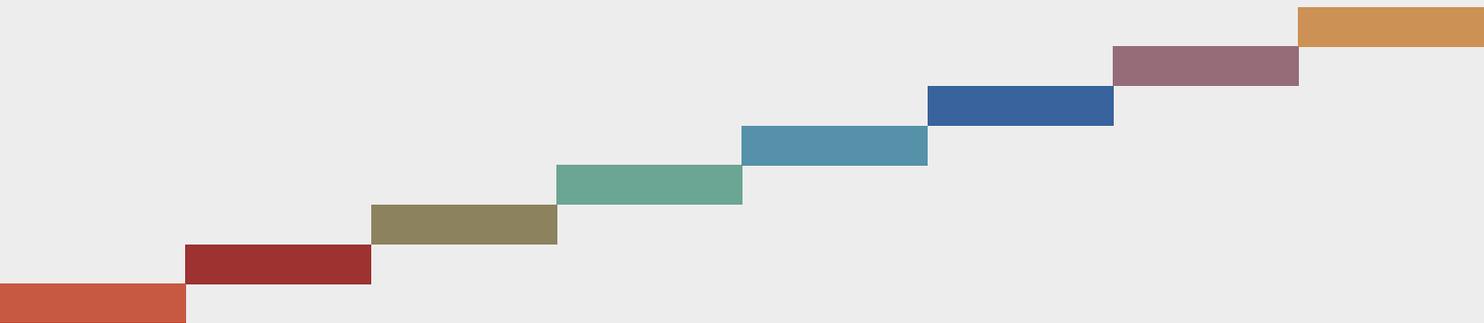


# how to tread lightly

st\_age expanded  
an exhibition



Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

**st\_age is a new initiative that TBA21 has conceived and produced in an effort to mitigate against cultural loss caused by the enduring Covid-19 pandemic. Its impact is affecting artists and curators and all practitioners from independent organizations, all the way up to national museums. There has never been a more important time for us to link hands and defend a culture of care. I have always believed in cultural diplomacy, ever since my father opened up his collection to Soviet museums at the height of the Cold War in an effort to bring peace to the world. That ambition may well have felt far-fetched at the time, as the US and the USSR were on a nuclear collision course. But today we are on another collision course which does not even have a clear front line. The balance of power is unclear and intellectual freedom, as well as social and environmental justice, is more evasive than ever. I also fundamentally believe that art can bring us hope and the courage to create a unified spirit of resistance, in the knowledge that we are on the right side of history.**

**Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza,  
Founder and Chairwoman of TBA21**

***How to Tread Lightly. st\_age expanded, an exhibition*** reframes the challenges raised by the Covid-19 crisis in terms of supporting artistic practice. It not only asks how commissioning can be developed in a more caring and meaningful manner, but demonstrates how it can adapt to emerging scenarios. The exhibition is a physical-world extension of the artists' projects currently being presented during Season 1 of *st\_age*, an online commissions initiative launched in September 2020 by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21).

The newly produced works both for *st\_age* and *How to Tread Lightly* explore ways in which we can re-situate ourselves in the current context to imagine possible futures. The works in the show pay special attention to environmental concerns and the recovery of ancestral forms of knowledge as means of generating more deeply-rooted understanding about the planet. This exhibition is a call for change and action.



An essay by the Indian author Arundhati Roy has resonated deeply with our conversations in recent months. It is titled “[The pandemic is a portal](#)”, and was published in the *Financial Times* in April 2020, at a point when the pandemic had then infected one million people globally. Roy reviews the health crisis in India and raises a series of questions that, in one way or another, we had perhaps all been asking ourselves. Questions such as: What really makes sense now? How can we better relate to others, whether humans or non-humans? How can we strengthen networks, and build communities of support and solidarity? The article ends with an invitation to cross through the metaphorical portal that the pandemic represents, thereby leaving behind those things that we know are not relevant. It is an invitation to move forward towards the future while treading lightly, and to overcome challenges that we could not even have imagined several months ago.

This is the starting point for ***How to Tread Lightly***, the first physical iteration of st\_age, a new digital project that aims to offer strength and refuge, while at the same time establishing a context for debate and collaboration between different disciplines and generations, so that we may, together, build the foundations of a new cultural space.

With this project we hope to collectively propose alternatives and new perspectives that will allow us to rethink the foundations of the present. Ultimately, we believe that it is important to live this moment not as if it were transitory, but as an opportunity to generate shared learning and appeal to other forms of knowledge to inhabit the world.

This exhibition is an invitation to sense the current moment, to embody other stories and ways of perceiving and inhabiting it from diverse points of view and different geographies. The project is underpinned by a desire to go beyond scientific knowledge, a framework so embedded in modernity, and instead to experience other forms of understanding, to let ourselves be carried away by encounters, whether physical or digital, and to connect with others.

The works that make up the exhibition are, beyond their physical presence that represent translations or expanded versions of st\_age

episodes, calls to care for the planet. Moreover, they often vindicate ancestral knowledge, not through nostalgia but as means of recovering a lost connection between human beings and nature. They suggest a coexistence based on respect and equality, accepting that difference brings enrichment. The projects are no less than invitations to a new form of spirituality that can help us transform while treading lightly through the portal evoked by Roy.

The Covid-19 emergency has also highlighted, even more, the climate emergency and the perils of habitat destruction. This is the focus of the work presented by **Yeo Siew Hua, *An Invocation to the Earth* (2020)**, in which he examines ecosystemic collapse through the lens of the destruction of forests in Southeast Asia, pre-colonial folk tales, and animistic rituals. His short film is a call to defend the rights of environmental activists in the Philippines, and by extension in other parts of the world where their work brings them into great danger.

