

The Imaginary Sea

17th April - 17th October 2021



Jeff Koons - *Acrobat*, 2003 - 2009
© Jeff Koons - Collection Carmignac

For its fourth season, the Villa Carmignac presents *The Imaginary Sea (La Mer imaginaire)*, which transforms the exhibition spaces into an underwater natural history museum that questions the interactions between our civilisation and the subaquatic world.

Conceived by the Mexico City-based American curator Chris Sharp, this exhibition was inspired as much by the architecture of the place – the spaces immersed under the villa’s ceiling filled with water – as iconic works from its collection: Bruce Nauman’s fountain with a hundred bronze fish, Miquel Barceló’s subaqueous fresco and Jeff Koons’s sculpture of a lobster perched on a chair, among others.

Several loans of works by French and international artists such as Henri Matisse, Gilles Aillaud, Mathieu Mercier or Gabriel Orozco, complete the ensemble along with new productions by Lin May Saeed, Kate Newby and Hubert Duprat, which were created for this occasion.

Thanks to a partnership with the Port-Cros National Park, the exhibition continues this year in the Fort Saint-Agathe and Villa Noailles with a series of photographs commissioned to Nicolas Floc’h. It explores the seabed between Porquerolles and its neighbouring islands.

With its ensemble of modern and contemporary works, *The Imaginary Sea* intends to celebrate the sea as a precious and evocative resource, swarming with known and unknown lives, opened to wondrous, strange and unexpected things, and whose immensity has always fed our imagination.

Press contacts

Fondation Carmignac

Anne Racine
+33 1 70 38 38 90
anne.racine@carmignac.com

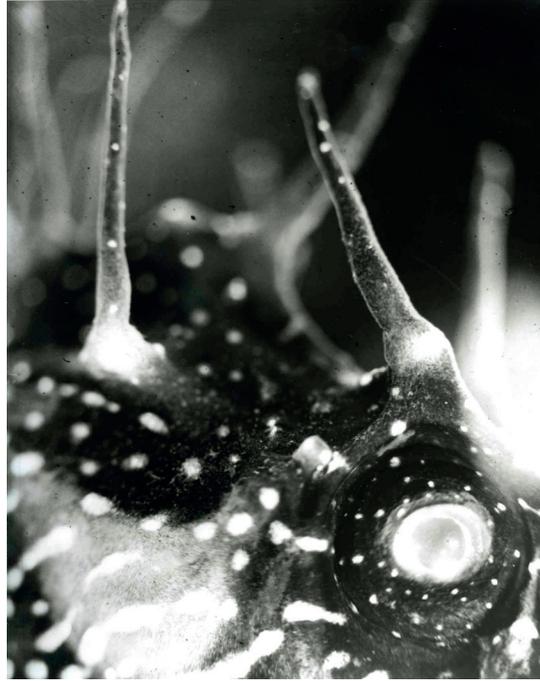
Valentine Dolla
+33 1 70 92 31 91
valentine.dolla@carmignac.com

The Imaginary Sea

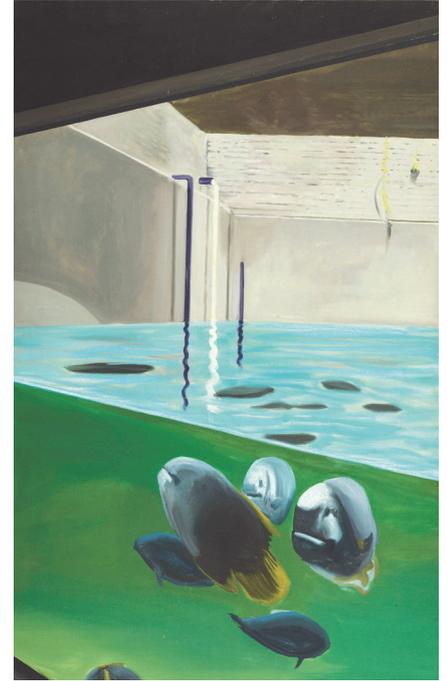
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Michael E. Smith - *Untitled*, 2011
Courtesy of Michael E. Smith and KOW, Berlin. Collection De Vleeschouwer - Pieters © Michael E. Smith at S.M.A.K, Ghent, 2017. Photo : Dirk Pauwels



