



22.05.25  
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Paul Duncombe

# Mesophotic

Curated by Dominique Moulon

OPENING ON THURSDAY 22 MAY 2025 . 6-9PM

**GALERIE DATA**

26, BOULEVARD JULES FERRY PARIS 11

THURSDAY-SATURDAY 2PM-8PM

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**Paul Duncombe**

# Mesophotic

**Curated by Dominique Moulon**

**From 22 to 31 May 2025**

**Opening on Thursday 22 May 2025, 6pm to 9pm**

Coral reefs are the result of tens of thousands of years of evolution. Yet, many of them now risk disappearing in the face of the climatic and environmental upheavals caused by modern human societies.

As a result of these disturbances, surface marine creatures are gradually migrating to deeper waters, fleeing the anthropogenic impacts on their original habitats. To follow this movement of life towards the abyss, biologists and explorers are developing increasingly sophisticated observation techniques.

In this context, Paul Duncombe was invited to board the schooner Under The Pole, immersing himself in the heart of the South Pacific, on the spectacular drop-off of Makatea. There, he followed the work carried out by scientists and technical divers dedicated to the preservation of deep reefs. These mesophotic zones, also known as twilight zones, host a biodiversity that remains little studied, subjected to extreme conditions of low light and high pressure.

Following this expedition, the artist was welcomed for a residency on the island of Moorea by the marine biologists of the Centre for Island Research and Environmental Observatory (CRIOBE, EPHE, CNRS, PSL), and then in Tahiti, within the laboratories of the University of French Polynesia (UMR 241 – Island Oceanic Ecosystems).

From these encounters and explorations emerged a series of creations blending digital arts, life sciences, and ecological commitment—a creative approach nourished by a profound dialogue between scientific knowledge and sensory experience.

**Galerie Data**

**26, boulevard Jules Ferry Paris 11**

**Thursday to Saturday 2pm-8pm**

[www.galeriedata.com](http://www.galeriedata.com)

<https://www.instagram.com/galeriedata/>

**Contact Press & Gallery**

Gabrielle Debeuret

+33(6) 18 52 26 86

**Paul Duncombe's artistic practice is of an exploratory nature. He enjoys the company of scientists, who grant him access to worlds not entirely our own.**

In the Pacific Ocean, his work is shaped through underwater dives from which he brings back clues, allowing him to create, in his studio, the images and sounds he presents as installations or performances. One of his central concerns is living organisms and their transformations in this age of the Anthropocene.

Thus, he observes life, notably at depths where diminishing light can no longer activate color. Unless, when it comes to coral reefs, this shift to black and white is due to climate change, the causes of which we know. Sometimes forced to delegate his observations to those who practice technical diving, he equips them with cameras and accompanies them via an underwater drone. With the data collected, he represents these strange territories where animals, without humans, would continue to evolve in symbiosis with plants and minerals. By using techniques such as photogrammetry, he can move his virtual cameras more fluidly within landscapes that are otherwise relatively transparent.

With access to an electron microscope, he continues his investigations at the scale of the microorganisms inhabiting corals to discover their structures. The result evokes meticulous, not to say obsessive, drawing practices. By exposing samples to infrared light, he reveals their bioluminescence, which, in the darkness of the depths, serves as a vector for communication among living beings.

With Paul Duncombe, the exhibition space takes on the appearance of a laboratory where the aesthetic experience revolves around meticulous observation. The artist designs his own display devices, allowing him in particular to classify aquatic organisms of the most diverse forms-mollusks and other crustaceans that never cross our paths, yet still suffer the consequences of our very existence. When he focuses on a fish larva, it is to scrutinize its pulsations which, at the tiny scale of its size, reveal the extreme fragility of a global ecosystem. And when all that remains of these living beings are external skeletons or shells, he uses radioactive elements to test their levels of protection, should the worst occur.

For the work that Paul Duncombe weaves through his experiences, from the natural environment to the exhibition laboratory, aims, beyond the aesthetic pleasure it provides, to awaken our consciousness.

**Curatorial text by Dominique Moulon**



**Extract from the performance 'Twilight-Zone'**

as part of the artist's residency on the island of Moorea, at the Centre de Recherches Insulaires and Environmental Observatory in collaboration with marine biologists, then in Tahiti in the laboratories of the University of Polynesia.

