SUPERFLEX THIS IS THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

GENERATOR: USF Contemporary Art Museum

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October 6 – November 22, 2023 Harbor Hall Gallery, USF St. Petersburg presented by GENERATOR: USF Contemporary Art Museum

SUPERFLEX: THIS IS THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG is curated by Sarah Howard, USFCAM Curator of Social Practice, and organized by USFCAM. GENERATOR: USFCAM and its programs are generously supported by USF College of The Arts; USF St. Petersburg; the Florida Department of State, Florida Arts & Culture; the Lee & Victor Leavengood Endowment; the Stanton Storer Embrace the Arts Foundation; and the St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership. Additional support was provided by Danish textile company Kvadrat. The USF Contemporary Art Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.







SOUTH FLORIDA

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This Is The Tip Of The Iceberg, 2019. Courtesy of OMR. Photo credit: SUPERFLEX





FOREWORD + ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Margaret Miller

Foreword

The Contemporary Art Museum (CAM), part of the University of South Florida College of The Arts, is pleased to present the first exhibition of GENERATOR in the Harbor Hall Gallery on the USF St Petersburg campus. GENERATOR was conceived as an incubator of new ideas and artistic experimentation with time-based art installations.

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The inaugural project is by SUPERFLEX, a Danish artist group founded in 1993 by Jakob Fenger, Rasmus Rosengren Nielsen, and Bjørnstjerne Christiansen. The gallery on the USF St. Petersburg campus has been converted into an immersive interactive space with an exhibition titled *This Is The Tip Of The Iceberg*.

CAM's Curator-at-Large, Christian Viveros-Fauné, advanced the idea of engaging SUPERFLEX for the new GENERATOR space. Bjørn Christiansen visited the USF St. Petersburg campus and designed an adaptation of *Vertical Migration*, a 2021 film that addressed interspecies living. *Vertical Migration* features a computer-generated jellyfish-like creature called a siphonophore. The viewer may consider interspecies living and vertical migration from the perspective of a siphonophore when participating in the interactive installation.

Vertical Migration was originally projected onto the United Nations Secretariat Building during the 76th United Nations General Assembly. It was originally commissioned by ART 2030 and TBA21–Academy and was developed in

Vertical Migration is commissioned by ART 2030 and TBA21-Academy, and supported by Avatar Alliance Foundation, Dalio Philanthropies, OceanX, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHOI), New Carlsberg Foundation, The Obel Family Foundation, Beckett Fonden, and Danish Arts Foundation. Vertical Migration was developed in close collaboration with Kollision. Vertical Migration is part of 'Interspecies Assembly' by SUPERFLEX for ART 2030. Photo credit: Lance Gerber. close collaboration with Kollision. The work is part of *Interspecies Assembly* by SUPERFLEX for ART 2030.

This Is The Tip Of The Iceberg is on loan courtesy of SUPERFLEX and OMR in Mexico City.

Acknowledgments

The exhibitions and related educational programs of GENERATOR are supported by the USF College of The Arts; USF St. Petersburg; the Florida Department of State, Florida Arts & Culture; the Lee & Victor Leavengood Endowment; the Stanton Storer Embrace the Arts Foundation; and the St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership. Additional support was provided by Danish textile company Kvadrat.

GENERATOR would not be possible without the enthusiastic support of Christian Hardigree, Regional Chancellor of the USF St. Petersburg campus and Chris Garvin, Dean of the College of The Arts. A note of appreciation to the leadership team on the USF St. Petersburg campus: Dr. Theresa (Terry) Chisolm, Senior Special Assistant; Caryn Nesmith, Community Relations; Howard Rutherford, Associate Vice President of Development; Dan Wood, Manager, Fiscal and Business Administration; Jim Waechter, Director, Facilities Services; and Kristina Keough, Campus Dean, Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, and Assistant Dean, College of The Arts. Additionally, David Watts, Assistant Director and Professor of Instruction of Graphic Design, School of Art and Art History, has been an immense help throughout this process.

