



Joan Jonas
Moving
Off
the Land II
Mar 24–
Sep 29,
2019

Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Venezia

EN

Foreword

The first few breaths of a new space are crucial. When the doors of Ocean Space open to the public for the first time this spring, we invite you to plunge into an immersive experience of the oceans. Revitalized over the past two years, the former Church of San Lorenzo now becomes a home dedicated to the seas, the myths surrounding them; explorations past, present, and future; and the creatures living in their depths. I could not think of a more unique voice than that of Joan Jonas to inaugurate Ocean Space. Her work weaves an intricate web of the histories of the oceans and their abundance of life. I hope that her remarkable exhibition “Moving Off the Land II” moves you just like her work has touched me ever since I first saw it.

The process of working with Jonas is indicative of the way TBA21–Academy connects disciplines, people, geographies, and formats. The Academy’s journeys at sea and on land catalyze processes that involve traveling, wandering, researching, and allowing art to happen in a processual way. Jonas’s methodology is related: she visited numerous aquariums around the world, experienced and filmed in the ocean, joined the Academy on a residency in Jamaica, spent time with local communities, gave a workshop to art students, and engaged in conversations with the scientific community, specifically David Gruber, who has been a close collaborator on this journey.

Participating in the way Jonas recognizes what art can achieve, how art senses the world, and how art motivates different knowledges about the ocean, opened our program up to forms, narratives, questions, limits, and futures we never saw before. At Ocean Space, “Moving Off the Land II” is a reminder that the subject of this program is a living, sentient entity: the ocean.

Markus Reymann,
director TBA21–Academy

Joan Jonas Moving Off the Land II

Joan Jonas's exhibition "Moving Off the Land II" is the inaugural public project at the Ocean Space. The installation is the culmination of three years of intensive research in aquariums around the world as well as in the waters off the coast of Jamaica, commissioned by TBA21–Academy, an itinerant platform that forms part of Thyssen–Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21). Comprising new video, sculpture, drawing, and sound works, as well as a performance on May 7, 2019, the show centers on the role the oceans have played for cultures throughout history as a totemic, spiritual, and ecological touchstone.

Joan Jonas is one of the most renowned artists of her generation. She is celebrated for her groundbreaking work in performance, installation, and video since the 1960s. At a time when art started leaving the confines of the gallery space, Jonas created work that converged with dance, music, and theater. Ever since, her work has tackled complex questions regarding humans' relationship with the environment. Jonas represented the United States at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015. With this new work, she returns to Venice and revisits some of the themes touched upon in her US Pavilion exhibition "They Come to Us Without a Word": the natural world and the animals inhabiting it—from bees to fish—as well as the present danger of climate change and extinction.

The oceans are a recurring motif in Jonas's work. For the video *Waltz* (2003), she visited a beach near the woods in Nova Scotia, where she spent most of her summers since the early 1970s. With a group of friends and accompanied by her dog, Jonas performed a series of imagined, abstract rituals involving objects such as masks, a staff, and mirrors. The work calls to mind ancient fairy tales and myths surrounding the oceans as well their raw and fragile beauty. *Beach Piece* (1970) was performed at Jones Beach in Long Island, New York, where the audience was invited to stand on the muddy ground as

performers appeared from and disappeared into sand dunes. Jonas, wearing a white sports mask, stood on a ladder with a mirror and reflected the sun back at the audience. In the installation *Reanimation* (2012), Jonas focused on Icelandic and Norwegian landscapes and their representations in age-old sagas as well as in the writing of the poet Halldór Laxness, resulting in an evocative merging of air, land, glaciers, and sea.

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.

In the last year and a half, as part of a sustained dialogue about their respective work, the marine biologist and coral reef and photosynthesis expert David Gruber has shared with Jonas his captivating underwater recordings that focus on biofluorescence. In 2018, Gruber visited Jonas at her summer home in Cape Breton, Canada, where he shot footage of her dog, Ozu, playing with the surf on the shoreline. The rich imagery by Gruber and other collaborators is juxtaposed with Jonas's own voice and that of young people she frequently collaborates with, as well as music by the celebrated composer and drummer Ikue Mori and by the acclaimed musicians María Huld Markan Sigfusdottir and Ánde Somby. In her unique visual language, Jonas has created a confluence of the poetic and the observational, of mythological folklore, contemporary narratives, and scientific studies, inviting viewers to plunge into a spellbinding experience.