# PAUL DUNCOMBE

Born in 1987, lives and works in Caen

<https://www.instagram.com/plduncombe/>



A graduate of the *École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris in 2014, Paul Duncombe develops and exhibits his creations in France and abroad: Max Ernst Museum (Brühl, 2023), Elektra (Montreal, 2022), COAL Prize (UICN, 2021), Némó Biennial (Le 104, Paris, 2021 & 2019), Festival ]interstice[ (Caen, 2024–2018), Unicorn Center for Art (Beijing, 2018), Salon de Montrouge (Paris, 2018), Palais de Tokyo (Paris, 2017), Jeune Création (Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, 2016), Avatar (Coopérative Méduse, Quebec, 2015), Kyoto Art Center (Kyoto, 2012)

## Biography

Through a singular reflection on the interactions between human beings and nature, Paul Duncombe-winner of the COAL Art and Environment Prize-explores the different scales of landscape. His successive research projects, from the ice floes of Labrador and the storms of the Celtic Sea to the boreal forests and the irradiated lands of Fukushima, focus on the contingent mechanisms that connect these vast territories with the creatures that inhabit them.

Beginning with in situ exploration and followed by a series of methodical experiments in the studio or laboratory, his projects relate the apparent simplicity of nature's creations to the increasing technicality of modern societies. From simple gestures to the most complex monumental installations-ranging between performances, minimal sculptures, and site-specific interventions-his work transcends borders and disciplines.

Whether organizing an expedition in a meteorite crater (Manicouagan), collaborating with the Under The Pole explorers (Tapemoana), or producing an experimental electronic work with the Grand Accélérateur National d'Ions Lourds (Nova Stella), his research has led him to work with specialists from a wide array of fields: biologists, geologists, astrophysicists-thereby multiplying perspectives and experiences

## **Paul Duncombe, Benthos** **Life at the bottom**

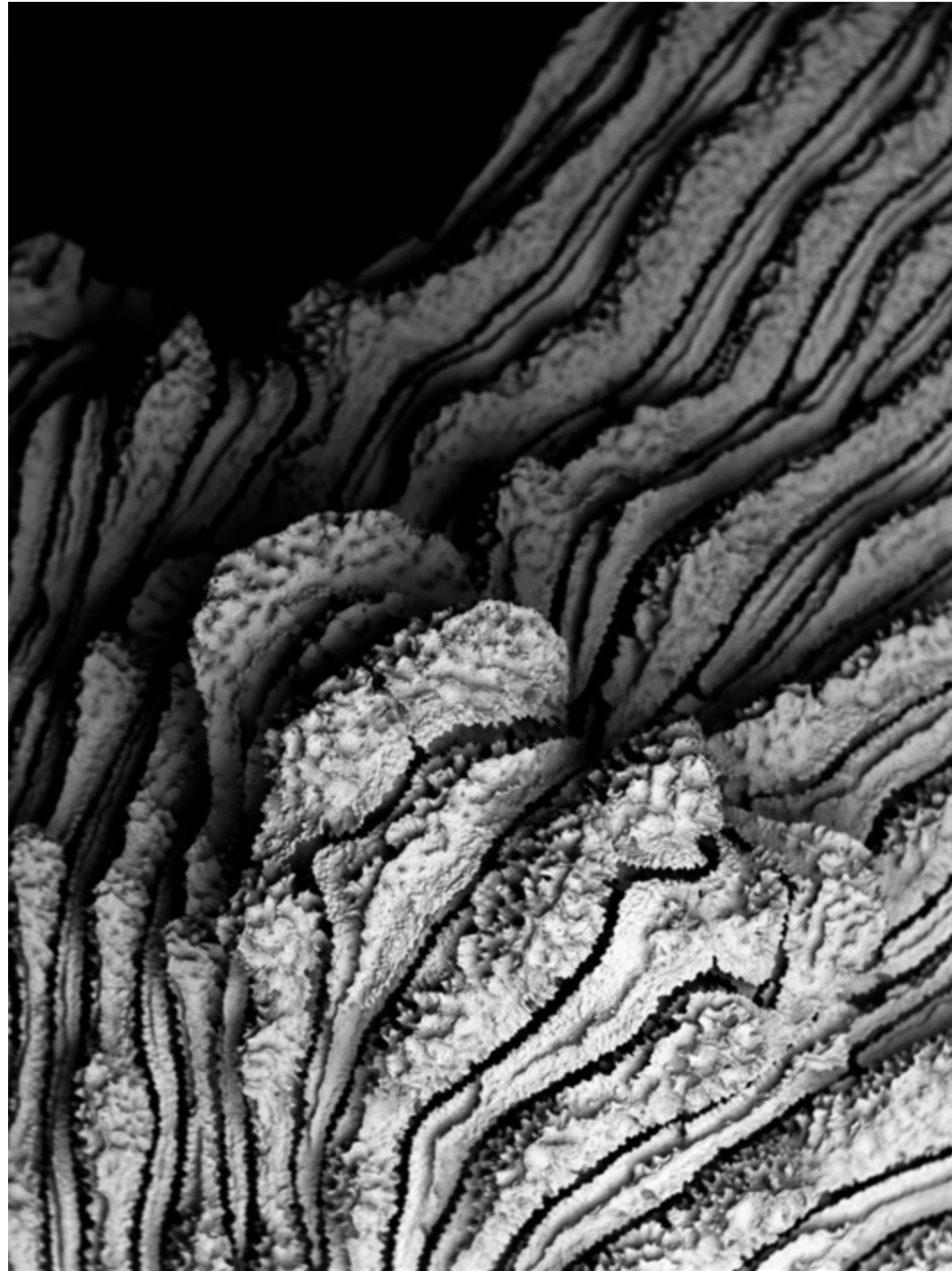
Where light fades, lost in the monochromatic reliefs of vast lunar landscapes, enigmatic creatures reveal their forms and colors. Bioluminescence, chemical signals, acoustic or vibratory cues-eluding our senses and our human world<sup>(1)</sup>, the twilight comes alive.

