

LAS Art Foundation presents Josèfa Ntjam: *swell of spæc(i)es*

Collateral Event of the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

ACCADEMIA DI BELLE ARTI DI VENEZIA
FONDAMENTA ZATTERE ALLO SPIRITO
SANTO 423, 30123 VENICE, ITALY

20 APRIL – 24 NOVEMBER 2024
PRE-OPENING: 17 – 19 APRIL 2024

LAS Art Foundation is pleased to announce a major new commission by artist, performer and writer Josèfa Ntjam. The first project to be presented outside of Berlin by the itinerant foundation, *swell of spæc(i)es* is a Collateral Event of the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, 20 April – 24 November 2024. The installation is housed in a purpose-built pavilion in the courtyard of the Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia, and is accompanied by an interactive element at Palazzina Canonica – CNR ISMAR (Istituto di Scienze Marine).

swell of spæc(i)es unfolds a new creation myth shaped by ancient and emergent ways of conceiving the universe. Within this imaginary, plankton is a point of convergence between the deep ocean and outer space, biological and mythical realms, possible pasts and alternative futures. Visitors to the installation work encounter an otherworldly environment animated by the cosmic landscapes of a new film displayed on a large LED screen, a rich soundscape by composer Fatima Al Qadiri and radiant sonic sculptures that create an interplay of voices and resonances in the space.

In recent years, Ntjam's practice has explored the political and utopian dimensions of oceans, receptacles of many stories of domination – from slavery and colonisation, to capitalism and environmental and humanitarian crises – but also of resistance, emancipation and creation. In Venice she will focus on plankton as an agent of transformation and resilience in recounting the story of Amma, a Dogon deity that created the stars by launching pellets of the earth into the sky, and Nommo, the first creatures to live underwater. Ntjam draws parallels between the Dogon cosmogony and a recent discovery which found limestone (primarily formed of the skeletons of plankton, coral and other marine organisms) in the debris of a former planet orbiting a white dwarf. Her film blends 3D animation and footage from aquariums into a circular narrative of creation, transformation and resurgence. It features a cast of interspecies characters synthesised using AI and other digital tools, including 3D models of marine life, images of West African statues held in Western collections

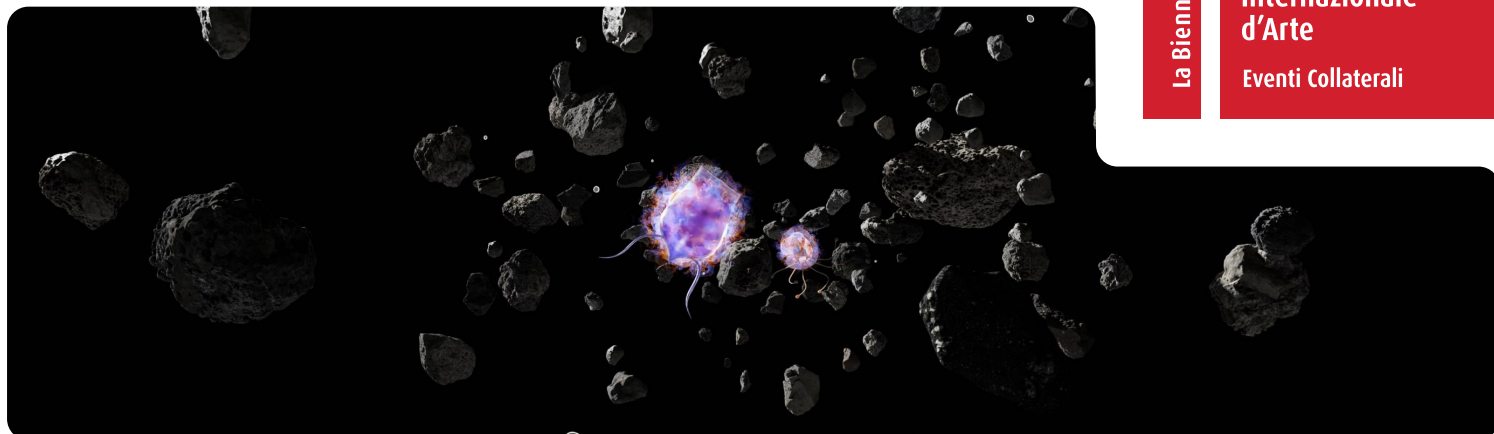


and photographs witnessing decolonial independence movements. These characters embed histories and memories subject to hegemonic erasure within marine and cosmic landscapes, reflecting influences from electronic music duo Drexciya, whose mythology tells of an underwater population born from the wrecks of the Atlantic human trade, and Sun Ra, who envisioned Saturn as a host planet for Afro-diasporic people.

