

Media Release

EXPERIMENTAL ECOLOGY

Art x Science in Dialogue

Basel, 24 August 2023 – From 25 August until 29 October 2023, the Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G is showing an interactive exhibition devoted to the ecological challenges of our time. Art far beyond fine art, science beyond mere theory – this is the concept of the curators Martina Huber, founder of WE ARE AIA, and Gianni Jetzer, Director of Kunstmuseum St. Gallen. EXPERIMENTAL ECOLOGY – Art x Science in Dialogue records discussions amongst interdisciplinary teams about current and urgent questions regarding ecology, biology, and climate research in five thematically different projects. The exhibition is at times visual and playful, shows surprising changes of perspective, is an interactive theatrical spectacle or a challenging olfactory experiment and is always accompanied by specific workshops as part of the Public Program.

Following *Experiments in Art and Technology* (E.A.T.), an initiative founded in New York in 1967 promoting the cooperation between art and new technology, Martina Huber and Gianni Jetzer started EXPERIMENTAL ECOLOGY in 2022 as a platform for artists and scientists working in the field of ecology. International representatives of both disciplines were selected who already had worked in collaborative projects before and who wanted to work together on innovative concepts about the environment and ecology in an experimental way.

Art and Science on equal terms

In experimental ecology, controlled experiments are used to investigate hypotheses based on the relationships between organisms and their environment. The observed effects on populations, communities or ecosystems should help in understanding cause and effect and provide evidence for theories and predictions about ecological systems. The curators Huber and Jetzer took it as a prerequisite that the conception, project work and authorship for the experiments in these five projects lie with both art and science. The initiative does not only aim to promote an active dialogue between the disciplines but also to bring it to the general public. This is where the aspirations and concerns of the initiators and the Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G, which is presenting the project, come together. What may, what should and what must art do? This is a question that should be discussed again and again, even heatedly, according to Raphael Suter, Director of KBH.G: *“For some, art should first and foremost be accessible and beautiful. It should enrich everyday life, give pleasure, and open up new horizons. For others, art must reflect the present with its problems such as climate change, emigration, overpopulation, or war. It should be unwieldy and political, oppose the establishment and encourage people to rethink. We don't just want to show beautiful art, but open ourselves up to current issues, like in this exhibition.”*

The five international teams and their projects

The German artist and author **Ingo Niermann**, who lives in Basel, and the Australian biologist **Alex Jordan** from Constance (Germany) are asking the question: **“How do fish feel?”** or **“How does one feel like a fish?”**. They create a scenario using a game with a fish avatar where visitors can develop empathy with a rather inconspicuous sea creature as well as with their life and their sense of feeling. Nierman is convinced that **“the sea is the biggest challenge for extending human love”**. A workshop accompanying the exhibition will take place on 12 September.

The Norwegian artist and olfactory researcher **Sissel Tolaas**, who lives in Berlin, and the American biologist and artist **Christina Agapakis** deal with perception and acceptance of smell in our society. **“We live in a world of complete antisepsis and a continuous all-encompassing deodorisation which corresponds to a global homogeneity of faceless glass buildings. As environmental smells cannot be pleasant anymore, it could mean that we will not have any smells any more at one point.”** Together, they research the microbial elements of human body odour, which has a very similar microbial original

as the smell of cheese. To further explore this connection, they experimented with making cheese using starter cultures collected on human skin. For the exhibition, they have used samples from Swiss celebrities for making cheese. Interested people can find out how this works at the exhibition and a workshop on 7 October.

The Canadian maritime and fishery biologist **Karin Pittman**, who lives in Norway, and the Berlin-based Chilean artist **Michelle-Marie Letelier** pursue the question as to what extent a lack of empathy stands in the way of successfully fighting climate change. In their project, they explore the **“geopolitical consequences of salmon – a so-called natural resource – used as a neo-colonial instrument by people from the global North in the global South.”** This is precisely the problem: salmon is not native to the southern hemisphere, yet it is farmed there for the global market. These and other questions are addressed in the interactive play **Salm Ethos**, which will be performed four times during the exhibition (26.08. at 10.30 am / 20.09. at 6 pm / 01.10. at 4 pm / 29.10. at 4 pm).

