson (1907-1964), inviting the viewer to undertake an underwater journey among the drawings created live by Jonas and stage props that give rise to aquatic creatures.

**Images, from left to right:** Joan Jonas, *Moving Off the Land*, 2019, Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Venice. Performance with Ikue Mori and Francesco Migliaccio. Photo: Moira Ricci © Joan Jonas. Installation view. Joan Jonas, *Moving Off the Land II*, Ocean Space, Venice, 2019. Photo: Enrico Fiorese | TBA21.

**More information and images:**

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

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[https://static.museothyssen.org/microsites/prensa/2020/Joan\\_Jonas/](https://static.museothyssen.org/microsites/prensa/2020/Joan_Jonas/)



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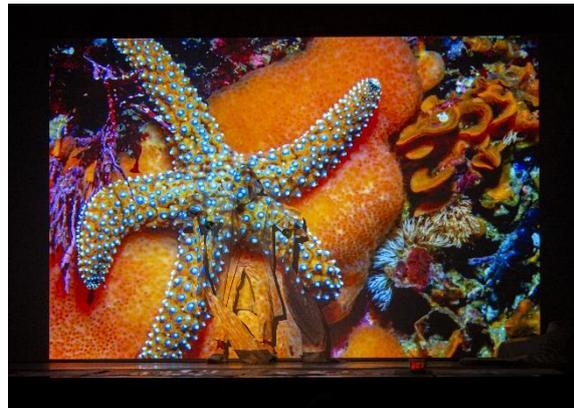
Joan Jonas, *Moving Off the Land II*. Installation view. Ocean Space, Venecia, 2019. Photo: Enrico Fiorese | TBA21.

In the installation at the Museo Thyssen the videos introduce the five new versions of the installation *My New Theater* created for Ocean Space in Venice, located in the historic church of San Lorenzo; constructions conceived as devices for the visualisation of moving images which Jonas has been making since 1997 in different dimensions and forms. On display are two small wooden structures with a monitor inside and three large installations with projected videos, each devoted to a different subject such as mermaids, mirrors, octopuses, whales and Jamaican fishermen. The film material in the

performances is interspersed with new images, including film footage in aquariums and the waters off Jamaica, shots of bioluminescent creatures filmed by the marine biologist and expert in coral reefs and photosynthesis David Gruber, and spoken word sequences and movements recorded in Joan Jonas's studio in New York. The result is a homage to the oceans and their animal life, to biodiversity and ecology, as well as a wake-up-call on the effects of climate change and species extinction.

The exhibition also features a selection of drawings created by the artist in her studio and based on her research on aquariums around the world. Again deriving from one of her artistic actions is a large original drawing of a whale produced in May 2019 at the Ocean Space in Venice, a new centre set up to promote research into oceans and their defence through the arts. This whale greets visitors at the entrance to the exhibition, next to a sound installation with sounds emitted by sperm whales from recordings provided by David Gruber.

The exhibition also includes the sculpture *Aquarium*, a glass box that represents a mountainous underwater landscape and, which like the old cabinets of curiosities that were used for both scientific study and entertainment, displays various marine species. The box was made in Venice by local craftsmen from a design by Joan Jonas that is in turn inspired by a 19<sup>th</sup>-century postcard.



Joan Jonas, *Moving Off the Land*, 2019, Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Venice. Performance with Ikue Mori and Francesco Migliaccio. Photo: Moira Ricci © Joan Jonas

Around the edge of the installation are Murano glass mirrors which the artist uses to play with the reflection of the works and create a greater sense of spatial depth. A recurring element in Jonas's work which she has used in her performances since the late 1960s, mirrors blur the distance between the work and the viewer, questioning our very view of reality. In the present-day world, in which human activity has speeded up the effects of global warming, these reflections locate visitors as part of an ecosystem, referring to our interdependency with other species.

## **EXHIBITION INFORMATION**

**Title:** *Joan Jonas: Moving Off the Land II*

**Organisers:** Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21)

**With the collaboration of Fundación Colec**

**Venue and dates:** Venice, Ocean Space, 24 March to 29 September 2019; Madrid, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, 25 February to 18 May 2020.

**Curator:** Stefanie Hessler, director of the Kunsthall Trondheim in Norway.

**Coordination:** Leticia de Cos, Exhibitions Department, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, and Soledad Gutiérrez, curator, TBA21.

**Number of works:** 5 wooden structures with video projections, 1 sculpture, drawings and mirrors.

## **VISITOR INFORMATION**

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza

**Address:** Paseo del Prado, 8. 28014, Madrid. Temporary exhibition galleries, basement level 1.

**Opening times:** Tuesday to Friday and Sundays, from 10am to 7pm; Saturdays, from 10am to 9pm. Mondays, from 12 noon to 4pm, free entry.

**Admission charge:** Full-access ticket: permanent collection and temporary exhibitions:

- General admission: €13
- Reduced admission: €9 for over 65s, pensioners and students (subject to proof of status).
- Group admission (7 people or more): €11 per person
- Free admission: children under 18, officially unemployed people, people with disabilities, large families, teachers in employment and holders of the Youth Card and European Youth Card.

Tickets can be purchased in advance from the ticket offices, on the Museum's website, and by dialling 91 791 13 70

**More information:** [www.museothyssen.org](http://www.museothyssen.org)

## **PRESS INFORMATION**

[https://static.museothyssen.org/microsites/prensa/2020/Joan\\_Jonas/](https://static.museothyssen.org/microsites/prensa/2020/Joan_Jonas/)