***La balada de las sirenas secas (The Ballad of the Dry Mermaids)* (2020)**, by **Patricia Domínguez** is an installation–totem that talks about the struggle to guarantee access to water, something that should be a universal basic right in all regions of the world. Domínguez focuses on Chile, the only country in Latin America where the right to water has (since 1984) been commercialized. We hear the voices of Rodrigo Mundaca, the “water widows,” and spokespeople for the activist group *Movimiento de Defensa por el Acceso al Agua, la Tierra y la Protección del Medioambiente (MODATIMA, Movement for the defence for access to water, earth, and environmental protection)*. Activists become sci-fi warriors who try to bring us closer to the situation in Petorca, a region where intensive avocado cultivation has meant that the local population does not have access to water and the survival of communities is threatened.

This installation is the unfolding of the third chapter of ***Gaiaguardianxs (Gaia’s Guardians)* (2020)** an interactive publication that Domínguez presents on *st\_age* and that emerges from three years of research—a personal journey through conflicts connected to the issue of water in Latin America. Its origins lie in Bolivia, where drought and fires in



the Chiquitanía region have destroyed more than 4 million hectares of forest in recent years. In her native Chile, Domínguez reached out to eco-social movements and raised awareness of people who have been blinded by the police during protests. The third part speaks about the privatization of water in Chile and informs *La balada de las sirenas secas*, as one of the possible iterations that involve each commissioning process associated with the digital space.

***Geometría del centro (Geometry of the Centre) (2020)*** emerged from a trip to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, a mountain range in northern Colombia that is home to the Kogui, Arhuaco, Wiwa and Kankuamo peoples. **Christian Salablanca Díaz** calls for these communities to be heard. He plunges us into the depths of aquatic mythologies about the formation of the Earth through a video poem and installation which both deal with the transmission of knowledge between regions in ancient times.

One of the few existing traces of the culture of the Ch'olti-speaking Maya people is a manuscript from 1685 entitled *Art and Vocabulary of the Ch'olti' Language* in which Friar Francisco Morán documented the language and culture of the indigenous people with whom he lived. The Manche Ch'ol were later violently annihilated and their homeland was depopulated by the military and missionary powers of the time. It was said that Spaniards from the colonial period believed the ancestral home of the Ch'olti-speaking people was haunted, and observed that the crops continued to flourish despite the area no longer being inhabited. In ***Huertos de los ch'olti (Orchards of the Ch'olti) (2020)***, **Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa** speaks about three of these crops that are now familiar in Europe—cacao, vanilla, and achiote—as a way to reflect on the processes of deculturation that Guatemalans continue to suffer today.

The cultural loss that Salablanca Díaz and Rodríguez-Figueroa's projects refer to historically is still deeply rooted in the present. Environmental conflicts and social inequalities continue to have devastating consequences for the world's cultural riches. **Dana Awartani's *Come, Let me Heal your Wounds (2020)*** is an installation made with hand-woven silk dyed with traditional pigments. Repaired

holes in the fabric correspond to acts of cultural destruction committed by Islamic fundamentalist groups in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Libya, Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen since the start of the Arab Spring anti-government protests in 2010. Her project is a call to preserve the traditional civilizations of the Arab world, to remember the collective history of handicrafts, and to recover the traditional knowledge of medicinal plants.

**Daniel Steegmann Mangrané** also brings us closer to a cultural and ecological heritage that is in danger of extinction, the Amazon rainforest. ***Panther Dreaming (2020)*** is a computer generated animation of infinite duration that imagines the dreams of a panther that wanders through the jungle. Always similar, but forever different, the panther's dream is persistently interrupted, the forest collapses, and the spell is broken. This work is inspired by indigenous peoples' perceptions of the forest and of the entities that inhabit it beyond the human: the divine characters of animals, rivers, plants, as well as the xapiris, the shamanic master spirits of the Yanomami people of Brazil. *Panther Dreaming* layers different forms of knowledge and knowing—indigenous wisdom, the images and sensations of sleep, and the artificial intelligence of a computer processor—and calls for new ways of being in the world.

Building networks has long proven one of the richest ways to produce culture, and a commitment to acting collectively has fed into *st\_age* from its conception. This spirit is also the starting point of *freq\_wave*, an evocation of a monster wave curated by **Carl Michael von Hausswolff** and produced in collaboration with TBA21–Academy for ocean archive. The project has involved the participation of 84 sound artists and composers in an interactive web-based collaboration around oceanic creativity that is run by artificial intelligence software for this exhibition. *freq\_wave* arises from a spontaneous act of solidarity, from the desire to connect and express oneself. Von Hausswolff believes the future lies in imagination and audacity, and that vision has led him to create a large-scale sound project that spans seven seas. He wants to show that art and culture can make the complexities of marine degradation and pollution audible while drawing attention to the delicate soundscapes of the sea.



Oceanic journeys are also at the centre of **Courtney Desire Morris'** piece ***Sopera de Yemaya (2020)***, a film which draws on the folklore of Yemayá, a deity with roots in the Yoruba religion who is often depicted as a mermaid. It delves into the notion of everyday life as a tool with which to explore racial history and the voices of enslaved people who were brought from Africa to Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, and the U.S. It grounds the current Black Lives Matter Movement in the spiritual, and deals with Black motherhood, informed by the artist's own pregnancy, and the grief of those mothers that have lost their children through police violence. At the same time all these issues are interwoven with a deep concern for non-human creatures and the underwater world, attributes indelibly connected to Yemayá and her spiritual paths.

**Eduardo Navarro's** contribution to both st\_age and the exhibition is a three-chapter animation titled ***Octo-Durga (2020)***. Octo-Durga is a multimedia manifestation of an ancient Indian deity who is devoted to making and undoing the self through poetry, gestures, and sounds. Created together with Indian artists BaRiya (Riya Raagini and Pratyush Pushkar) Navarro's animation invites us to dive into a state of mind that connects with an underwater world where tentacular and meditative visions speculate about new forms of living based on solidarity and communality.

