

THE SYMPATHETIC IMAGINATION



OCT 29, 2016–
JAN 8, 2017

Diana
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THERE IS NO LIMIT TO
THE EXTENT TO
WHICH WE CAN THINK
OURSELVES INTO
THE BEING OF ANOTHER.
THERE ARE NO BOUNDS
TO THE SYMPATHETIC
IMAGINATION.

—J. M. COETZEE

Among the most important artists to emerge during the 1990s, Los Angeles-based Diana Thater creates 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.

At the heart of Thater's work is the tension between the natural environment and mediated reality and, by extension, between the domesticated and wild, the scientific and the fantastical or magical. Drawing on a wide variety of sources, including literature, animal behavior, mathematics, and sociology, Thater layers imagery onto architectural surroundings to create complex relationships between time and space. A hallmark of Thater's groundbreaking installations, this nuanced wedding of projected imagery to architectural site literally immerses viewers in her works. 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.

The texts accompanying the artworks featured in this guide were written by the artist herself.

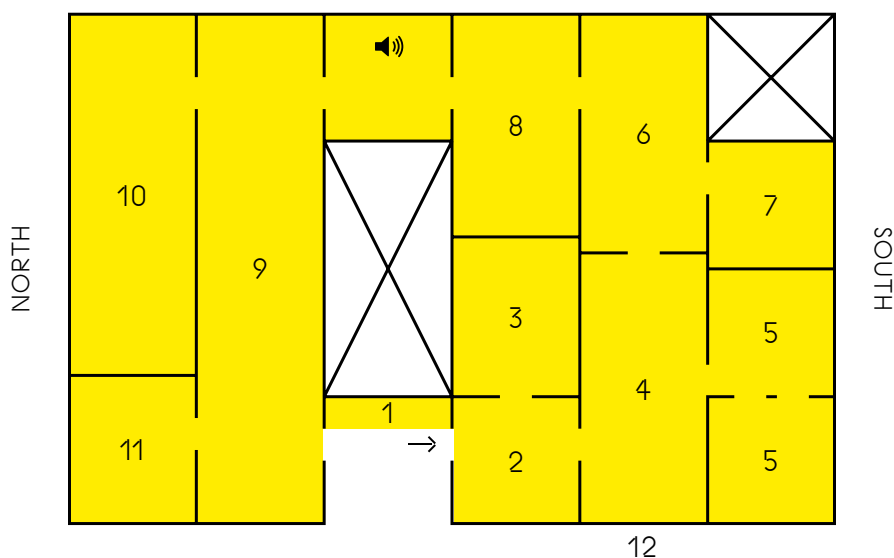
Diana Thater: The Sympathetic Imagination was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. It was cocurated by Lynne Cooke, Senior Curator for Special Projects in Modern Art at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; and Christine Y. Kim, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art at LACMA. The Chicago presentation is coordinated by Joey Orr, the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow.

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Cover: Diana Thater, *Cast of Falcons*, 2008. Four video projectors, display computer, and two spotlights; overall dimensions variable. Installation view, *Diana Thater: The Sympathetic Imagination*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2015–16. © Diana Thater. Photo © Fredrik Nilsen.

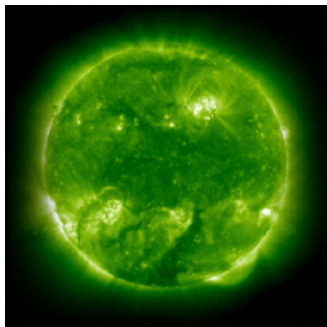
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THE SYMPATHETIC IMAGINATION



- 1 Six-Color Video Wall
- 2 Untitled Videowall (Butterflies)
- 3 China
- 4 knots + surfaces
- 5 Oo Fifi, Five Days in Claude Monet's Garden, Part 1 and Part 2
- 6 Delphine

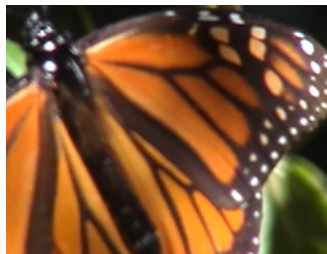
- 7 Day for Night
 - 8 One and Two
 - 9 Abyss of Light
 - 10 A Cast of Falcons
 - 11 Life is a Time-Based Medium
 - 12 Chernobyl
-
- 12 A Series of Events



- 1 Six-Color Video Wall
2000
- I acquired the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) spacecraft footage from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) after discovering that their images of the sun are separated into the component colors of light—red, green, and blue—for study by scientists. I took these images and made the complementary colors—cyan, magenta, and yellow. These six colors are the primary and secondary colors of the video band, which I often deconstruct into its elements: color and light.

