

Exhibition: *Diana Thater: The Sympathetic Imagination*

On View: November 22, 2015–February 21, 2016

Location: Art of the Americas Building (Plaza Level) and
BCAM (Third Floor)



Image captions on page 5

(Los Angeles—June 25, 2015) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Diana Thater: The Sympathetic Imagination* (November 22, 2015–February 21, 2016), the artist's first comprehensive museum exhibition in the United States. Among the most important artists to emerge during the 1990s, Los Angeles–based artist Diana Thater has created groundbreaking and influential works of art in film, video, and installation that challenge the normative ways in which moving images are experienced. Her dynamic, immersive installations address key issues that span the realms of film, museum exhibitions, the natural sciences, and contemporary culture through the deployment of movement, scale, and architecture. Co-curated by Lynne Cooke, Senior Curator for Special Projects in Modern Art at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, and Christine Y. Kim, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art at LACMA, *The Sympathetic Imagination* comprises 22 works from the early 1990s through 2015. Occupying approximately 20,000 square feet, it is LACMA's largest monographic exhibition dedicated to a female artist to date.

The primary emphasis of Thater's work resides in the tension between the natural environment and mediated reality, and by extension, between the domesticated and wild, and science and magic. Drawing on a wide variety of sources, including literature, animal behavior, mathematics, chess, and sociology, her evocative and layered imagery engages its surroundings to create complex relationships between time and space. Among the standouts in this 25-year survey of Thater's career of single-channel monitor works and

monumental installations are *Oo Fifi, Five Days in Claude Monet's Garden, Part 2* (1992) and *Abyss of Light* (1993), both from LACMA's permanent collection.

Co-curators Cooke and Kim explain why this retrospective is long overdue: "As evidenced in the numerous exhibitions that she has made in galleries and institutions around the globe, Diana Thater's work speaks to key issues of our time: ethics, bioecology, the environment, earth sciences, and the Anthropocene. A hallmark of the artist's groundbreaking installations is the nuanced wedding of projected imagery to architectural site so that viewers are literally immersed in the work. Experiencing these installations kinetically, viscerally, and psychically rather than by merely observing passively from a distance, visitors enter into an active dialogue with work that is consistently challenging, disciplined, and intellectually rigorous."

For Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director, Diana Thater's retrospective exemplifies the museum's continued interest in the intersection of art and film. "Her expansive practice pulls the moving image out of the screen and off the wall, creates multiple perspectives, and merges image and architecture in surprising ways. *The Sympathetic Imagination* is a rare opportunity to see the full spectrum of Thater's impressive body of work."

Following its run at LACMA, *The Sympathetic Imagination* travels to the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, where it will be on view October 2016–January 2017.

Concurrent with LACMA's presentation of *The Sympathetic Imagination*, Thater's installation *gorillagorillagorilla* will be on view at the Aspen Art Museum (November 5, 2015–January 24, 2016). An immersive film environment with wall-sized projections of the jungle encompassing the gallery, *gorillagorillagorilla* centers on the western lowland gorillas of Cameroon's Mefou National Park.

About the Exhibition

The Sympathetic Imagination spans across LACMA's campus, with part one located in the Art of the Americas building (AoA) and part two in BCAM. In addition, two works, *The best space is the deep space* (1998) and *Perfect Devotion Six* (2006), are currently on long-term display in the Bing Theater lobby. In AoA, which contains mostly earlier works, visitors will be able to discern the development of Thater's filming techniques, subject matter, use of changing technologies, range of palettes, and approaches to architecture.

Depicting a range of natural phenomena—such as dolphins in their fluid underwater world; honeybees, who communicate through dancing; monkeys and humans bridging a

nebulous boundary between the tamed and the wild in Jaipur's Galtaji Temple—Thater's works explore the subjectivity of animals and the complex relationships humans have constructed with nature.

Drawing on the medium's artistic potential by magnifying video's lo-fi and composite qualities, Thater often exaggerates synthetic color and pixilation until the effect approaches the hand-painted. In her breakthrough work *Oo Fifi, Five Days in Claude Monet's Garden, Part 1 and Part 2*, created from footage shot at the Fondation Claude Monet in Giverny, France, video's primary colors (RGB) were partially reconstructed or projected separately in order to enhance the medium's impressionistic effects. As in other works in the exhibition, *Oo Fifi* also introduces an interactive dimension, by overlaying visitors' shadows rendered in various hues onto the projected imagery.