Stefanie Hessler,
curator

Moving Off the Land II, 2019

Five wooden structures with video projections based on the series *My New Theater* (1997–ongoing), paint (mermaid, mirror pool, octopus, whale, Jamaican fishermen)

Video durations: 11'27", 13'04", 13'27", 7'09", 4'06"

Dimensions of the theater boxes: 211×354×387 cm, 242×596×289 cm, 242×394×380 cm, 194×110×237 cm, 175×150×211 cm



Moving Off the Land II, 2019, video still,
Courtesy of the artist

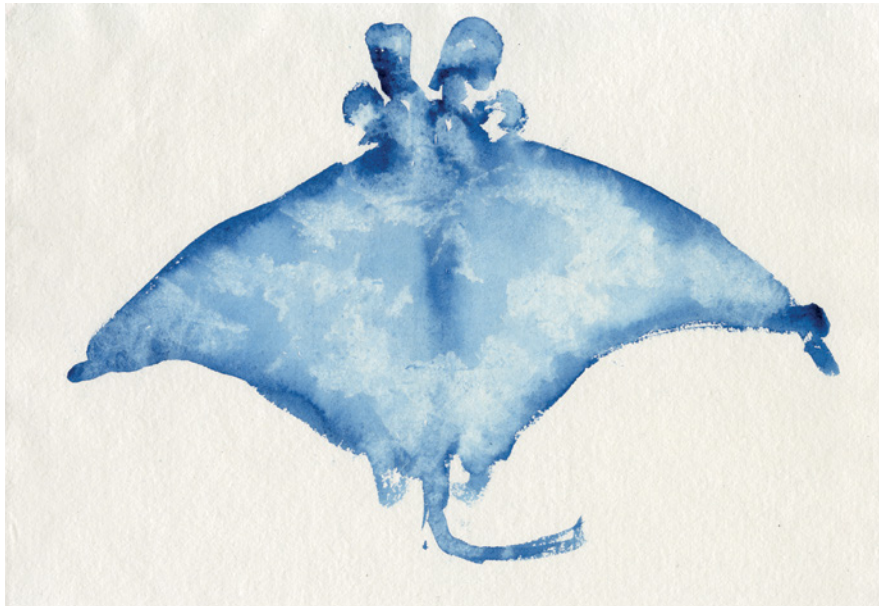
Jonas's practice unsettles the linearity of time as much as it transcends the confines of physical space. The installations *My New Theater*, which she has been making in different sizes and varying shapes since 1997, are conceived as viewing devices for moving images. The installations are reminiscent of theater stages, a space in which illusions and fantastical stories captivate the audience. Jonas has referred to magic shows she saw as a child as influential on her work, as well as shadow puppetry and Japanese Noh theater.

At Ocean Space, there are five new iterations of *My New Theater*. Two small-scale wooden looking boxes each built around a monitor, channel Jonas's fascination with looking,

manifested in the viewfinder-like shapes of the sculptures, which create a heightened sense of focused attention. In addition, three large-scale installations can be entered like portals as if transporting viewers into the projected videos themselves, analogous to how Jonas layers her films to produce a sense of spatial depth and temporal concurrence. Throughout her career, Jonas approached the space created by video as something to be altered, climbed into, and reflected onto itself like a mirror. Indeed, the artist has referred to video as "an illusion of boxed space."

On the monitors and screens, footage from Jonas's performance *Moving off the Land* (2016–ongoing) is interwoven with a range of materials. Among these are videos filmed in aquariums and in the waters off the coast of Jamaica, shots of biofluorescent creatures provided by Gruber, and sequences of quasi-ritualistic movements and spoken word filmed in a studio in New York with a young cast of people who also featured in her Venice Biennale installation. In Jonas's signature style, the superimposed imagery juxtaposes diverse geographies, indoor and outdoor spaces, and scenes that coexist in different—if conflated—environments.

