

**Mathias Kessler**  
**Nowhere to Be Found, 2010**

Installation, skull with corals and shrimp, in water tank on wooden base.

Dimensions: 17x16.5x17.5"



**Installation view, VoltaNY 2010**

For nearly six years Mathias Kessler has been taking a detailed look on the today's reality of nature. In his works he does not only show the apparent interventions of human culture into nature, but rather plays with our longing for the apparently untouched nature. In a subtle manner he exposes the human intervention, which cultivates, creates and reconstructs nature and point out that nature is just another fiction of 19th and 20th century (Robert Smithson). In the same time he investigates the complex relation between man and nature in the area of tensions between "natura naturans, self-creating nature and natura naturata, created nature"<sup>1</sup>.

His new sculpture „Nowhere to Be Found“(2010) is also placed in the field of tensions: a human skull suspended in a saltwater tank, on which the artist has settled corals. Over several years this will transform into a coral reef.

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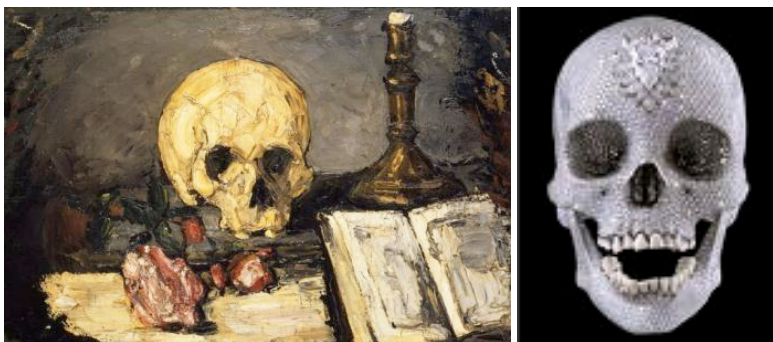
<sup>1</sup> Dieter Buchhart, The Experienced as Proof of Existence in the Age after Nature, in: Mathias Kessler, The Taste of Discovery, Nürnberg 2009, p.10



Adriaen van Utrecht, "Vanitas still life with skull and bouquet, 1642

Without any doubt this work of Mathias Kessler stands within the tradition of vanitas still lifes, beginning with Caravaggio and the Netherland painters of the 17. Century over Paul Cezanne, Max Ernst, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Subdoh Gupta up to Damien Hirst's diamond skull<sup>2</sup>.

Like the works of his predecessors Kessler's installation also refers on one hand to the fact that death is a part of life. But on the other hand it reminds us that we should be aware of our short life time and therefore live for the moment. The viewer can also read the art work under the aspects of *Memento Mori* und *Carpe Diem*.



Paul Cezanne "Nature morte, crane et chandelier", 1865  
and Damien Hirst „For the love of God, 2006

Unlike most of the other vanitas representations the installation „Nowhere to Be Found“ is more than an illustration of an idea. The artist has artificially initiated the nature immanent

<sup>2</sup> Cp.: Les vanités dans l'art contemporain, edited by Anne-Marie Charbonneaux, Paris 2010

transformation process within this installation. The corals, which are implanted on the skull, need the calcium of the skull bones to live and grow. Here, Kessler brings up the issue of the human impact in natural processes which forms also a lot of his other works.

In the same time Kessler uses biological, or rather biomorphic formal vocabulary and he lines himself up with a group of artists which offers us with their artworks images, which helps us to understand the complexity of life in itself, but also the difficult relation between man and nature<sup>3</sup>. So nature is shown as origin, condition and result of human existence<sup>4</sup>. But this also means responsibility and commitment. Only with a balanced mixture of minerals and micronutrients the corals will be able to survive and grow in the aquarium. The owner of this work therefore takes a real responsibility. He holds in his own hands, whether these creatures will continue to exist, as we all do, not only in relation to the worldwide endangered coral reefs.



Christa Sommerer, Laurent Mignonneau, Interactive Plant Growing, 1992

Still the fore-mentioned are not all layers of the meaning of the artwork. In the context of Mathias Kessler's working cycle „The Taste of Discovery“<sup>5</sup> this man size sculpture can also be read as a monument for those people, who lost their life in the depth of the polar sea during the search of adventure and knowledge expansion, but who are “Nowhere to be found”.

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<sup>3</sup> Cp: Life? Biomorphie Forms in sculpture, edited by Peter Pakesch, Graz 2008

<sup>4</sup>Cp: Heike Strelow, Introduction, Natural Reality, Artistic positions between nature and culture, Stuttgart 1999, p. 19

<sup>5</sup> Cp: Mathias Kessler, The Taste of Discovery, Nürnberg 2010