

DOMINIQUE
GONZALEZ-FOERSTER

TOMÁS
SARACENO

01.12

MORE-
HUMANS
THAN-

WORKS FROM THE THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA
ART CONTEMPORARY COLLECTION

25.09

DOMINIQUE GONZALEZ-FOERSTER
AND TOMÁS SARACENO

MORE-THAN-HUMANS

THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA ART CONTEMPORARY
AND MUSEO NACIONAL THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA,
MADRID

More-than-humans is part of an ongoing series of exhibitions drawn from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) collection and presented at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. Through its activities in Madrid, TBA21 seeks to present new ideas to a regular and growing local community, as well as to bring an engaged new audience to the museum through active programming. If we consider that art has the possibility to render the invisible visible and are willing to put ourselves into a context that helps us understand the artwork, then this becomes the most direct conversation that we can have with history. One should view the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection as a collective of energy, generationally driven, and not simply as a collection of artworks that span centuries.

Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza

Culture is an expression of who we are, our history, but also of the progress that we have made—Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza

Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) is a leading international art foundation, established in Vienna in 2002 by the philanthropist and collector Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza—daughter of Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen Bornemisza, promoter of this museum—and representing the fourth generation of the Thyssen-Bornemisza family's commitment to the arts.

TBA21 introduces, however, a novel approach. The foundation has commissioned numerous works from leading contemporary artists, becoming a close collaborator in the artistic process and an active agent in the production of the works. This practice has led to the formation of a unique collection, which is now being made accessible to audiences in Madrid through a series of exhibitions and public programs over a period of four years. Driven by the curiosity of its founder, the foundation is dedicated to artistic research, production, exhibition, dissemination, and affiliated public programming with a particular emphasis on artworks that investigate pressing topics of our time. Having emerged during a new geologic era—the Anthropocene—TBA21 has dedicated its practice to ecological thinking and is fully aware of the intricate interconnectedness of nature, culture, politics, gender, and human and more-than-human relationships.

Spiders do not have an auditory apparatus, and yet sound makes up an important part of their lifeworld. Through vibrations in their webs—whether from noise, wind, or prey caught in their sticky patterns—spiders can tell the size and distance of an object of interest. Jumping spiders (*Phidippus audax*), researchers found in 2016, can detect human speech in the vibration of the hairs on their legs.

Music, conversely, is considered one of the highest human achievements, with opera being perhaps the most elaborate form of (Western) culture. The vibrations of vocal cords, the resonance in the singer's body, and long training bring forth extraordinarily moving experiences.

We do not usually think of spiders and opera together. And yet the patterns of the spider's web bear a resemblance to the mathematical figures of music. Both are full of sensuality—the silky elasticity of the web, which responds to its surroundings through vibrations, and the singer's vocal eruptions, which quiver in the listener's body. We may think of a spider's web as a stringed instrument, and a voice may carry vibrations through the air to take hold of the web's tissue and temporarily move it to its frequency. Both invite us to become attuned to our surroundings and to sense that which goes beyond the retinal, beyond that which can be seen.

More-than-humans brings together two exceptional artists whose work is inspired by research yet transcends modes of knowing intellectually, considering that which cannot be explained by the rational anthropoid mind. In bringing together outstanding works by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Tomás Saraceno from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) collection, the exhibition invites visitors to explore questions of human and nonhuman technologies, culture in the Anthropocene, our own intelligence and that of other species, haunted presences at the edge of disappearance, and the power and attraction of the unknown.

Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster searches for what exists behind images and visual experiences. Her work is inspired by modernism, architecture, literature, and cinema, and yet she is less interested in narrative than in the pleasure of the image's atmosphere. Nineteenth-century photography is a recurring source of inspiration, as artists often used it in search of the uncanny or supernatural. *Opera (QM.15)* (2016) draws on early holographic techniques—speculative simulacra conflating different temporal and spatial dimensions. In the work Gonzalez-Foerster appears as the soprano Maria Callas (1923–1977), dressed in the iconic red garments of her last performances while lip-syncing to some of her most famous early recordings. Callas is one of a series of personalities, including the actresses Marilyn Monroe and Sarah Bernhardt, who appear in installations that Gonzalez-Foerster refers to as “apparitions,” as if they were, in the words of the artist, “a kind of spiritual session.”