Jonas's own voice is heard as she narrates an anecdote about an octopus in the New England Aquarium in Boston, who every night lifted the lid of his enclosure, climbed out and into another tank to catch fish, then returned unnoticed. In another sequence, she focuses on the mythology of mermaids. The earliest of these fantastical creatures, half woman and half fish, was likely the Syrian fertility goddess Atargatis, depicted on an ancient coin shown in the performance. The representation of women as goddesses, orators, and shamans throughout history is a recurring subject in Jonas's work. Threading through myth, folklore, literary sources by writers like T.S. Eliot and Emily Dickinson, the science writing of Peter Godfrey-Smith, as well as scientific findings, the *My New Theater* looking boxes and installations issue an elegiac caution of environmental threats and simultaneously offer a polyphonic praise of the world's hydrosphere.



Reproductions of drawings made between 2017–18, sublimation print on nautical fabric, 138 × 175 cm; UV pigmented inkjet print on Fabriano paper, 104 × 140 cm, Courtesy of the artist

Drawings:

Paint on canvas, dimensions 300 × 500 cm
Reproductions of drawings made between 2017–19: UV pigmented inkjet print on Fabriano paper, dimensions between 61 × 91 cm and 104 × 140 cm; and sublimation print on nautical fabric, dimensions 175 × 138 cm

Jonas once said that “to draw [is] one of the most important things for me,” highlighting the tactility of the process and likening the choreography in her videos and performances to drawing in space. During her performance *Moving Off the Land*, which will be presented at Ocean Space on May 7, she creates drawings with a brush on a ninety-centimeters-long stick with Japanese ink on pre-cut pieces of paper laid out on the floor. The sketches are made in fast and decisive movements, often in less than thirty seconds, and remain on stage where they are held up for the audience to see. Jonas commonly chooses images related to the content of the work and draws them from memory. At other times, as in the recent multi-media installation including twenty-six framed drawings, *Stream or River, Flight or Pattern* (2016–17), the images are drawn from pictures in books, in this case a publication on birds from Thailand. Jonas often transfers images between different media. For instance, drawings made during performances later become part of an installation or a video, patterns of walking in circles are traced with chalk during the performance *Lines in the Sand* (2004), or the artist watches the image of the drawing she is making on a monitor as it is being filmed in a closed circuit.

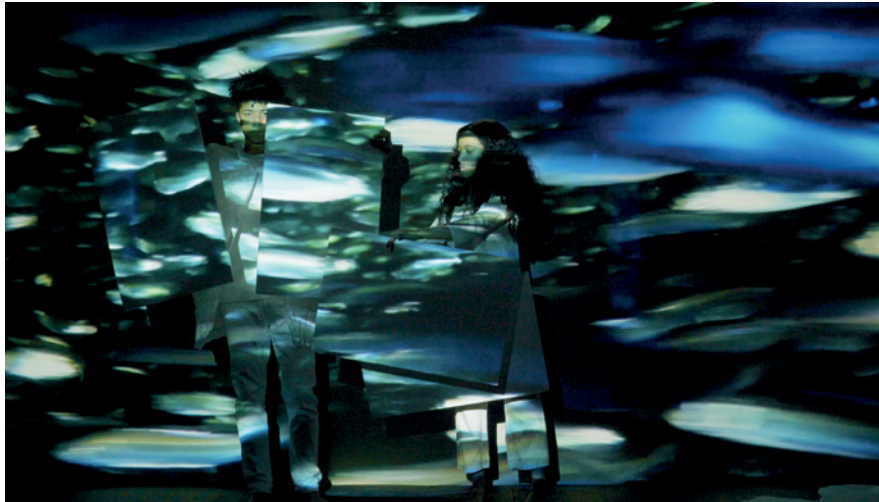
Jonas made the drawings shown in this exhibition in her studio, based on her research in aquariums around the world, and during live performances of *Moving Off the Land*. They were scanned and printed in large formats, except for a large drawing of a whale installed in front of the double altar of the church, which is shown as original. Throughout the nave, the works are hung at different heights, reminiscent of the oceanic layers reaching from the epipelagic surface to the hadalpelagic zone extending from depths of 6000 meters to the deepest bottom plains.

