

TEXTS BY ATIF AKIN, JOAN ANIM-ADDO, MAGALÍ ARRIOLA, RAKHEE BALARAM, ERIKA BALSOM, UTE META BAUER, BETTINA BRUNNER, D. GRAHAM BURNETT, PATRICK CHARPÉNEL, DAMIAN CHRISTINGER, SEBASTIAN CICHOCKI, CM LIVE (NEELOFAR, SURAJ RAI, AND SHAMSHER ALI), GABRIELLE CRAM, HEATHER DAVIS, ANGELA DIMITRAKAKI, GEORGES B.J. DREYFUS, EVA EBERSBERGER, CHARLES ESCHÉ, BEATRICE FORCHINI, ANSELM FRANKE, NATASHA GINWALA, DAVID GRUBER, CARLES GUERRA, SOLEDAD GUTIÉRREZ, NAV HAQ, EVA HAYWARD, STEFAN HELMREICH, STEFANIE HESSLER, VÁCLAV JANOŠČÍK, CAROLINE A. JONES, RUBA KATRIB, LUTZ KOEPNICK, CRESANTIA FRANCES KOYA VAKA'UTA, LUCA LO PINTO, SARAT MAHARAJ, CHUS MARTÍNEZ, MARGARIDA MENDES, SUZANA MILEVSKA, VANESSA JOAN MÜLLER, HEIKE MUNDER, SARA NADAL-MELSIÓ, HENNING NASS, ASTRIDA NEIMANIS, INGO NIERMANN, SANDRA NOETH, HANS ULRICH OBRIST, BORIS ONDREIČKA, ANNIE PAUL, NATAŠA PETREŠIN-BACHELEZ, IGNAS PETRONIS, ELIZABETH A. POVINELLI, FILIPA RAMOS, RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE, MARKUS REYMANN, KATHRIN RHOMBERG, DAN RICHARDS, RIDYKEULOUS (NICOLE EISENMAN + A.L. STEINER), RALPH RUGOFF, THIBAUT DE RUYTER, NADIM SAMMAN, MIRJAM SCHAUB, ANDREAS SCHLAEGEL, CORY SCOZZARI, TSERING SHAKYA, CHRIS SHARP, JASPER SHARP, FREDERIKE SPERLING, ANDREAS SPIEGL, FRANCESCA THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA, EMILIANO VALDÉS, NICOLA VASSELL, FRANZISKA SOPHIE WILDFÖRSTER, EVA WILSON, SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, DANIELA ZYMAN, OONA ZYMAN

Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary The Commissions Book

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The Commissions Book

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Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary: The Commissions Book

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Mario García Torres

THE DAY MANKIND FADED AWAY, N.D.

SINGLE-CHANNEL VIDEO INSTALLATION (TRANSFERRED FROM 16MM FILM), COLOR, SOUND
2:21 MIN.

THE ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE, N.D.

SOUND, CA. 25 MIN.
LIBRETTO, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE

The Day Mankind Faded Away, like several other works in Mario García Torres's oeuvre, is the product of successive missteps and/or failures and became something different from what it was originally intended to be. It was one of two components of the artist's contribution to Manifesta 11. Held in Zurich in 2016, the biennial involved each artist selecting a local figure outside of the artworld to collaboratively produce an artwork with. García Torres originally wrote lyrics to a utopian libretto for the now retired concert hall tenor Christoph Homberger, but after he ultimately withdrew from the project García Torres then developed a second libretto for a different Zurich-based tenor, Eelke van Koot. In the process, García Torres abandoned the original idea to make one artwork and instead made two. The first was entitled *The Artwork of the Future*, a copy of the libretto originally written for Homberger, printed on distinct blue paper and arranged in a line at the viewer's eye level. And the second, *The Day Mankind Faded Away*, is a video work with a libretto (with new lyrics) sung by Van Koot paired with stock video footage from a protected wildlife sanctuary in Northern Mexico depicting a dense swarm of endangered Monarch butterflies without a human in sight. These incredible creatures continue to migrate annually from forests in the United States and Canada to the same ancestral valley in Northern Mexico despite the ways their habitats and flight paths are damaged from human-induced degradation. The area from the footage is paradoxically thriving because of its status as wildlife sanctuary but also, perhaps even more so, because of the violence in the region that prevents visitors from safely accessing the park, creating an almost secluded oasis within a troubled stretch of land. Together, these two works present some difficult but plausible scenarios and questions about the current and future state of our world, and about its possible collapse. This meditative reflection asks what might happen at the exact moment when "mankind faded away" and proposes that if there are no humans left to testify to the existence of humanity, then perhaps we never existed at all.

The Day Mankind Faded Away and *The Artwork of the Future* were co-produced by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary for Manifesta 11, June 11–September 18, 2016, in Zurich, Switzerland.