***we are opposite like that (2017–22)*** is a multi-faceted work that reflects on alignment and intimacy, ecological loss and the loss of a home, and investigates the geography and imagery of the polar regions through a series of dream documents, love letters, poems and predictions. **Himali Singh Soin** has created for st\_age a trio of experimental audio episodes in collaboration with the musician **David Soin Tappeser**. The audios are poems from the book of the same title—*we are opposite like that*—in which Singh Soin reflects on her research process. ***Subcontinentment*** comprises a series of fictional ice archives and some meditations on futurism in South Asia. ***Antarctica was a Queer Rave...*** follows an icy story of conjecture, and ***Lady Antigua*** reflects, from the point of view of a figurehead of a black woman on the bow of a

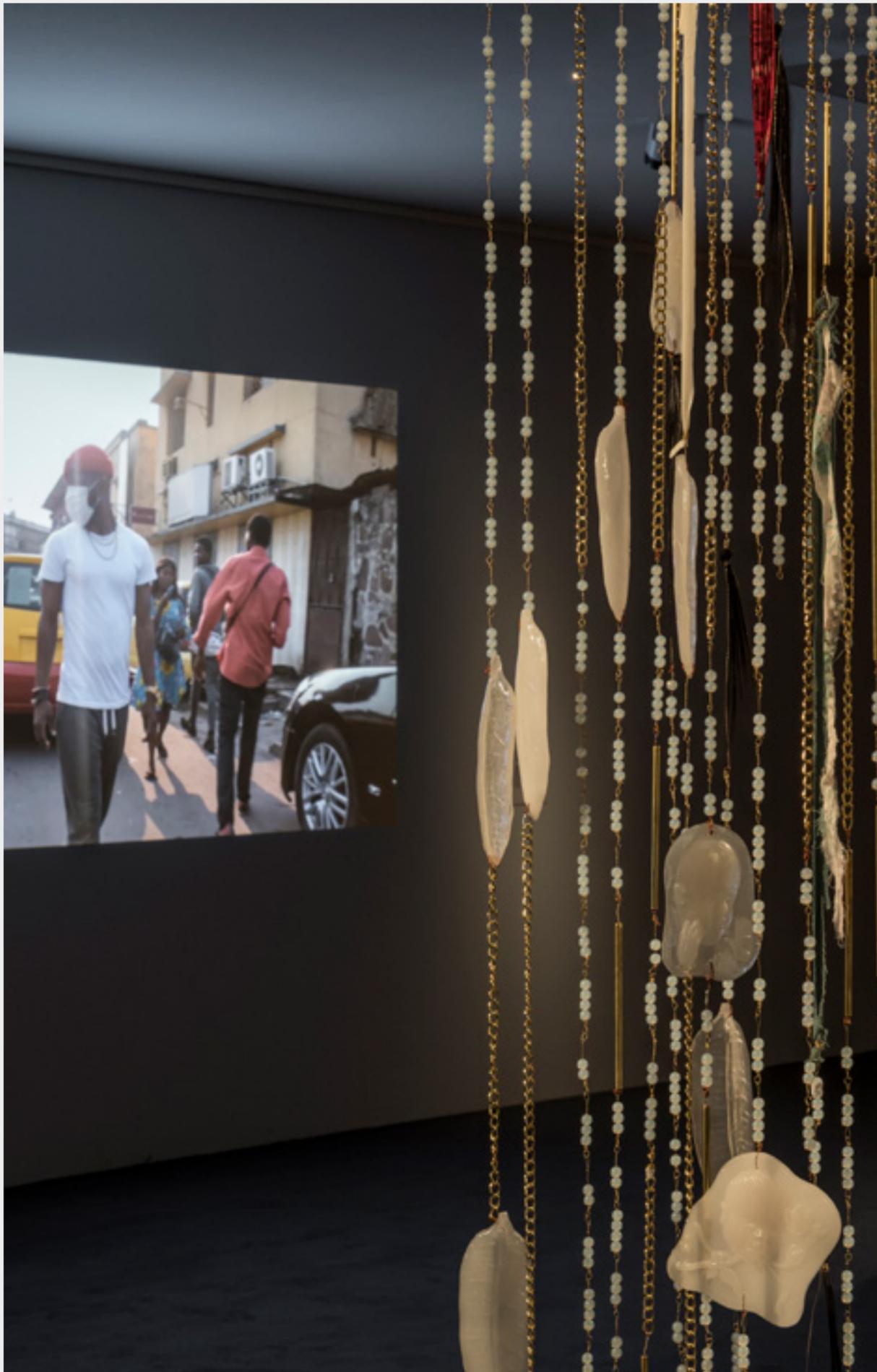
ship, on the artist's confusion at seeing herself as "a brown body on the polar tundra."

Singh Soin's poems, both read and performed, transport us to other places through sounds and words: to New Delhi during lockdown, the recordings made in her expeditions to the Arctic regions, the drums of the Himalayas, and the gospel music that accompanies us under the sea with the protection of the deity Yemayá. Singh Soin describes these works as open texts in which one can be immersed in a personal way and somehow assume the authorship of the experience of sound. Her work is a vindication of the senses and traditional knowledge and also an exploration of the role of the artist as a mediator of an often complex reality.

In this sense, Singh Soin's contribution has a lot in common with **Dorine Mohka's** proposal in ***Lettres du Congo (Letters from Congo) (2020)***. In collaboration with several Congolese artists, he sends out a message in the form of a video that addresses the innumerable disasters experienced by a country where, from outbreaks of the Ebola virus, through escalations of political violence, numerous armed conflicts, governmental instability, and economic weakness, crisis seems to have become a permanent state of affairs. Each of the contributions defends the urgency to create, in the here-and-now, against all odds.

