

# SEANKELLY

der Kokosnuss, Ritter. "Julian Charrière: Knight of the Coconut," *Berlin Art Week Magazine*, September 2018.

Ritter der Kokosnuss

## JULIAN CHARRIÈRE

Knight of the Coconut



—He researches human attacks on nature, and in order to do so, he travels to the most distant parts of the world. The exhibition at the Berlinische Galerie presents this year's GASAG Art Prize winner, Swiss artist Julian Charrière who is exhibiting traces left behind by atomic bomb tests on the Bikini Atoll

The coconut canon has disappeared into storage for now. Early in 2017, Julian Charrière managed to appear in the tabloid press with it. Originally he wanted to use the construction to shoot contaminated radioactive coconuts into the perpetual ice during the first Antarctic Biennale. But during test runs in Berlin, passers-by were alarmed by it and notified the police.

The object was then impounded and the happening in the Antarctic had to be cancelled. "In the meantime, I've got the canon back," says Charrière. "However, I'm not allowed to use it in Germany anymore."

**Charrière is focused on the attacks of humans on nature, which have often left deep scars outside the radar of everyday awareness.**

The radioactive coconuts, however, can be seen at the exhibition at the Berlinische Galerie, and the artist, who was born in 1985, is currently preparing them in his studio. One of the nuts lies next to various old globes on top of a cupboard, and Charrière has encased them in a lead capsule to protect people from the radiation. The coconuts are souvenirs from an expedition to the Bikini Atoll, where the US Army carried out nearly 70 atom bomb tests in the 1940s and 1950s, and which has been uninhabitable since then.

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travels to the most inaccessible and distant places in the world—to a radioactive restricted zone in Kazakhstan or to Salar de Uyuni in the Bolivian Andes, the largest salt lake in the world and one of the most important lithium reserves. He spent four weeks on the Bikini Atoll. Just the journey from the nearest airport took three days.

Charrière dove down to the wrecks of the decommissioned warships that were blown up with atom bombs after the Second World War and now rust away 60 meters deep. He photographed beaches and palm groves that at first glance look like paradise. However, radioactive radiation, invisible to the human eye, becomes visible on the prints in the form of little white flecks.

A group of works at the Berlinische Galerie evoke the forgotten and suppressed world of the Bikini Atoll. In addition, after the opening, Charrière shows a video installation at the club Berghain that hypnotically draws a connection between an Indonesian palm oil plantation and global techno culture.

However, even if his projects' theme is the imprudent destruction of the planet as a result of hubris and greed, they can never be nailed down to a definite position. "I'm an artist and not an activist," says Charrière, who studied under Olafur Eliasson. The ambivalence of his own role—the fact that he himself leaves a considerable CO<sub>2</sub> footprint by his flight mileage and thereby changes the world—is not something he ignores, but rather makes part of the equation. One of his most impressive works shows him attempting to melt away a huge iceberg with a gas burner.

For the coming year, Charrière is planning an exhibition in Lugano, focusing on the closing of the northern Polar region. A point of reference being "The Purchase of the North Pole" by Jules Verne from the year 1889, in which a group of scientists, with the help of a gigantic canon, try to remove the tilt of the earth, in order to melt the polar ice cap and thereby enabling access to valuable raw materials. To pay homage to this megalomaniacal endeavour, Julian Charrière will bring his coconut canon back into use again.

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GASAG KUNSTPREIS

## 3 QUESTIONS TO...

**Dr. Gerhard Holtmeier, Chief Executive of GASAG AG, talking about the Art Prize, endowed with 10,000 euros, which the energy supplier awards every two years. At first sight, GASAG's commitment to art is not something which comes to mind naturally. Why does the corporation award a prize to artists?**

GASAG has been a part of Berlin for over 170 years and is committed to the future of the metropolis. And naturally that also means supporting art and culture. The GASAG Art Prize is an important corner-stone of what that entails. The prize is given to newly emerging talents who are active in the area where art and science overlap. Nowadays, it has both a national and international appeal and thereby strengthens the cultural position of Berlin.

**Why was Julian Charrière predestined to be the prizewinner? What distinguished his approach?**

What particularly impressed me was how Charrière combines different media in his art to create new worlds. In his exhibition ›As we used to float‹, he leads the public underneath the surface of the Pacific Ocean and shows the consequences of humans' interaction with nature.

**What are you particularly looking forward to at Berlin Art Week?**

The diversity, obviously! Berlin Art Week brings diverse artistic concepts

and positions to the city and, as this is my first Berlin Art Week as the main sponsor's representative, I am particularly looking forward to experiencing this wide spectrum. Besides the art, there are interesting people, locations and event formats. Unfortunately though, I will not have the time to see everything that Berlin Art Week has to offer.