JULIAN CHARRIÈRE
MIDNIGHT
ZONE

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German translation of the essays and the interview
Deutsche Übersetzungen der Essays und des Interviews

Foreword

In the pitch-black depths of the Pacific, the glistening light of a Fresnel lens, normally used in lighthouses, attracts huge schools of fish. Vast underwater glacier landscapes confuse the senses, making it difficult to tell up from down. In the aquatic caves of Mexico, known as cenotes, divers sink into the darkness as if weightless. The solo exhibition *Midnight Zone* by the French-Swiss artist Julian Charrière presents a fascinating exploration of the mysterious world of water through a diverse and impressive range of works. In addition to photographs, sculptures, and installations, several video pieces created for the exhibition are presented for the first time, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in Julian Charrière's multilayered and fascinating oeuvre.

The exhibition, jointly organized by the Museum Tinguely in Basel and the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, highlights not only the sensual and metaphorical levels associated with the element of water and its various aggregate states, but also political references such as human-induced water pollution, the melting of glaciers and polar ice caps, and the exploitation of the seabed through deep-sea mining.

The fact that the two museums are collaborating on the exhibition *Julian Charrière: Midnight Zone* is not least due to their respective topographies. Despite their very different histories and structures, both museums and their host cities are marked by the presence of water and the possibilities it offers: Basel on the Rhine and Wolfsburg on the Midland Canal. Both waterways have long been, and continue to be, of great importance as transport routes for the development of socioeconomic interdependencies in Europe, as well as for the formation of identities in the cultural landscapes through which they flow. So what could be more natural than to join forces with Julian Charrière, one of the most important artists of his generation, to explore artistically the element of water, which is becoming increasingly relevant in ecological, political, economic, and social terms, and to succumb to the fascination of his aesthetic, profound, and in some cases moving images?

The multifaceted texts in this accompanying publication, written by internationally renowned authors from a variety of academic disciplines, provide an opportunity to explore Julian Charrière's artistic work in greater depth and to delve more deeply into the themes it explores.

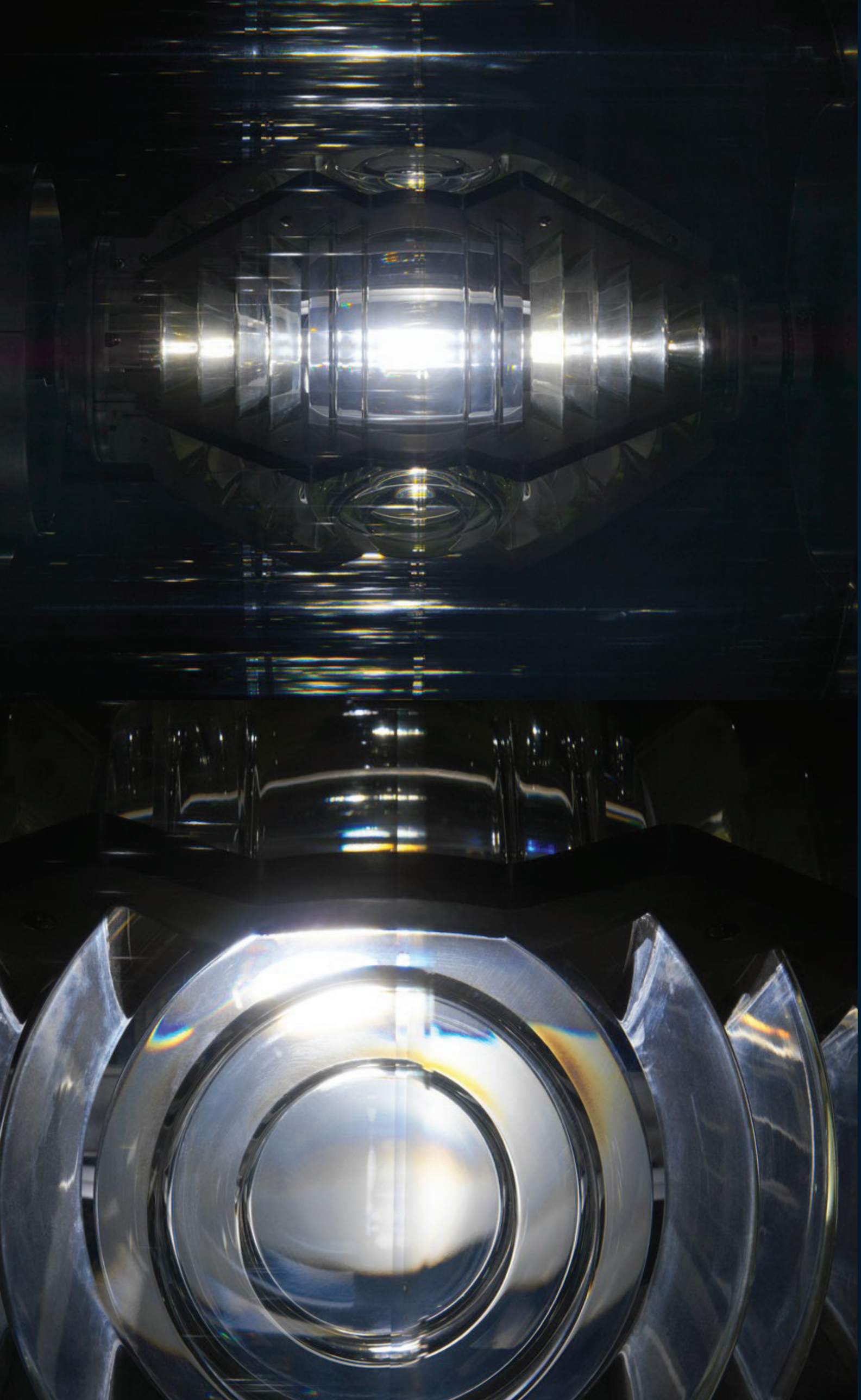
Our heartfelt thanks go to Julian Charrière, who has been fully committed to our exhibition and publication project from the very beginning, and to the entire studio for their tireless and active cooperation. Our collaboration with the artist and his team has been characterized by a high degree of professionalism and friendly solidarity, which has enabled the project to be realized in the best possible way.

