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"Tidalectics" at Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna

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Eduardo Navarro, *Hydrohexagrams (For Tahuata)*, *Tidalectics*, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, 2017
Photo: Jorit Aust

Text by Barbara Casavecchia

In "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia Woolf describes her first memory as "of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water on the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind (...) and feeling it is almost impossible that I should be here." By echoing the lapping sounds of the sea and its intermittent rhythms, Woolf associates her earliest stream of consciousness with language, in an "ecological" continuum where human being/being human and nature are

inseparable. It's in the fluidity of language, after all, that we keep on looking for new metaphors to express new ideas about art and poetry, as well as science and politics.

Under the impending doom of the Anthropocene and the devastations of climate change, finding new models for thinking and talking about nature and our increasing fragility is essential. "*Tidalectics* is an experiment to formulate an oceanic worldview, a different way of engaging with the oceans and the world we inhabit," writes curator Stefanie Hessler about this exhibition at TBA21. The title pays homage to a concept by Barbadian poet Kamau Braithwaite—who described the Caribbean and Pacific cultures as resulting from "an 'alter/native' historiography to linear models of colonial progress," inspired to "the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic motion"—as a symbol of liquidity, intermingling, crossing, exchanges, connections, and alternate influences, opposed to the destructively linear, vertical and obsessively land-based pattern of exploration, colonization and exploitation, perpetrated in the name of "progress."

The exhibition owes its contents to TBA21-Academy, a project founded by art patron Francesca von Habsburg that involves research on art and ocean-related environmental issues and supports interdisciplinary voyages, which brought its participants to travel to the Caribbean, Papua New Guinea, French Polynesia, Fiji, Tonga. After Ute Meta Bauer, the new "expedition leaders" are now Chus Martinez and SUPERFLEX, who will guide the fellowship program for next three years.

Several works on show were made for the occasion, but not all the artists involved participated in the expeditions.



(https://www.perrotin.com/exhibitions/izumi_kato/6332)

The layout is immersive: Videos, sound, kinetic, and olfactory works create a liquid scape which is the strongest point of the show. At the entrance, visitors are greeted by three large I Ching bronze coins embossed with drawings, created by Eduardo Navarro for his installation, *Hydrohexagrams (For Tahuata)* (2017). The coins—as a monumental video projection reveals after walking into the first room—were tossed six times in the ocean with the help of members of the community of Hapatoni, in the Marquesas. The images of the performance, mixed with sea views, moments of daily life at the village, and the construction of a traditional raft are accompanied (on headphones) by the deafening sound of winds and waves. Simultaneously, a choir of women chant “Rari”, a song they composed to interpret the oracle, which (in absence of translation) remains uncertain. *The Ocean SmellScapes*, 2017, by Sissel Tolaas, reproduces, by means of molecular chemistry, the smells collected by the artists in the Caribbean and along the Pacific coasts of Costa Rica. Tue Greenfort’s *Tamoya Ohboya*, 2017—a tank with floating jellyfish that glow in the dark, illuminated by the projection of footage shot by the artist during his trips with TBA21 Academy—is installed right across Susanne M. Winterling’s *Glistening Troubles*, 2017, an installation comprising

samples of bioluminescent algae collected in Jamaica and enshrined in glass columns. Reflections from the surrounding works and the viewers' images mingle with those of a video, where a Jamaican man explains how these algae have always been prized locally for their healing properties. His voice — reflected and diffracted—spills over the entire space, together with Jana Winderen's sound installation *bára*, 2017, which records underwater sounds, as well as the languages of cetaceans and small fishes. It plays at different times of the day, in accordance to the variations in the tidal calendar of Trieste, the geographically closest sea coast near Vienna.

In the second room, the metallic sound produced by Ariel Guzik's *The Nereida Capsule* (2015), a quartz submersible capsule, associated with a set of drawings of bathygraphy and cetacea, embodies utopic ways of communicating underwater. Next to it, Newell Harry's series *Untitled (Anagrams and Objects for R.U. & R.U. (Part I))*, 2015, plays with the mixing of languages, heritages, and cultures with piercing irony. On the banners, printed on hand-beaten Tongan *ngatu* fabric (obtained from bark and used exchanged in formal occasions), letters and cultural points of reference keep on rolling back and forth (GOYA/DOES/YOGA/ODES; YODA/VEDA/DAYO/DEVA; SOLO/LOOS/SHAG/HAGS), while a large table displays various "ethnographic" paraphernalia, from tribal masks to musical instruments and documents – disrupting the construction of "primitivism" as alter ego of "modernity."

The show clearly aims at situating itself in post-colonially correct terms, and to avoid sinking into debates on appropriation; but whether and how a Western-fueled perspective (obsessed with the technological and the machinic) can be undone, destabilized, and merged with others is a vacillating issue. Em'kal Eyongakpa's rocking installation *Gaia beats/bits III-i/doves and aged hammock*, 2017, literally shakes the viewer's balance. The exhibition ends on a menacing note, with *Iroojrilik* (the Micronesian god of the West and fertility) (2016), a large video projection by Julian Charrière. Shot at the Bikini Atoll in the Marshalls Islands, the images of post-nuclear ruins and submerged infrastructure are accompanied by an impressive soundtrack by Edward Davenport, which adds to the emotional *crescendo* of the images, where "natural" and "human-made" are hard to separate and define. The Pacific Islands—like the Marshall or the French Polynesia—violently exposed to nuclear testing and radioactive contamination (covered up for decades by the US and French governments), nowadays are forced to face the catastrophic consequences of rising sea levels, devastating storms, hurricanes, cyclones, tsunamis, and salination of freshwater supplies. Farewell tropical paradises: Welcome to the age of awareness. Well, let's really, really hope so.

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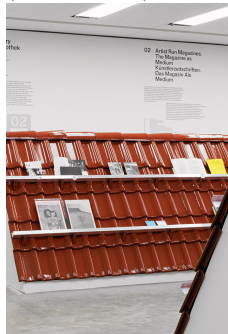
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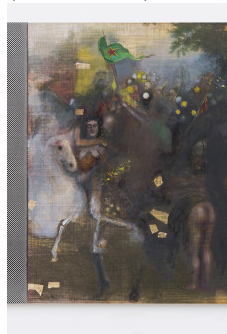
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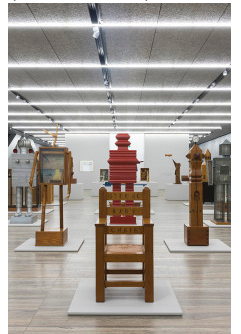
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