Six video monitors and six players; horizontal stack; dimensions variable

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, purchase, with funds from the Contemporary Committee and the Film and Video Committee, 2000.193



- 2 Untitled Videowall
(Butterflies)
2008
- Each year, the forests of Michoacán, Mexico, become the overwinter home for tens of millions of monarch butterflies, who make the journey from Canada in November. The year I filmed there, a winter frost killed off millions of the delicate creatures. This broken video wall focuses on one butterfly slowly flapping its wings.

Six video monitors, one player, six 48-inch fluorescent light fixtures, and Lee filters; dimensions variable

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, museum purchase, the Suzette Morton Davidson Art Acquisition Endowment Fund



- 3 China
1995
- China* was made in an outdoor arena on a hillside with a circle of six cameras surrounding two performing wolves: Shilo, a grizzled older male, and China, a young female. The work documents their actions as their trainers attempt to make them stand still in the center of the circle. The six images become one moving picture that wraps around the room, forming a continuous landscape that is divided into the primary and secondary colors of video: red, green, blue, cyan, magenta, and yellow. Wolves, like humans, live in complex social groups. One wolf is always an individual and a group simultaneously. The viewer is always inside *China*, surrounded by wolves, cameras, and projectors.

Six video projectors and six players; edition 2 of 2; dimensions variable

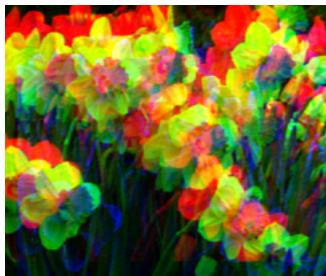
Private collection, courtesy of David Zwirner, New York/London



- 4 knots + surfaces
2001
- Featuring honeybees and a hive made of multicolored hexagons, *knots + surfaces* addresses a recent mathematical hypothesis that correlates a six-dimensional spatial model to the map of a honeybee's dance. I often work with animals that exist as individuals and as part of a complex social network functioning as a unit. Initially, the many images seem to form a single picture. However, when viewers walk into the projections, they penetrate the bee space; the one picture breaks into five, and the surrounding bees become a vision of chaos.

Five video projectors, sixteen-monitor video wall, and six players; dimensions variable

Private collection, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth



Part 1
Video projector and
player; dimensions
variable

Courtesy of 1301PE,
Los Angeles

Part 2
Three video projectors
and three players;
dimensions variable

Los Angeles County
Museum of Art, gift of
David and Monica
Zwirner, M.2008.68.1-.4

5 Oo Fifi, Five Days in Claude Monet's Garden, Part 1 and 2 1992

In 1991 I was one of three artists in residence at the Fondation Claude Monet in Giverny, France. Living and working on the grounds of Monet's home for six months, I set about documenting his famous garden from April through August, as it went from manicured and orderly in the early spring to overgrown and jungle-like at the end of the summer. Taking a cue from Monet's innovative use of color as separated rather than mixed, I separated the video into its component colors: red, green, and blue. In Part 1 of the piece we see the image of the garden separated into these colors and projected by one projector. In Part 2 the same video appears with each color projected by a different projector and the image reassembled.

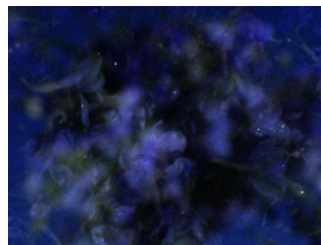


Four video projectors,
nine-monitor video
wall, five players, and
four LED wash lights;
artist's proof; dimensions
variable

Art Institute of Chicago,
Donna and Howard
Stone New Media Fund,
2005.93

6 Delphine 1999

Shot in the Caribbean, *Delphine* documents a camera crew filming a pod of free dolphins, the humans and animals interacting to create the footage. Dolphins live vertically, horizontally, and in depth. They live in a world without boundaries or borders—in continuous space. Thus, in *Delphine*, there are three kinds of bodies in space: dolphins moving through volumetric space; the sun spinning in a vacuum of black space; and then the viewer, moving through "real" space made volumetric by the artificial magenta light filling the gallery and framing the projections.