The letters *QM* in the title are inspired by Bernhardt's maxim “quand même,” which translates as “even so” or “nevertheless.” To Gonzalez-Foerster, the expression resonates with the lives of the personas she appears as: “They can't stop, and art is their vehicle; their very lives must become works of art, no matter the cost. The supreme excitement is the artistic experience.” Throughout their lives, Bernhardt, Callas, and Monroe had to shield their private lives against public interest. Living for their passion—their art—their lives were prone to drama. Numerous rumored love affairs contributed to the enigma surrounding them. As women they had to negotiate expectations placed on them, which in the case of Monroe famously led to her death by suicide at age thirty-six. Callas similarly passed under mysterious circumstances, and Bernhardt was fascinated by death throughout her life. When she played death scenes on the stage, audiences were often in tears, contributing to her prominence but also to the mystery of her persona and her legacy.

The three women's passion for art and their uncompromising ways of living their lives, as well as a fascination with the otherworldly, the haunted, and the thin line between this and other worlds, crystallize in Gonzalez-Foerster's *QM* series, including *Opera (QM.15)*, on view in this exhibition. The performances function as what the psychoanalyst Donald Woods Winnicott calls transitional objects, a bridge between the real world and the world of the imagination. Psycho-sensitive as they are, they may activate unconscious feelings and memories.

Since she participated in the visual arts opera *Il Tempo del Postino*, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Philippe Parreno in Manchester in 2007, Gonzalez-Foerster has been searching for an impossible opera. The work on view is such a science-fictional attempt to communicate with specific spirits and inhabit their afterimages. It may be a reaction to the grid and rules of rational, efficient, digital life, in search of the uncontrollable, the ghostly, the more-than-human. According to Gonzalez-Foerster, “artists, like scientists, generate a kind of ‘artificial life’; artworks can become types of monster.”

Tomás Saraceno is known for his speculative research projects, such as *Aerocene*, an interdisciplinary artistic inquiry into alternative modes of transportation that do not require fossil fuels, and for his collaborations with spiders. The Arachnophilia Team at his studio homes in on lively multispecies ecologies, cultivating different “arts of noticing,” a phrase coined by the anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. Collaborators from various disciplines, from arachnologists to entomologists to ethologists to geographers, come together to explore complex forms of spider architecture or culture, together with the spiders and through different socialities. In workshops and discussions organized on the occasion of his exhibitions, Saraceno has invited collaborators to explore areas such as biotremology—the vibrations produced, dispersed, and perceived by spiders—and develops playful ways of encountering webs by readings conducted with his Arachnomancy divination cards. This take on tarot cards formed part of his *Spider/Web Pavilion 7* at the 2019 Venice Biennale. These readings propose a non-anthropocentric way of storytelling involving practitioners from different fields, who interpret the structure and vibrations of a spider/web*. Drawing on age-old forms of storytelling that resonate with cultural, spiritual, and scientific realms, these readings highlight the interwoven histories, presents, and futures of humans, spiders, and other species. The Western trope of human exceptionalism and agency set apart from our interactions with other beings is here undone for speculative interpretation of how our shared ecologies might play out in the Chthulucene. The feminist theorist Donna Haraway has proposed this term as an alternative way of conceptualizing our current epoch, describing it as a time when the (Western) Anthropos ceases to be a destructive force on the planet and acknowledges and enjoys its kinship with many other forms of life and nonlife.

* The word spider/web is part of a specific vocabulary that Saraceno is developing as part of his practice.

The works on paper *Solitary semi-social mapping of HS 1700+6416 by a solo Nephila senegalensis—one week and a solo Cyrtophora citricola—three weeks* (2016) and *Solitary semi-social mapping of Ceginus by a duet of Nephila senegalensis—four weeks, a triplet of Cyrtophora citricola—three weeks* (2018) were each made in collaboration with two different spider species. In bringing together genera that would not normally collaborate, Saraceno, his studio, and their spider collaborators bring forth hybrid spider/webs created in multispecies gatherings. The series of Spider/Web prints offer a different way to read and interpret the architecture of the spider/web: as a topological map of movements and temporalities that trace the intricate complexities of these silken sculptures.