Glass box (aquarium)
Hand cast glass, mirror, wood
52 × 153 × 82 cm

Jonas is known for installations involving carefully selected props, some of which were given to her by friends, and some of which she collected over the years in places such as Cape Breton, the American southwest, or Jamaica. The “aquarium” was manufactured in Venice by local glass makers, based on a design by Jonas that was inspired by a postcard of a nineteenth-century drawing depicting a mountainous underwater landscape inside a glass box. Glass, a material made of sand, brings to mind beaches, the contact zone between land and sea where seafaring cultures meet, sometimes clash, and where their stories merge. The islands of Murano are known for their glass production, ever since the Venetian glass makers were forced to move out of the city due to the risk of fires in 1291. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, the city lost its monopoly, as its production secrets were disclosed to other European countries. However, traditional manufacturing methods are still practiced in Murano and the wider Veneto region to this day. The sculpture also calls to mind cabinets of curiosities, those collections of natural history for scientific study and entertainment, the first record of which stems from the apothecary Ferrante Imperato’s engraving in the book *Dell’Historia Naturale*, published in Naples in 1599. Similarly, aquariums bring us closer to subaquatic environments, they are created for study, enjoyment, and increasingly also as sanctuaries for endangered marine species.



Moving Off the Land II, 2019, video stills,
Courtesy of the artist



Moving Off the Land II, 2019, video stills,
Courtesy of the artist

Murano glass mirrors
Each 120 × 60 cm

Mirrors are a recurring material in Jonas's practice, and constitute key elements in the exhibition. Jonas has used reflective surfaces in her performances since the late 1960s and onward, for instance in *Mirror Piece I* (1969), in which performers carry rectangular looking glasses that alternately reflect their own bodies and those of the audience, offering them a view of themselves and integrating their position as onlookers into the work. Similarly to the way Jonas collapses disparate spatial and temporal dimensions in her videos by superimposing footage, as well as through methods of layering moving image and material like paper, cloth, and the performers' bodies in her performances, the mirrors flatten the distance between the work and the viewers, questioning the perception of vision. Interrogating the psychology of seeing, they deny any position of stability. Jonas cites her work with mirrors as a reference to Jorge Luis Borges's collection of short stories *Labyrinths* (1962). In an earlier poem, *Mirrors* (1960), Borges likens mirrors to water, describing them as "impossible space of reflections" and as prolongations of "this hollow, unstable world." Mirrors throw us back onto ourselves—for Borges, this caused a feeling of horror. Today, as human actions have left their indelible mark on the environment, mirrored reflections showing us as part of our surroundings also allude to our implicated co-dependence with other creatures, and, in a wider sense, to the unsteady boundaries of culture and "nature."

At Ocean Space, two different kinds of Muranese mirrors produced for the exhibition after Jonas's visit to several factories reflect the works on view and create a sense of spatial depth. Some of the mirrors are more clear, while others have a rippled structure, reminiscent of the surface of the ocean.

Sound installation
9'08"

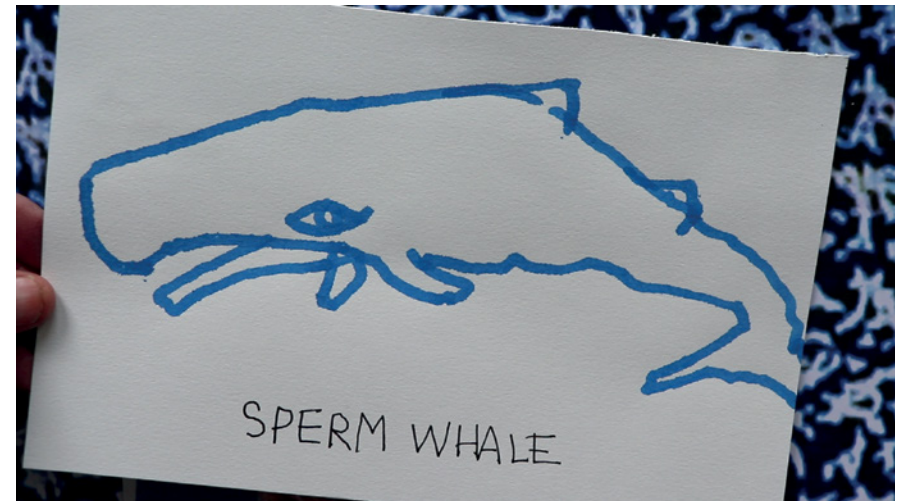


Reproduction of a drawing made in 2019, UV pigmented inkjet print on Fabriano paper, 104 × 140 cm; Courtesy of the artist

For the front room of Ocean Space, Jonas and her studio have created a sound work consisting of hydrophone recordings given to her by Gruber. The sounds heard throughout the space are the audible frequencies of noises emitted by sperm whales. These large whales are the deepest diving marine mammals, and their clicking vocalizations, emitted as pulses from their heads, are the loudest sounds produced by any animal. Sperm whales communicate with each other, and researchers imagine

that their sounds transmit information related to mating, concerning their social status, and whether they are swimming downward or toward the surface. Whale sounds have been detected with the development of sonar technologies during World War II, and sound pollution caused by such technologies, seismic testing, and explosions from undetonated dynamite affect sensitive ocean ecosystems.