The Chinese artist **Zheng Bo** and the German biologist **Matthias C. Rilling** discuss the **relationship between humans and plants**. To do this, they include the biology, economics, and politics of plants as well as the accumulation of plastic in soils and the water environment. **“Soil ecology is critical to providing a variety of ecosystems that serve humans, as well as mitigating climate change”**. How do plants change due to climate change, how do they adapt to it and how can humans take their perspective. By reversing perspectives and roles, plants are discovered in a whole new way. A workshop in the context of the exhibition will take place on 25 August in the Botanical Garden of the University of Basel.

“What role does plankton play in the marine ecosystem and in regulating the Earth's climate?” With this question in mind, the Zurich-based Finnish artist **Riikka Tauriainen** and the Swiss climate researcher and marine ecologist **Meike Vogt** immerse us in the imaginary world of plankton. **“Plankton is sensitive to environmental changes and its condition corresponds to the well-being of all marine life. The fact that phytoplankton, driven by photosynthesis, provides up to 50 per cent of our oxygen supply and binds large amounts of carbon dioxide is a service for which we should all be grateful.”** A workshop on the exhibition project will take place on 21 October.

Martina Huber and Gianni Jetzer are convinced that art can trigger change: *“Today, ecology is a wide field of knowledge in which interesting subcategories have emerged. In the last decade, the impact of humans on the Earth's biosphere has become a pressing issue that is being addressed at various levels. However, artistic and scientific approaches are often separated because there is hardly any space for exchange. We want to change that.”* More about this in the Curator's Talk on 5 September at 6 pm.

25 August – 29 October 2023

EXPERIMENTAL ECOLOGY – Art x Science in Dialogue

Daily (except Tuesdays) 11 am until 6 pm | Admission and catalogue are free of charge
Images can be found from 24.08. [here](#) | Details about the Public Program on kbhg.ch

Further information:

Medienstelle KBH.G | Laverrière Public Relations

Corinne Laverrière | T: +41 44 920 01 78 | M: +41 78 778 48 00 | corinne@laverriere.ch

About the curators

Martina Huber

Martina Huber is the founder and curator of the platform WE ARE AIA | Awareness in Art, which she founded in 2020 at the Löwenbräu in Zurich, Switzerland. She curates exhibitions which develop from transdisciplinary collaborations between experts and artists. By doing this, she wants to sharpen awareness of complex social questions and make issues accessible on an emotional level. Some of her past projects include "The Mouth is for Speaking," which considered what is needed to stand up for one's rights, "Back to the Roots," about the objectification and exploitation of nature, and "Can You See Me Now?" about digital surveillance in the form of automated data collection. These projects promote constructive discourse and show new perspectives. weareaia.ch | [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#)

Gianni Jetzer

Gianni Jetzer is a prolific curator specializing in contemporary art. He has more than two decades of experience as director and curator of museum exhibitions in Europe, Asia, and North America. After having gained a reputation curating exhibitions at the Migros Museum in Zurich, he became Kunsthalle St. Gallen's youngest Director in 2001. In 2006, he left his native Switzerland to become director of the Swiss Institute in New York. Since 2013, he has worked as an independent curator and since 2014 as Curator-at-Large at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC. Since 1 November 2022, Jetzer has been Director of the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, one of the oldest art museums in Switzerland with an extensive collection in three different venues. gianni-jetzer.com | [Instagram](#)

Über die Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G

The Basel H. Geiger | Cultural Foundation was founded KBH.G 2019 by the philanthropist Sibylle Geiger (1930-2020), who named the foundation after her grandfather, the Swiss pharmacist and entrepreneur Hermann Geiger (1870-1962). The foundation has the aim to provide a new type of forum for art and culture for the city of Basel and its residents and visitors. All activities of the Basel H. Geiger Cultural Foundation aim to add a new topic to the rich cultural offerings of the city of Basel. The foundation plans to carry out two to three artistically independent exhibition projects each year; Admission and the accompanying catalogue are both free of charge. kbhg.ch | [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)