Each
Nine-monitor video wall;
dimensions variable

One
Private collection,
courtesy of David Zwirner,
New York/London

Two
Private collection,
London/Collection of
Patrick J. Healy and
Isabelle A. Georgeaux

7 Day for Night One and Two 1993

Flowers are a recurring subject in my work. Here, shooting in double-exposed 16 mm film using a technique called "Day for Night," I filmed during the day with dark blue filters so that it resembled evening. In addition to filming living animal and human subjects on location, I work in the studio with easily obtained signs for the natural—such as bouquets of flowers—a part of my practice I see as similar to painting a still life in the absence of a model.

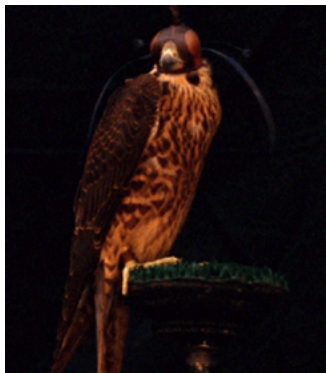


Three video projectors,
three players, and Lee
filters; dimensions
variable

Los Angeles County
Museum of Art,
purchased with funds
provided by
Robert and Kelly Day,
Contemporary Art
Acquisitions Fund, the
Ralph M. Parsons
Fund, and Director's
Acquisitions Funds,
M.2008.54.1-.4

8 Abyss of Light 1993

Abyss of Light is divided into three screens and three acts, the traditional structure of classic narrative film. In the first act, all the images synchronize to form a single panorama of Bryce Canyon in Utah. In the second, the screens break away from one another into three parallel sequences wherein each projection shows the same one hundred images at different speeds. In the third, all three images synchronize once again to form a single wrapping panorama of Death Valley, California. In *Abyss of Light*, continuous disruptions of the American landscape document my refusal to see the land as backdrop for man's heroic conquering of the wild; instead I see it as a foreground, a subject to be contemplated for itself and for which wildness is a state of grace.



9 A Cast of Falcons
2000

I made a body of work with California falconers and their trained birds, some of whom were once severely endangered and have only recently come back from the brink of extinction. Framed by the moon and the sun, this work makes reference to the Egyptian falcon god Horus, whose eyes were said to represent the two celestial bodies. Here we see beings who cannot look back at us—that is, until the final subject of the film appears: an owl, the only bird who looks straight into the camera lens, evoking the unanswered questions: “What do I see when I look at the other, and what does it see when it looks back at me?”

Four video projectors, Watchout system, and two Source Four lights; edition 1 of 2; dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner, New York/London



11 Chernobyl
2011

I traveled to Chernobyl, the site of the worst nuclear meltdown in history (now possibly surpassed by Fukushima) to film the abandoned city of Pripyat and the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. There I filmed animals and nature struggling to survive in the abandoned and poisoned Soviet site. With that footage, I mounted a six-part projection inside the rubble-strewn movie theater in Pripyat and filmed it so that the room in which the piece is projected here is a kind of mobile Chernobyl. The work encircles viewers as they stand watching swirling images of the world just outside the crumbling walls of the movie theater projected on the gallery walls. In this way, they are both *inside* a theater and *outside* in the landscape at the same time.

Six video projectors and six players; edition 2 of 3; dimensions variable

Pinault Collection



10 Life is a Time-Based Medium
2015

I filmed a troop of rhesus macaques who live in the cliffs above a temple to the Hindu monkey god Hanuman, just outside of Jaipur, India. Rhesus monkeys, known in the West as the subjects of torturous scientific experiments, are sacred in Hindu culture and allowed to run wild in the temple, whose facade is built up against a stone cliff side—an exterior without an interior. In this installation, I give it an interior, accessible through a door into the temple of the monkey god. I examine the spaces inhabited by animals and those inhabited by humans, as well as how they intersect. The space within the image, the space of the temple, and the space of the museum itself merge.

Three video projectors, Watchout system, and one player; edition 1 of 3; dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth



12 A Series of Events
2003, 2015, 2016

Making text work satisfies my desire to have images that function like poetry. I began writing indices when I began making art, which is also the time when I started reading philosophy and theory. I found those forms difficult to understand so would just read a book randomly using the index as a table of contents. The index has its own logic and forms a kind of boldfaced overlay on top of a complex text.

Vinyl text on yellow wall with two LED wash lights; dimensions variable

Collection of the artist