Following the collaborative thinking that triggered *st\_age*, for *How to Tread Lightly*, TBA21 has joined efforts not only with the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, but also a whole range of inventive international partners and peers—from Khoj International Artists' Association in India, to FLORA ars+natura in Colombia, the 13th Shanghai Biennale, and NTU CCA Singapore. The voices of these partners are present in the exhibition through the works they have co-produced, as well as through the public programs. TBA21 aspires to continue to collaborate further with these partners about how to face this crisis and, together, build more organic institutions that are able to adapt to listen to their communities, and respond to an unpredictable future.



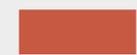


For Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, founder of TBA21, both *st\_age* and now *How to Tread Lightly*, are manifestations of a vision of a new art world. “There is a critical need to shift and transform the structure of the arts ecosystem towards more social responsibility. This is a vision of more collaboration rather than competition, and of helping support artists at the very source of their practice,” she says.

Soledad Gutiérrez  
Curator

# topics

In order to strengthen and focus the commissions, st\_age content is subdivided into eight topics covering a broad range of current issues that we believe have the potential of unfolding the most urgent issues of our time. They are:



## Who are we?

This topic addresses projects that explore and express the creation and composition of social initiatives and worlds that imagine diverse forms of communality—remarkable ways of coexistence under contested and often violent conditions.



## Displaced histories

What does it take to live and act in the world 'otherwise'? This topic relates to how contemporary art has become, in many instances, a field for alternatives and proposals, for divergent models, both inside and outside of the institution.



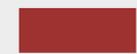
## Thinking oceans

This topic challenges the obsolete dualities of humanity and nature, of earth and mind, of technology and culture, to acknowledge the vast changes and disruptions taking place in the planet's oceans.



## Trailblazing into the unknown

An investigation into the burial of raw words and sounds, so that the great silence within can finally be deciphered. A practice of intuitive conversation with our destination toward healing.



## Staging resistances

This topic seeks to address the act of speaking out as a specific form of advocacy, and the nature of the voice as a tool against repression. On the other hand, what power can the withdrawal of words have? What is the difference between political speech and speaking politically?



## The undisciplined form

These projects live in multiple crossroads and intersections. At the same time they connect with the sensibilities and methods undertaken by artists who see themselves as researchers, who bear witness to the troubled ecologies of life, and who deploy new ways to register and encounter the world around us.



## Shifting all baselines

This topic explores alternative forms of research into ecological and ecopolitical issues concerning air, water, and land. Here artistic practices seek to unravel the multiple meanings and intertwined definitions of nature and ecology while aiming to create more- than- human communities of care.



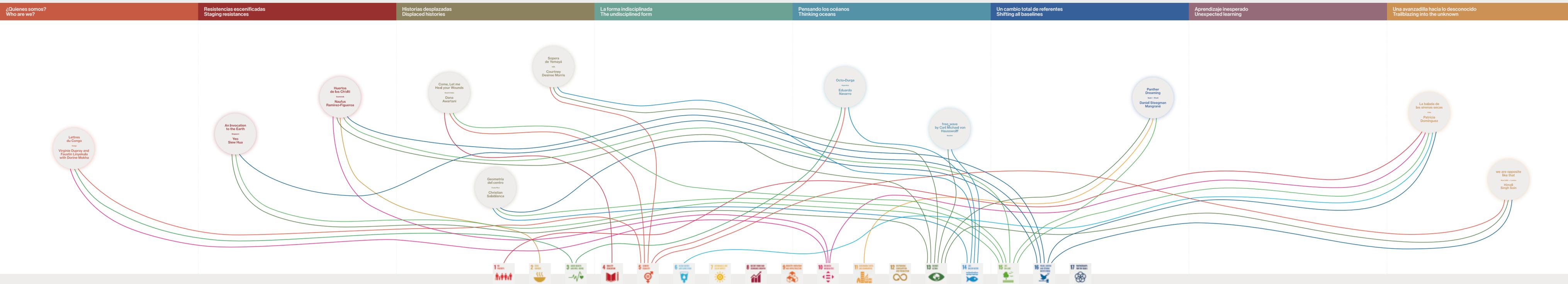
## Unexpected learning

Certain kinds of knowledge perpetuate imperial hierarchies, violent and colonial systems of power. This topic explores other ways of being and learning of listening and unlearning. The exercise of social freedom opens a debate on what counts as knowledge and the ways in which it can be accessed, guarded, and passed on.

# mindmap

This MindMap aims to reflect upon the multiple connections and layers the projects on How to Tread Lightly and st\_age bring together. It is a work in progress that will unfold together with different groups of people throughout the exhibition.

**Sustainable Development Goals.** Through its commissions, st\_age proposes to engage with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations. We are exploring the relationship between art as an agent of change and its impact on the increasingly urgent issues of our time. The works of some of the most generous and compelling artists of today can help contextualise the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and how they meet the challenges of the present without compromising future generations.



# the projects

# Yeo Siew Hua

Film, color, sound, 16 min

Commissioned and produced by NTU CCA Singapore and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) for st\_age

The Singaporean film director Yeo Siew Hua's *An Invocation to the Earth* (2020) speaks to the plight of those who strive to protect ecosystems in a time of planetary and human rights crises. It looks through the lens of pre-colonial folktales and animistic rituals. Deep in the tropical rainforest of Southeast Asia, a series of incantations invoke the spirits of yore, including the tricky Kancil (mouse-deer) and the ferocious Buaya (crocodile). These ancient animals enact their folkloric vendetta in a furious dance of dominance, yet long-overdue vengeance is shrouded in smoke. Meanwhile, an effigy of a tree is burning, summoning a whole other host of specters and ancestors.

