

MARKUS REYMANN

OCEAN SPACE



**Markus Reymann** is Co-Director of TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary which is based in Madrid, where the foundation works in association with Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza and has its other important poles of action in Venice and Jamaica. In 2011, together with Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, Markus co-founded TBA21-Academy, the foundation's research arm, fostering a deeper relationship with the Ocean and other bodies of water by working as an incubator for collaborative inquiry, artistic production, and environmental advocacy. Since 2019, TBA21-Academy has hosted exhibitions, research, educational and public programs at Ocean Space in Venice.

**Art Talk Magazine:** Hello Markus, or as we like to say, Good morning and Good afternoon wherever you are in the art world! Before we dive into TBA 21 (Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary), can you tell us about yourself, who you are, your journey in art and your passion for the water?

**Markus Reymann:** Hi Carolina, wherever you are right now as well. The sight of the sea is actually one of my very first memories. My mother is Scottish and my grandmother lived on the west coast of Scotland. So looking out over the Firth of Clyde towards the Isle of Arran must have been so extraordinarily different from what I was used to growing up in central West Germany close to Frankfurt that it burned itself vividly into my memory. And I've always felt very close to and at home in the water. I was a competitive swimmer growing up and spent many hours every day in the water. My journey towards art started in the theater. After a decade on stages in Germany and Switzerland I encountered TBA21 when I worked with the artist Walid Raad on the performance *Scratching On things I*


*Could Disavow* for the Wiener Festwochen. Working with Walid was really the gateway drug for me into contemporary art, his practice, the way he is able to condense incredibly complex issues and thoughts into objects and narratives and in his performances, slowly and elegantly, pulling the rug of reality out from under your feet. This experience was simply extraordinary and to me allowed for so much more freedom and possibility than found in the theater. I've been head over heels for the arts and TBA21 ever since and then it was just a matter of time to bring those two passions, the ocean and the arts together.

**ATM:** The impetus for this article was the discovery of the Ocean Space in Venice which we visited earlier this year. In trying to understand the mission and vision, we realized that Ocean Space is one important piece, but the origin is TBA 21 founded in 2002 followed by the TBA Academy founded in 2011. Can you tell us more about TBA 21, its mission and vision and about Francesca, the inspiration behind TBA?

**MR:** Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza founded TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary more than 20 years ago to build a collection intended to live in the public sphere. But very early on she realized that just buying objects was not really the way she wanted to go about it. Instead, she preferred to be close to the creative process, the development and production of the work. So many of the works in the collection were commissioned by TBA21. These works were from the very beginning engaging with pressing issues of their times, very often addressing either societal or environmental subjects. Many artists we have worked with over the years are advocates for causes or activists and by supporting their work we had the privilege to learn about the







things they cared for or fought against. Francesca herself has engaged with many causes she feels strongly about –Tibet, the safeguarding and restoration of cultural objects threatened by war, sound pollution in the ocean– and she is immensely passionate about the ocean in general. The organization is infused with this spirit, so over the years TBA21 developed into an international art and advocacy foundation that engages to unlock art’s transformative potential within societies and ecosystems. We work across disciplines to create new mindsets and, from there, opportunities to change the ways in which we produce, consume, waste, play, love, travel, work, build, and govern.

I believe that artistic thinking provides strategies to engage broader society as allies in the fight against the climate crisis. The ocean itself is our biggest ally in this fight for change. Ocean Space was born with an intention – the intention to share ideas, fostered by itinerant thinking that couples artistic imaginaries with scientific research from, with, and for the Ocean. Does the Ocean have opinions? I think yes, and we are training in listening to making these opinions heard.

While TBA21 is based in Madrid, where it works in association with Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Ocean Space in Venice is programmed by TBA21–Academy, which is TBA21’s research arm. The program at Ocean Space is inspired by a series of long-term research cycles called The Current. These are transregional exercises in sensing, thinking, and learning with the Ocean. The Current is itinerant and afloat, and when this issue will be out, in the beginning of December, we will be holding a convening in the Caribbean, in the Dominican Republic. If you happen to be in the region, please join us!

After two years of peripatetic exercises each Current lands in its third year in Ocean Space in Venice with an exhibition and public program that is conceived on the journey. We just concluded the Mediterranean cycle, and we look forward to hosting the Caribbean cycle in 2025 in Venice. While 2024 will see a return of Taloi Havini –who brought her magic sound installation ‘Call and Response’ in 2021 to Ocean Space– to curate an exhibition and public program with many-fold positions from Pacific islanders.

