

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION period: February 25 – September 13, 2020

Joan Jonas pays tribute to the ocean and their manifold creatures in the celebrated exhibition *Moving Off the Land II*.

- TBA21 presents a signature work of the renowned New York-based artist at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.
- In her most recent body of work comprising video installations, drawings, a sound work, and sculpture, Jonas combines poetry and prose by writers like Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville with moving images filmed in Jamaica and in aquariums around the world to celebrate the ocean's delicate ecology.
- An intimate conversation between the artist and the curator – taking place on February 24, 2020 – unpacks the working process.
- The artist gives a unique performance at the Museo del Prado on February 26, 2020.



Joan Jonas, *Moving Off the Land*, 2019, Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Venice.  
Performance with Ikue Mori and Francesco Migliaccio. Commissioned by TBA21–Academy.  
Photo: Moira Ricci © Joan Jonas

Joan Jonas's exhibition *Moving Off the Land II* conjures a captivating underwater universe in which the artist pays tribute to the ocean's mythologies, biodiversity and delicate ecology. Comprising video installations partially produced whilst in residency at the Alligator Head Foundation in Portland, Jamaica, sound, drawing, sculpture, as well as a performance at the Museo del Prado Auditorium, this multi-layered exhibition enchants and simultaneously points to our current moment of ecological urgency.

*Moving Off the Land II* is the culmination of three years of intensive research and production by Jonas, commissioned by TBA21–Academy. In 2019, the exhibition inaugurated Ocean Space in Venice, a cultural embassy for the ocean led by TBA21–Academy. Its presentation at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza closes the cycle of research and production for Jonas's seminal oceanic body of works.

Joan Jonas is one of the most renowned artists of her generation. She is celebrated for her groundbreaking work in performance, installation, and video since the 1960s. Ever since, her work has tackled complex questions regarding humans' relationship with the environment. With this new body of work, she revisits the natural world and the animals inhabiting it as well as the present danger of climate change and extinction.

**Stefanie Hessler**, curator of the show, says "Joan Jonas's new works dive deep into the ocean water, swim with the fish inhabiting it and weave in literature and poetry by writers who have honed in on the liquid masses that cover two thirds of the planet."

Jonas conveys her unique artistic universe and symbolism through **sound installations**, where the sound of sperm whales resonates throughout the space, and in a live **performance** comprising drawing, movement, video and a live score by Ikue Mori to take the audience on a magical underwater journey amidst a variety of aquatic creatures.

The artist combines poetry and prose by writers like Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville with texts by Rachel Carson and Sy Montgomery, and with moving images filmed in aquariums around the world and in Jamaica, where algae bloom and overfishing pose urgent threats to the environment.

In the last year and a half, as part of a sustained dialogue about their respective work, the marine biologist and coral reef and photosynthesis expert **David Gruber** has shared with Jonas his captivating underwater recordings. In 2018, Gruber visited Jonas at her summer home in Cape Breton, Canada, where he shot footage of her dog, Ozu, on the shoreline. The rich imagery by Gruber and other collaborators is juxtaposed with Jonas's own voice and that of young people she frequently collaborates with, as well as music by the celebrated composer and drummer Ikue Mori and by the acclaimed musicians María Huld Markan Sigfusdottir and Ánde Somby. In her unique visual language, Jonas has created a confluence of the poetic and the observational, of mythological folklore, contemporary narratives, and scientific studies, inviting viewers to plunge into a spellbinding experience.

### Performance

Joan Jonas' multilayered performance *Moving Off the Land* celebrates the ocean and its creatures, biodiversity, and delicate ecology. Composed of video footage filmed by Jonas in aquariums around the world, as well as on the coast of Nova Scotia, it is layered over videos shared with her by David Gruber. In a delicate dramaturgy, Jonas conjures an aquatic universe of mythological and real figures. Through her signatory combination of movement, live drawing, readings and video projections, new stories of sheer beauty and ecological urgency emerge. Jonas is joined onstage by the celebrated composer, improviser, and electronic musician Ikue Mori and performer Francesco Migliaccio. This performance takes place on February 26 at the Museo Nacional del Prado Auditorium on the occasion of Jonas's exhibition *Moving Off the Land II* at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, presented by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary.

"As each year passes, I hope that TBA21's program in Madrid brings more and more content and consciousness to the already vibrant cultural life of this city. We bring with us nearly 18 years of hard work and commitment towards initiating and developing our very own method of art practice. It remains our firm belief that when approached this way, the arts can become a powerful agent of change and speak to the powers above and the activism below by reaching a new creative common ground of concern", said **Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza**.

### About the artist

Joan Jonas (1936, New York) is a world renowned visual artist whose work covers a wide range of media: video, performance, installation, sound, text, and sculpture. The experiments and productions Jonas carried out in the late sixties and early seventies continue to be key in the development of many contemporary artistic genres, from performance and video art to conceptual art and theatre.

In 1968, the artist started to investigate ways of seeing the rhythms of rituals and the impact of objects and movement. Jonas has been the object of exhibitions, projections and performances around the world, in museums, galleries and major collective exhibitions such as the Taipei Biennale; documenta 5, 6, 7, 8, 11 and 13; the Sydney Biennale and Yokohama Triennale in 2008; and the 28th Biennale of Sao Paulo. Recently, she has

been invited to put on several solo exhibitions in Jeu de Paume, Paris; Museum of Modern Art, New York; CCA Kitakyushu, Japan; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston; HangarBicocca, Milan; NTU Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore; the United States Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale; and in the Tate Modern, London. In 2018, she received the prestigious Kyoto Prize that recognizes those who have contributed significantly to the scientific, cultural and spiritual betterment of mankind.

### About 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.

### About TBA21-Academy

TBA21-Academy leads artists, scientists and thought leaders on expeditions of collaborative discovery. Headed by director Markus Reymann, the Academy is dedicated to fostering a deeper understanding of the ocean through the lens of art and to engendering creative solutions to its most pressing issues. TBA21-Academy commissions interdisciplinary research that catalyzes engagement, stimulates new knowledge and inspires artistic production. Established in 2011, the Academy runs a non-profit program driven by the belief in the power of exchange between disciplines and in the ability of the arts to be a vessel for communication, change and action.

"At the Academy we acknowledge that the ocean is a living entity with a voice and we are dedicated to listen to it through our commissions, fellowships and artist in residence programs like in this work brilliantly demonstrated by Joan. In days like today when environmental injustices and social inequalities are getting more and more visible it is fundamentally important to recognize the urgent needs for constituted rights of nature." Markus Reymann, Director TBA21-Academy

**The exhibition *Moving Off the Land II* is co-organized by TBA21 and the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza based on a commission by TBA21-Academy and produced with the collaboration of Luma Foundation.**

### Press conference

Monday, February 24, 12.30 am  
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

### Artist talk

Monday, February 24, 6.00 pm  
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. Auditorium.  
Joan Jonas, artist, and Stefanie Hessler, curator, introduced by Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, TBA21 founder and chairwoman.

### Performance

Wednesday, February 26, 8.30 pm (door opens 8.15pm)  
Museo Nacional del Prado. Auditorium.

Link to images: <https://bit.ly/2vORpdj>

**T B A** Thyssen  
Bornemisza  
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