

KÖNIG GALERIE

CLAUDIA COMTE JUNGLE AND CORALS

12 JANUARY – 28 FEBRUARY 2021
ST. AGNES I CHAPEL

KÖNIG GALERIE is pleased to present *Jungle and Corals*, Claudia Comte's third solo exhibition at St. Agnes. The exhibition consists of new sculptural works out of wood in the form of corals and a series of paintings that explore geometrical abstraction and comic book iconography.

Life Revealed In The Tiniest Things

Nothing seems more natural right now than to pay attention to the non-human aspects of life. Actually, it may be because of the virus that we have come to understand life better at the level of microorganisms, like corals. Historically, we have never been pushed to understand non-human forms of life. We develop „protection“ impulses and ideas of care, but, to be honest, till very recently they were all presenting us – humans – as the ones capable of damaging, but also of rescuing the planet. However, in the last decades we have witnessed both from science and art, a growing interest in listening to nature. Yes, you are understanding correctly! Listening to nature! It is not a metaphor but an invitation to reprogram all your senses, to tell your eyes about eyes that can see underwater, in the blueness of the Oceans; to tell your ears that the sounds of the seas are conversations of which we do not know a thing about; to tell your hands that the touch of fish scales is the touch of skin...

In the last years, Claudia Comte has been invested in understanding – through her work – the relationships between different forms of life. Materials do not only have a memory, but they also possess a knowledge about the environments they belong to. Wood remembers the forest. The Forests embody the thousands of symbiotic processes that allow air, energy, breathing, growing, food, shelter. What happens when you discover a cactus at the core of a tree? To shape a tropical tree in the form of a cactus is like asking the tree about all the forms a plant would be able to take to survive in extreme conditions. In seeing these cactuses emerging from the noble woods of the Jamaica forests, we are reminded of the multiple stages of storytelling through which we encounter the stories of nature. Funny: cactuses have such a presence in comics. We, humans, see in them a form similar to ours, standing there, in the harsh conditions of the desert, they survive, as we aspire to do. Playing with their form means to play with the exchangeability of roles between the human and the non-human, with the possibility of communicating a certain humor and empathy with the realm of plants.

Cactuses, though, have been coexisting lately with another form: corals. They are formally not far apart even if they are so different. Corals represent exuberance, collaboration between animals and plants, production of oxygen, beauty...they are the gems of the Oceans and in danger of perishing. Corals in wood! It makes sense, they are oxygen providers, like trees. They are also in danger due to the ocean acidification. Soft in their new bodies made

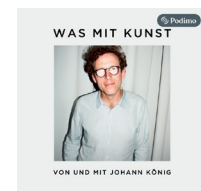
EXHIBITIONS

Chiharu Shiota
I Hope
St. Agnes I NAVE
12.01 – 28.02.2021

Claudia Comte
Jungle and Corals
St. Agnes I CHAPEL
12.01 – 28.02.2021



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Johann König launched his podcast **WAS MIT KUNST** in October 2020. Every week he meets personalities from the art scene, including artists, curators and art critics. Guests have included artist Katharina Grosse, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist and Phillips chairwoman Cheyenne Westphal.

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KÖNIG GALERIE

of wood, or hard and telling about their death, their stone future made of marble, this sculpture group addresses the importance of relating to every material as a carrier, as a storyteller, as a substance willing to create a bond between what is alive and its permanence.

The exhibition of these two families of corals allows us to see ourselves seeing these processes and reflecting on the magnificence of art revealing life in the tiniest things, in some flower, in a stone, in tree bark, or in a birch leaf. The coral series is a fundamental exercise in understanding something crucial: how human impact alters the transformation of natural forms. And materials are capable of speaking the tongue of corals.

Text: Chus Martinez

Jungle and Corals presents new sculptural works produced while Comte was on residency last year in Jamaica at the Alligator Head Foundation as a fellow of the TBA21–Academy. There she collaborated with local woodworkers in an outdoor studio set up on the premises of the Alligator Head marine Lab and worked alongside marine biologists, conservation- and coral reef specialists, as well as nature wardens. The Alligator Head Foundation manages a six square kilometre large marine protected area in East Portland and is dedicated to the recovery of fish stocks, improving coral growth and the overall biodiversity in the regions protected waters. Influenced by the myriad of coral species and their strange alien forms, Comte set out to produce a body of coral shaped sculptures made from ecologically sourced tropical woods such as, almond, dogwood, and guinep wood. In May 2021, she will present the entire body of coral sculptures produced in Jamaica in a major solo exhibition that envisions an immersive underwater landscape at the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid, curated by Chus Martinez.

Alongside the coral sculptures in the exhibition are a series of paintings that were produced in Comte's new studio in Basel last year. The artist references the visual iconography of the Belgian comic artist André Franquin, known for such comics as *Spirou et Fantasio*, *Gaston Lagaffe* and *Marsupilami*. In Comte's version she draws attention to Franquin's linear backgrounds of the natural world, removing all depictions of industrialised life and human intervention. By leaving out the figures, buildings and text bubbles, Comte brings the landscape into focus as central protagonist. The paintings are expanded through her signature geometric patterns, which oscillate in the background. The canvas is cut into eight panels and hung 18 cm apart fragmenting the image, a structural conceit often used by Comte to suggest the infinite division in all things, a meta conceit in this case that refuses categories of bifurcation. Through the distortion the natural forms gain an abstract quality, forcing the viewer to piece them back together.

Jungle and Corals interweaves nature and popular culture through forms and patterns that coalesce in space. The exhibition foregrounds the artist's keen interest in the natural world through her idiosyncratic representations of mutating flora and fauna. These embodied interpretations offer spaces for active reflection by positioning the viewer within a cool abstract landscape where corals and jungles take primacy.

CLAUDIA COMTE

Comte has a forthcoming solo exhibition at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza (Madrid) and will participate in the 58th October Salon, Belgrade Biennial in Spring 2021. She has recently had solo exhibitions at Castello di Rivoli (Turin), Gladstone Gallery, (Brussels and New York), Copenhagen Contemporary (Copenhagen), KÖNIG GALERIE (Berlin), Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland and Kunstmuseum Luzern. She presented the large-scale installation *NOW I WON* at the Messeplatz during Art Basel in 2017. Recent group exhibitions include *KölnSkulpture#9*, Cologne and *The Language of Things*, with the Public Art Fund, New York.

KÖNIG GALERIE

KÖNIG GALERIE was founded in Berlin by Johann König in 2002, and currently represents 40 international emerging and established artists, mostly belonging to a younger generation. The program's focus is on interdisciplinary, concept-oriented and space-based approaches in a variety of media including sculpture, video, sound, painting, printmaking, photography and performance. In May 2015, KÖNIG GALERIE took up St. Agnes, a monumental former church built in the 1960s in the Brutalist style, where museum-like exhibitions take place in two different spaces, the former chapel and nave. In 2017, KÖNIG GALERIE opened KÖNIG LONDON in a former car park in Marylebone, London. In November 2019 KÖNIG TOKIO opened in Japan presenting artists that are based in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

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Opening Hours
Tue – Sat 10 AM – 6 PM
Sun 12 – 6 PM

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