MARIO GARCÍA TORRES, **THE DAY MANKIND FADED AWAY**, N.D., STILLS



THE
ARTWORK
OF
THE
FUTURE

AN ESSAY—ORATORIO
ABOUT OUR
WORLD'S ANTICIPATIONS

A libretto prepared by Mario García Torres
for tenor Christoph Hübner

THE FEEL OF
THINGS TO COME

THE BUTTERFLY PLAY
OCCURRED LONG BEFORE WE
EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT IT

TODAY READ:

MARIO GARCÍA TORRES, **THE ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE**, N.D.
INSTALLATION VIEW, MANIFESTA 11, ZURICH, 2016

I want to talk a little bit about the relationship with Christoph Homberger, a concert hall tenor who caught my attention. I am telling you this story because I think that a lot of the content of the work comes from my discussions with him. I don't feel that it's interesting to go to a city and invent a new piece; I wonder who I am to go and have opinions and make work about how things work there. In the end, I want the pieces to come from my studio, but I still wanted to take into account some part of where the work will be shown and even though the piece doesn't speak directly to Zurich or Switzerland, it does talk about a certain context and uniqueness of the region. It talks about the paradox of knowing that the world is collapsing, that there are all these problems with climate change, and yet in Switzerland it doesn't feel like it; they have all this clean water, everything works, there is money. A lot of my understanding of this comes from discussions with Christoph. He is a very famous tenor, who decided to retire from the opera many years ago because he thought the opera scene was too posh, and that the public was just there to hang out and be entertained. In response, he started to do something that he calls his salon. It started in his house, where he cooked and sang for people for free. He thought that it was a good way for him to start living the opera again. So I began working on a track for him. We talked a lot about how he, in essence, would compose a song through singing, putting a rhythm to lyrics that I would write, and so I brought my concerns about what would happen if we actually *did* fade away, if we actually *did* end this world. Then Christoph basically quit Manifesta because he had some issues that I think came from the same place as his problems with the opera, mainly rhetorical concerns about the way the institution approached him. I convinced him to come back a couple of times, but the third time he quit I said, "Ok, I can't beg for his collaboration," and so we moved on. I decided to publish the original script and this became *The Artwork of the Future*. The overall narrative was about the collapse of the world. It was about our obsessions with prediction and forecasting, and at the same time about our anxieties about destroying this world. There was already this idea that it was the work of the future, because it was an impossible piece that nobody would be able to sing. It was a song that was going to be sung at the exact moment when everything was destroyed. So when Christoph quit, I thought about it again and said, "I need to publish it, and I need to realize the opera in a different way." I didn't want to replace Christoph and have a new singer come and sing the same thing—that was a project I didn't finish. As it turned out, there was a young guy working at Manifesta, a tenor as well, but with less experience. He had recently finished school and was getting jobs here

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and there at operas, but never as the main guy. Still, he could sing. I thought it was really interesting to have one tenor that had quit, and another who was just beginning. And so that's how the idea of realizing the song came about. I wrote new lyrics for him, and these lyrics had a different component, based on that philosophical paradox, I guess, or question: what happens if a tree falls in the forest and nobody hears it? What the lyrics say is that the world will actually end, and if there is nobody there to say that civilization had actually happened and that people were living here for 4,000 years, what would that mean? The video is basically trying to imagine that moment where everything we know is over, there is nobody else, there is just this voice asking: did we ever exist? We started recording, without really knowing which direction the project was going in. The structure was basically the same—I worked on the lyrics and then we worked together to create a rhythm and a composition, even though it was only the voice. We practiced for a few days, and then we went into studio and recorded. Then I found this footage of the butterflies in the forest and I thought it was interesting because it was in a place that in terms of fauna and insect life is very vibrant and intense. It is an area that is protected by the government, but in reality because there are all these cartels and drug dealers in that area, it somehow feels even more protected. Nobody can go there because the surrounding areas are very violent. So I thought it was interesting to have an image of a landscape that was effectively impossible for me to access. Maybe the world would become something like this place if we all died. Maybe insects will still be around but there would be nobody who could talk about us. It is very difficult to work with opera, because it's such a cliché, such a romantic thing. At the end, I thought the most interesting thing for me about opera is this incredible feeling—I couldn't refuse or figure out a way to negotiate that romanticism. And instead of doing that I thought I would totally embrace it, totally use it, but in the saddest way, with the most dramatic atmosphere. I thought that it was interesting to have this one voice at the end of the world say something, and have it be the saddest person on earth. That is also how it was edited, the way that we mastered the song, the way that it accompanies the video, I hope that it brings forth the idea that this guy is there but you cannot see him, he's in the background, by himself.

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