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On Whose Behalf: on Anne Duk Hee Jordan's Riders on the Storm
By Markus Reymann

I first encountered Duk Hee Jordan's work in the autumn of 2023, at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, inside Chus Martínez's exhibition *Liquid Intelligence*. *Ziggy and the Starfish* had been installed there as a wooden structure with a large single channel video playing inside it, surrounded by three soft textile sculptures — an anemone, an electric clam, a starfish — tender and a little absurd. Something about the whole arrangement reminded me, improbably, of a German Hobbykeller — that species of basement room where the father of one of your friends growing up might have assembled a fishkeeping setup or a giant model railway environment. The uncanny domesticity of it made me laugh before I understood what I was laughing about. And then I sat down in the structure, and the sea slugs were getting it on on the screen, and I realised the work was not doing what museum installations usually do. It was not addressing me as a viewer. It was making a room in which I could be something other than a viewer, and asking, quite gently, what that might be. A creature among creatures. A guest in a community that did not require me to declare my species at the door.

This, I think, is what Jordan has been doing for fifteen years: building rooms that propose different terms of relation for who you are once you are inside them. The word worldbuilding has grown slack with overuse, as if it meant only the staging of immersive environments or the writing of speculative fictions. Jordan has meant it more seriously. A world is a set of relations. To build one is to propose who is in the room, who speaks, who listens, and by what rules kinship is made. The potato, infused with the artist's own blood, proposed solidarity across the diasporic journey of a nightshade. The queer sex lives of octopuses and sea slugs, filmed over months of freediving off the Basque coast, proposed that non-binarism was not a human aberration but an oceanic norm, and that sexuality in the underwater depths is responsive to the community of those who inhabit that space. Jeremy, the left-coiled garden snail who could mate only with another sinistral, proposed that rarity was not a defect but a condition of love, and that love sometimes requires a search party. These were never only fictions. They were arguments for a different set of rules — for who is obligated to whom, and for what.

What has changed, more recently, is the register in which those arguments are made. Jordan has not waited for the legal scholars and the diplomats to catch up. Jordan has crossed over. The work performs jurisprudence. It insists that the imaginative act of hearing a storm, a river, a sea slug, an oxygen molecule, and the

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procedural act of representing one are not sequential but simultaneous — and that the studio is as legitimate a site for drafting treaties as the parliamentary committee. Last November, in a small Westphalian town, Jordan — together with a lawyer, scientists, local experts, and a chemistry class — helped establish an institutional structure to represent the river Pader, a step toward its recognition as a legal subject. Not a metaphor. Not a poem about a river. A body that signs. The rules of relation are no longer only imagined. They are drafted, negotiated, recognised. Kin-making becomes procedural. Symbiosis acquires a signatory.

Here I speak from inside a network — the Confluence of European Water Bodies, gathering in Berlin this September — that TBA21–Academy helped found in 2023 precisely to hold this kind of question open. Seen from that position, Jordan's allyship is of the rarer kind: not illustration but enactment. A practice that arrives in the room with a school class and a lawyer and a freediver and a hurricane and a snail, and proposes that none of them should be asked to leave.

Riders on the Storm gathers this decade of relational work into the pressure system of a single exhibition. A green vortex spins inside a glass vessel in a deep-sea room, atmospheric physics scaled down to the size of a body (*Electrify Me, Baby*). A mirrored chamber holds a sculptural hurricane — *Fiona*, the Atlantic storm of September 2022, rendered in resin and a carpet — reflected infinitely back on itself. Aluminium teapots, a small orange hard hat beside them, roll across a white floor as if to remind us that weather is also domestic labour. Tin-can robots, their labels still readable — goat cheese, Coca-Cola, German sausages — scuttle the floor carrying the globalised food economy in their bodies. On the wall, a drawing titled *The End Is Where We Start From* compresses mountain, jungle, ocean, and deep sea onto a single sheet. Jordan has said this work is about how we will always have to cope with catastrophe, and that we are all in the same boat. The humour is not a softening. It is the condition of being able to stay in the room together.

Jordan has said that to understand ecology we must think in continuous cycles. This exhibition is the cycle closing and opening at once. A storm passes. Another forms. A snail finds its partner. A river finds its voice. The end is where we start from. So is the question each of us will be asked, with increasing insistence, in the coming decade: on whose behalf are you speaking, what have you signed, and which storm are you riding?

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