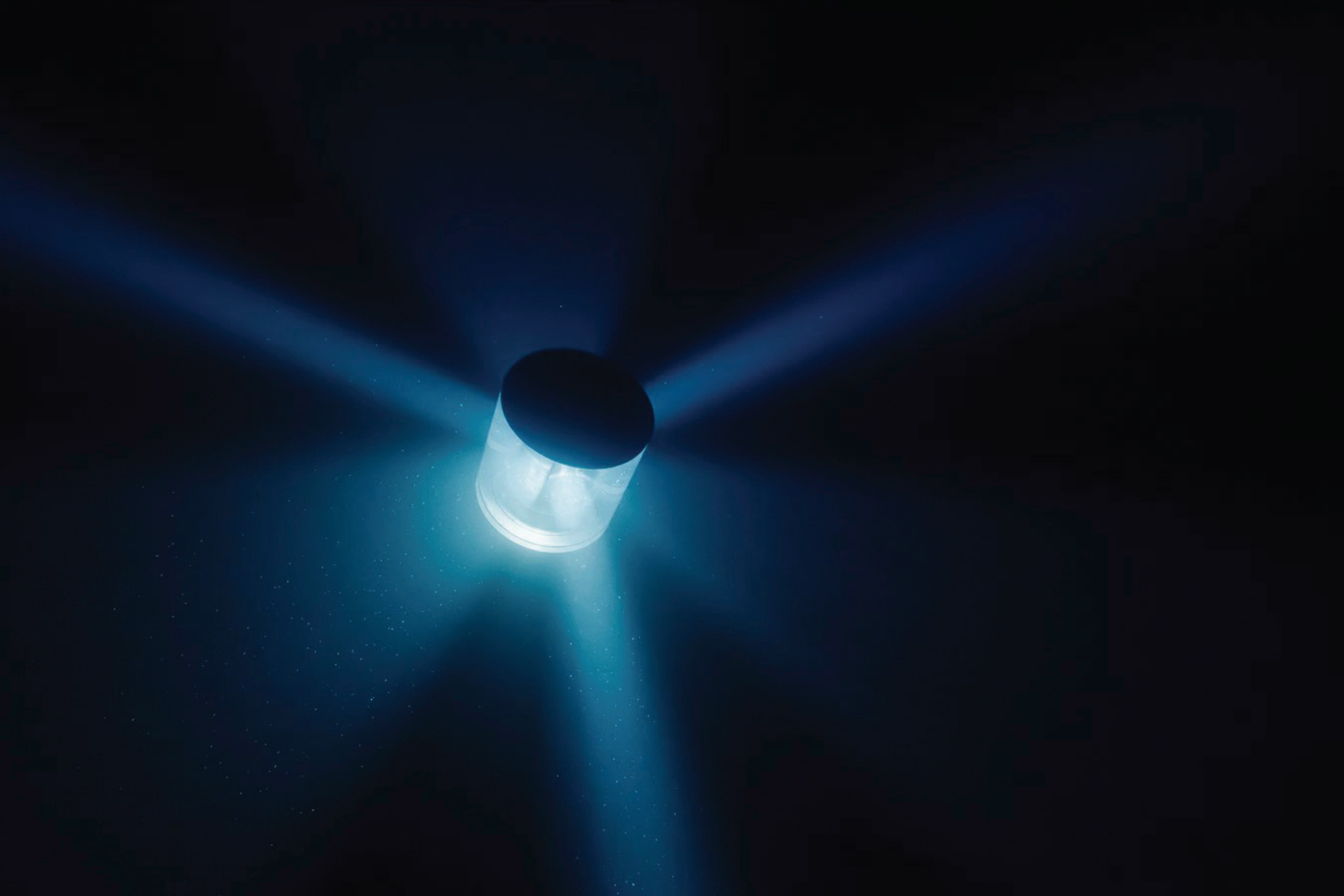
We would also like to express our sincere thanks to the authors of this publication, whose insightful and illuminating essays are well worth reading and contribute to a better understanding of Julian Charrière's work. We thank Patricia Bondesson Kavanagh for her outstanding commitment as Editor at Large of this catalogue and as author of the work texts compiled in this volume. In order to make the essays published here accessible to a broad audience, the German translations of the individual texts can be accessed via a QR code found in the table of contents. We also wish to thank the translators Susanne Bosch-Abele and Gérard Goodrow and the copyeditors Johanne Förster and Dawn Michelle d'Atri. We are grateful to the Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König for including the book in their program, to Nicole Rankers for her support on behalf of the publisher, and to Marcus Muraro of Lösch GmbH & Co. KG for his support during the production process.