The USF Contemporary Art Museum team was led by Sarah Howard, Curator of Social Practice, who worked directly with Bjørn Christiansen to organize the myriad of details associated with the installation.

Special thanks to Gary Schmitt, Exhibitions Designer, who creatively solved problems related to the design and installation of *This Is The Tip Of The Iceberg*.

Each member of the CAM team contributes in a multitude of ways to our exhibitions, including Shannon Annis, Curator of the Collection and Exhibitions Manager; Eric Jonas, Corporate + Art Bank Coordinator and Chief Preparator; Alejandro Gómez, Preparator; Madison Andrews, Preparator; Leslie Elsasser, Curator of Education; Don Fuller, New Media Curator and Communication + Technology Manager; David Waterman, Chief of Security; Randall West, Deputy Director of Operations; Amy Allison, Program Coordinator; Tamara Thomas, Events Coordinator; Mark Fredricks, Research Administrator; and Delaney Foy, Graduate Assistant.



We are especially appreciative to the SUPERFLEX collective of Jakob Fenger, Rasmus Rosengren Nielsen, and Bjørnstjerne Christiansen, and their studio team managed by Malene Natascha Ratcliffe, CEO, and Maria Jose Felix Diaz, Head of Projects and PR.

MARGARET MILLER Professor and Director USF Institute for Research in Art



MIGRATING TOWARDS INTERSPECIES EQUITY

Sarah Howard

Interspecies living is a way of bridging the perceived gap between humans and nature. By acknowledging the agency of all species, we can move toward a sustainable future as ecological equals. —SUPERFLEX

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SUPERFLEX: This Is The Tip Of The Iceberg explores a world in which human life depends on coexistence with other species. Emerging from SUPERFLEX's long-term, in-depth research into the deep sea, biodiversity, and the climate, the exhibition immerses viewers in two parallel and interconnected realms—a terrestrial space unsettled by rising water and a submerged space in the ocean's depths—in order to highlight the impacts and consequences of climate change, a subject especially relevant to Florida and its coastal communities, and to prompt the imagination of a future in which all lifeforms coexist as ecological equals. SUPERFLEX probes how we can redefine our thinking about our built environments and infrastructure to accommodate all forms of life, not only humanity. SUPERFLEX: This Is The Tip Of The Iceberg reflects on the precarity of our climate to provoke deeper thinking about our ecological relationships. The exhibition seeks to diversify and expand perspectives for future adaptation and cohabitation as the conditions of our changing climate continue to shift dramatically.

Inside the darkened waterfront gallery space at the University of South Florida's St. Petersburg campus, SUPERFLEX's two installations situate viewers physically and conceptually at the edge of the tidal plain of the low-lying coastal waters. Scaffolded by a framework weighted with sandbags, the illuminated text-based work *This Is The Tip Of The Iceberg* (2019) signals the rising tides to come. Similar to commercial signage mounted on the elevated façades of buildings, *This Is The Tip Of The Iceberg* is one in a series of LED signs produced by SUPERFLEX—others include the phrases *We Are*





THIS IS THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG



We Are All In The Same Boat, 2018. Marcela and Jose Noe Suro Collection. Photo credit: Ramiro Chaves, Courtesy of OMR.

Ve Are Having The Time Of Our Lives, 2019. Courtesy of von Bartha. Photo credit: Pinelopi Gerasimou. Photo Courtesy of Onassis Stegi.

WE ARE HAVING THE TIME OF OUR LIVES

All In The Same Boat (2018) and We Are Having The Time Of Our Lives (2019) that cleverly translate colloquial sayings into prescient messages for our future lives, when sea level rise penetrates our inhabitable lands and forces the adaptation of our urban infrastructure. These messages simultaneously speak to the need for the collective "we" to harness collaboration and cooperation with one another and other species, and toward new learning and ways of inhabiting a warmer and wetter environment.