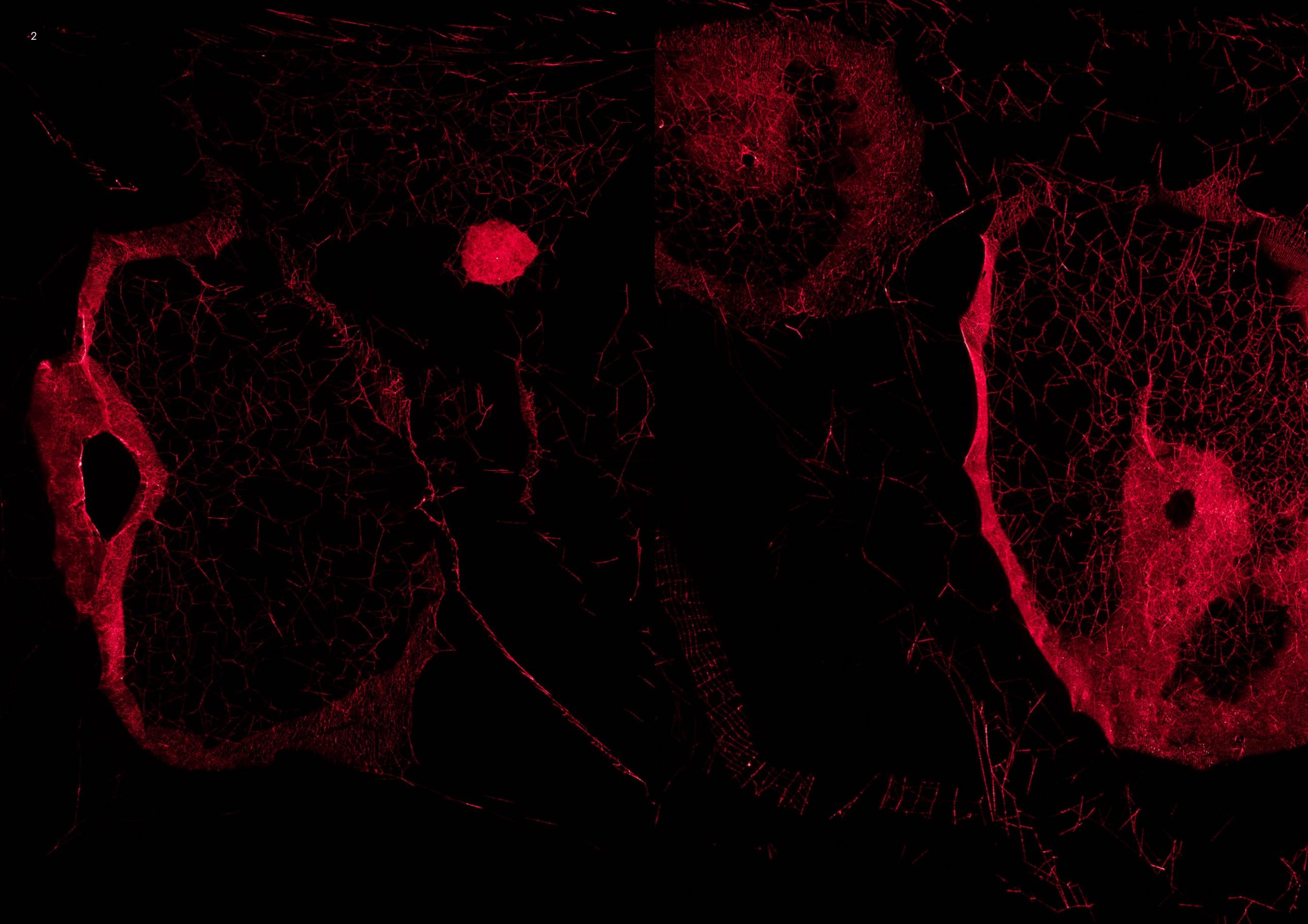
The installations *Hybrid semi-social solitary Instrument HD74874 built by a triplet of Cyrtophora citricola—four weeks—and a solo Angelena labyrinthica—one week* (2019) and *How to entangle the universe in a spider web?* (2018) forms part of Saraceno's celebrated studies of spider/webs, whose complex structures resemble tiny universes, surpassing many of the architectural and other constructions made by humans, resonating across scales with the cosmic web. Some scientists have observed that complex, three-dimensional spider/webs resemble computer simulations of the cosmic web. In the second installation, a laser sheet bidimensionally intersects the spider/web. The visual vibratory signals of the laser reveal the hidden architectural entanglements woven by the spiders. In other works Saraceno amplifies the vibrations of spider/webs as if they were musical instruments, making them audible for human participants. These entangled floating landscapes create sensorial and living connections across ecosystems, resonating among participants to create a fuller awareness of the unheard and unnoticed voices that surround us.