A custom-designed software analyzes the behavior of the abyss's denizens, translating locomotion and propulsion movements into audible data. The score generated by these algorithms echoes a sibylline microcosm, giving language to silent curiosities.

<sup>(1)</sup> The concept of the «human world» here references biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944), who introduced the idea of *Umwelt* (perceptual environment) to describe the sensory universe unique to each living being: we do not inhabit an objective, universal world but exist among infinite subjective worlds specific to each organism.



**Paul Duncombe, Benthos, 2025**  
installation screens on stand  
& mosaic of prints 15x10 cm



**Paul Duncombe, Leptosaris, 2025**  
30x20 cm print on Fine Art paper, mounted on aluminium-dibond, American case

## **Paul Duncombe, Leptosaris Rock Corals**

The use of gas and fossil fuels has led to a nearly 40% increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) levels since the preindustrial era. Approximately 30% of this CO<sub>2</sub> is absorbed by the oceans, causing a decrease in seawater pH. This process, termed «acidification,» impacts calcifying organisms, particularly their ability to form tests<sup>(1)</sup>, skeletons, or shells<sup>(2)</sup>.

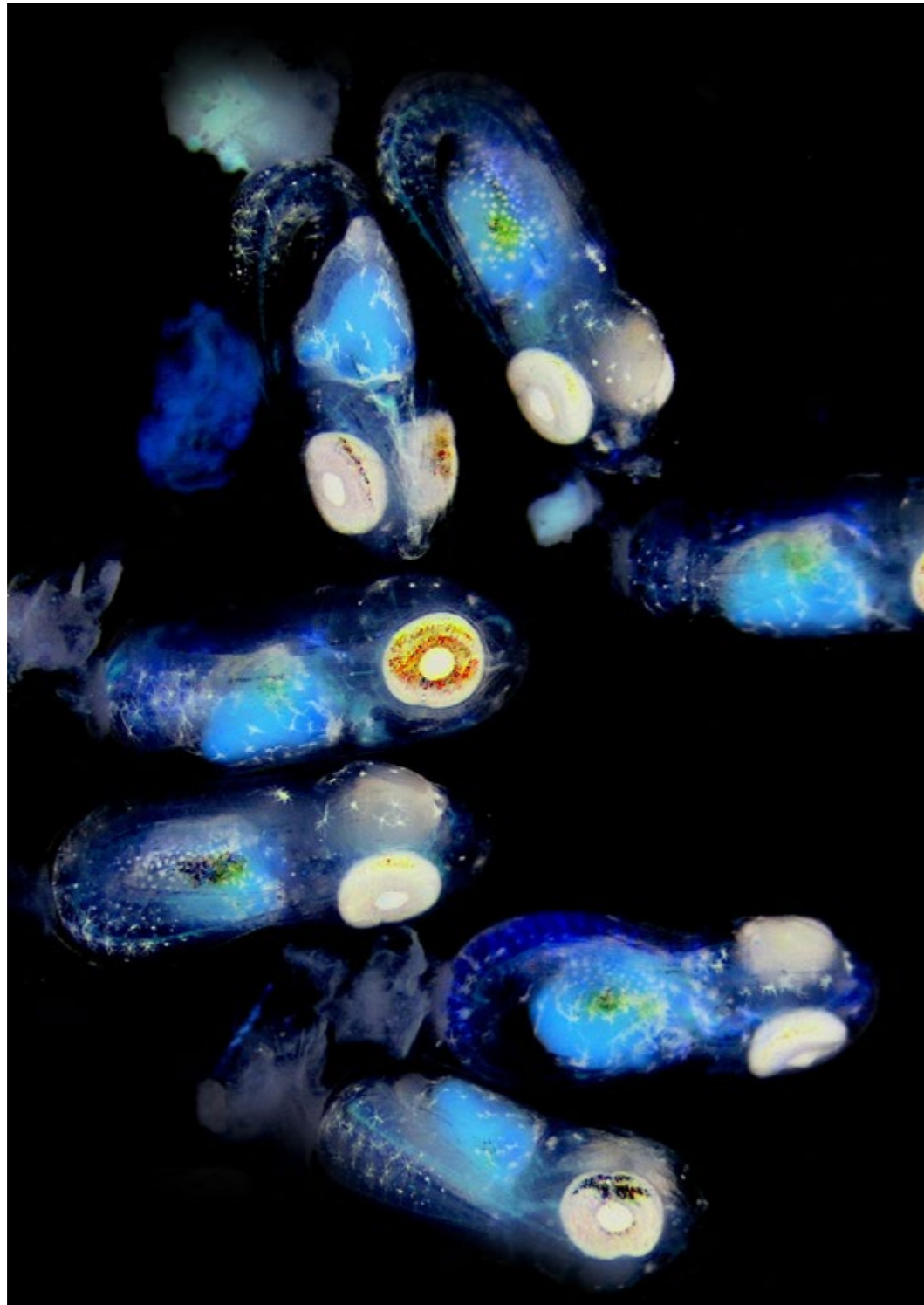