Enveloped in the glowing blue light of This Is The Tip Of The Iceberg, the installation initially translates as a warning of the imminent effects of reaching "the tipping point": the moment when the impacts of anthropogenic activity become irreversible, causing the collapse of the planet's climatic systems. Referred to by scientists and climatologists as the period when a warming planet triggers glacial melt and rising seas, recent record-setting temperatures across the world, on both land and sea, demonstrate that we may have already reached "the tipping point" of global warming and are currently experiencing the impacts of "global boil."¹ The latter term is defined by unpredictable and extreme weather-including increased heatwaves and wildfires, stronger and more saturated storms, unprecedented flooding and landslides, and the loss of coral reef habitats-as well as devastating consequences for the global future. By imagining new ways of coping with and preparing for these inevitable impacts, SUPERFLEX posits an alternative meaning for "the tipping point," one that indicates a dire need for a shift in human perception and an expanded consciousness to provide new ways of inhabiting our world in partnership with other species, which the Danish art collective frames as "interspecies living."

Inside the gallery, a translucent curtain bifurcates the space in order to allow viewers to move between the installations' terrestrial and submerged environments, imitating the liminal zone of tidal waters. Immersed in this fluid realm, viewers encounter *Vertical Migration* (2021), an interactive animation featuring the siphonophore, a marine species and distant relative of the more commonly known jellyfish. Using sensors to track and respond to the movements of viewers within the gallery space, *Vertical Migration* invites closer engagement and interaction with this alien-looking yet ubiquitous sea creature. Abrupt movements cause the animated siphonophore to

^{1. &}quot;Hottest July ever signals 'era of global boiling has arrived' says UN chief", UN News, July 27, 2023, https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/07/1139162.









retreat into the dark depths. However, if the viewer remains still and calm, the creature will cautiously approach, potentially allowing the boundary between human and marine species to dissolve, transforming the viewer's point of view to that of the siphonophore. This merging of perspectives inspires deeper connections and understanding of the critical importance of biodiversity to the planet's health as well as all those who inhabit it.

By championing the collective action of the siphonophore, *Vertical Migration* models the cooperative behavior of a creature composed of specialized segments that work together as one. With almost 200 identified species, siphonophores are colonial organisms, similar to coral colonies, composed of genetically identical individuals called zooids. These zooids are physically connected but rely on the distinct function of each contributing individual to survive. A superorganism, siphonophores sequester carbon and provide shelter, transportation, and food for other ocean-dwelling species, harnessing the power of shared action to benefit the communal ecosystem.

Through other experimental research projects not included in this exhibition, SUPERFLEX engages in contractual and collaborative activity with other species. Recent endeavors, such as *Interspecies Campus* (2022) and *As Close As We Get* (2022), expand into public and submerged spaces to propose new infrastructure and spaces for interspecies habitation. Their expansive practice of designing and activating public spaces with community participation and input redefines our place and relationships within the larger ecosystem. SUPERFLEX imagines how our coastal urban infrastructure will, in the near future, be impacted and inhabited by aquatic species as rising waters invade the landscape and reclaim terrestrial domains.

For instance, the pink, curvilinear sculptural components of *Interspecies Campus*, installed across multiple sites at Roskilde University in Denmark, expand and multiply vertically and horizontally to architecturally frame spaces for thoughtful contemplation and dialogue around interspecies relationships. The project, assembled to interrupt and redirect human movement from the usual flow patterns in the landscape, prioritizes nonhuman species as ecological equals through a contractual agreement obligating those who enter the *Interspecies Campus* to slow down, listen, and learn from "All Species." Engaging in this contractual activity, SUPERFLEX joins the growing, global "rights of nature" legal and philosophical movement, a campaign that recognizes and grants legal rights to natural entities, such as ecosystems, rivers, and animals, as a means of protecting the environment and promoting interspecies living.

Sited in the waters of the Copenhagen harbor, *As Close as We Get* simultaneously functions as an experiment, a habitat for marine

This & following pages: Interspecies Campus, 2022 by SUPERFLEX In close Collaboration with KWY.studio. Commissioned by The Danish Building and Property Agency. (Bygningsstyrelsen) for Roskilde University. Photo credit: Torben Eskerod.