Webs and networks are a ubiquitous reference in culture today, and yet the spiders' complex webs and lifeworld still seem alien to us. The video *Living at the bottom of the ocean of air (Underwater spider)* (2018) focuses on a particularly curious arachnid, the diving bell spider (*Argyroneta aquatica*), a species that lives almost entirely underwater in lakes, ponds, and marshes. Surrounding its abdomen is an air bubble captured with its hairs and giving it a silvery appearance. The spider surfaces only briefly to replenish its air supplies. Underwater it resides in its air bell, dashing at prey that touch the silk threads attaching it to plants. This unique behavior highlights the capacity of certain species to transform their way of life to adapt to new environments. In this way the underwater spider sounds an invitation for biospeculation, calling us to question the unexplored possibilities of our future environment.

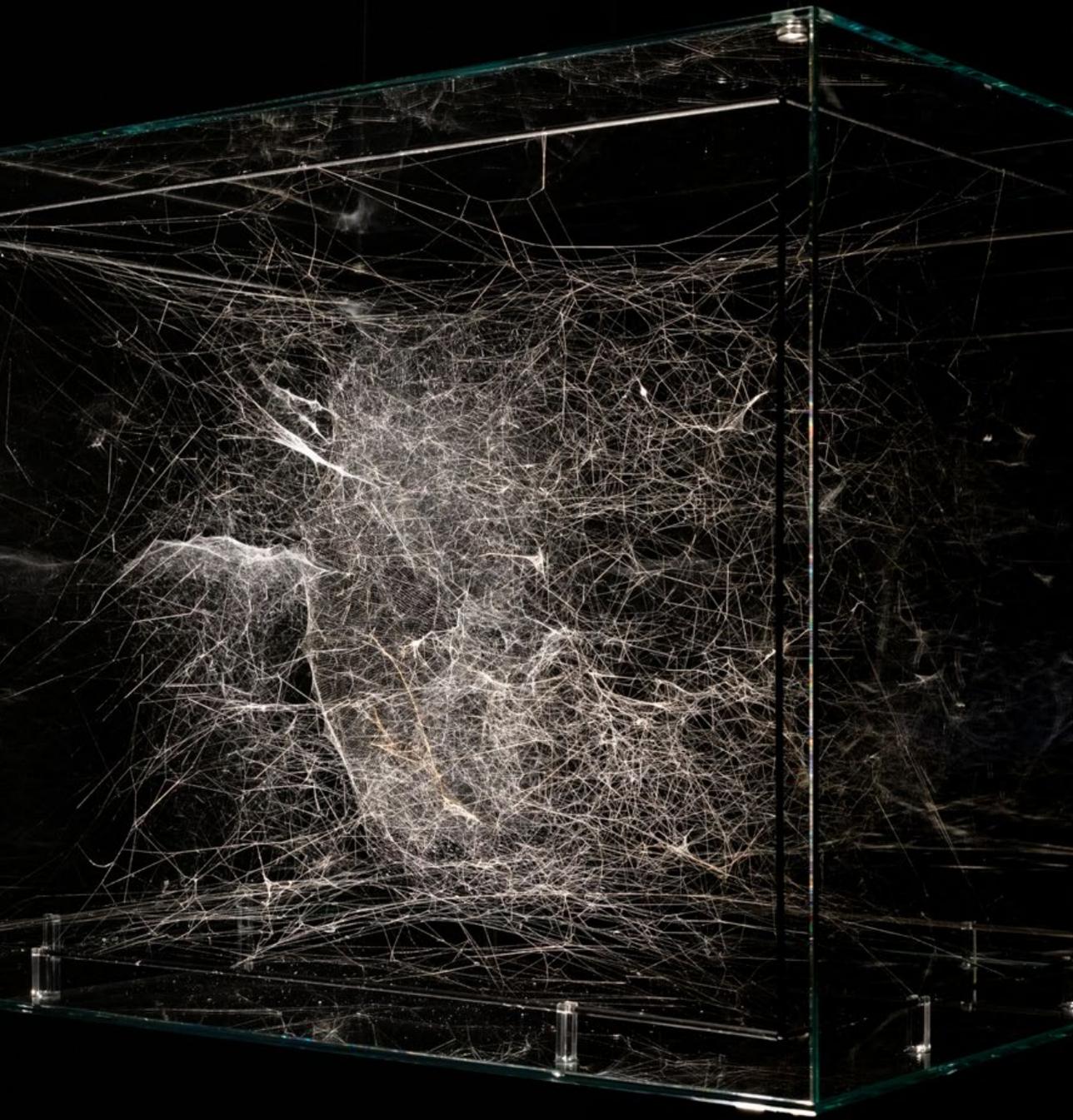
Saraceno's works show the spiders from their perspective and within their *Umwelt*, since, in the slightly amended words of the sociologist Bruno Latour (who wrote about humans in this passage), "no visual representation of [spiders] as such, separated from the rest of their support systems, makes any sense today." In doing so, the works invite us to veer from arachnophobia to arachnophilia, acknowledging our sympoietic entanglements and, in tune with the philosopher Isabelle Stengers, working toward *cosmopolitics*, a new attention to our shared ecologies with nonhumans.

Stefanie Hessler, curator of the exhibition