Jonas considers how sound is indicative of spatial distance, how it is delayed, or, in the case of water, travels four times faster than through air. At San Lorenzo, the sound envelops viewers, conjuring a sonic image of the oceans as ambiguous, fluid, illusionistic space.



Moving Off the Land II, 2019, video still,
Courtesy of the artist

Performance

This exhibition originated with Jonas's lauded performance *Moving Off the Land*. Drawing on a wellspring of materials including literature, mythology, and Jonas's collections of sketches and notes on the sea, the performance explores the ocean as, in the words of the artist, "a life source and home to a universe of beings." Video footage of underwater scenes—from Jean Painlevé's black-and-white reels of sea creatures to shots of aquariums—intersect poetically and associatively with voice-over excerpts from Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Montgomery's *Soul of an Octopus*, and Carson's *Undersea*. Jonas herself, in collaboration with Ikue Mori and one performer, takes viewers on a magical journey underwater, using live drawing and props to conjure a myriad of aquatic creatures.



Moving Off the Land, 2016/2018, Cowell Theater,
Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture, San Francisco, 2019.
Credit: Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture/Justine Oliphant



Moving Off the Land, 2016/2018, Cowell Theater,
Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture, San Francisco, 2019.
Credit: Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture/Justine Oliphant

Originally commissioned by TBA21–Academy in 2016 as a lecture–demonstration, *Moving Off the Land* was presented in parallel to the 2016 Kochi–Muziris Biennale during the Academy's three-day interdisciplinary Convening #2. The initial version has evolved to a full-fledged performance that was presented at TBA21–Augarten in Vienna and during Sequences VIII in Reykjavik in 2017; at Danspace New York and the Tate Modern Turbine Hall in London in 2018; and at Fort Mason in San Francisco in 2019. On May 7, for one night only, the performance will be presented at Ocean Space, in the exhibition it inspired.

Joan Jonas Biography

Joan Jonas (b. 1936, New York, USA) is a world-renowned visual artist whose work encompasses a wide range of mediums including video, performance, installation, sound, text, and sculpture. Jonas's experiments and productions in the late 1960s and early '70s continue to be crucial to the development of many contemporary art genres, from performance and video to conceptual art and theater. Since 1968, her practice has explored ways of seeing, the rhythms of rituals, and the authority of objects and gestures. Jonas has exhibited, screened, and performed her work at museums, galleries, and large-scale group exhibitions throughout the world, including the Taipei Biennial; Documenta 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 13; the 2008 Sydney Biennial; the 2008 Yokohama Triennial; and the 28th São Paulo Biennial. She has recently presented solo exhibitions at Jeu de Paume, Paris; Museum of Modern Art, New York; CCA Kitakyushu, Japan; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston; HangarBicocca, Milan; NTU Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore; the United States Pavilion for the 56th Venice Biennial; and the Tate Modern, London. In 2018, she was awarded the prestigious Kyoto Prize, presented to those who have contributed significantly to the scientific, cultural, and spiritual betterment of mankind.

About TBA21–Academy

TBA21–Academy leads artists, scientists, and thought-leaders on expeditions of collaborative discovery. Founded by Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza and led by Director Markus Reymann, the Academy is dedicated to fostering a deeper understanding of the ocean through the lens of art and to engendering creative solutions to its most pressing issues. TBA21–Academy commissions interdisciplinary research that catalyzes engagement, stimulates new knowledge, and inspires artistic production. Established in 2011, the nonprofit's program is informed by a belief in the power of exchange between disciplines and in the ability of the arts to serve as a vessel for communication, change, and action.

