

## ALLAN SEKULA: OKEANOS

21 February – 14 May 2017

**“Most sea stories are allegories of authority. In this sense alone politics is never far away.” – Allan Sekula**



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Allan Sekula, Middle  
Passage, chapter 3,  
Fish Story, 1994  
Photo: The Estate of Allan  
Sekula, 1994

**Allan Sekula: OKEANOS** is a monographic exhibition that explores the legacy of Allan Sekula (American, 1951–2013) by charting the artist’s research into the world’s largest and increasingly fragile hydrosphere: our oceans. The exhibition title is a reference to the figure of Okeanos – the son of Gaia, the mythical goddess of the earth – who ruled over the oceans and water. His aquatic perspective – from and of the oceans – represents a shift of focus that counters the terrestrial narratives of even the most advanced contemporary discourses on the environment.

Drawing from the **Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21)** collection, the exhibition features a selection of seminal works from Sekula’s multi-faceted oeuvre. Three chapters from Sekula’s magnum opus “Fish Story” evocatively document maritime spaces and the effects of globalization. By describing shifting labor locations and relations, complexities of containerization, shipping logistics and economic pressures, “Fish Story” weaves observations of global socio-political and economic configurations and explores histories of the seas.

Other important works featured in the exhibition include two films: “Tsukiji” 2001, and “Lottery of the Sea” 2006, as well as photographic works from Sekula’s series “Black Tide / Marea negra” 2002–03: “Large and small disasters” (Islas Cíes and Bueu, 12-20-02), 2002–2003 and “Self-portrait” (Lendo, 12-22-02), 2002–03.

Francesca von Habsburg, founder of TBA21, notes, “Allan Sekula’s photography, films and writing open a window to the reality of life at sea. Sekula not only highlighted the ugliness of exploitation, he also revealed the beauty of the ordinary, of the everyday. His thoughtful work is a testament to resistance and to hope, and it plays a vital role in understanding the challenges facing our embattled oceans.”

**Allan Sekula: OKEANOS** forms part of TBA21’s year-long series of events, exhibits, talks and performances dedicated to promoting the oceans, their inhabitants and cultural history through the arts. TBA21 Year of the Oceans aims to expand public understanding of our oceans, seas and coastal areas, which together form an essential component of the global life-support system.

### **Allan Sekula’s legacy**

Throughout his career as an artist, Sekula pioneered an expanded and critical practice, alongside his engagements as theorist, photographic historian, filmmaker and educator. Through these activities he was able to lead a prolific and deeply political career.

Sekula’s legacy and his pointed exploration of global ocean-bound trade, serves as a case-study for understanding the environmental, political and social interconnectedness of our oceans.

For many decades, Sekula passionately investigated the exploitative geopolitical constellations and labor relations active on seas, ports and harbors, which – almost invisibly – manage the shipment and distribution of goods in a highly interconnected world. His work highlights the oceans’ pivotal function in the world’s industrial systems and speaks to the vulnerability of its ecosystems and the social and personal precariousness of the actors engaged in these sea-based industries.

Sekula’s work epitomizes a profoundly thoughtful reflection on the nature of the image and its implications in the systems and institutions of archives. It offers a thorough investigation and a comprehensive archive of the seas, charting the many networks and interconnections of economy, politics, social conditions and ecology, while reshaping the system of knowledge itself.

### **Educational Program**

#### **Symposium**

#### **Allan Sekula: *From the Panorama to the Detail***

This two-day symposium discursively unpacks the oceanic themes addressed in the exhibition and expands and updates some of the socio-political topics that Sekula’s work engages with in more general terms. The talks range thematically from environmentalism and the ocean to the complicated legality surrounding international waters; to the role of art in relation to political change; to use of the sea as a trope in cinema.

*Allan Sekula: From the Panorama to the Detail*

Tuesday, 21.02. From 3–7 pm

Wednesday, 22.02. From 3–7 pm

#### Participants include:

Nabil Ahmed, Sabine Breitwieser, Jegan Vincent de Paul, Carles Guerra Rojas, Francesca von Habsburg, Gabriele Mackert, Boris Ondreička, Florian Pumhösl, Markus Reymann, Harry Sanderson, Anja Isabel Schneider, Cory Scozzari, Andreas Spiegl, Sally Stein, Ina Steiner, Lisa Tabassi, Jeroen Verbeeck, and Daniela Zyman

#### **Film program**

##### ***Sekula beyond Sekula***

This film program features a series of films co-curated by Filipa Ramos and Cory Scozzari that explore Sekula's legacy and the way it has inspired a younger generation of artists to contribute new meanings and interpretations to his work. Many of the films interweave a critique of late capitalism with political commentary and social documentation, both of which play a significant role in Sekula's oeuvre. Each Friday at 6 pm, a different film will be screened within the exhibition.

##### *Sekula beyond Sekula*

Every Friday at 6 pm, starting 03.03.

