



Photography by Ximena and Sergio.

Francesca Thyssen- Bornemisza

By Jesús Castaño

Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, (Lausanne, Switzerland, June 7, 1958) is today one of the leading figures in the art world, both as a patron of the arts and as a collector. This year she has been awarded with the Collecting Award in the category 'Philanthropy and International Collection' granted by the ARCO Foundation, and in 2021 she received the Honorary Order of Distinction from Jamaica for her efforts in marine ecosystem restoration of Portland.

In a clear commitment to continue with the family tradition, as she already represents the fourth generation, her own art collection includes more than 1,000 works, and more than 200 commissions of contemporary art, in whose production she herself has been involved, accompanying the creative process with the artists. To this end, she regularly participates in major biennials, co-commissioning and co-producing new artworks by world artists through the platform she created in 2002 in Vienna, TBA21 (Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary). She has a clear commitment to the fight against climate change –with special focus on the oceans– with the activity of TBA21-Academy and its Ocean Space that opened in 2019 in the Church of San Lorenzo, in Venice. The foundation has moved its headquarters to Madrid under the leadership of Carlos Urroz. TBA21 is committed to belief in art and culture as a carrier of social and environmental transformation and change. It has a long term collaboration with the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, of which Francesca is a patron, and other institutions, where it regularly organizes exhibitions of international artists – Walid Raad, Claudia Comte, Joan Jonas, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Tomás Saraceno, etc.

You have become a great disseminator of the power of art to transform and change the world and TBA21 has a thirst for experimentation to create new methods through the language of art to help see the world differently. During all this time your platform has grown into a leading international art and advocacy foundation. What has this process been like for you?

During and following the years that I spent traveling to the Soviet Union with my father and showcasing his collection in Moscow, Leningrad and also Novosibirsk, and Kiev, I became very sensitive to the power of art for being a diplomatic tool, of having this huge potential for cultural diplomacy. Later, when I came to know the works by Janet Cardiff, who is motivated by and engaged with political and social ideas, this encounter was really important because it made me realize that I could work with contemporary artists like her, which gave me tremendous hope to actually create a unique language, to support and encourage artists who want to take on the urgencies of today, and translate them into artworks. That was a moment of departure, to break from the commercial realm of collecting the art world was taking at that time. And since then, having accomplished more than 200 commissions, working on projects that have had their own journey, their own method of artistic research in particular, this has been for me a learning opportunity that opened my eyes to so many facets around us that I feel immensely blessed and privileged by this experience.

It has been almost 40 years since 1983 when the UN created the World Commission on Environment and Development and its guidelines for a sustainable future. Today, the environmental data is as terrible as the fact that we are not giving the right value to nature, destroying much of it forever. The fight against climate change must be a priority for the world. In this rather daunting scenario, what role does art have? What does sustainability mean for the art world and what role can this market play in raising awareness of environmental issues? How can more responsible practices be developed and what tools exist to help the global art market make changes with a positive environmental impact?

We believe that a cultural response is necessary in order to shift paradigms towards more imaginative and regenerative thinking, which in turn will lead to more sustainable and abundant futures. In our work and in collaborations we look for new forms of art production and inquiry, to propagate the urgent shift of ecological and artistic thinking at the cusp of severe environmental loss on a damaged planet. Our programs place an emphasis on the centrality of regenerative and healing practices to reorient towards futures of thriving communities and relationships. But we also adapt our practice - for the upcoming exhibition of Himali Singh Soin at Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid we are sourcing natural and renewable materials to work with. As a general approach,



Ocean Space by TBA21-Academy, San Lorenzo Church, Venice.



Left: Ernesto Neto, Esqueleto Glóbulos, 2001. "Abundant Futures" TBA21-Andalusia Contemporary Creation Center (C3A), 2022.

C. Tere Solar, Forma de Fuga, 2020. "Abundant Futures" TBA21-Andalusia Contemporary Creation Center (C3A), 2022.

Right: Asuncion Molinos Gordo, ¡Cuánto río allá arriba!, 2021. "Futuros Abundantes" TBA21-Centro de Creación Contemporánea de Andalucía.



Himali Singh Soin, Caribbean Futurism, 2021. The Third Pole, Himali Singh Soin with music by David Soin Tappeser. Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum, Madrid Curated by Soledad Gutiérrez.

this is how TBA21 seeks to define its future: we aim to shift our practice away from traditional collecting to generous, creative, and engaging programming to lower our carbon footprint and to develop new strategies of cultural emergence.

The evocative power of a work of art is capable of transporting us to spaces where utopia, reality, emotion or fantasy mingle. The great art historian Ernst Gombrich said that there is no such thing as art, only artists. They are those people who are prey to the irrepressible need to express their concerns through plastic means. That story sometimes has to do with intimate emotions, but always universal, and sometimes with social or even political messages. Art is also a mechanism to catalyze and channel critical thinking. The TBA21 program is disseminating the work of artists who have engaged in the global debate on climate change and sustainability through their work. They share their vision with us, allowing us to use their work as an instrument to build a debate in different areas, including education. How do you come to choose the artists and how far does your involvement as a promoter and patron go?

