

Ocean Space, a New Platform for Collaborative Research and Innovation, Opens First Phase in Venice on March 24, 2019

Inaugural program features large-scale installation by artist Joan Jonas
commissioned by TBA21–Academy

Ocean Space reanimates the newly restored Church of San Lorenzo,
after being largely closed to the public for more than a century



L: The exterior of the Church of San Lorenzo in Venice. R: Video still of *Moving Off the Land II* by Joan Jonas.

Venice, Italy—February 19, 2019—Ocean Space, a new center on the oceans and collaborative platform for change, will launch its first phase this March. Initiated by TBA21–Academy, this new embassy for the oceans will catalyze transdisciplinary research and foster collective action, encouraging audiences to radically reimagine how we see and treat the oceans. Located in the Church of San Lorenzo in Venice, Italy, Ocean Space reintegrates the historic building back into the cultural fabric of the city, after two years of extensive restoration and more than 100 years of being largely closed to the public.

To inaugurate Ocean Space, TBA21–Academy presents an immersive multimedia installation by the acclaimed artist Joan Jonas, the culmination of three years of intensive research and explorations with the itinerant academy. *Moving Off the Land II* is curated by Stefanie Hessler, and on view from March 24 until September 29, 2019. As part of the opening program, Hessler will moderate a conversation between Jonas and Dr. Sylvia Earle, marine biologist and National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence. In early May, coinciding with the opening week of the Venice Biennale, Ocean Space will host a series of special performances and presentations, including a performance by Jonas on May 7 that builds on themes explored in the installation.

Following the closure of *Moving Off the Land*, Ocean Space will undergo additional work on its interior to create a dynamic structure of platforms and flexible spaces, designed by architect Andrés Jaque / Office for Political Innovation. Ocean Space's program will relaunch next spring, with work on its interior design expected to be completed over the next two years.

“Ocean Space opens a new front line to the seas, with a mission to challenge mindsets, foster engagement, and dissolve traditional single-disciplinary approaches to solving the most pressing issues facing our oceans. Conceived as a collaborative platform, Ocean Space builds upon practices that TBA21–Academy has been championing by cultivating research across disciplines and co-creation that merges knowledge systems,” stated Markus Reymann, Co-Founder and Director of TBA21–Academy. “We are creating Ocean Space to serve as a Global Commons, a place that welcomes individuals and organizations from throughout the region and from around the world to imagine a radically different future for the Earth and our oceans.”

“We selected Venice for this new embassy for the oceans as it has long been a center for international exchange. Historically, the city served as a critical hub for trade and the navigation of the high seas. Today, it struggles alongside numerous small island states and coastal communities, which are all connected by the massive body of water covering 72 percent of our blue planet, with the effects of a rapidly changing climate and sea level rise, making the mission and program of Ocean Space ever more topical to the local community and its visitors,” stated Co-Founder Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Ocean Space builds on the expansive work of TBA21–Academy, which since its founding in 2011 has engaged leading artists, scientists, policy-makers, and influential leadership from climate-change hotspots in residencies, expeditions, and public workshops worldwide. The new center will offer a public platform for research, projects, and initiatives by TBA21–Academy and partners in Venice and from around the world, including arts organizations, museums, universities, NGOs, and government agencies—helping to bring new urgency to issues related to the environment and catalyze ocean literacy, research, and advocacy. Ocean Space will also provide outreach and educational programming tailored for the Venice community and designed to further connect the city and its citizens with the sea.

Ocean Space Inaugural Program: *Moving Off the Land II* by Joan Jonas

Commissioned by TBA21–Academy and building on the artist’s recent performance work and research on the seas, *Moving Off the Land II* (2019) pays tribute to the oceans and their creatures, biodiversity, and delicate ecology. On view at Ocean Space from March 24 through September 29, 2019, the installation brings together drawings, sculptures, video installations, and sound works centering on the oceans as a totemic, spiritual, and ecological touchstone. Following the methodology that has gained her lauded reputation, Jonas combines prose by writers like Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville with texts by Rachel Carson and Sy Montgomery, and with moving images filmed in aquariums around the world as well as at TBA21–Academy’s scientific arm, Alligator Head Foundation, in Portland, Jamaica. In addition to these recordings, David Gruber, Presidential Professor of Biology and Environmental Science at Baruch College and coral reef and photosynthesis expert, has shared with Jonas his captivating underwater footage that focuses on bioluminescence. Threading together this material, Jonas imbues contemporary science and observational knowledge in her poetic and evocative presentation.

With *Moving Off the Land II*, Jonas deconstructs and translates her mesmerizing performance *Moving Off the Land* (2016–ongoing). The performance was commissioned by TBA21–Academy and developed as a result of Jonas’ participation in the Academy’s signature fellowship program, *The Current*. It has been previously presented in parallel to the Kochi Biennale in 2016; at *Sequences VIII* in Reykjavik and TBA21–Augarten, both in 2017; during the artist’s retrospective at the Tate Modern, London and at Danspace Project in New York, both in 2018; and at Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture, San Francisco, in January 2019. Jonas will be performing the work, accompanied live by the acclaimed composer and drummer Ikue Mori, at the Ocean Space on May 7, during the opening days of the 58th Venice Biennale.