MINIMUALA

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Contract for the Interspecies Campus

The Parties to this agreement (herein the "Contract") are: All Species and The Human

Purpose of the Contract

The purpose of the Contract is to establish the conditions for interaction within the Interspecies Campus at Roskilde University. The pink sculptural infrastructure demarcates the Interspecies Campus. It interrupts the Human's movement and provides places to practice interspecies living. Interspecies living involves actively coexisting and thriving together, acknowledging the agencies and voices of All Species.

Obligations

By entering the Interspecies Campus, the Human commits to interspecies living. They must slow down and listen to All Species. They must learn from All Species. They must live in caring relationships with All Species, as a part of an expanded collective.

Remedy

In the event of a breach of the Human's obligations, the Human shall be required to ask All Species what they should do differently. The Human must not leave the Interspecies Campus until they receive an answer. This answer shall become an additional obligation for the Human under this Contract.

Governing law

The Contract is governed by the laws of nature and interspecies ethics.

On behalf of All Species

microorganisms, and an artwork. Designed for modularity, SUPERFLEX's multiple three-dimensional forms feature flat, irregularly sized planes stacked on top of one another that visibly rise above the water's surface. Protruding from the water, these artworks function as public sculpture, while the portions submerged underwater serve as habitats for microorganisms to gather, grow, and buoy the health of the aquatic ecosystem. Both *Interspecies Campus* and *As Close As We Get* use organic building materials to innovate these underwater constructions. Specially designed bricks and building components crafted from stone, clay, and sand create porous surfaces and spaces that encourage human and marine organisms to connect, stimulating growth, and migratory movement as the boundaries between human and marine species' habitats merge.

SUPERFLEX's ongoing research and collaboration with marine species to develop infrastructure for submerged environments informs their current project *Superrev (Super Reef)*. A partnership and collaboration with the World Wide Fund for Nature and other agencies and communities, *Superrev (Super Reef)* will restore more than 55 square kilometers (approximately 13,600 acres) of stone reefs that were, ironically, previously removed from Danish waters to be used as building materials. By creating hospitable environments for marine species to grow and thrive, SUPERFLEX's *Superrev (Super Reef)* bridges environmental advocacy with art and architecture to foster biodiversity, improved water quality, and better health and well-being for all species.

As warmer climate conditions push us further into uncharted waters, SUPERFLEX forecasts solutions for a hopeful future. By prompting imagination and harnessing the vital and creative potential of adaptation and innovation to connect and collaborate with other species, the forward-looking Danish collective inspires greater understanding and consciousness of the needs of all species for a sustainable future.

SARAH HOWARD Curator of Social Practice USF Contemporary Art Museum









THE WATER IS COMING: OR OUR FUTURE BASED ON PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES ACCORDING TO SUPERFLEX'S VERTICAL MIGRATION Christian Viveros-Fauné

No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. —Albert Einstein

A funny thing happened on the way to my writing desk during the darkest period of the COVID lockdown. On the morning of September 16, 2021, I received an email outlining an unlikely but astonishingly high-wattage event.

As the U.N. General Assembly met for the first time since the start of the global pandemic, the missive read, the Danish art collective SUPERFLEX was to stage a nightly projection of their new 20-minute film *Vertical Migration* onto the façade of the United Nations' glass and marble tower. Put in New York tabloid newsspeak: as Joe Biden, Boris Johnson and others convened to discuss the global pandemic, the end of the U.S.'s Trump-era isolationism and global warming, an especially savvy group of artists had hijacked the event's image agenda by summoning a little-known but crucial non-human invitee to the exclusive colloquium.