We choose artists because of their alignment with our programs and how they address the issues and topics that we are looking at closely in various programs, whether they're for Ocean Space in Venice, for the C3A in Córdoba or the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid. And we are very interested in also selecting artists from Spain, especially with the project in Córdoba. Working together with young, upcoming Spanish artists is our way of engaging with the vibrant art scene here, where many of the artists are particularly dealing with climate change issues.

We foster new collaborations across the arts, humanities, and sciences. Partnership is central to our approach to promote and produce artist-led encounters. How are we engaged and how far does this go? It's an ongoing process because what we do is to give artists a lot of time to develop their work and there could be even iterations of the process during the production of the work over this time. And of course, what we do is to curate for them a number of introductions with scientists, indigenous voices, anthropologists, or marine biologists who work in a specific field that the artists are interested in. Our network is grounded in so many different disciplines as it is in the field of art. And so our responsibility is to foster exchange, to give artists the long term support that they need for their field work, for their artistic research, for accessing situated knowledges, so that we accompany them over time and in manyfold ways.

The decision to open a fully operational physical space in the Spanish capital marked a new and exciting milestone in the foundation's trajectory, as well as evidence of its firm commitment to both Madrid and the rest of Spain. In April you presented at the Centro de Creación Contemporánea de Andalucía (C3A) the exhibition 'Abundant Futures' that weaves together the voices of artists from different generations and multiple geographies to imagine ecological futures through the prism of abundance and fullness. Curated by Daniela Zyman,



Olafur Eliasson, Eye see you, 2006. "Abundant Futures" TBA21-Andalusia Contemporary Creation Center (C3A), 2022.

the exhibition invites the audience to learn more about the collecting and commissioning practice developed at TBA21 over the years, encountering some of the most important works in the collection. What other plans do you have in Spain from now on? Which Spanish artists have you selected to continue completing your collection?

We have expanded our research practices and methodologies to Córdoba, exploring its histories and possible futures. 'Abundant Futures' is the first exhibition in a three-year collaboration with the Center for Contemporary Creation of Andalucía (C3A) and the City of Córdoba to create new cultural and public programming. As part of the exhibition 'Abundant Futures' at C3A, we have incorporated new commissions with Teresa Solar and Asunción Molinos Gordos and Regina de Miguel, whose pieces have recently been added to the collection. 'Meandering' is a new live research program produced by TBA21-Academy, that speaks from the Guadalquivir, Andalucía's great river, through three long-term commissions by pop polymath Lafawndah, philosophy-trained choreographer and artist Isabel Lewis, and visionary artist Eduardo Navarro. They bring together sound, voice, food, drawing, installation, performance, and movement to be in dialogue with the environmental and social histories at the heart of TBA21's collection.

And how does this fit into the global perspective of your plans for the foundation?

Spain is an active choice for the global organization we have become, because it gave us an opportunity to govern our projects in Spain and abroad, all under one roof. Our transdisciplinary approach has led us to broadening the scope of the foundation well beyond just exhibition making. The commitment of the foundation to its legacy in Spain and our commitment to extending our activities to education, to programs connecting science, technology, arts, and to building on fertile grounds for engagement in the fields of sustainability and social justice, is as strong as ever. Art is an agent of change, and in these difficult times, we need its transformational powers more than ever. At TBA21, we have always supported and given a voice to artists who speak up against political violence and repression. At the beginning of the war in Ukraine, along with other leaders in the European cultural sector, I initiated "Museums for Ukraine," an initiative to support Ukrainian art and culture. And in only two months' time, at the end of November, "In the Eye of the Storm", a very special exhibition of Ukrainian avant-garde art curated by Konstantin Akinsha is bringing together over 60 international loans to open at the Museo Nacional

Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid. The exhibition, accompanied by a symposium and publication, aims to rewrite art history to give full acknowledgement of Ukraine's incredible importance as protagonist in the development of modern art since many artists of the avant-garde movement were actually Ukrainian - Kazimir Malevich and Sonia Delaunay were Ukrainian for example. This is how I hope to support change.

The second part of the C3A exhibition 'Abundant Futures' is opening on October 19 in Cordoba with new pieces by Pipilotti Rist, Olafur Eliasson, Patricia Domínguez, Tomás Sarraceno, etc.



Daniel Steegman Mangrané , ∞, 2020. "Abundant Futures" TBA21-Andalusia Contemporary Creation Center (C3A), 2022.



"Abundant Futures" TBA21-Andalusia Contemporary Creation Center (C3A).

Images courtesy of TBA 21.