



THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

October 30, 2024

JULIAN CHARRIÈRE AND CECILIA VICUÑA AWARDED MOCA'S INAUGURAL ERIC AND WENDY SCHMIDT ENVIRONMENT AND ART PRIZE



Images, l to r: Julian Charrière by Nora Heinisch, © Julian Charrière; and Cecilia Vicuña, courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin. © Cecilia Vicuña

Los Angeles, CA — The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) announced today two winners of the inaugural Eric and Wendy Schmidt Environment and Art Prize: **Julian Charrière** (b. 1987 in Morges, Switzerland; lives and works in Berlin, Germany) and **Cecilia Vicuña** (b. 1948 in Santiago, Chile; lives and works in New York, NY and Santiago, Chile). Each artist will receive \$100,000 and institutional support from MOCA to develop a commissioned project addressing the critical intersections of art, climate change, and environmental justice. Established earlier this year by philanthropists Eric and Wendy Schmidt, the prize is awarded biennially to artists whose work foregrounds pressing environmental concerns and engages communities in thought-provoking, creative solutions.

Charrière and Vicuña were selected by a distinguished five-person jury. Originally intended to be awarded to one artist, after intense deliberations, the jury selected both Charrière and Vicuña for their unique yet complementary approaches to addressing environmental issues through art. Eric and Wendy Schmidt generously decided to fund two prizes so both artists would receive the total unrestricted honorarium. Charrière and Vicuña will present their

commissioned works at MOCA in 2026, marking a significant milestone in MOCA's commitment to environmental conversations through contemporary art.

"The Schmidt Prize is a testament to the power of art to provoke dialogue and inspire action around the most critical issues of our time," said Johanna Burton, Maurice Marciano Director of MOCA. "Julian Charrière and Cecilia Vicuña are two extraordinary artists who have dedicated their careers—and lives—to illuminating the connections between environmental degradation and cultural memory. Their visionary practices, which engage deeply and distinctly with history, materiality, and society, help to reshape the way humans consider our relationships with the natural world."

"Science can explain our environment, but only art can illuminate it—cutting through the corpus of data to capture the spirit of our planet, our humanity, and the deep interconnectedness we share with all life around us," said Wendy Schmidt, co-founder and president of the Schmidt Family Foundation and Schmidt Ocean Institute. "We are thrilled to recognize not one but two artists who show us what's at stake in the future of our fragile blue world."

Charrière has gained international acclaim for his interdisciplinary practice that spans film, photography, and sculpture. His work often stems from field research in remote locations such as glaciers, volcanoes, and radioactive sites, where he explores humanity's evolving relationship with nature. His forthcoming MOCA project will delve deeper into the fragility and resilience of planetary water systems, creating an immersive installation that bridges art and science. The project will engage the public through interactive elements, inviting audiences to reflect on the urgent realities of climate change and environmental degradation while meditating on nature's powerful, raw beauty.

Vicuña, whose work spans six decades, is known for her large-scale installations, performances, and poetry. Her work readapts ancient Indigenous Andean systems of knowledge, such as the *quipu*, a pre-Columbian form of communication using knotted cords, to activate the contemporary collective consciousness. Her MOCA commission will take the form of a "Quipu of Encounters," the latest in a series of collective actions that she has created with communities around the world since the 1960s. Centering on the prompt "to dream the return of water," it will facilitate the exchange of ideas, poetry, and political strategy between communities fighting for the sacred public rights of water and communities in Chile and those in the broader Los Angeles region.

"I am deeply honored to receive the inaugural Eric and Wendy Schmidt Environment and Art Prize from MOCA. Through its Environmental Council established in 2020, MOCA continues to affirm its position as a leading institution fostering critical discourse on environmental issues," said Charrière. "This prize, in collaboration with Eric and Wendy Schmidt, reinforces the museum's commitment to supporting artists who engage with these pressing questions. I'm excited to embark on this journey, allowing me to further explore how art can shape conversations on climate and sustainability—themes that have always been central to my work."

"We are past the time when we could do just art; now, our efforts must also confront the existential threat to humanity itself by conjuring new systems for relating and hearing each other across social class, race, and national boundaries," said Vicuña. "I suspect the new art required of us is also the oldest, the encounter. It is in this spirit I propose my commissioned project with MOCA, *Quipu of Encounters: The Dream of Water [Quipu de encuentros: El sueño del agua]*, a call to create pods of action and exchange between the creative forces of art, science, and community by readapting ancient Indigenous Andean methods such as the "quipu" and the "minga," to bring unity in a field of exacerbated individualism."

The Eric and Wendy Schmidt Environment and Art Prize was established in 2024 to support projects that engage with the intersections of art, architecture, design, climate activism, and sustainability. The prize will be awarded every two years, from 2024 to 2030. Winners receive a \$100,000 unrestricted honorarium and additional resources from MOCA to develop and present new work that promotes ecological well-being and environmental justice. In addition to the commissioned artwork, each winner is encouraged to select an advisor with expertise in climate science, environmental justice, or sustainability who will collaborate on the project's development and context.