An experimental artist based in Paris, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster has been exploring since 1990 the different modalities of sensory and cognitive relationship between bodies and spaces, real or fictitious, up to the point of questioning the distance between organic life and work. Metabolizing literary and cinematographic, architectural and musical, scientific and pop references, Gonzalez-Foerster creates “chambers” and “interiors”, “gardens”, “attractions” and “planets”, with respect to the multiple meanings that these terms take on in the works of Virginia Woolf or Nathaniel Hawthorne, the Brontë sisters or Thomas Pynchon, Joanna Russ or Philip K. Dick. This investigation of spaces extends to a questioning of the implicit neutrality of practices and exhibition spaces. Her *mises en espace*, “anticipations” and “apparitions” seek to invade the sensory domain of the viewers in order to operate intentional changes in their memory and imagination. Haunted by history and future, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster’s works become containers where the artist incubates a form of subjectivity that does not yet exist. Through multiple international exhibitions, short films, productions and concerts, Gonzalez-Foerster’s mutant work contributes to the invention of new technologies of consciousness. Her most recent exhibitions include *Martian Dreams Ensemble*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig (2018); *Pynchon Park*, Museu de Arte, Arquitetura e Tecnologia (MAAT), Lisbon (2017); *Costumes & Wishes for the 21st Century*, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2017); *1887–2058*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen K20, Düsseldorf (2016); *1887–2058*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2015); *Temporama*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (2015).