What is very important to me is that Ocean Space is more than an exhibition space, It is conceived as a community center, a place for the people of Venice, where through the lens of art we want to inspire care and action, for and in the lagoon, as well as beyond. We offer a place for unexpected encounters, for these magical, unique moments, when you experience a work of art that is opening up a new way to look at the world. And this is why it makes me so happy to see that our public program at Ocean Space is supported by the Venice football club –not only because I have a soft spot for the game, but because I think this is what drives me most: to open up art to new audiences, and to reach out to neighborhoods and communities, rather than to hide in a white cube.

ATM: 1. In a world that seems to consistently be pushed into silos, TBA 21 led to the creation of the Ocean Archive, a space dedicated to the sharing of knowledge about oceans, and other bodies of water, from contributors such as ocean lovers, researchers, practitioners, but also a community for all. What has this sharing community contributed to the preservation of the oceans? How has it affected much needed “action rather than words” in a world crippled by green-washing, or perhaps in this case blue-washing?

Hammerhead sharks, Cocos Island. Photo: Nico Ghersinich, 2020.\*\*\*





Vertical Migration 08 Lance Gerber \*\*\*\*



After launching The Current at COP21 in Paris in 2015 we continued to go to these large-scale framework conferences like COP, IUCN, or the United Nations oceans conference. We were often more on the periphery of the official gatherings, but we realized that TBA 21 being an art organization occupied a peculiar space at these conferences, and that people would come together on our invitation that otherwise wouldn't. Out of these experiences, realizing our potential of bringing ideas together and bridging distances, if not oppositions, we established Ocean-Archive.org. The Archive is an open digital platform that invites contributions across different disciplines, geographies, and backgrounds into a framework for collaborative research. We wanted to create a shared digital space for a multitude of voices and stories around the Ocean. And it happened almost naturally that on this platform an Ocean Community began to settle. First, the community was created as a collective space for the students attending OCEAN / UNI, our open learning initiative that brings together art, activism, law, and the sciences. It is online, tuition-free, fluid in thinking, and it offers a program that encourages students to move toward more amphibious actions by diving into topics around the realities and futures of the Ocean.

Since its inception, the ocean comm/uni/ty has grown from a village into a town, with now more than 1,500 engaged members who exchange knowledges, seek inspiration and by this not only sharing but actively shaping this space. In their activations, the members of the community have gone beyond the digital, they have organized meetings in Venice and elsewhere, at scientific conferences and political manifestations. It has become an ecosystem for learning, discovering, gathering, and ulti-

mately creating projects together which is perfectly embodying what we want the whole Academy to become: a 'think-and-do-tank'.

And on the note of the large-scale framework conferences, where we once started as a side note: for the Third United Nations Ocean Conference, co-chaired by France and Costa Rica in Nice in 2025, we were officially appointed by the French government to lead the facilitation process for contributions to 'Oceans Art and Science'.

**ATM: The work that you do is renowned globally for its impact. The task of "saving the world" cannot however be undertaken by just one entity. What needs to be done to have a wide scale impact and reach the 2030 goals? What do you think the world is doing right, and what are we doing wrong?**

**MR:** In general I'd say that collectively we've been quite successful in raising awareness and spreading knowledge about the challenges we're facing. I think that one of the biggest challenges is to translate the knowledge into actions. Another pressing issue we face is the capacity to collaborate. Our systems are built on the idea of competition, this goes from the way funding is granted to the set up and governance of our organizations. The multitude of immense challenges we're facing demand multi scalar multi sector collaborations which ask for a very different way of being in the world. And I believe the art space allows us to rehearse these kinds of collaborations. I also believe that we are facing a crisis of imagination, or rather a lack of spirit and capacity to imagine a world we want to inhabit. It seems to be easier to list what we don't want than to describe the world we want to live in and to dare the political vision and courage to put the necessary steps into motion.



TUTTE LE NOSTRE GINOIE.





OCEAN SPACE\_Petrit Halilaj\_Alvaro Urbano\_PERFORMANCE ©gerdastudio \*\*\*\*\*

**ATM:** We are hosting a panel during Arte in Nuvola in Rome around the subject of the “Unsustainability of sustainability”. In short, when half the world is buried in conflict, and a large part of the other half is left choosing between food and heat, between clean water and education, how do we make a majority of humans care, and act to build a better world, for themselves, their children, and generations to come?  
**MR:** Obviously when the main concern is survival there is very little room to consider anything else. Therefore we need to address the climate crisis holistically, with social and environmental justice, equity and accessibility amongst many other aspects as central to transformations as decarbonisation, less consumption and the end of fossil fuels. And this can only be achieved through care.