Coral microstructures collected during the expedition are photographed using a scanning electron microscope<sup>(3)</sup>. Crafted by invisible builders, these complex architectures form the foundations of benthic ecosystems. Observed at the scale of their inhabitants, this mineral lace reveals humanity's imprint in its altered weave. Contrasting with the delicacy of these animal constructions, reinforced concrete bricks are made from powdered coral and cement.

The CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, in turn, reduces the pH of the interstitial water within concrete. This process, called «carbonation,» impacts the structure of this emblematic material of modern times.

<sup>(1)</sup> In marine biology, a test refers to the hard shell of organisms like foraminifera or sea urchins.

<sup>(2)</sup> Calcifying species, including corals and mollusks, rely on calcium carbonate to build protective structures.

<sup>(3)</sup> Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) allows nanoscale visualization of coral skeletal porosity and dissolution patterns caused by acidification.



**Paul Duncombe, Pulse, 2025**  
45x30 cm print on Fine Art paper, mounted on aluminium-dibond, American case

***Paul Duncombe, Pulse***  
***The Echo of the Reef***

Filmed under a microscope, fish larvae reveal imperceptible heartbeats through the transparency of their membranes. This organ, in its palpitations, exposes the health of the entire reef and its inhabitants. Pollution, warming, acidification... the tiny creature becomes a witness to a changing world.

Analyzed by custom-designed software, these feverish pulsations are amplified and transposed into powerful sound and light oscillations, immersing the viewer in the heart of the reef.