The idea for this short film first came to Yeo during last year's Hungry Ghost Festival, traditional Buddhist and Taoist festivities which are staged in honor of their most special guests—the spirits of ancestors. At the same time large-scale fires were consuming the forests of Indonesia. The film is dedicated to the fallen environmental defenders of Southeast Asia, a region riddled with ecological threats, in the hope that their spirits will be reborn. In the Philippines, for example, more than 150 environmental defenders have been killed with impunity since 2016. It is already one of the deadliest countries for activists opposing illegal logging, destructive mining, or corrupt agribusiness. The Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 further imperils their safety, labelling them as terrorists and allowing detention up to 24 days without charges, warrantless arrests, and the suppression of rights to privacy.

*An Invocation to the Earth, 2020*

# Courtney Desiree Morris

Mono channel video installation, color, sound  
Commissioned and produced by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) for st\_age

Based in California, Courtney Desiree Morris is an artist and academic whose work examines race, environmental politics, remembrance, and the constant search for “home.” Her art is concerned with understanding the ways that we inhabit places—whether through migration, ancestry, or shared social memory—and how those places inhabit us. This interplay between territory and human subjectivity can be seen in how she often uses her own body as a staging ground for remembering her families’ experiences of loss and dispossession.

Morris participates in *How to Tread Lightly* with a short experiment film entitled *Sopera de Yemayá* (2020). It is guided by the idea that the sacred can be found everywhere, even in the most mundane spaces and practices of daily life. The artist delves into the experiences of female ancestors and elders whose stories are often missing from family histories and official historical narratives. The film draws on the folklore of Yemaya, a deity with roots in the Yoruba religion who is often depicted as a mermaid. Stories about Yemaya were brought to Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, and the U.S. by enslaved Africans as early as the 16th century. *Sopera de Yemayá* manifests the fierce, nurturing energy of Yemaya as a contemporary tool to make the human voices of the transatlantic slave trade more tangible, to ground the current Black Lives Matter Movement in the spiritual, and to better recognize the injustices and trauma faced by Black mothers in particular. At the same time all these issues are interwoven with a deep concern for non-human creatures and the underwater world, attributes indelibly connected to Yemaya and her spiritual paths.

## *Sopera de Yemaya, 2020*

Sound installation  
Commissioned and produced by TBA21–Academy  
Courtesy of the artists and TBA21–Academy

*freq\_wave* (“freak wave”) is like a rogue tsunami: it is unpredictable, unexpected, and can hit with tremendous force. Curated by composer and artist Carl Michael von Hausswolff (b. 1956, Linköping, Sweden) this project encompasses the contributions of 84 sound artists, composers and musicians in an interactive installation around oceanic creativity. It swells from countless spontaneous acts of solidarity and the will to connect and express. It is also an act of remembrance intended to draw attention to how climate chaos, social inequalities, and environmental injustices are violently manifesting themselves among humans and non-humans around the world. *freq\_wave* spans the seven seas to show how art and culture can make the complexities of marine degradation audible, bringing attention to the delicate soundscapes of the sea.

The sounds of *freq\_wave* stems from the element Water and include hydrophone recordings within the aquatic frequency ranges audible to the human ear, as well as those derived from information inscribed in data sets from ocean monitoring. The interplay of noises evoke the seas’ sonic capacities and spatial dimensions while indicating the extent and magnitude of human intervention. *freq\_wave* grows out of a web-based sound installation of the same name, and *freq\_out*, a sequence of 12 live sound works which have been ongoing since 2002. It is a commission by TBA21–Academy which first unfolded on Ocean Archive coinciding in with the digital program of the long-term research project Oceans in Transformation by the architectural research duo Territorial Agency.

List of participating artists: Jana Winderen, Finnbogi Petursson, Tommi Grönlund/Petteri Nisunen, PerMagnus Lindborg, Mike Harding, Kent Tankred, BJNilsen, Jacob Kirkegaard, Maia Urstad, Christine Ödlund, Peter Rehberg, Hans-Joachim Roedelius, Zavoloka, Dungeon Acid, Christopher Chaplin, Klara Lewis, Joachim Nordwall, Bethan Kellough, Christina, Kubisch, Anna von Hausswolff, Lise-Lotte Norelius, Francisco Meirino, Puce Mary, Nadine Byrne, Chris Watson, Ulf Bilting, Brandon LaBelle, JG Thirlwell, Dark Morph, Yann Novak, Chandra Shukla, Tim Story, Dorit Chrysler, Stephen O’Malley, John Duncan, Okkyung Lee, Maria Chavez, Randall Dunn / Chloe Alexandra Thompson, Kali Malone, Yan Jun, Gus Ferguson, Jim O’Rourke, Minoru Sato, Bana Haffar, Dickson Dee, Ryoji Ikeda, Basel Abbas/Ruanne Abou-Rahme, Kim Ng c, James Webb, Lawrence English, Francisco Lopez, Cielo Vargas, Felix Blume, Leonel Vásquez, Aoki Takamasa, Jonny Nash/Esmee Geerken, RAMZi, Alice Eldridge, Lisa Schonberg, Asma Ghanem, Yannick Dauby, Von Lichten, Sun Araw, Manja Ristić, Maia Koenig, Yambe Tam/Dylan Henry Price, Soundwalk Collective, Dror Feiler, Tatiana Zobnina/Alonso Vázquez, Mats Lindström, Mark Fell, Adi Newton, Lary 7, Carl Abrahamsson, Tetsuo Furudate, Leif Elggren, Robert Crouch, Schneider TM, Zachary Paul, Thierry Charollais, Michael Esposito, Scot Jenerik, Daniel Menche, Scanner TM.



# *freq\_wave* by Carl Michael von Hausswolff

# Christian Salablanca Díaz

Video, color, sound, 14 min; charcoal on paper and charcoal sculptures. Drawings and charcoal sculptures courtesy of the artist  
Commissioned and produced by FLORA ars+natura and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) for st\_age

The work of Costa Rican artist Christian Salablanca Díaz focuses on the phenomena of violence and the ways in which it produces, determines, and conditions history, society, and politics. His production methods function as affective encounters and are concerned with territories and populations in Central and South America, and the Caribbean. Salablanca's interdisciplinary works attempt to create a radical reflection on the cultural relations of violent systems: from the human to the animal, from the word to symbolic memory, and from the centres of power to the periphery.