Tomás Saraceno’s practice is elevated by the concepts linking art, architecture, natural sciences, astrophysics, and engineering. Enmeshed at the junction of these worlds, his floating sculptures, community projects, and interactive installations propose and explore new, sustainable ways of inhabiting and sensing the environment. In 2015 Saraceno established the international, interdisciplinary artistic and scientific project *Aerocene*, with which he achieved the world record for the first manned flight exclusively powered by solar energy, which was also the longest. His profound interest in spiders and their webs led to the formation of the Arachnophilia department at Studio Tomás Saraceno, engendering the creation of Arachnophilia.net and the Arachnomancy App. Through these platforms Saraceno invites people from around the globe to weave the web of interspecies understanding. He was the first person to scan, reconstruct, and reimagine spiders’ woven spatial habitats and possesses the only three-dimensional spiderweb collection in existence. In the past decade he has initiated several interdisciplinary collaborations, including those with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Max Planck Society, and the Nanyang Technological University. Select residencies include Centre National d’Études Spatiales (2014–15), MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology (2012–), and Atelier Calder (2010). Saraceno has most recently exhibited at the 58th Venice Biennale, *May You Live In Interesting Times* (2019); the Carte Blanche exhibition *ON AIR*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018); *A Thermodynamic Imaginary*, Museu de Arte, Arquitetura e Tecnologia (MAAT), Lisbon (2018); and *How to Entangle the Universe in a Spider’s Web*, Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires (2017). His work is housed in international collections, including the Bauhaus Museum, Weimar; Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Saraceno lives and works in and beyond the planet Earth.

EducaThyssen offers the general public a variety of educational resources to facilitate comprehension, enrich the exhibition experience, and show how it is connected to other works in the museum's collection.

CONVERSATORIO 21 [Conversation Studio 21]

Conversation with the audience about the More-than-humans exhibition, guided by a museum educator. This activity aims to make the show more accessible and understandable and draw visitors into a lively debate about the discourse of the artists and the curator. Advance registration at www.educathyssen.org required

5, 10, 19 and 24 October and 2, 7, 16, 21 and 30 November at 4:30 pm

SOUND INTERVENTION

In partnership with the Centro District Municipal School of Music and Dance, EducaThyssen proposes a sound intervention related to the exhibition.

More information at www.educathyssen.org

WORKSHOP: TUNING IN TO OTHER WORLDS: SPIDER WEBS AND INVERTEBRATE VIBRATIONS

Activity led by Dr Roland Mühlethaler, entomologist and expert on vibrational communication in animals.

In this popular science workshop, participants build simple electronic devices that let them hear the vibrations made by spiders, insects and other invertebrates. The devices made during the workshop can later be used in another activity, *Spider Web Mapping and Field Recording* in local ecosystems.

30 October, 10 am–1 pm

GUIDED TOUR: SPIDER WEB MAPPING AGAINST EXTINCTION AND FIELD RECORDING IN LOCAL ECOSYSTEMS

Activity led by entomologist Dr Roland Mühlethaler.

During this guided tour of the museum and its environs, participants will learn how to find the spider webs that share our urban ecosystems. Those who participated in the previous workshop can use their recording devices to pick up the vibrations of the invertebrate worlds they discover.

30 and 31 October, 2–4 pm

Advance registration at actividades@tba21.org required

ARACHNOMANCY READINGS

Individual fortune-telling sessions with Ania Puig Chang, using spider-based Arachnomancy cards.

15-minute sessions conducted in Spanish.

Register at actividades@tba21.org

30 and 31 October, 2–7 pm

TALK: ANIMISM AND ARACHNOMANCY: THE SEARCH FOR NON-HUMAN INTELLIGENCE USING THE SPIDER WEB ORACLE

Stefanie Hessler will talk about animism, shamanism, sensibility and non-human spider divination practices.

30 October, 7–8:30 pm, Auditorium, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. Free admission.

Advance registration at www.museothyssen.org required

MORE-THAN-HUMANS CONCERT

Programme TBA

31 October, 9–11 pm. Auditorium, Museo

Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. Advance registration at actividades@tba21.org required

CONVERSATION: LEARNING FROM THE OTHERS

María Blasco (researcher and director of the Spanish National Cancer Research Centre) and Rafael Doctor Roncero (curator, art critic and former director of the MUSAC and the Centro Andaluz de la Fotografía) will talk about how to learn from animals in an anthropocentric culture. Moderated by Carlos Urroz (director of TBA21)

12 November, 5–7 pm. Auditorium, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. Free admission.

Advance registration at www.museothyssen.org required

OTHER ACTIVITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR SPECIAL AUDIENCES**COMUNIDAD MUSARAÑA [Shrew Community]**

For practising teachers and educators. Over a weekend, teachers will experiment with contemporary art to discover new lines of work related to non-human intelligence and environmental awareness.