About Ocean Space

Ocean Space, a new global center for catalyzing ocean literacy, research, and advocacy through the arts, will open to the public this spring in the newly revitalized Church of San Lorenzo in Venice. Spearheaded by TBA21–Academy and building on its expansive work over the past eight years, this new embassy for the oceans will foster greater engagement and collective action on the most pressing issues facing the oceans today. Conceived as a platform for collaboration and exchange, Ocean Space will provide flexible facilities for installations, performances, workshops, archives, and research, overseen by TBA21–Academy and its network of partners, including universities, NGOs, museums, government agencies, and research institutes from around the world. The project will open in phases, reintegrating the historic building back into the cultural fabric of the city after two years of extensive revitalization works and more than 100 years of being largely inaccessible to the public.

Credits

Joan Jonas

Moving Off the Land II

March 24–September 29, 2019

Curator: Stefanie Hessler

Curatorial Assistant: Eleni Tsopotou

Exhibition design: Joan Jonas

Video: Joan Jonas

Video editing: David Sherman and

Joan Jonas

Sound design: Joan Jonas and

David Sherman

Sound mixing: Neil Benezra

Joan Jonas Studio: Sekeena Gavagan,

Jin Jung, David Sherman

Assistant to Joan Jonas in Venice: Elena

Mazzi

Light design: Jan Kroeze

Performance space architecture: Andrés

Jaque / Office for Political Innovation

Exhibition project architect: Philipp Krummel

Project management: DH Office;

M+B studio srl

Graphic design: Ana Dominguez Studio

with Judit Musachs

Media relations: Resnicow and Associates;

Casadorofungher

TBA21

TBA21 Chairwoman: Francesca

Thyssen-Bornemisza

Director TBA21-Academy: Markus Reymann

CEO TBA21: David Hrankovic

TBA21-Academy: Tristan Acutt, Kat Davis,

María Montero Sierra, James White

Ocean Space Venice team: Fanny Liotto,

Sara Mattiazzi, Alice Sartori

Video performers

Zora Casebere, Noah Delorme, Lila Gavagan,

Joan Jonas, Francesco Migliaccio, Jonas

Moran, Malcolm Moran, Willa Schwabsky

Video

Footage recorded by Jonas in the following
aquariums: the Lofoten Aquarium in Norway;

the New England Aquarium in Boston, MA;

the New York Aquarium in Coney Island, NY;

the National Aquarium in Baltimore, MD;

the Aquarium in Genoa, Italy; the Mystic

Aquarium in Mystic, CT; and various

Aquariums in Tokyo, Japan

Biofluorescent sea animals and Cape Breton

footage recorded by David Gruber

Underwater swimming footage recorded

in Jamaica by Cynthia Beatt

Footage accompanying George Williams,

the Jamaican fisherman, recorded by

Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza

Music

Ikue Mori, María Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir,

Ánde Somy

Additional audio credits

Original sperm whale recordings by

David Gruber

Literary sources

Anna Akhmatova, Jonathan Balcombe,

John Berger, Rachel Carson, Emily

Dickinson, T. S. Eliot, Peter Godfrey-Smith,

Herman Melville, Sy Montgomery,

Neil Shubin

Texts

Curatorial text by Stefanie Hessler

Additional wall text in the exhibition based

on writing by David Gruber

Translation & Copy-editing

María Nadotti, Orit Gat

Acknowledgments

Emily Bates, Ute Meta Bauer, Valeria

Bottalico, Gavin Brown, Troels Bruun,

Enrico Casagrande, Fabrizio Cattaruzza,

Andrea Cherido, Massimo Mario Cherido,

Anna Daneri, Luca Delise, Marco Franco,

David Gruber, Roberto González García,

Pieter Jurriaanse, Michele Lombardelli,

Marco Motisi, Adriana Navarro, Boris

Ondreička, Ozu, Franco Pianon, Rosa

Pietroiusti, Pier Paolo Pilla, Gionata Rizzi,

Francesca Vason

Special thanks to George Williams and

the Jamaican fishermen at the Alligator

Head Marine Lab

Studio camera footage and performance in

New York recorded by Greenhouse Media

Moving Off the Land II is commissioned

by TBA21-Academy and co-produced with

Luma Foundation.

Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo

Castello 5069

30122 Venezia

Tuesday–Sunday: 11.00–19.00

Closed Mondays

Free entry

For more information:

www.tba21.org/academy

www.ocean-space.org

T ∞ Thyssen-Bornemisza

B Art Contemporary

↪ **A** Academy