*Geometría del centro* (Geometry of the Centre), 2020, emerged from a field trip Salablanca undertook in 2020, along with five artists and the team from FLORA ars+natura, to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, a mountain range in northern Colombia that is home to the Kogui, Arhuaco, Wiwa, and Kankuamo peoples. The group visited the Terunna—an ancient ceremonial city also known as Ciudad Perdida, the lost city. This remote and uniquely spiritual place is formed by a series of stone terraces and circular plazas. Salablanca was struck by the similarities between this location and the mounds and foundations of the Guayabo Monument, a largely unexplored archaeological site in central Costa Rica.

Imagined as a “video poem” that integrates audio designs by the sound artist Daniel Lara Ballesteros as well as fragments of text, *Geometría del centro* (Geometry of the Centre) explores the formal and conceptual relationship between these two ancient places. It records the making of a series of drawings. These paper inscriptions take shape through the use of charcoal tools whose forms recall pillars or instruments for measurement, such as plumb bobs.

***Geometría del centro***  
***(Geometry of the Centre), 2020***

# Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa



Bronze, glass, ceramic beads

Commissioned and produced by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) for *How to Tread Lightly*

Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa’s art ranges from performance and video, to sculpture, installation, and printmaking. It has encompassed investigations of dreams, architecture, abstraction, theater, and notions of the spiritual. Ramírez-Figueroa frequently explores historical narratives—especially the legacy of Guatemala’s brutal civil war (1960–96)—through the conditions of the body.

His project for *How to Tread Lightly* is titled *Art and Vocabulary of Ch’olti Language* and refers to the title of a manuscript written in 1695 by Friar Francisco Morán, in which this Spanish colonist documented the Ch’olti language while living in Guatemala. As an outcome of Morán’s advice, the Ch’olti-speaking Maya people were violently annihilated and their homeland was depopulated by the military and missionary powers of the time.

The Manche Ch’ol territory remained an enchanted and haunted place for the colonists. Some Spaniards from the 18th century are said to have observed that the fields of cacao, vanilla, and achiote were still being taken care of even though the land lacked a population to look after the crops. Morán’s manuscript and the context in which it was created reflects the process of deculturalization and loss that Guatemalan people still suffer today.

Ramírez-Figueroa presents a series of hanging beaded curtains that take their inspiration from the “enchanted” gardens of the former Ch’olti-speaking territory and refer to drawings that Morán included in his manuscript. Each curtain hangs from a sculpture representing cacao, vanilla, and achiote plants and the installation will be accompanied on stage by a sound piece featuring the words documented by Morán.

***Huertos de los ch’olti***  
***(Orchards of the Ch’olti), 2020***

# Himali Singh Soin with David Soin Tappeser



Sound installation, 10:22 min, sound poem from the publication *we are opposite like that*, 2020  
Commissioned and produced by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) for st\_age

Himali Singh Soin is a writer and artist based between London and New Delhi. She often works in a speculative way with performance, narration, and immersive audio-visual environments, and frequently uses metaphors from outer space and natural environments. Her multifaceted work *we are opposite like that* (2017–22) thinks through alienation and intimacy, ecological loss and the loss of home, and explores the geography and imaginary of the polar regions through a series of dreamlike documents, love letters, poems, and predictions.

For st\_age Singh Soin has created a trio of experimental audio chapters with musician David Soin Tappeser. *Subcontinentment* encompasses a series of fictional ice archives and meditations on south asian futurism. *Antarctica was a queer rave...* traces an icy history of conjecture, while *Lady Antigua* starts with the bust of a black woman at the bow of a boat, and reflects on the artist's "confusion being a brown body in the polar tundra."

*Subcontinentment* has been translated into a sound installation for *how to tread lightly* where the visitor is invited to submerge into the Singh Soin's poems, read by the artists and where sounds from New Delhi during lockdown and the recordings made in her expeditions to the Arctic regions with her words.

This research in the polar regions has taken her to explore her "third pole" and focus a new body of work *as grand as what* (2018 - 2021) on the Himalayas. Drawing on research into her namesake, she evokes animistic rituals and remedies, as well as summoning Buddhist concepts of astral planes. One iteration of this piece will be presented as part of the online digital activation programme on the 14th November in collaboration with the Shanghai Biennial.

***Subcontinentment, 2020***

# Dana Awartani

Darning on medicinally dyed silk  
Commissioned and produced by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) for  
*How to Tread Lightly*

The works of Saudi-Palestinian artist Dana Awartani explore the geometrical principles of Islamic arts and crafts to reveal their highly developed philosophical meanings. Her works are continual acts of revival, where she brings traditional Islamic art forms into the present through illuminated manuscripts, parquetry, ceramics, and textiles.

*Come, Let me Heal your Wounds* (2020) is an installation comprising of medicinally-dyed and hand embroidered silk. Dozens of herbs and spices — each with their own particular cultural references — were used to create the textiles. Tears and holes were made in the fabric in locations corresponding to acts of cultural destruction committed by Islamic fundamentalist groups in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Libya, Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen since the start of the Arab Spring anti-government protests in 2010. All 355 of these wounds were then repaired by artisans and the artist herself through the art of darning, a hand sewing technique long used to mend or restore woven fabric. There is no cartographic correlation to each panel. Instead the textiles are a borderless representation of annihilated cultural heritage. The project is a plea to safeguard ancient civilizations in the Arab world, a bid to recall the collective history of artisanship, to rejoice in the knowledge of healing plants, and to respect the venerable tradition of revering objects.