Jean Painlevé - *Tête d'Hippocampe d'Arcachon*, 1931
© Les Documents Cinématographiques, Paris



Gilles Aillaud - *Aquarium demi-plein*, 1976 - 1982
© Gilles Aillaud - ADAGP, Paris, 2020

After an initiatory journey through the woods, visitors are invited to plunge barefoot into a dreamlike yet vulnerable sea, where they can discover enthralling creatures by Jean Painlevé and Jean-Marie Appriou, strange fish by Allison Katz and Michael E. Smith, not to mention Yves Klein's surrealist sponges...

Distancing itself from the notion of men's superiority over nature inherited from the Enlightenment, this exhibition touches upon the unfathomable, seemingly boundless depths of the sea: after all, 90% of the seabed and the species that inhabit it are still completely unknown to us. It thus remains, in large part, mysterious and enchanted.

The Imaginary Sea further explores how some artists have foreseen a paradigmatic change towards a world, in which humanity may no longer necessarily be the dominant species but an integral part of wildlife, a fragment in a community of living beings constantly interrelated with other ecosystems.

The position of the observer, such as standing behind the glass window of an aquarium or the bars of a cage in a zoo, is thus challenged.

Beyond its critical component, *The Imaginary Sea* has also a resolutely elegiac, if not melancholic quality, which conveys the feeling of eco-anxiety

About Chris Sharp

Chris Sharp (United States, 1974) is a writer and independent curator based in Mexico City, where he co-runs the independent project space *Lulu*, which contributed to last summer's exhibition *Prince.sse.s des villes* at Palais de Tokyo, Paris.

This year, he co-curated New Zealand's pavilion at the Venice Biennale, working with artist Dane Mitchell. He has organised critically acclaimed exhibitions around the world, notably in Australia, the US, Canada, Mexico, Austria, Hungary, Italy and Switzerland.

In France, he recently curated *Tom Wesselmann* at Nouveau Musée National de Monaco (2018); *Martin Soto Climent: Works and Days*, Atlantis, Marseille (2017); as well as projects at Le Parc Saint-Léger, Pougues-les-Eaux (2014), and at the CREDAC, Ivry (2014).

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Henri Matisse - *Polynésie, le ciel* (tapestry), 1964
Ville de Beauvais. Photo : Sophie Goullieux. © Succession H. Matisse



Allison Katz - *Whale II*, 2014
Courtesy of the artist and The Approach, London

that the Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht has coined *solastalgia*: it is a sense of helplessness and distress caused by the inexorable loss of nature.

A large part of the undersea world, which we still seek to apprehend, is now endangered. As it disappears, many marine creatures and organisms no longer have any other substance than in our imagination and that of the artists.

Through its sensitive course, the exhibition thus tackles many questions, which force us to reflect upon the way we share the world with other living beings.

Created in 2000 by Édouard Carmignac, Fondation Carmignac is a corporate foundation founded on two main strands: its contemporary art collection that comprises more than 300 works and the Carmignac Photojournalism Award, an annual award that has supported the production of an investigative report since 2009.

Led by Charles Carmignac, the foundation is dedicated to supporting contemporary creation and sharing its collection with the public. In June 2018, Fondation Carmignac opened an exhibition space, Villa Carmignac, and a sculpture garden inspired by the surrounding listed national park on the Mediterranean island of Porquerolles, France. Visitors are invited to discover temporary exhibitions, *in situ* commissions and a programme of cultural activities and performances.

Open from April 17th to October 17th 2021

From **Tuesday to Sunday** (closed on Monday) from **10am to 6pm** (last ticket sold at 4.30pm)

Late-night visits on Thursdays in July and August until 9PM

Reservation recommended
villacarmignac.com

Exhibition by Nicolas Floc'h at Fort Sainte-Agathe **during the exhibition**
The Imaginary Sea

Address
Villa Carmignac
Porquerolles island
83400 Hyères, France
T : +33 4 65 65 25 50