Ntjam's sonic sculptures are made from innovative materials such as bio-sourced resin. Voices emanate from two suspended jellyfish-shaped sound showers, illuminating the stories of the characters and myths seen in the film, weaving together numerous perspectives on the interconnectedness of life and the cosmos. A membrane-like layer emerges from the ground, resembling a large alien egg or embryo. Visitors can rest inside its interior cavity while its outer surface acts as a speaker, diffusing frequencies of the environment's soundscape. Intertwining ethereal sounds of flute, harp and synths with deep, visceral registers of cello and oboe, the score gives musical voice to the film's protagonists.

The project contends with a universe in continual expansion, and with the very complex interconnections between species and histories, planetary and extra-planetary forces. It maps affinities between shared conditions, stories and perspectives, proposing new ways of relating to each other, and to other species, beyond the categorisations, linearity and desires of hegemonic concepts of origin and identity.

Designed by UNA / UNLESS architecture studio, led by Giulia Foscari, the pavilion housing Ntjam's work is a triangular, reflective, blue prism pointing toward the water. Its striking geometry stands in contrast to the organic forms in Ntjam's work. Appearing to have fallen from outer space, the reflective structure subtly interlocks with the Accademia di Belle Arti's Renaissance-era building, forming a temporary extension. Upon entering the space, a large convex curtain traces the footprint of a 16th-century church by Sansovino once located on site. The pavilion is constructed so that it can be disassembled and remounted for future use.



Research is at the core of LAS commissions, and in developing the project, Ntjam has held exchanges with plankton scientists at Cardiff University, Wales, and Istituto di Scienze Marine (ISMAR), Venice. In the project's satellite space at ISMAR's Palazzina Canonica, audiences can expand Ntjam's mythological universe. An AI-based interface allows visitors to generate their own hybrid plankton species by blending Ntjam's dataset with photographs of plankton produced by ISMAR. The audience-generated creatures populate a virtual ecosystem on site.

Josèfa Ntjam: *swell of spæc(i)es* is complemented by a series of public and educational programmes, organised with Ocean Space, ISMAR and the Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia.



JOSEFA NTJAM, *SWELL OF SPAC(T)ES*, 2024, FILM RENDER. COMMISSIONED BY LAS ART FOUNDATION. COURTESY THE ARTIST; LAS ART FOUNDATION; GALERIE POGGI, PARIS; AND NICOLETTI, LONDON © ADAGP, PARIS, 2024.

Notes to editors

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las-art.foundation/press

OPENING HOURS

Thursday to Sunday from
10:00 – 18:00
including public holidays on
25.04, 01.05, 02.06, 15.08 and 01.11

Closed on Monday to Wednesday,
except 22.04, 17.06, 22.07, 02.09,
30.09 and 18.11

ABOUT JOSEFA NTJAM

Josèfa Ntjam is an artist, performer and writer whose practice combines sculpture, photomontage, moving image and sound. Collecting the raw material of her work from the internet, books on natural sciences and photographic archives, Ntjam uses assemblage — of images, words, sounds and stories — as a method to deconstruct the grand narratives underlying hegemonic discourses on origin, identity and race. Her work weaves multiple narratives drawn from investigations into historical events, scientific processes and philosophical concepts, to which she confronts references to African mythology, ancestral rituals, religious symbolism and science fiction.