*Come, Let me Heal your Wounds, 2020*

# Dorine Mokha with Virginie Dupray and Faustin Linyekula

Film, color, sound, 23 min  
Courtesy Studios Kabako

Dorine Mokha is a Congolese citizen, dancer, choreographer, and author. His multidisciplinary performances have often dealt with struggles of identity, social rejection, homophobic violence, and the overcoming of adversity in an unwaveringly autobiographical and intensely introspective way. Both his solo work and collaborations with the likes of rapper Franck Moka are a testament to a process of self acceptance despite the psychological and physical barriers that certain sectors of Congolese society have built around difference in the name of religious beliefs, moral laws and traditional customs.

*Letters from Congo* (2020) is a film project initiated in collaboration with dancers from Lubumbashi and Kinshasa, including Didier Ediho and Jeannot Kumbonyeki. It is growing into a collection of personal statements from artists and collectives from Congo, and ultimately 17 other African nations. The collective talks and dances in response to the multiple crises and emergencies that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has gone through in the last two decades. From outbreaks of the Ebola virus, through escalations of political violence, numerous armed conflicts, governmental instability, and economic weakness, crisis seems to have become a permanent state of affairs in the country. Despite the troubles of this place, artists still live their daily lives, creating survival strategies and hope, *Letters from Congo* declares. Each of the contributions defends the urgency to create, in the here-and-now, against all odds, while Mokha's letter in particular reaffirms his commitment to fight against the further emergencies and violence suffered by LGBT people.

*Lettres du Congo*  
*(Letters from Congo), 2020*



**Eduardo Navarro  
with BaRiya (Pratyush Pushkar  
and Riya Raagini)**

Video animation, color, sound

Video animation coordinator: Carolina Fusilier

Commissioned and produced by TBA21-Academy and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) for st\_age

The art of Eduardo Navarro investigates different ways of transforming our senses in order to create new understandings of our world. His works have ranged from large scale sculptures, to actions, and participatory installations which investigate empathy and contemplation.

*Octo-Durga* is a three-chapter animation that simultaneously imagines a primordial past and an alternative future. Taking the form of a sacred text on ethics, polity, and love, that could also be a proposal for a science-fiction universe, it questions the obsolete dualities of humanity and nature, of earth and mind, of technology and culture, to acknowledge the vast changes and disruptions that are taking place in the planet's oceans. A cephalopod dancer character emerges from the depths of the oceans on one of Jupiter's moons, Europa. Summoning a multimedia manifestation of an indigenous ancient-Indian goddess — one of the initiators of a parallel primary multiverse — *Octo-Durga* is “journey of unearthing multi-dimensional oceanic sensory and para-sensory conversations,” in the words of the artist. The octopus-goddess “speaks on behalf of the eternal oceanic bridges between worlds, hears, and brings humble almost edible visual-poetic-sonic gifts for her lovers.”

Created together with Indian artists BaRiya (Riya Raagini and Pratyush Pushkar) Navarro's animation invites us to dive into a state of mind that connects with an underwater world where tentacular and meditative visions speculate about new forms of living based on solidarity and communality.

***Octo-Durga, 2020***

# Daniel Steegmann Mangrané

Virtual loop simulation developed in Unity, sound  
Infinite virtual simulation developed in Unity, sound  
Commissioned and produced by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) for st\_age

The art of Daniel Steegmann Mangrané hinges on the natural and the geometric, often splicing the unfathomable dimension of the forests of his adopted home, Brazil, with the clear lines of abstraction and man-made order. His work of the last decade has incorporated chromatic watercolor studies, kaleidoscopic collages, photography, as well as sculptures with etched leaves and citrus fruit. His recent film and augmented reality projects seem to suggest that a fascination with a kind of organic cinema has been ever-present.

His works often derive from an ecological understanding of the complex webs of interdependence found in the Atlantic Rainforest of Brazil (Mata Atlântica). Such dense tropical forest would have been the first habitat Portuguese colonists encountered on their arrival in the year 1500. *Panther Dreaming* (2020) is a cinematic installation of potentially infinite duration that derives from a self-generating online animation presented on st\_age. Always experienced differently, it conjures the viewpoint of a large feline walking in reverie through a forest. The panther's dream is persistently interrupted, the forest collapses, and the spell is broken. Confused and drowsy, the panther yawns and stretches, only to find herself inside a similar dreamlike scenario once more. She then starts to explore again, continuously acclimatizing to finding herself in yet another cycle of dreaming and wakefulness.

This work is inspired by indigenous peoples' perceptions of the forest and of the entities that inhabit it beyond the human: the divine characters of animals, rivers, plants, as well as the xapiris, the shamanic master spirits of the Yanomami people of Brazil. *Panther Dreaming* layers different forms of knowledge and knowing—indigenous wisdom, the images and sensations of sleep, and the artificial intelligence of a computer processor—and calls for new ways of being in the world.

*Panther Dreaming*  
(*Pantera soñando*), 2020

# Patricia Domínguez

*La balada de las sirenas secas (The Ballad of the Dry Mermaids)*, 2020  
Video installation, color, sound, 20 min  
Commissioned and produced by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) for *How to Tread Lightly*

