

secession

Vereinigung bildender KünstlerInnen Wiener Secession
Friedrichstraße 12, A-1010 Wien
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Press release

The Otolith Group

What the Owl Knows

November 19, 2022 – February 5, 2023

Galerie

Preview for the press: Friday, November 18, 2022, 11 a.m.

Exhibition talk: Friday, November 18, 2022, 6 p.m.

Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun from The Otolith Group in conversation with Bettina Spörr
An event by the Friends of the Secession

Opening: Friday, November 18, 2022, 7 p.m.

The Secession is delighted to announce *What the Owl Knows*, the solo exhibition of The Otolith Group named after the new moving image work directed by the artists. The post-cinematic practice of Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar is informed by an attention to an aesthetics of the essayistic that takes the form of a science fiction of the *present* that seeks to dramatise the interscalar catastrophes of the Racial Capitalocene.

The artists' preoccupation with rearranging the *intertemporal* relationships between past, present and future often departs from the existing works of composers, producers, musicians, poets, theorists, and painters. The approaches to sound heard in the works of figures such as Julius Eastman, Codona, Drexciya, Etel Adnan, Una Marson, Denise Ferreira da Silva and Rabindranath Tagore imply a range of artistic methods for rethinking the force, mass and motion of images.

This way of hearing *across* media allows Eshun and Sagar to visit and revisit a sonic practice of image-making which invites audiences to listen to video as a choreography of images in motion. Such an approach asks audiences to encounter the present as a historical experience projected from the *horizon* of an expectant future. In *The Third Part of the Third Measure* (2017), to name only one of several such works, The Otolith Group redirects the temporal structure of the past by staging the music of composer Julius Eastman from the perspective of a future that confronts contemporary audiences with the militant figure of the gay guerrilla.

What the Owl Knows emerges from an enduring friendship between painter and writer Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Sagar and Eshun. The mutual admiration between the three Londoners provides a precondition for a work that aims to affirm the oblique affiliations within, between and across media. Traditional documentary and contemporary television, like contemporary museums and galleries, tend to seek the motivation of the painter as a public figure in the search for psychological insight.

In contrast, the work of Eshun and Sagar could be said to be motivated by the desire to *frustrate* the demand from *institutions* for biographical explanation. This enduring desire to frustrate institutional demands for *explication* reaches a certain crescendo in *What the Owl Knows*, a work subtended by the

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ambition to *displace* the biographical imperative that informs the histories of cinema's encounter with painting.

To watch *What the Owl Knows* is to grasp the extent to which The Otolith Group seek to protect the work of painting from exposure and preserve the presence of the painter from the revelation promised by the camera. *What the Owl Knows* aims at disarticulating the work of painting. It revels in what it does *not* reveal. It lingers on details, tarries with fragments and labours on the negative work of decomposing the incremental accretion of the compositional process. It studies Yiadom-Boakye as she studies specific sections within a canvas whose extent we cannot see, ponders her next move, weighs the gravity of adjacent chromaticity and registers the shifting balance of chromatic forces.

What animates *What the Owl Knows* is an ambition to shift the focus of attention away from the painter, as an *object* of attention, towards the *quality* of attention bestowed upon the paint by the painter. *What the Owl Knows* aspires towards a poetics of recursion in which an audience *pays* attention to the ways in which digital video pays *attention* to the ways in which a painter *pays* attention to what she paints.

The attention to the recursive duets with a series of scenes in which Yiadom-Boakye appears as a singular figure, a silhouette under sodium light, unbeholden to the camera, circumnavigating wildernesses of urban London selected for their specific yet undisclosed significance. As Yiadom-Boakye reads from her poems, each of which have been restructured for and by video, a restricted economy of introspective expressionism takes hold of the *mise-en-scène*.

Suspending documentary cinema's demand for explanation, it becomes apparent, opens an abyss in meaning that allows for a heightened state of intimation and implication through video's recourse to the aberrant drama of poetic language. The oscillation between the intimacy of the interior studio and the drama of the exterior setting takes on the structure of a feeling whose interplay gestures towards video's powers of assembly. In its encounter between painting and poetry, video's movement from day to night carries Yiadom-Boakye's night-thoughts from light to dark and back again. To listen to the light of night is to hear the night of day. It is to sense the ceremony of video as it invokes a convocation between the immortality of painting, the dead of poetry and the life of the voice.

The Otolith Group's attention to the displacement of expectation makes itself felt in the animated allegory that appears at the midpoint of *What the Owl Knows*. In the animated fable between an Owl and a Pigeon inspired by Eshun and Sagar's reading of Yiadom-Boakye's text *Plans of the Night*, the Pigeon can be understood as the *engineer* of its own demise hoist by its own petard.

Text by The Otolith Group

The Otolith Group
What the Owl Knows, 2022
HD video, colour, sound
Projection screen, seating
55 minutes 7 seconds

Commissioned by Secession, Vienna
Co-produced by Cooper Gallery, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee

Programmed by the board of the Secession
Curated by Bettina Spörr

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Current exhibitions

Hauptraum

Jean-Frédéric Schnyder

November 19, 2022 – February 5, 2023

Galerie

The Otolith Group *What the Owl Knows*

November 19, 2022 – February 5, 2023

Grafisches Kabinett

Patricia L. Boyd *Ceiling Analysis*

November 19, 2022 – February 5, 2023

Artists' books

Jean-Frédéric Schnyder. Mappe A55

Double-knot stitching, 24 pages, 17 images, EUR 26,40

Patricia L. Boyd. Ceiling Blues

Book-leaf clamp, 192 pages, 90 images, EUR 26,40

Permanent presentation

Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Beethoven – Painting and Music in cooperation with
Wiener Symphoniker

Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Admission

Adults € 9,50 | Students, seniors € 6,00 | Free admission for children under ten

Press contact Secession

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Press images

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Biografie / Biography The Otolith Group

Anjalika Sagar geboren / born in 1968 in London UK. Kodwo Eshun geboren / born in 1966 in London UK.

Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl) / Solo exhibitions (selection)

XENOGENESIS, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin IE (2022/23); *The Otolith Group. Two Sonic Works*, Kunstraum Innsbruck AT (2022); *The Otolith Group. O. Horizon*, Guggenheim Bilbao (2022); *XENOGENESIS*, Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana + Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, Ljubljana SI (2022); *XENOGENESIS*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah AE (2021); *XENOGENESIS*, Buxton Contemporary, Melbourne AU (2020); *XENOGENESIS*, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge CA (2020); *XENOGENESIS*, Institute for Contemporary Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond US (2020); *XENOGENESIS*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven NL (2019); *O Horizon*, The Rubin Museum of Art, New York US (2018); *The Radiant*, Art Gallery Miyauchi; Tokyo JP (2017); *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*, Casco – Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht NL (2014); *Novaya Zemlya*, Museo de Serralves, Porto PL (2014); *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*, Delfina Foundation, London (2014); *In the Year of the Quite Sun*, Kunsthall Bergen, NO (2014); *Medium Earth*, RedCat, Los Angeles US (2014); *I See Infinite Distance Between Any Point and Another*, Fabrica, Brighton UK (2012); *AuViCo 2109*, Project 88, Mumbai IN (2012); *Westfailure*, Project 88, Mumbai (2012); *Thoughtform*, MAXXI, Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome IT (2011); *A Lure a Part Allure Apart*, Betonsalon, Paris FR (2011); *In the Year 2103*, Seven Arts, Delhi IN (2011); *In the Year 2103*, Experimenter, Kolkatta IN (2010).

Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl) / Group Exhibitions (selection)

Drum Listens to Heart. Part II, California College of the Arts Wattis Institute, San Francisco US (2022); *Tresor 31: Techno, Berlin and the Great Freedom*, Kraftwerk, Berlin DE (2022); *This Language that is every stone*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane AU (2022); *The Narrow Gate of the Here-and-Now: The Anthropocene*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2021); *Life Between Islands: Caribbean-British Art 1950s- Now*, Tate Britain, London (2021); *Turner's Modern World*, Tate Britain, London (2020); *CC World*, Haus Der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2020); *Non-Aligned*, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore SG (2020); *Dhaka Art Summit*, Dhaka BD (2020); *Sharjah Architecture Triennial*, Sharjah (2019); *Streams of Consciousness. A Concatenation of Dividuals*, 12th Rencontres de Bamako: African Biennale of Photography, Bamako ML (2019); *bauhaus imaginista*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2019); *Bubble Chamber*, Mikro, Zurich (2019); *Kochi Biennial*, Cochin IN (2018); *Carnegie International*, 57th Edition, Pittsburgh US (2018); *bauhaus Imaginista: Corresponding With, Japan*, The National Museum of Modern Art Kyoto JP (2018); *Frontier Imaginaries: Trade Markings*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2018); *Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War*, Haus Der Kulturen der Welt (2017); *This is the Sea*, Manuel Correa Monaco MC (2017); *Mondialité*, Villa Empain, Brussels (2017); *Tamawuj*, Sharjah Biennial (2017); *The Museum of Rhythm*, Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz PL (2016); *Endless Shout*, ICA Philadelphia US (2016); *The Eighth Climate (What Does Art Do?)*, Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju KR (2016); *Murder Machine*, Ormston House, Limerick IE (2016); *I Got Rhythm. Art and Jazz since 1920*, Kunstmuseum Stuttgart DE (2016); *Telling Time*, *Rencontres de Bamako*, 10th African Biennale of Photography, Bamako (2016); *Interrupted Surveys*, Asia Cultural Centre, Gwangju (2015); *The Freedom Principle, Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2015); *After Year Zero: Universal Imaginaries - Geographies of Collaboration*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw PL (2015); *Rare Earth*, Thyssen-Bornemisza Contemporary Art, Vienna (2015); *The Anthropocene Project. A Report*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2014); *Cut to Swipe*, Museum of Modern Art, New York US (2014); *Unstuck in Time*, Te Tuhi Art Centre, Auckland NZ (2014); *No Country, Contemporary Art for South and South East Asia*, Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore (2014); *Key Words: Art, Culture and Society in 1980s Britain*,

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Tate Liverpool UK (2014); *Aquatopia*, Tate St Ives UK (2013); *After Year Zero / Geographies of Collaboration since 1945*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2013); *Reflections on Damaged Life*, Raven Row, London (2013); *The Whole Earth*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2013); *ECM: A Cultural Archaeology*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2012); *Modern Monsters: Death and Life of Fiction*, 9th Taipei Biennial TW (2012); dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel DE (2012); *Horizon 3 India: Visions from the Outside*, Cultuurcentrum, Brügge BE (2012); *Forum Expanded*, 62nd International Film Festival, Kunstsaele, Berlin (2012); *The Matter Within: New Contemporary Art of India*, Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts, San Francisco US (2011); *A Terrible Beauty is Born*, 11 Biennale de Lyon FR (2011); *Jean Genet*, Nottingham Contemporary UK (2011); *In the Days of the Comet*, *The British Art Show 7*, Nottingham Contemporary (2011); *Turner Prize 10*, Tate Britain, London (2011); *Par quatre chemins. Chris Marker*, Beirut Art Center (2011); *La Bienal Europea de Arte Contemporaneo Region de Murcia en dialogo con el Norte de Africa*, Manifesta 8, Murcia ES (2011).