

About TBA21–Academy

TBA21–Academy leads artists, scientists, policy-makers, and other thought-leaders on expeditions of collaborative discovery, fostering a deeper understanding of the oceans and engendering creative solutions to its most pressing issues. Drawing upon the experience of Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) as a producer of socially responsive artworks, the nomadic academy is powered by a belief in the exchange between disciplines and the ability of the arts to act as a vessel for communication and change. Since its establishment in 2011, the nonprofit research organization has catalyzed engagement and stimulated new knowledge through its innovative program of symposia, conferences, fellowships, and commissions around the world.

At the heart of TBA21–Academy’s activities is its signature three-year fellowship program, *The Current*, a pioneering initiative that cultivates transdisciplinary practice and the exchange of ideas. Taking inspiration from the ocean tides, the program is organized in three-year cycles led by curators and artists selected by TBA21–Academy. These Expedition Leaders guide one expedition annually over the course of three years and propose fellow participants from a range of backgrounds to join the journeys aboard the research vessel, the *Dardanella*. Leaders and participants subsequently contribute to a Convening—held approximately six months after each expedition—that engages local communities and the public with experiences and lessons learned from the participants’ fieldwork in the Pacific. Curator Ute Meta Bauer served as the first Expedition Leader of *The Current*; curator Chus Martínez and artist collective SUPERFLEX are currently the leaders of the second cycle of the program that launched in 2018.

Alongside *The Current* and as an outgrowth of its expeditions, TBA21–Academy has inspired and supported the creation of major new arts projects, including the commissioning of some 15 new works by artists including John Akomfrah, Joan Jonas, Armin Linke, and Eduardo Navarro, among many others. In 2017, TBA21–Academy organized its first major traveling exhibition, *Tidialectics*, and published its eponymously titled anthology, curated and edited by Stefanie Hessler, released jointly with MIT Press in 2018, offering new research into the cultural, political, and biological dimensions of the oceans.

In addition to its work in the cultural sphere, TBA21–Academy has been seminal in the development of new research, legislature, and conservation efforts around the world, including the establishment of Alligator Head Foundation, which manages and oversees the East Portland Fish Sanctuary in Jamaica, houses a marine lab, and TBA21–Academy’s residency program; the launch of a conservation and research project for the pelagic species that inhabit the waters surrounding Cocos Island off Costa Rica; and most recently the designation of the first-ever offshore marine protected area in Fiji surrounding Navatu Reef. In 2018, Alligator Head Foundation and TBA21–Academy announced a series of new initiatives in collaboration with the Jamaican Ministry of Tourism, UNESCO, and its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) to advance ocean literacy, conservation, and sustainable tourism throughout the region. TBA21–Academy is the first and only arts organization to be granted observer status at the International Seabed Authority (ISA), the UN body located in Kingston, Jamaica, that administers and distributes resources on the seabed of the high seas.

In March 2019, TBA21–Academy launches the first phase of Ocean Space in Venice, a new collaborative platform for change that builds on these ongoing efforts. Located in the Church of San Lorenzo, this new embassy for the oceans will catalyze transdisciplinary research and foster collective action, encouraging audiences to radically reimagine how we see and treat the ocean.