The 2024 Schmidt Prize jury included Johanna Burton, Maurice Marciano Director of MOCA; Carson Chan, Director of the Emilio Ambasz Institute for the Joint Study of the Built and the Natural Environment, and Curator of

Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Dan Hammer, Managing Partner of Ode, Co-Founder of Clay & Advisor to MOCA's Environmental Council; John Kenneth Paranada, Curator of Art and Climate Change at the Sainsbury Centre, UK; and Maria Seferian, President of Hillspire and Chair of MOCA Board of Trustees. For more information about the Eric and Wendy Schmidt Environment and Art Prize, please visit moca.org/about/schmidt-prize.

ABOUT JULIAN CHARRIÈRE

[Julian Charrière](#) is a French-Swiss artist based in Berlin, whose work has been widely exhibited across esteemed institutions and museums around the globe. Marshaling performance, sculpture, and photography, his projects often stem from remote fieldwork in liminal or discarded locations, such as volcanoes, icefields, and radioactive sites. By encountering places where acute geophysical identities have formed, Charrière speculates on alternative histories, often looking at materials through the lens of deep geological time. Exploring how our ideas of nature have changed from the Romantic movement into the Anthropocene, his projects deconstruct the cultural traditions that govern how we perceive and represent the natural world. A former student of Olafur Eliasson's Institute for Spatial Experiments, Charrière frequently collaborates with scientists, engineers, art historians, and philosophers. Whether undertaking artistic expeditions or staging immersive installations, the core of his practice concerns itself with how the human being inhabits the world and how it, in turn, inhabits us.

His work has been the subject of solo presentations at major international institutions, among them Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2024); LagoAlgo, Mexico City (2024); SFMOMA, San Francisco (2022); Langen Foundation, Neuss (2022); Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas (2021); MAMbo, Bologna (2019); Berlinische Galerie, Berlin (2018); Parasol Unit Foundation, London (2015); and MCBA, Lausanne (2014). Charrière has also been prominently featured at the 59th Biennale di Venezia (2022); 57th Biennale di Venezia (2017); the Antarctic Biennale (2017); the Taipei Biennial (2018); the 12th and 16th Biennale de Lyon (2013, 2022); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2019, 2021); Sprengel Museum, Hannover (2019); Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus (2019); SCHIRN Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2018); and Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre, London (2018).

ABOUT CECILIA VICUÑA

[Cecilia Vicuña](#) (Santiago de Chile, 1948) is a visual artist, poet, filmmaker, and activist based in New York. Her poetic work in space, performance, and visual arts began as a decolonizing vision that anticipated ecofeminism. She coined the term "Arte Precario" in the mid-1960s in Chile as a new independent and non-colonized category for her impermanent works composed of structures that disappear in the landscape, and in 1974, while in London, she co-founded the collective Artists for Democracy. Vicuña has re-invented the ancient Pre-Columbian *quipu* system of non-writing with knots through ritual acts that weave the urban landscape, rivers, and oceans, as well as people, to re-construct a sense of unity and awareness of interconnectivity. These works bridge art and poetry as a way of "hearing an ancient silence waiting to be heard."

In recent years Vicuña has exhibited at Turbine Hall, TATE, London; and Guggenheim Museum, New York; MoMA Museum of Modern Art, New York; Documenta 14, Athens and Kassel; Kunstinstitut Melly (ex Witte de With) Rotterdam, The Netherlands; MUAC, Mexico; CA2M, Madrid, where she received the Velasquez Award; and Museo de Arte Miguel Urrutia (MAMU), Banco de la República, Bogotá, Colombia. Her retrospective "Soñar el agua" was recently on view at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Santiago de Chile; MALBA, Buenos Aires; and the Pinacoteca, São Paulo. She received the Golden Lion Award for her trajectory at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022. Her work is collected in major institutions around the world. In February 2023, she was elected Honorary Foreign Member of the Academy of Arts and Letters of the United States and Dr. Honoris Causa by Universidad de Chile. She was the winner of the Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas 2023, one of the most prestigious awards given by her homeland.

ABOUT THE ERIC AND WENDY SCHMIDT ENVIRONMENT AND ART PRIZE

Established in 2024, the Eric and Wendy Schmidt Environment and Art Prize, funded by philanthropists Eric and Wendy Schmidt, is awarded to an artist, or artists, whose work addresses intersections in art, architecture, design, climate, conservation, sustainability, and environmental justice. Winners receive a \$100,000 unrestricted honorarium and additional resources to complete a newly commissioned project focusing on environmental justice, climate activism, and human rights. MOCA will award the prize every two years until 2030, resulting in three prizes over six years.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART (MOCA)

Founded in 1979, MOCA is the defining museum of contemporary art. In a relatively short period of time, MOCA has achieved astonishing growth; a world-class collection of nearly 8,000 objects, international in scope with deep holdings in Los Angeles art; hallmark education programs that are widely emulated; award-winning publications that present original scholarship; groundbreaking monographic, touring, and thematic exhibitions of international repute that survey the art of our time; and cutting-edge engagement with modes of new media production. MOCA is a not-for-profit institution that relies on a variety of funding sources for its activities.

###

MEDIA CONTACT

Danielle Bias
Chief Communications Officer
dbias@moca.org

Elizabeth Cooke
Cooke PR
elizabeth@cookepr.com