The graphic designer Bijan Dawallu conceived an extremely appealing and imaginative design for this book, and he, too, deserves our warmest thanks, as do the cocurators involved in the exhibition, without whose valuable and judicious collaboration the project could hardly have been realized: Tabea Panizzi for the Museum Tinguely and Dino Steinhof for the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg.

Roland Wetzel
Director, Museum Tinguely, Basel

Andreas Beitin
Director, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg





Choralography, 2025

Choralography is a spatial experiment that brings to the surface the bioacoustic landscape of coral reefs. Spanning several spaces of the exhibition *Midnight Zone*, it immerses the visitor in layers of oceanic sounds, challenging the persistent misconception of these regions as silent. From the rhythmic clicks of crustaceans to the harmonic calls of fish, the distant songs of whales to the crackling static of microbial life, it reveals an environment where auditory conversation is as vital as light in shaping life.

In *Choralography*, Julian Charrière listens closely to these delicate yet essential systems of communication, opening a channel usually beyond the register of the human senses. The arrangement begins naturalistically, as if the listeners were just dipping below the surface of a shallow sea. Yet, as it progresses, the score becomes increasingly distorted, adapting marine communiqués to the physiognomy of the human body. As the walls darken and deepen in color, an intensifying sonic uncanniness reveals the temporal dissonance between sound in water and in air, traveling 4.3 times faster in the former. As the visitor moves through the spaces, the soundscape itself undergoes a subtle but unsettling shift—evolving from a vibrant biophonic concerto into a sparser, more brittle acoustic environment, where anthropophony, the pervasive sonic footprint of human activity, slowly drowns out the natural voices of the reef.

This gradual erosion of the acoustic commons mirrors the realities faced by marine ecosystems worldwide, where human presence increasingly manifests not only through extraction and pollution, but through disruptive noise. It is a dichotomy where the life of the reefs is silenced, all while our anthropogenic presence grows louder. Yet reflected in *Choralography* is also the regenerative power of sound. This can be seen in a scientifically developed process known as acoustic enrichment, where underwater sound systems emit the songs of healthy reefs in areas that have become damaged or abandoned. This playback becomes part of a feedback loop that promotes increased biodiversity—sonic beacons for sealife to return, resettle, and regrow what once seemed irrevocably lost.

Flowing between these paradises and dystopias, the work sets the tone for the exhibition, oscillating between the poetics and politics of the sea. An intangible yet deeply physical installation, it stages a dialogue between presence and absence, past and future, inviting land dwellers to think through water—and meet the deep sea halfway.