Care is a radical concept in its profound and transformative nature. It represents a fundamental shift in the way we view and interact with the world around us and it invites us to reimagine our relationships, our communities, and our society as a whole. It is about empathy, compassion, recognizing the interconnectedness of all living beings. In a world often characterized by division, indifference, and self-interest, care disrupts the norm by fostering a sense of solidarity and shared responsibility. It encourages us to look beyond our own needs. The radical nature of care lies in its potential to bring about a profound societal transformation, one that values inclusivity, justice, and sustainability. It challenges the prevailing systems that perpetuate inequality, discrimination, extraction, and environmental degradation. Since art possesses the unique ability to evoke emotions and foster empathy, to awaken our sense of responsibility, I see in our work and its reception that artists can



become influential advocates for care. Exhibitions and public programs can create opportunities to stimulate conversations that finally resonate with decision-makers. We are clearly only at the beginning of a long journey but I believe that the immersive experiences we share can create lasting impact and thereby contribute to social and environmental transformation.

**ATM:** Last, but not least, art & culture play a major role in TBA 21, the Academy, the Archive and Ocean Space. Do you think art has a responsibility more than ever to be a reflection of its time and serve as a conduit to support essential causes? How is the choice of art that you (TBA 21, ...) make a reflection of your fundamental missions and visions? Do you feel that younger generations are more engaged in "Artivism" (Art as Activism) than with "traditional art (fine or digital)?"

**MR:** I don't think we can say in general that art or artists must have this responsibility. Art also has many other purposes or should have the freedom to be purposeless. I don't think artists should be instrumentalized. Still, we believe that making art and artistic thinking are essential for transformative efforts, because they embrace complexity, they create engagement by starting from building relationships, they are critical and therefore reflexive, iterative and process oriented. This does not apply to each and every artist but it is true for the artists we choose to work with. As an organization we want to be actively involved in transformative processes and we believe that regenerative practices should become cultural efforts instead of actions to only mitigate disaster. To turn to and rely on the same thinking, mechanisms and forces to solve the issues we facing that brought us to where we are today will most likely not produce the radical shifts we need. Quickly and

therefore we insist on making artists, artistic processes and practices integral to this work as they have made radically different proposals of possible futures over and over again. I imagine the acknowledgement of the climate crisis is wider spread with younger generations who grew up with the discourse in the mainstream, but relying on them to solve the challenges entirely is really not fair. All of us who can, need to be active in this transformation and we need to start now.





\* Simone Fattal, "Sempre il mare, uomo libero, amerai!", 2023. Exhibition views of "Thus waves come in pairs", Ocean Space, Venice. Commissioned and produced by TBA21-Academy. Photo: gerdastudio.

\*\* Exhibition view of "The Soul Expanding Ocean #3: Dineo Seshee Bopape. Ocean! What if no change is your desperate mission?", Ocean Space, Venice, 2022. Commissioned and produced by TBA21-Academy. Photo: Matteo De Fina.

\*\*\* Hammerhead sharks, Cocos Island. Photo: Nico Ghersinich, 2020.

\*\*\*\* Vertical Migration, SUPERFLEX, 2021. Photo by Lance Gerber, courtesy of SUPERFLEX.

Vertical Migration is commissioned by ART 2030 and TBA21-Academy, and the presentation in New York was supported by Avatar Alliance Foundation, Dalio Philanthropies, OceanX, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHOI), New Carlsberg Foundation, The Obel Family Foundation, Beckett Fonden, and Danish Arts Foundation.

Vertical Migration was developed in close collaboration with Kollision.

Vertical Migration is part of 'Interspecies Assembly' by SUPERFLEX for ART 2030.

\*\*\*\*\* Simone Fattal, "Sempre il mare, uomo libero, amerai!", 2023. Exhibition views of "Thus waves come in pairs", Ocean Space, Venice. Commissioned and produced by TBA21-Academy. Photo: gerdastudio.

\*\*\*\*\* Lunar Ensemble for Uprising Seas, performance by Petrit Halilaj and Álvaro Urbano, April 21, 2023 at Ocean Space, Venice. Co-commissioned by TBA21-Academy and Audemars Piguet Contemporary. Courtesy of the Artists and ChertLüdde, Berlin; kurimanzutto, Mexico City / New York; Mennour, Paris; Travesía Cuatro, Madrid / Mexico City / Guadalajara. Photo: gerdastudio.

\*\*\*\*\* Markus Reymann and curator Chus Martínez at TBA21-Academy's Ocean Space, Venice. Photo: Enrico Fiorese, 2021.

\*\*\*\*\* Taloi Havini, "Answer to the Call", 2021. Exhibition view "The Soul Expanding Ocean #1: Taloi Havini", Ocean Space, Venice. Commissioned by TBA21-Academy and co-produced with Schmidt Ocean Institute, co-founded by Wendy Schmidt. Photo: gerdastudio.