

Diana Thater *Yes, there will be singing*

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David Zwirner Offsite



Diana Thater, *Yes, there will be singing*, 2020

David Zwirner is pleased to present a new video installation by the Los Angeles–based artist Diana Thater. The third presentation in the gallery’s Offsite series, this new sound, video, and light piece will be installed by the artist in a remote location and can only be experienced digitally, via a multichannel livestream video feed on the David Zwirner website. The title of the show refers to a poem by Bertolt Brecht, written while the playwright was in exile in Denmark in the late 1930s after having fled Nazi Germany. It reads: “In the dark times / Will there also be singing? / Yes, there will be singing / About the dark times.”

Since emerging in the early 1990s, Thater has pioneered the use of film, video, light, and sound, continually challenging the boundaries of time-based media and installation art. Her work explores the relationship between the natural and man-made worlds while critically examining the structures of mediated reality. Drawing on a wide variety of sources, including literature, animal behavior sciences, mathematics, chess, and sociology, her evocative works directly engage their surroundings, producing an intricate relationship between time and space.

Responding to the global pandemic that has left people isolated and disconnected, *Yes, there will be singing* will be accessible twenty-four hours a day, upending the spatial and temporal constraints of the traditional exhibition format and allowing anyone anywhere to experience the work live. The installation is composed of a rectangular exhibition space in which Thater has installed in a wide circle four speakers and four video cameras on tripods. Theatrical lighting fixtures are placed throughout the room and are programmed to slowly shift through the color spectrum over the course of the day. The cameras record the room in 360 degrees, capturing the surfaces, equipment, and changing effects of light and color. Thater has programmed the video to automatically switch between feeds, creating an immersive spatial effect that simulates the feeling of spinning.

The speakers play audio recordings of the distinctive songs of “Whale 52,” likely a male blue whale or a hybrid of fin and blue whales, who has been identified only by the unique pitch of his vocalizations, which pulse at fifty-two hertz. Like human language, whale song—the intricacies of which scientists are only just beginning to understand—has complex linguistic characteristics and dialects. Whales use their songs to locate and communicate with one another, and, importantly, to find mates. Sound is how they “see.” Though he has never been photographed or even seen, some scientists have suggested that the odd frequency of Whale 52’s songs may be due to his being deafened by Navy sonar testing and other kinds of human sound pollution, which have been shown to dramatically affect whale vocalization and hearing. Nicknamed “the loneliest whale in the world,” as his possible hearing impairment would

¹Thater quoted in a forthcoming interview with *BOMB magazine* in 2020.

have left him unable to communicate with other whales, Whale 52 and his uncommon songs remain a mystery, yet they resonate as potent symbols of how humans disrupt the natural environment.

In Thater's installation, Whale 52 further emblemizes the desire to communicate and connect across time and space—a longing that is all the more powerful during these troubling times. "Silence, and isolation in both time and space, made me think about ... Whale 52," says Thater. "It seems likely that he cannot understand, nor be understood by, other whales. The wonderful thing about him is that he sings nonetheless."¹ Much like the experience of communicating today, the work is both connecting and distancing, present and absent, confined and limitless.

Yes, there will be singing follows on the artist's groundbreaking exploration of 360-degree video installations such as *China* (1995), *relay* (a collaboration with T. Kelly Mason, 2007), and *Chernobyl* (2012) while offering an entirely novel visual and aural experience: "This particular piece is not a circle of video projections," notes Thater, "but is instead a circle of audio projections and cameras filming themselves, the speakers, and the empty room, while theatrical lighting fills the space – turning it into a visible volume."² This work is a reordering—rather than a video presented as a physical installation, the installation is transposed into video. Here, the viewer is immersed in the sonic and sensorial phenomena that make up the lived experience of whales in their environment. Through this innovative approach, Thater offers a truly original and deeply somatic encounter with a world of sound and color that viewers can bring into their homes and lives during this period of protracted isolation and physical distance.

Born in 1962 in San Francisco, Diana Thater studied art history at New York University before receiving her MFA from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California.

Since 1993, the artist has been represented by David Zwirner. In 2015, *Science, Fiction* marked Thater's eighth solo exhibition at the gallery in New York. Previous shows include *Chernobyl* (2012), *Between Science and Magic* (2010), *Here is a text about the world...* (2008), *New Work* (2005), *the sky is unfolding under you* (2001), *China, Crayons & Molly Numbers 1 through 10* (1996), and *Late & Soon (Occident Trotting)* (1993).

In 2018, a solo presentation of the artist's work was presented at the new ICA Watershed, Boston. In 2017, the solo show *A Runaway World* was first exhibited at The Mistake Room, Los Angeles, and later traveled to Borusan Contemporary, Istanbul, and the Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain. In 2015, a comprehensive mid-career survey of Thater's work, *The Sympathetic Imagination*, was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The show traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Over the past decade, her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at prominent institutions that include the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2015); San Jose Museum of Art, California (2015); Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2011); Santa Monica Museum of Art, California (2010); Kunsthaus Graz, Austria (2009); Natural History Museum, London (2009); Kunsthalle Bremen, Germany (2004); Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, Germany (2004); Dia Center for the Arts, New York (2001); and the Secession, Vienna (2000).

In 2018, the artist was awarded an Art + Technology Lab Grant from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Other notable awards and fellowships include a California Community Foundation Fellowship for Visual Artists (2014), an award for artistic innovation from the Center for Cultural Innovation, Los Angeles (2011), 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; Friedrich Christian Flick Collection at Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York;

² Ibid.

and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Also a prolific writer, educator, and curator, Thater lives and works in Los Angeles.

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