Projected 505 feet high, the film's improbable star animated a radically ecological interspecies script: the mysterious yet ubiquitous "siphonophore," an oceanic creature that is also a symbol of many beings collaborating as one. Not a single animal, but a colony of specialized marine organisms pulling together to enhance group survival, siphonophores can grow gigantic in size. Some are longer than the largest blue whale. The fact that they reside mostly at depths that light cannot reach means these

Facing & following pages:

Vertical Migration is commissioned by ART 2030 and TBA21–Academy, and supported by Avatar Alliance Foundation, Dalio Philanthropies, OceanX, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHOI), New Carlsberg Foundation, The Obel Family Foundation, Beckett Fonden, and Danish Arts Foundation.

Vertical Migration was developed in close collaboration with Kollision. *Vertical Migration* is part of 'Interspecies Assembly' by SUPERFLEX for ART 2030. Photo credit: Lance Gerber.







CHRISTIAN VIVEROS-FAUNÉ

beings travel from utter darkness to the ocean's surface to feed and disappear each day before dawn. Their routine "vertical migration" serves as a natural carbon pump that removes up to six million tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere every year. (Six million tons of CO_2 is several times the amount of carbon emitted by all the world's automobiles.) For the U.N. projection, a single, Godzilla-sized, augmented reality siphonophore performed a hypnotic dance by way of presenting humans with a non-anthropocentric ecological alter ego: an uncanny, alien-looking being on whom, frankly, the health of the entire world depends. In New York, the animal's Brobdingnagian capering helped introduce a simple if underknown fact to the widest possible audience: without siphonophores carbon dioxide in the world's atmosphere would rise more than 50 percent. Put differently, these and other organisms, which remain largely unaccounted for in our navel-gazing, workaday calculus, make the earth habitable for humans.

"Human activity is at the root of climate change, and our unwillingness to listen to the wants and needs of other species is contributing to the Earth's ecological turmoil," reads a press statement penned by SUPERFLEX. "Our agreements and demonstrations are proving insufficient; the water is coming. Eels are vanishing, corals reefs are under severe heat stress, sheep laurel bloom earlier and mackerel and flamingos are moving north. All species are suffering from human-made climate change, but their needs and wishes are still to be accounted for."

* * *

"The water is coming."

This forecast is nowhere more accurate than in the coastal communities edging Southern Florida. Beamed onto the Secretariat Building, Vertical Migration drew attention to the siphonophore's deep-sea carbon removal system, but also to the promises made by the United Nations—the world's chief international organism-to respond to "a watershed moment" made up of "complex and interconnected crises" by "finding transformative solutions to interlocking challenges." Those crises are here-they announced themselves well before 1945, the date scientists peg as the start of the Anthropocene, our new geological age-while promised solutions, at global, national and local levels, have suffered repeated shortfalls. In the U.S., few places are more impacted by climate change response inadequacies than the Tampa-St. Petersburg area. (Leaving aside the direct damage wrought by yearly once-in-a-lifetime storms, flooding from warming oceans, hurricanes and other heavy precipitation events have led USF scientists to forecast the sea level to rise locally between a foot and 19 inches over the next three decades.)





THE WATER IS COMING

As a number of astute commentators have written, water is at once an increasingly scarce resource and an increasing threat. Polar ice caps are melting, deserts are spreading from Chile to California, flooding from extreme climate events routinely devastates human and animal communities, from Cedar Key, FL, to Derna, Lybia. For existentially urgent reasons, homo sapiens-independent of their generational cohort, educational level or party affiliation-need introducing (or re-introducing) to humble organisms such as the siphonophore. Doing so, SUPERFLEX proposes, can help "foster friendly relations among species and nurture interspecies living." Artful colloquies, like those staged at both the U.N. and at GENERATOR in St. Petersburg, they suggest, may be one compelling way to get humans to conceive of the unthinkable: "to pause and attempt to see the world from the perspective of other life forms."

> * * *

The members of SUPERFLEX—Jakob Fenger, Bjørnstjerne Christiansen and Rasmus Rosengren Nielsen-first encountered the siphonophore in 2019 in the Coral Sea off the northeast coast of Australia. As part of an expedition sponsored by TBA21-Academy, a 10-yearold nonprofit in Europe dedicated to deepening awareness and preservation of the ocean through art, they came upon creatures they found at once pervasive and unfamiliar enough to puncture key myths around human exceptionalism. (The Danish troupe routinely engages with a wide variety of collaborators, scientists among them.)