Saturday, 26 October 2019, 10 am–2 pm and 4–7 pm

Sunday, 27 October 2019, 10 am–2 pm

More information at www.educathyssen.org

HECHO A MEDIDA [Made to Measure]

For community, social and healthcare organisations and collectives.

Tours of the exhibition, designed in collaboration with participating institutions, that draw connections between the featured artworks and the specific interests of these collectives.

1, 8, 15, 22 and 29 October and 5, 12, 19 and 26 November at 4 pm

Bookings at educathyssen@museothyssen.org or on +34 913 600 334

UN IMPULSO EXTERNO [An External Drive]

Activity for Education students.

In partnership with the Complutense University of Madrid's Department of Education Sciences, EducaThyssen offers an introduction to the practices and content of contemporary art for Education students preparing to become teachers.

Free admission. More information at www.educathyssen.org

PARTNERSHIP WITH MEDIALAB-PRADO

On the occasion of *More-than-humans*, Medialab Prado, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) and the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza are launching a collaborative programme which will link the exhibition themes to a public call for projects that explore the connections between living organisms and digital invention. Thanks to this partnership, there will also be a guided tour of the *More-than-humans* exhibition at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza on 29 November and a visit to the Fab Lab to see the developed projects.

For more information about the Medialab Prado workshops, write to: info@medialab-Prado.es actividades@tba21.org

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE TEATRO REAL

To mark the presentation of Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's work *OPERA (QM.15)* at the *More-than-humans* exhibition, the Teatro Real, TBA21 and the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza have joined forces and opened their doors to a variety of institutional activities and events.

TBA21, in partnership with nuevospublicos.com, is working to engage with new audiences through offline and online campaigns aimed at associations and collectives in the fields of the environment, ecology, science, research, development and technology, attempting to create synergies between their practices and the content of *More-than-humans*.

For more information, please write to actividades@tba21.org or info@nuevospublicos.com

Clips from the conversation between the artists Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Tomás Saraceno, the curator Stefanie Hessler and Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza that took place on 24 September will soon be posted on the TBA21 YouTube channel, www.museothyssen.org and social media.

Joan Jonas
MOVING OFF THE LAND II
25 February – 17 May 2020

In *Moving Off the Land II*, Jonas pays tribute to the oceans and their creatures, biodiversity, and delicate ecology. Her new works dive deep into the ocean water, swim with the fish inhabiting it, and weave in literature and poetry by writers who have homed in on the liquid masses that cover two thirds of the planet. Following the methodology that has gained her lauded reputation, Jonas 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 and in Jamaica, where algae bloom and over-fishing pose urgent threats to the environment.

Claudia Comte
6 October – 27 December 2020

Claudia Comte's new site-specific installation for the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza brings together characteristic aspects of her work, such as wall painting as a method to disorient the senses in the space and sculptures made of wood and marble; it also introduces the intelligence of underwater life, like the way fish use bioluminescence to send signals through their skins, and the presence of corals as a call for humans to transform their behavior toward the oceans. The resulting installation is a total environment where viewers can initially see the pieces as part of a larger whole, then reflect upon the different kinds of information and knowledge that every element produces on the future of life on the ocean, on Earth.

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 FUNDACIÓN AMIGOS
DEL TEATRO REAL

MEDIALAB
PRADO

**An exhibition organised by
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza and
Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary
(TBA21)**

Exhibition

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza
Paseo del Prado, 8
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25 September–1 December 2019

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Copenhagen; Pinksummer Contemporary
Art, Genoa; Esther Shipper, Berlin



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A Art Contemporary