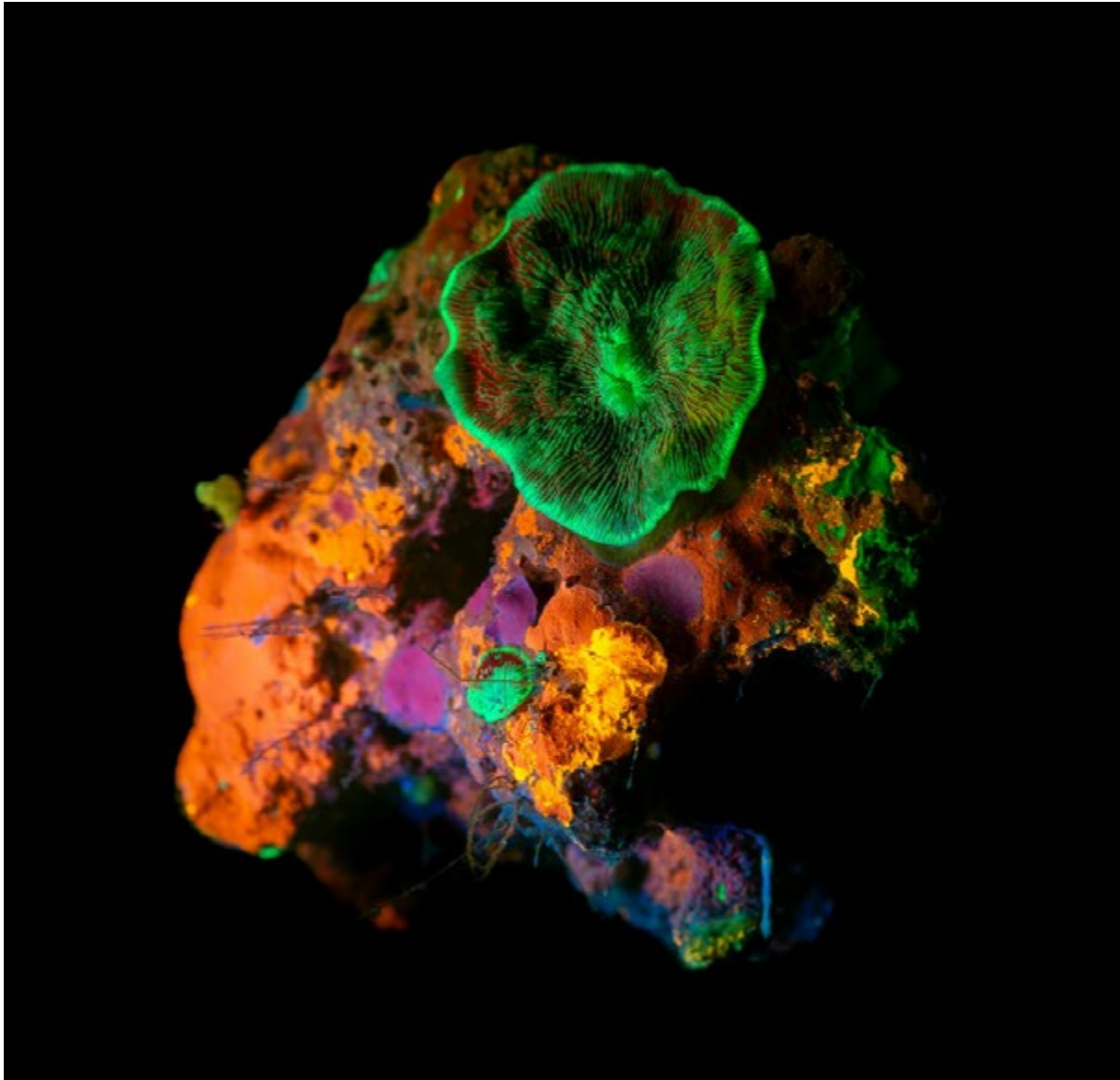
## **Paul Duncombe, Bleach Dead Zones**

Fragments of mesophotic landscapes are photographed using specific light sources, revealing the diversity of forms, colors, and textures that constitute this universe-perceived by our eyes as a monochromatic desert.

Inspired by the phenomenon of mass coral bleaching<sup>(1)</sup>, an artificial intelligence process degrades this digital data, ultimately producing specimens of dead corals. Extending this approach, silver-based films from the expedition are chemically altered, stripping colors from the microflora lining the depths.