Thater's *Delphine* (1999), filmed in the Caribbean, depicts dolphins in their natural habitat. Shot both from above and from a diver's perspective, the footage has been divided into four projections. The sun provides an important orientation point: all underwater shots directed upward are shot with video while the downward-facing angles are documented with film, subtly underscoring differences in vantage point. In addition to the projected images, the installation includes a discrete video wall comprising nine monitors that shows an image of the sun shot from a NASA telescope. While the video wall adds an additional conceptual element to the installation, it also helps to ground the viewer in the seemingly unbounded environment, a luminous counterpoint to the expansive and potentially destabilizing projections.

knots + surfaces (2001) was inspired by the dance of honeybees, in which worker bees signal the availability of, and distance to, food sources to their fellow bees. This complex mode of communication has been linked by anthropologists and mathematicians to the geometry of six-dimensional space. At the threshold to the gallery, the artwork embodies a single perspectival vantage point. From that specific spot in the installation, visitors see a video projection of giant bees moving over five static hexagons. The details of the surrounding architecture seem dematerialized as the vibrating imagery resolves into a coherent whole. However, viewed from elsewhere in the room, the bees' movement becomes abstracted as the hexagons are distorted into a play of colored shapes that gambol over the floor, walls, corners, and ceiling. As a counterpoint to these projections, Thater introduces a bulky, freestanding four-by-four monitor "video wall" displaying an orange flower.

The most recent work included in the exhibition, *Life Is a Time-Based Medium* (2015), was filmed at the Galtaji Temple—a Hindu pilgrimage site—in Jaipur, India. A monumental

installation, it conflates the projected architecture of the temple with that of the gallery in which it is shown. Focusing on the behavior of the resident monkeys, Thater's work questions distinctions between the tame and wild by reference to the divine status of the animals in Hinduism.

Exhibition Catalogue

Diana Thater: The Sympathetic Imagination is accompanied by a fully illustrated, scholarly catalogue that is co-published by LACMA and DelMonico/Prestel. The 224-page volume, edited by Lynne Cooke and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, with Christine Y. Kim, includes more than 150 color images, an interview between Diana Thater and Lynne Cooke, plus essays by Giuliana Bruno, Michael Govan, Lisa Gabrielle Mark, and Jason E. Smith. An online digital supplement to the catalogue by Diana Thater and Patti Podesta will be available in early January 2016, featuring texts by Lynne Cooke, Christine Y. Kim, and Diana Thater, plus new photography of the artist's installation at LACMA by Fredrik Nilsen.

About Diana Thater

Born in 1962 in San Francisco, Diana Thater studied Art History at New York University, before receiving her M.F.A. from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, where she is currently the faculty chair of the Graduate Art department.

Over the past decade, her work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at prominent institutions that include the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2011); Santa Monica Museum of Art, California (2010); Kunsthaus Graz, Austria; Natural History Museum, London (both 2009); Kunsthalle Bremen, Germany; Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, Germany (both 2004); Dia Center for the Arts, New York (2001); Secession, Vienna (2000); and The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (1995).

In 2014, Thater was awarded a California Community Foundation Fellowship for Visual Artists. Other notable awards and fellowships include a 2011 Award for Artistic Innovation from the Center for Cultural Innovation, Los Angeles, as well as a James D. Phelan Award in Film and Video (2006), a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (2005), and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship (1993).

Work by the artist is represented in museum collections worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Castello di Rivoli, Turin; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney

Museum of American Art, New York; and the Friedrich Christian Flick Collection at Hamburger Bahnhof–Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin. Also renowned as a writer, educator, and curator, Thater lives and works in Los Angeles.

Credit: This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Presented by:



Additional support provided by:

COOMI

This exhibition is made possible by Hauser & Wirth, David Zwirner, the Pasadena Art Alliance, Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso para el Arte, and Suzanne and David Johnson. Media support provided by *Town & Country*.

Diana Thater: The Sympathetic Imagination is part of The Hyundai Project: Art + Technology at LACMA, a joint initiative exploring the convergence of art and technology.

All exhibitions at LACMA are underwritten by the LACMA Exhibition Fund. Major annual support is provided by Kitzia and Richard Goodman, with generous annual funding from Janet Chann and Michael Irwin in memory of George Chann, Louise and Brad Edgerton, Edgerton Foundation, Emily and Teddy Greenspan, Jenna and Jason Grosfeld, Lenore and Richard Wayne, and the Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation.

Image captions: (Left) Diana Thater, *knots + surfaces*, 2001, five video projectors, 16-monitor video wall, and six players; dimensions variable; installation view, Dia Center for the Arts, New York, 2001, © Diana Thater; photo © Fredrik Nilsen

(Center) Diana Thater, *Delphine*, 1999; four video projectors, five players, nine-monitor video wall, and Lee filters; dimensions variable; installation view, Kunsthalle Bremen, Germany, 2004 © Diana Thater, photo © Roman Mensing/artdoc.de

(Right) Diana Thater, *Life is a Time-Based Medium*, 2015; three video projectors, three lenses, player and Watchout system; dimensions variable; installation view, Hauser & Wirth, London, 2015, © Diana Thater; photo by Alex Delfanne, courtesy Hauser & Wirth

About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes nearly 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art, Latin American art, ranging from pre-Columbian masterpieces to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over a million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives, such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement at

lacma.org. Situated in Hancock Park on over 20 acres in the heart of Los Angeles, LACMA is located between the ocean and downtown.

Location and Contact: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard (at Fairfax Avenue), Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

LACMA press contact: press@lacma.org, 323 857-6522

Connect with LACMA



@lacma #DianaThater