

KÖNIG GALERIE

CLAUDIA COMTE
CORALS AND JUNGLE

17. – 20. SEPTEMBER 2020

KUNSTTAGE BASEL | OETLINGERSTR. 156, 4057 BASEL

KÖNIG GALERIE is delighted to present Corals and Jungle by Claudia Comte (b. 1983, Grancy) on the occasion of Kunsttage Basel with a special solo presentation at Oetlingerstrasse 156.

The natural environment is a common theme in Comte's work – the forest in particular has played an instinctive creative role. Ecologically sourced wood, often from sustainable forests found in and around her hometown of Morges, Grancy, has become the artists primary medium from which she carves her idiosyncratic abstract forms. Comte's sculptural process begins by roughly carving her shapes with a chainsaw – a tool not known for its precision, but rather for its expediency and force. The finished sculptures retain none of the marks and inflections of the chainsaw, they are smooth and glisten to reveal the intricacies of the woods hidden grain. This approach links Comte's work to her wider interests in forest ecology and biodiversity, which she evokes through play, connection and touch.

In more recent years, Comte's interest in the ocean and marine life has become a recurring subject in her personal reflections and her artistic practice. In March 2018, she was invited to participate in an oceanic expedition to New Zealand organised by TBA21-Academy, and lead by the curator Chus Martinez, together with a crew of fellow artists. The Academy brings together scientists, writers, thinkers and artists and instigates intersectional and collaborative research, artistic production, and new forms of knowledge, investigating environmental injustice against the ocean through the lens of art.

Since her involvement with the Academy Comte has developed several works and artistic interventions that incorporate her oceanic findings; her project strives to retain aesthetic formalisms and thought while asking how the artistic object can do something else in the world simultaneously.

Corals and Jungle 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 February 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.

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OPENING HOURS
TUE – SAT 10 AM – 6 PM
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Alongside the coral sculptures in the exhibition are a series of paintings that were produced in Comte's new studio in Basel this 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.

Corals and Jungle 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.

Comte has a forthcoming solo exhibition at Kustraum Dornbirn and the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza (Madrid). 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, 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.

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