<sup>(1)</sup> Coral bleaching is a phenomenon triggered by environmental stress, primarily due to rising water temperatures. When water becomes too warm, corals expel their symbiotic microalgae (zooxanthellae), which provide vibrant coloration and most of their energy. Without these algae, corals turn white and become more vulnerable to disease, degradation, and death. This process serves as an alarming indicator of climate change and marine ecosystem collapse





**Paul Duncombe, Bleach, 2025**  
60x60 cm print on Fine Art paper, mounted on aluminium-dibond, American case



**Paul Duncombe, Bleach, 2025**  
90x60 cm print on Fine Art paper, mounted on aluminium-dibond, American case



**Paul Duncombe, Shelters, 2025**  
Installation, shell

## **Paul Duncombe, Shelters** **Stimulated Tinnitus**

Specimens of mollusks are exposed to different radioactive sources. Evoking marine biology research facilities, the installation reveals in real time the particles that penetrate the fragile calcareous skeletons (calcite and aragonite).

Each shell depending on its shape, density, and thickness filters the flow of radiation, becoming the unique note of a post-nuclear organ. Inspired by the phenomenon of simulated tinnitus<sup>(1)</sup>, the installation immerses the viewer in a dying reef<sup>(2)</sup>, where the ocean's murmur gives way to the clicking of Geiger counters.

<sup>(1)</sup> Simulated tinnitus results from the resonance of ambient sounds amplified by the shape of a shell held to the ear, thus creating a sound illusion similar to that of the sea.

<sup>(2)</sup> Between 1966 and 1996, France conducted 46 atmospheric and 147 underground nuclear tests in the Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls in French Polynesia.

In parallel with the exhibition, Paul Duncombe presents the installation Shelters at the Centre Wallonie Bruxelles from 16 May to 23 August as part of the group exhibition Symbiosium 2, Cosmologies Speculatives #Abyssal, Sideral & Synthétique.

# SYMBIOSIUM 2

## COSMOLOGIES SPÉCULATIVES

ABYSSAL, MANIFESTE des interdépendances, contaminations, invasions & mutations

SIDÉRAL & SYNTHÉTIQUE

Anarkhè-exposition, conférences, éditions, performances, concerts, projections ...

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COLLABORATION:  
Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Fondation François Sommer

SYNERGIE: Le Cube Garges, Salon de Montrouge, ceramic brussels, Prix COAL, Nuit des Musées, Nuit Blanche, Brussels Videonline Festival / Centrale for contemporary art, Fondation Fémisoo

SOUTIENS: Département Recherche & Innovation de Wallonie-Bruxelles International, Promotion de Bruxelles de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Commission communautaire française de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale

CONCEPT:  
Christopher Yggdre & Stéphanie Pécourt

COMMISSARIAT DE L'OPUS 2:  
Stéphanie Pécourt en synergie avec Christopher Yggdre & Andy Rankin

MARRAINE:  
Evelyne Deret

art nova

différentielles

MOUVEMENT

design graphique: Polypeptide



The *Shelters* installation is presented at the Centre Wallonie Bruxelles from 16 May to 23 August 2025, as part of the group exhibition **Symbiosium 2, Cosmologies Speculatives #Abyssal, Sideral & Synthétique**



Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles  
127-129, rue Saint Martin 75004 Paris

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday: 11:00 am – 7:00 pm  
Thursday: 2:00 pm – 9:00 pm

**GALERIE DATA** has been to located **at République in Paris**, since 2022. Its programming focuses on Generative Art, with a particular interest in work, from the digital to the tangible (drawing with a plotter, prints, installations...).

The gallery aims to show work from transdisciplinary fields of application, wich explore the frontiers between art and technology.

The artists exhibited in the gallery experiment with generative forms ; using software and code, creating their own automated tools, exploiting data...

The artists creations are inspired by geometry, mathematics and biology... They exploited technologies and use innovative practices, to express a critical and poetic point of view.

Founded in 2020 by Gabrielle Debeuret, Web & Social Media Artistic Director, with a professional Master's degree in art market.

The gallery organizes exhibitions by deploying active partnerships with art market actors and influencers from the digital world.

# **GΔLERIE DΔTΔ**

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*Gabrielle Debeuret +33(6) 18 52 26 86*