#### Films by:

Julieta Aranda, Will Benedict and David Leonard, Hannah Black, CAMP (Shaina Anand and Ashok Sukumaran), Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel, Jennifer Chan, Rob Chavasse, Tyler Coburn, Morag Keil and Georgie Nettell, Mikhail Karikis, Andrew Norman Wilson, Jaakko Pallasvuo, Hito Steyerl.

#### **Publication**

To acknowledge the vast amount of critical writing Sekula produced, TBA21 will also produce a publication that will crystallize the collaboration between the exhibition at TBA21 and a forthcoming exhibition at Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona, Spain. With contributions from both institutions, the two will also work together to commission and edit new texts and to position Sekula's ideas within a contemporary debate.

## **INFORMATION**

### **Exhibition**

#### ***Allan Sekula: OKEANOS***

21 February – 14 May 2017

### **Location**

TBA21–Augarten, Scherzergasse 1a, 1020 Vienna, Austria

### **Free Admission**

### **Visitor Information**

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## EDITORS' NOTES

### About the artist

Allan Sekula (1951–2013) is a renowned American photographer, theorist, historian and writer. His extraordinary body of experimental work has mainly been concerned with chronicling the social, economic and political dynamics of life on the oceans and exploring the consequences of globalization, as well as the function of documentary photography in the media, art and society. Known for his formally rigorous perspective toward the tradition of social or critical realism, Sekula's work often depicts labor within the workplace. He developed a complex visual language to describe struggle and class conflict, reclaiming photography as a medium that could be descriptive or used to advance socio-political change.

Sekula's recent solo exhibitions include, *Fish Story*, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, Gillman Barracks, Singapore (2015); *Dockers' Museum*, Johan Jacobs Museum, Zurich, Switzerland (2014); *Meditations on a Triptych*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2013); and *Ship of Fools*, Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Hungary (2010).

Select group exhibitions include the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2015); Leal Rios Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal (2015); Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2014); Victoria & Albert Museum, London, England (2014); MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts, Rome, Italy (2014); 55th Venice Biennale, Catalan pavilion (2013); 29th Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2010); and Documenta XII and XI, Kassel, Germany (2007 and 2002). His work is in the collections of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Museo de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Tate, London, UK; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, Austria; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, San Diego, CA; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, among others.

### About Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21)

Founded in 2002 by Francesca von Habsburg in Vienna, Austria, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) represents the fourth generation of the Thyssen family's commitment to the arts. The foundation is dedicated to supporting ambitious, experimental and unconventional projects that defy traditional categorizations. TBA21 promotes practices that are informed by social and environmental concerns, transdisciplinary cross-pollinations, and investigations of the pressing issues of contemporary life.

After more than 15 years of collecting, commissioning projects and engaged exhibition practice, TBA21 has established a highly respected collection of more than 700 contemporary artworks including film, sound and mixed-media installations, sculpture, painting, photography, and performance. This approach has gained the collection a pioneering reputation throughout the world.

In 2015, von Habsburg decided to dedicate the foundation's ongoing program to becoming an agent of change by focusing on the complexities and urgencies of the age of the Anthropocene, as well as today's pressing challenges caused by climate change, with a special focus on marine ecosystems.

### **About TBA21–Academy**

TBA21–Academy is the exploratory soul of Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, and an itinerant site of cultural production and interdisciplinary research. Conceived as a moving platform on the oceans, it brings together thinkers from various fields concerned with today's most urgent ecological, social and economic issues. Through its expeditions on sea and land, TBA21–Academy seeks to reinvent the culture of exploration in the 21st century, while inciting new knowledge, communicative strategies and dynamic solutions for environmental challenges facing the world we inhabit.

The past year saw further international engagement by TBA21–Academy, occupying the space between the spheres of contemporary arts, science, conservation and policy. In 2016, the Academy repeatedly demonstrated its strengthened stance on the stage of the international global climate change agenda, an engagement that started by launching *The Current* at COP21 in Paris in 2015.

Besides co-hosting the Lopud Seminar, TBA21–Academy presented its work at 11 high-level conferences in 2016, including the IUCN conference in Hawaii, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission in Ispra, and on the main stage on Earth Day in Dallas, Texas.

TBA21 was recently granted official observer status by the International Seabed Authority (ISA). It is the only arts organization in the world to claim such status with an internationally renowned organization, giving it the same standing as the United Nations, the World Bank, WWF, Greenpeace and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, among others.

### **Supported by**

This exhibition has been made possible with the generous support of the Vienna Insurance Group. As one of the leading insurance groups in Central and Eastern Europe, the Vienna Insurance Group and its main share holder Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein clearly perceive its social responsibilities and have been reliable sponsoring partners for Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary and other cultural projects for many years. Numerous museums and galleries have insured their collections with Vienna Insurance Group. The main objective for cooperating with cultural institutions is to promote the international exchange in the field of arts and culture.