



DIANA THATER

NÉE EN 1962 À SAN FRANCISCO (ETATS-UNIS).
VIT ET TRAVAILLE AUX ETATS-UNIS.
BORN IN 1962 IN SAN FRANCISCO (UNITED STATES).
LIVES AND WORKS IN THE UNITED STATES.



The Conversation, 2021

Since the early 1990s, Diana 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 behavioral science, mathematics, chess and sociology, his provocative works engage directly with their environment, producing a complex relationship between time and space. Combining the temporal qualities of video with the architectural dimension of his physical installation, Thater's work explores the artifice of his own production and its ability to construct perception and shape the way we think about the world through its image.

Many of Diana Thater's works begin with the point at which the subjectivity of humans and animals meet. Through color, light, image, and form, the artist generates an experience through which the viewer can empathize without anthropomorphizing the natural world. In *Talk to Us* (2021) and *Listen to Us* (2021), which together comprise the artist's second major sound installation, two human voices mirror each other in call and response, while a third audio track of an African grey parrot vocalizing to himself (unaware he is being observed) plays simultaneously as an externalized internal monologue.



The spoken audio begins simply, with phrases that can be understood as instructions or propositions that to be enacted, echoing early conceptual works such as Lawrence Weiner; *Statements*, 1968, or the mantra-esque repetition of works such as John Baldessari's *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, 1971. The call and response then progress in complexity, with longer phrases replacing the instructions, evolving the reference to include works such as Bruce Nauman's *Good Boy Bad Boy*, 1985.

Thater uses these art-historical references as raw material to re-situate where language is placed in the human paradigm. The common misconception is that parrots are mimics, when in fact they process language as humans do, through socialization. Parrots listen and talk, they comprehend rather than simply repeat what is heard.

Furthermore, like humans, a parrot's subjectivity is expressed through their vocalizations, asserting their presence through affect and volume as well as content. By isolating and layering these specific uses of language, Thater poses a contest to the idea that language is what separates the human from the animal, comprehension from imitation. What emerges from this investigation is a tensile duality where the cacophonous accumulation of "voice" serves to emphasize how language shapes our cultural environments, as well as engagements with other forms of life.

This shifting of the viewer's point of perception is a hallmark of Thater's groundbreaking installations and is further reinforced in *The Conversation* through the nuanced and immersive layering of image, audio, and light. By stepping into the exhibition, visitors enter into an experience that is kinetic, visceral, and psychically engaging, rather than merely observable from a passive distance. In this way, the work and the viewer together form a dialogue that is consistently and subtly challenging the linear narratives humans rely on to make sense of themselves and the natural world.

The artist's works are represented in museum collections around the world, including the Art Institute of Chicago; the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; the Castello di Rivoli, Turin; the Friedrich Christian Flick Collection at Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin; the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.