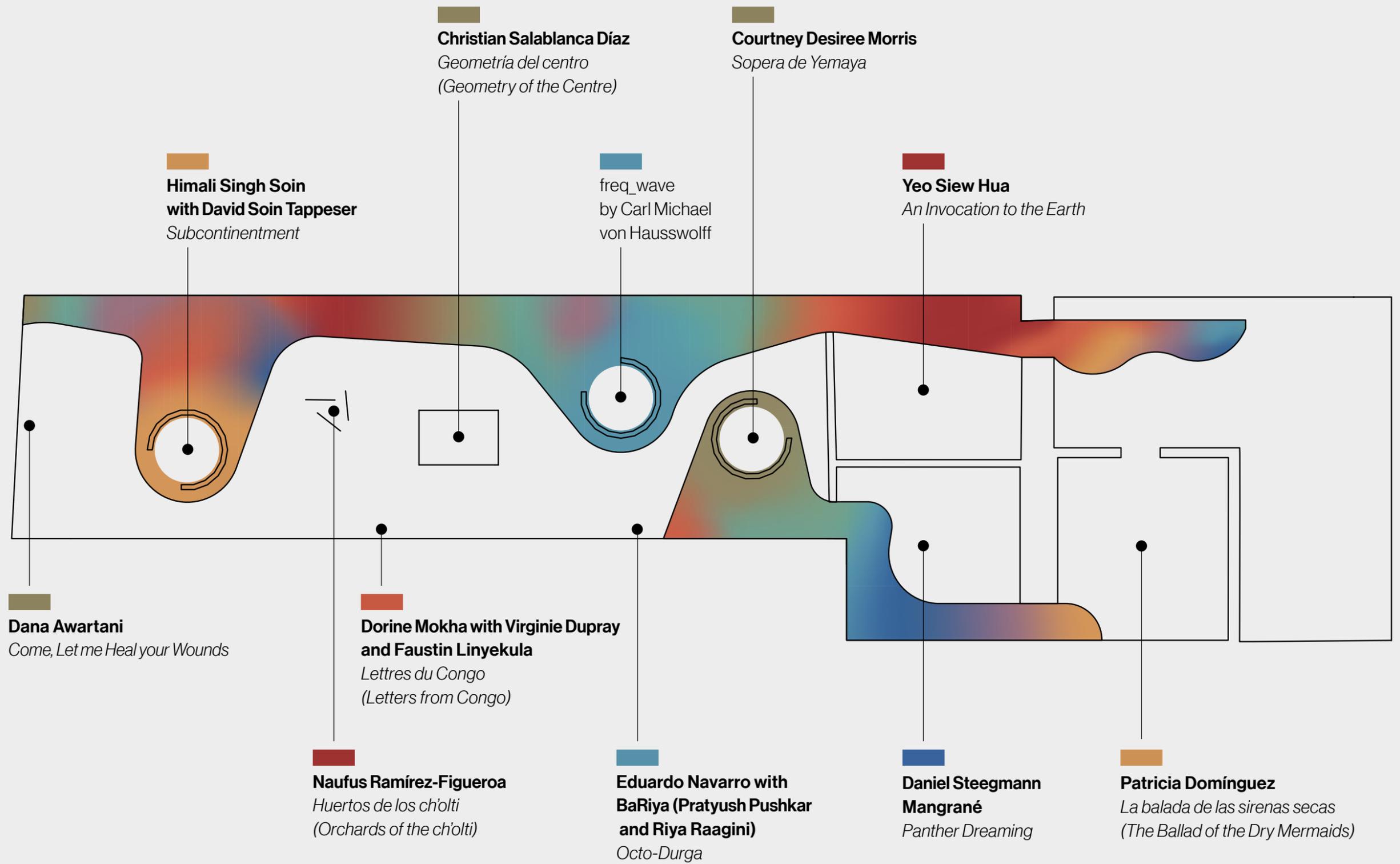
Combining experimental research on ethnobotany, curative practices, and wellbeing, Patricia Domínguez's art focuses on the relationships between living species in an increasingly corporate cosmos. Her practice is directly connected to her activism, and she understands art as a field of possibility that can disrupt existing political narratives, challenge interpretation, and propose new ways of approaching problems.

First published online on *st\_age*, *Gaiaguardianxs (Gaia's Guardians)* (2020) is an interactive publication that emerges from three years of research—a personal journey through conflicts connected to the issue of water in Latin America. Its origins lie in Bolivia, where drought and fires in the Chiquitanía region have destroyed more than 4 million hectares of forest in recent years. In her native Chile, Domínguez reached out to eco-social movements and raised awareness of people who have been blinded by the police during protests. The third part speaks about the privatization of water in Chile, and how fresh water has been diverted to irrigate large-scale corporate avocado plantations in the Petorca region. Since the 1990s, Chile has been plagued by the appropriation of water by the agriculture industry in collusion with politicians. Many people do not have clean water for drinking and basic sanitation, a situation made even more troublesome with the spread of Covid-19.

For *How to Tread Lightly*, Domínguez has transformed the latter chapter of the publication into a new sculpture–totem and video *La balada de las sirenas secas (The Ballad of the Dry Mermaids)* (2020), for which she collaborated with Las Viudas del Agua (The Widows of the Water) a group of women who are devoting their lives to the fight for access to water resources within their communities. *The Ballad of the Dry Mermaids* examines the complex flows of water in terms of the possibilities for crying, healing, and spirituality in the digital era.

*La balada de las sirenas secas*  
*(The Ballad of the Dry Mermaids)*, 2020

# the space



## Exhibition

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza  
Paseo del Prado, 8  
28014 Madrid (Spain)  
www.museothyssen.org  
October 6 - December 13, 2020

### Exhibition Artists

Dana Awartani, Patricia Domínguez, *freq\_wave* by Carl Michael von Hausswolff, Virginie Dupray, Faustin Linyekula with Dorine Mokha, Courtney Morris, Eduardo Navarro with BaRiya, Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa, Christian Salablanca Díaz, Yeo Siew Hua, Himali Singh Soin with David Soin Tappeser and Daniel Steegmann Mangrané.

### Curator

Soledad Gutiérrez

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Elena Utrilla

### Sound Design

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### Sound

Meyer Sound

### Project Architect

Enorme estudio

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Jotateam Studio

### Production

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### Audiovisual Production

Creamos Technology

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### Acknowledgments

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## Booklet

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- p. 24: Video still: Yeo Siew Hua, *An Invocation to the Earth*, 2020. Photo: Courtesy the artist
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### More information at:

[tba21.org](http://tba21.org)  
[stage.tba21.org](http://stage.tba21.org)

### #st\_age

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