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PRESS RELEASE:

LOTHAR BAUMGARTEN

Amazon Cosmos

1 September – 7 October 2021

Opening: Wednesday 1st September, 6–8 pm

My critical approach does not intend to offer autobiographical solutions to universal problems.

I believe art should encourage us to question the status quo and the structures that allow it to persist.

— Lothar
Baumgarten

Galerie Marian Goodman is pleased to announce an exhibition of works by Lothar Baumgarten (1944–2018), which will open to the public on the 1 September 2021. As an homage to one of the most influential German artists of his generation, the exhibition focuses on his early works, including his iconic film, *Origin of the Night (Amazon Cosmos)*, a selection of photographs, a slide projection, as well as several sculptural installations. His famous floor piece, *America Señores Naturales*, originally created for the German Pavilion at the 41st Venice Biennale in 1984, and for which he was awarded the Golden Lion prize, is shown on the ground floor of the gallery. This historical piece, alongside the other works in the show, encompasses the founding elements of Baumgarten's conceptual practice, from the emphasis on the architectural and historical context, along with the

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preeminence of naming and typography, to references to his investigations on systems of representation.

With *America Señores Naturales* (1984), Baumgarten wanted to challenge the historical role played by Western colonialism as well as its system of thought. In a new publication dedicated to the project, Joanna Vickery-Barkow notes that in “removing rows of the building’s original honey-colored marble floor tiles and replacing them with new ones spelling the word *America*, the river names *Amazonas*, *Tapajos*, *Xingu*, *Purus*, *Orinoco*, *Vaupes*, and *Tocantins*, and depicting four abstract graphic symbols, he sought to ‘impose the topographical structure of the Amazon basin onto the lagoon of Venice.’”¹ On the ground floor, the original marble flagstones of the German Pavilion are either laid on the floor separately or piled one on top of the other, and juxtaposed with brass rods and natural feathers, following Baumgarten’s instructions for the last installation of the artwork in 2016.

The pigment sculpture *Tetrahedron (Pyramid)* (1968) illustrates the artist’s early interest in spontaneous and ephemeral interventions. It suggests archaic high culture, fragility and transience, and came as a response to the growing market conformity Baumgarten felt exposed to, with the advent of the first art fair in Cologne at the time.

On view in the lower gallery is a selection of Baumgarten’s early works, such as color photographs from the 1968–72 series *Culture-Nature (Manipulated Reality)*, as well as a number of black-and-white photographs mostly of ephemeral sculptural interventions, including some the artist staged and photographed before his first trip to South America in 1977 in the Rheinaue wetlands not far from his home. As a reptile meets a sink, jungle meets kale, and pyramids meet molehills, it also becomes clear how fragile meaning and representation are and how apparent the structuralist binarism is.

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In the wall installation *Moskitos* (1969) Baumgarten employs pigeon feathers and small bread loaves, combining typical elements from nature and culture to create an imaginary species.

The nearly two-hour film *Origin of The Night (Amazon Cosmos)* (1973–1977), which references a myth of the indigenous Tupi people, is a meditation on the South American rain forest that was filmed in its entirety along the Rhine near Düsseldorf Airport. In it, the dichotomies of day and night, new and old worlds, and nature and culture unfold glacially and immersively. Only at the very end, in the film's closing credits, does Baumgarten reveal where the compelling and poetic images were shot.

The photographic essay *Eine Reise oder 'Mit der MS Remscheid auf dem Amazonas' / Der Bericht einer Reise unter den Sternen des Kühlschranks (A Voyage or 'with the MS Remscheid on the Amazon' / The Account of a Voyage under the Stars of the Refrigerator)* (1968–1971) combines color and black and white images of Baumgarten's same ephemeral sculptures from the late 1960s, realized mostly outdoors, with photography and text related to the research of ethnologists Theodor Koch-Grünberg and Guido Boggiani at the turn of the 19th century.

Lothar Baumgarten was born in Rheinsberg, Germany, in 1944 and died in Berlin in 2018. He studied at the Staatliche Akademie für bildende Künste, Karlsruhe (1968) and at the Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (1969–71), where he was a student of Joseph Beuys. Between 1978 and 1980, he lived for a period of 18 months among the indigenous Yanōmami people in the Orinoco region, Venezuela. Lothar Baumgarten exhibited internationally and major solo shows have been held in museums such as the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and the Palacio de Cristal, Madrid, Spain (2016); Fundación Botín, Santander, Spain (2012); Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany (2011); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2009); Museu d'Art

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Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), Spain (2008); Museum Kurhaus, Kleve, Germany (2006); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA (2003); Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany (2001); National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto and Tokyo, Japan (1996); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA (1993); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, USA (1987); Musée National d'Art Moderne - Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France (1987); and ARC/Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France (1986).

Lothar Baumgarten also participated in Documenta V (1972), VII (1982), IX (1992), X (1997) and was the recipient of the MFI Prize, Essen, Germany (2003); the Lichtwark Prize, City of Hamburg, Germany (1997); The Golden Lion, First Prize of the 41st Venice Biennale, Italy (1984); the Prize of the State of Nordrhein-Westfalen (1976); and the Prize of the City of Düsseldorf, Germany (1974).

¹ Joanna Vickery-Barkow, "Ground, Map, Floor: The Site and the Subject of Lothar Baumgarten's *Señores Naturales*" in *Lothar Baumgarten, America Señores Naturales*, published by Marian Goodman Gallery, 2020, page 15.

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