"One evening a marine biologist took us on a blackwater dive," Nielsen told one interviewer. "You go in the middle of the night and witness this giant migration that happens every night as these creatures come to the surface. They don't have arms or two eyes, and they're not scared of you. They come right up to you. You've never seen anything like this."

Approached later by ART 2030, a Danish nonprofit, to help visualize the U.N.'s agenda for sustainable development, the group immediately thought to harness the example of the siphonophore. The creature's strangeness-its non-anthropomorphic and Ridley Scott-like extraterrestrial qualities—paradoxically recommended it as the perfect interlocutor for interspecies thinking.

"We had a feeling of strong companionship with these creatures," Nielsen said. "We get stuck with the pandas and the elephants that figure in a Disney movie. We decided, let's invite this one, an unusual guest. It's like all the science-fiction films you've ever seen happening every night in the world."





CHRISTIAN VIVEROS-FAUNÉ

At GENERATOR in St. Petersburg, a slightly larger than human-scale siphonophore engages the viewer in much the way Nielsen and other members of the collective experienced it in the dark waters of the Coral Sea. Guided by a sensor, the film's photo-based animation tracks the viewer's movements, reacting to them in real time. If the viewer moves abruptly, as they might in the face of a seafaring threat, the creature will warily retreat. If the viewer remains calm, the creature will approach cautiously, potentially coming so close that the boundaries between human and creature dissolve.

One turning point among many for what SUPERFLEX has termed "the beginning of the meltdown of long-standing human structures," the complex installation at GENERATOR looks to dislodge the kind of rote archaic thinking that traps humans (and other life forms) inside our current global warming spiral. To achieve ecological consciousness, SUPERFLEX has designed an immersive artwork to help spark solidarity where reams of data fail to move individuals and populations to stem our raging climate catastrophe. By facilitating an experience of connection, *Vertical Migration* demands more from its viewers still. It proposes nothing less than the end of the "time of man," while, conversely, signaling the start of a new beginning.

CHRISTIAN VIVEROS-FAUNÉ Curator-at-Large USF Contemporary Art Museum

ABOUT SUPERFLEX

SUPERFLEX was founded in 1993 by Jakob Fenger, Bjørnstjerne Christiansen, and Rasmus Rosengren Nielsen. Conceived as an expanded collective, SUPERFLEX has consistently worked with a wide variety of collaborators, from gardeners to engineers to audience members. Engaging with alternative models for the creation of social and economic organization, works have taken the form of energy systems, beverages, sculptures, copies, hypnosis sessions, infrastructure, paintings, plant nurseries, contracts, and public spaces.

Working in and outside the physical location of the exhibition space, SUPERFLEX has been engaged in major public space projects since their award-winning *Superkilen*



Photo credit: Ulrik Jantzen/Büro Jantzen

opened in 2011. These projects often involve participation, involving the input of local communities, specialists, and children. Taking the idea of collaboration even further, recent works have involved soliciting the participation of other species. SUPERFLEX has been developing a new kind of urbanism that includes the perspectives of plants and animals, aiming to move society towards interspecies living. For SUPERFLEX, the best idea might come from a fish.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST All works by SUPERFLEX

This Is The Tip Of The Iceberg 2019 LED lights, plexiglass, aluminum, power adapter, polypropylene sandbags 72 x 94.5 x 45 in. Edition of 5 (#4/5) Courtesy of OMR and SUPERFLEX

Vertical Migration 2021 interactive projection duration variable Vertical Migration was developed in close collaboration with Kollision and co-commissioned by ART 2030 and TBA21-Academy. Courtesy of SUPERFLEX

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Vertical Migration. 2021. Exhibition view of Danish Architecture Center/BLOX. Vertical Migration was commissioned by Art 2030 and TBA21-Academy. Developed in close collaboration with Kollision.

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