



SPRING 2017

# Ursula Biemann: Subatlantic



Ursula Biemann, *Subatlantic*, 2015, video. Image courtesy of the artist.

# URSULA BIEMANN: SUBATLANTIC

MAY 4 TO JULY 5, 2017

CURATED BY JENNIFER MATOTEK, DIRECTOR/CURATOR

## The Visible Invisible

BY JENNIFER MATOTEK, DIRECTOR/CURATOR

The arctic is melting. Ocean habitats are diminishing. Organisms older than humanity, frozen in ice, are slowly dissolving into the seas.

The narrator in Ursula Biemann's work *Subatlantic* postulates that these ancient creatures exist outside of history. The notion of pre-human life, existing outside of known history and understood facts, is difficult to comprehend. The enormity of climate change is likewise difficult to grasp, picture, and truly understand. A pre-human past cannot be easily reconciled with present experiences despite our possession of knowable facts, recorded history, and tested theories. Some fiction is necessary for understanding.

*Subatlantic* fuses fact with fiction as a strategy to help us grapple with the challenge of comprehending how our planet is changing. The voiceover provided by Biemann's narrator, a

researcher on a North Atlantic island (who, while speculatively fictional, speaks many facts), includes eyewitness accounts of the effects of climate change she has encountered firsthand in her research. These include, for example, having to move geological equipment because of the rising tides, and noting the physical and geological effects of temperature changes. Paired with the voiceover of Biemann's "narrative figure" are stunning recordings of icebergs melting into the oceans and gorgeous, sublime, changing landscapes peppered with wildlife.

It is the philosophizing human presence, the human voice, in *Subatlantic* which makes comprehensible the unstable nature of our current living environment. As the video moves through the Shetland Islands, Greenland's Disco Bay, and a tiny Caribbean Island, the narrator links significant moments in human history



Ursula Biemann, *Subatlantic*, 2015, video. Image courtesy of the artist.





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and human thought with significant moments in geological time – ice melts and temperature shifts over 2,500 years. In connecting the human voice and body with human history and the natural history of the world, Biemann connects complex ideas and issues into a geographical, historical, and philosophical web. The remarriage of scientific thought with the humanities, made more and more visible as *Subatlantic* unfolds, creates a feeling of pleasant, if ominous and unsettling dread, like going for a walk on a sunny and unseasonably warm winter day. The invisible becomes visible, bringing together a time before humans existed with our uncertain present.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Ursula Biemann is an artist, writer, and video essayist. Her artistic practice is strongly research oriented and involves fieldwork in remote locations where she investigates climate change and the ecologies of oil and water. Biemann has exhibited widely throughout Europe, and her films have screened at FID Marseille and TEK Rome. She has also participated in Biennials in Sao Paulo, Gwangju, Shanghai, Liverpool, Bamako, Istanbul, Montreal, Venice, Thessaloniki, and Sevilla. Ursula Biemann holds a BFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York and pursued post-graduate studies at the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York. Until 2014 she was a senior researcher at the Zurich University of the Arts. In 2008, Biemann was appointed a Doctor Honoris Causa in Humanities by the Swedish University, Umea, and in 2009, she received the 2009 Prix Meret Oppenheim, the national art award of Switzerland.



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### COVER IMAGE

Ursula Biemann, *Subatlantic* (detail), 2015, video. Image courtesy of the artist.



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