As a digital extension of Jonas' exhibition in Ocean Space, select archival and research materials relating to the project, including exclusive interviews with the artist, will be available through Ocean Archive. Launching in complete form in September 2019, this new digital platform will enable the public to research TBA21–Academy's archive of expeditions, exhibitions, and related public events, and engage with oceanic projects from around the world. Ocean Archive is developed by User Group, Inc., and initiated by TBA21–Academy.

Moving Off the Land II is organized by TBA21–Academy and curated by Stefanie Hessler. The exhibition is supported in part by LUMA Foundation.

About the Church of San Lorenzo – History and Restoration

Located close to the Arsenale and the Giardini in the Venetian *sestiere* of Castello, the Church of San Lorenzo was founded in 812 by Orso Partecipazio (later Doge Partecipazio). The current structure was designed in the late 16th century (1592 – 1602) by architect Simone Sorella. The building is recognizable to visitors by its unfinished façade, and is one of few churches in Italy to have been built with a two-sided altar.

In 1810, the church was deconsecrated and all decorations except the main altar were removed. Following the unification of Italy, the church came into the hands of the municipality and closed to the public in 1865. In 1954, under peril of collapse, urgent restorations were undertaken, focusing especially on the ceiling. Archeological excavations, in search for the remains of Marco Polo, who is likely to have been buried there, revealed remnants of the original ninth-century church. In 1984, Renzo Piano designed a temporary architectural intervention inside the church for the presentation of Luigi Nono's opera "Prometheus" as part of Venice's international music biennale.

In 2016, TBA21–Academy secured a long-term lease of the church to restore the building and create a new type of art and research center, returning the structure to the community for sustained active use. Key restoration work by TBA21, the sister organization to TBA21–Academy, included the major stabilization and consolidation of the edifice, a complete replacement of the ceiling, and backfilling of the floor in such a way as to protect the previous archeological excavations. The building project is being overseen by restoration expert Gionata Rizzi, together with engineer Franco Pianon.

Outside of few events, the Church of San Lorenzo has been closed to the public for more than a century. For many, the opening of Ocean Space will be the first moment in living memory when it will be possible to experience this magnificent and enigmatic architectural structure. Its continued activations will engage the community on an ongoing basis.

Architectural Design of Ocean Space

Following the closure of *Moving Off the Land II*, Ocean Space will undergo additional work on its interior to support its transformation into a dynamic transdisciplinary hub for oceanic research and innovation. The interior architectural intervention, designed by architect Andrés Jaque / Office for Political Innovation, will begin construction in October 2019 and is expected to be complete within two years.

Jaque's design envisions Ocean Space as an immersive access point to the oceans. Taking advantage of the soaring vertical space within the Church of San Lorenzo, the project will create a modular and highly flexible structure of platforms that allow for a range of potential exhibitions, installations, workshops, and research to be enacted within the space. A physical reminder of the urgency of the oceanic issues,

the first platform will float 40 centimeters above the floor, indicating the estimated sea level rise by 2100 if the current carbon emissions remain consistent, and the next at 4.19 meters to the expected sea level predicted by COP21 for 2215. The top level, under the cupola of the church, will be the Ocean Chamber, a space for discussion and advocacy that invites collaborators to consider the ocean a participant in its discussion and decision-making by immersing them with views of the sea and city in every direction.

ABOUT TBA21–ACADEMY

TBA21–Academy leads artists, scientists, and thought-leaders on expeditions of collaborative discovery, fostering a deeper understanding of the ocean through the lens of art and engendering creative solutions to its most pressing issues. Founded in 2011, the itinerant Academy commissions transdisciplinary research that catalyzes engagement, stimulates new knowledge, and inspires artistic production. TBA21–Academy’s program is informed by a belief in the power of exchange between disciplines and in the ability of the arts as a vessel for communication, change, and action. Collaborators have included:

- artists and curators, such as Joan Jonas, Armin Linke, Claudia Comte, Inhabitants, Nabil Ahmed, John Akomfrah, SUPERFLEX, Chus Martínez, and Ute Meta Bauer;
- scientists and environmental groups, including noted marine biologists Sylvia Earle and Walter Munk, as well as rising stars in the field like David Gruber;
- policy-makers including Taholo Kami, Special Adviser for Pacific Partnerships and International Civil Society for the UN; Hawaiian State Senate Majority Leader J. Kalani English; and President of the Republic of Palau Thomas Esang "Tommy" Remengesau, Jr.; and
- academic partners including Max Planck Institute, NTNU Trondheim, University of the West Indies Mona, NTU Singapore, and the University of the South Pacific.

TBA21–Academy’s unique approach was instrumental in the development of its scientific arm, the Alligator Head Foundation, which manages the East Portland Fish Sanctuary in Jamaica. The Academy is also the first and only arts organization to be granted observer status at the International Seabed Authority, the UN body located in Kingston, Jamaica.

TBA21–Academy is a nonprofit, non-collecting research organization, supported by individuals, foundations, universities, government agencies, and corporate philanthropies.

MEDIA CONTACTS

TBA21 Press Office

media@tba21.org

<http://press.tba21.org/>

International Media

Resnicow and Associates

Juliet Sorce / Catherine Coughlin / Racheal Campbell

jsorce@resnicow.com / ccoughlin@resnicow.com / rcampbell@resnicow.com

212-671-5158 / 5162 / 5157

Italian Media

CasadoroFungher Comunicazione

Elena Casadoro

elena@casadorofungher.com