

# ANIMARIS

Theo Jansen

11 January - 22 February, 2020

Opening 11 January 2020, 5 - 7pm



Theo Jansen, *Animaris Mulus*, 2017, ©the artist  
 Courtesy: the artist and Media Force

After the exhibition 'Empathic Systems' at Frankfurter Kunstverein (2019), AKINCI is proud to present the moving animals of artist - inventor Theo Jansen (The Hague, 1948). Theo Jansen is known for his beach animals: large kinetic sculptures, made almost entirely out of PVC pipes. Jansen's creatures are reminiscent of archaic skeletons that live aesthetically somewhere between biomorphic and inorganic forms of growth. AKINCI shows three beach animals as well as drawings and 'fossils', to provide insight into the exceptional combination of emotional expressiveness and technology Theo Jansen brings together in his oeuvre.

Jansen studied physics at the Delft University of Technology from 1968 to 1975. Driven by his interest in unconventional technical constructions and the mechanism of evolution, he develops as an artist. Throughout his oeuvre, Theo Jansen developed a deep understanding for the principles of life and the evolution of species. Slowly his beach animals came to life, initially intended to solve the danger of rising sea levels by moving grains of sand from the bottom of the beach to the top. It started with the *Animaris vulgaris* (1991), the common (vulgaris) animal of the sea (maris). Later generations of beach animals moved on the energy of wind, moved grains of sand, developed ingenious walking patterns and eventually could run independently on air pressure in PET bottles ('stored wind'). To give an example: there was the *Sabulosa* (1994) who had four fins and was able to dig and the *Umerus* (2009), the suicidal animal that regularly broke its own backbone. At AKINCI the *Animaris Ordis* (ordinary beast) from the *Cerebrum* (period of the brain, 2006-2008) will be shown, alongside the *Animaris Uminami* and *Animaris Chalibs*, both from the *Bruchum* (era of the caterpillars, 2016-now).

The artist states that his animals get animated by the wind, which inspires movement. The movements of his beings usually cause a fascination with the viewer, due to the idiosyncratic nature of complex movement patterns, which appear organic and are reminiscent of living beings. The structures are clearly recognizable as artificial, but they still evoke the organic walking and motor skills of long-legged insects or

caterpillars. Although Jansen's constructions lack intellect and free will, and the artist remains the human author, their autonomous movement processes makes one forget this. The viewer develops the assumption - through emotions and cognitive knowledge - that motor skills are the hallmark of a living being.

Theo strives for self-reliance of his beach animals; according to him, they should be able to live independently in flocks on the beach. So far, most of his animals are extinct after a season or two. Some can be resuscitated. While they have no metabolism, nor do they reproduce autonomously, Jansen sees the ability to move and respond to environmental conditions as the basic characteristics of artificial life and intelligence which he continues to develop.

*Theo Jansen exhibited in many leading art institutions around the world, including Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt, DE (2019); National Museum of Science and Technology Leonardo da Vinci, Milan, IT (2019); Fundación Mar Adentro, Santiago, CL (2018); San Francisco Exploratorium, USA (2016); Tamagawa En-nichi, Tokyo, JP (2015); Palais de Tokyo, FR (2015). He gives lectures about his work worldwide. In the Netherlands he showed his animals in and around leading art institutions, including Elektriciteitsfabriek, The Hague (2014); Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2011); Kunsthal Rotterdam (2003); Centraal Museum, Utrecht (1999); Westergasfabriek, Amsterdam (1994). He holds public demonstrations on the beach at Scheveningen. Jansen lives and works in The Hague. The computer program that Theo Jansen developed for his beach animals in 1991 became internationally famous. In 2016, NASA invited him to a think tank that designs autonomous engines for future space missions to Venus. Jansen has many admirers worldwide, who use the unique mechanics of his work as a starting point for the development of fundamental ideas in the scientific and arts field.*

*In 2016, Theo Jansen received the Barnett & Annalee Newman Foundation Award, granted by artist Frank Stella.*

*From 1986 to 2008 Jansen wrote the column 'Reflection' in 'de Volkskrant'. A selection of these were published in the book 'Klimmen in de lucht' (Climbing in the air). In 2002 he won an oeuvre prize at the Witteveen + Bos prize for Art + Technology. In 2007 Jansen published the book 'De Grote Fantast' about the development process of his beach animals. In 2014, the photo album 'Strandbeest: The Dream Machines of Theo Jansen' by the Russian-American photographer Lena Herzog was published. In 2016 Jansen received the Brilliant Artist of the Year 2017 award, in November 2017 he was named Artist of the Year 2018 and in 2018 he received the The Hague Culture Prize. In 2019 he received the Pierre Giannadda Prix de la Fondation at the Academie des Beaux-Arts in Paris.*



Theo Jansen, *Animaris Ordis*, 2006, ©the artist  
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