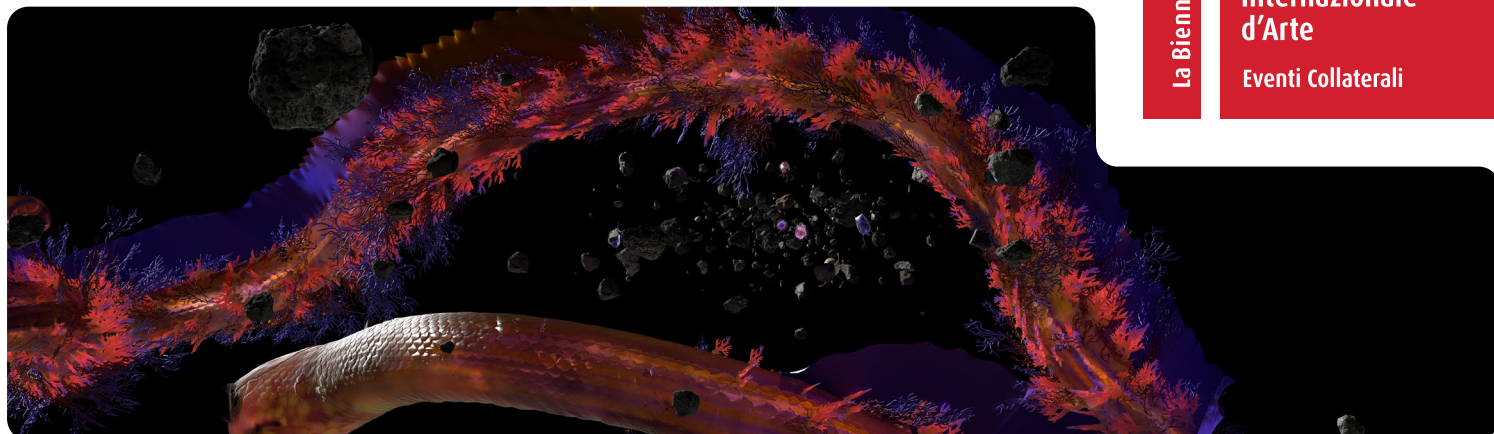
Solo exhibitions include Fotografiska, New York and Berlin (2024); LVMH Métiers d'Art, Paris (2024); Fondation d'entreprise Pernod Ricard, Paris (2023–24); FACT, Liverpool (2022–23); The Photographers' Gallery, London (2022); CAC La Traverse, Alfortville (2022) and Hordaland Art Center, Bergen (2019). She has performed at Forma, London (2023); Lafayette Anticipations, Paris (2023); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2022); LUMA Arles (2022); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2020) and Centre Pompidou, Paris (2020) among others.

Ntjam is currently a resident at LVMH Métiers d'Arts. She lives and works in Saint-Étienne, France.

ABOUT LAS

LAS Art Foundation is a new type of arts organisation — one that looks deep into our present and gives form to future imaginaries. We work with visionary artists, thinkers and institutions around the globe to develop ground-breaking projects and experiences. We investigate topics ranging from artificial intelligence and quantum computing to ecology and biotechnology — illuminating the intersections between art, science and technology.

Our programme comprises installations and performances, as well as educational programming, publications and research projects. Curiosity drives us to continually reimagine the role of an arts institution as one that shapes and evolves with our collective futures.



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More from LAS Art Foundation

INTERSPECIES FUTURE

Publication:

Publishing in April 2024, *Interspecies Future: A Primer* outlines some of the most transformative developments poised to shape new approaches to interspecies thinking. Equal parts theory and practice, the publication assembles contributions from more than 60 scientists, technologists, philosophers and artists that offer both concrete and imaginative propositions to a future beyond the Anthropocene.

Events:

Wednesday, 17 April 2024, 18:30 – 20:00

Palazzina Canonica – CNR ISMAR, Venice

Book launch and panel discussion in Venice with artists Jakob Kudsk Steensen, Agnieszka Kurant and designer and researcher Yasaman Sheri, moderated by LAS curator-at-large Julia Kaganskiy

Saturday, 27 April 2024, 17:00 – 19:30

Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin

Book launch in Berlin with artist Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg in conversation with philosopher Emanuele Coccia

Register via RSVP@las-art.foundation

More information:

las-art.foundation/explore/interspecies-future-a-primer

THE SOUL STATION

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley: *THE SOUL STATION*

12 July – 13 October 2024

Halle am Berghain, Berlin

LAS Art Foundation presents *THE SOUL STATION* by Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley at Halle am Berghain, Berlin, from 12 July to 13 October 2024. Alongside a newly commissioned work, Brathwaite-Shirley's first solo presentation in Germany brings together video games created during the past five years. Employing game-based installations and fictional worlds, *THE SOUL STATION* explores lived and imagined experiences of Black trans