

# Midnight Zone: Infrastructures of Extraction Beneath the Surface

By: Thinley Wingen

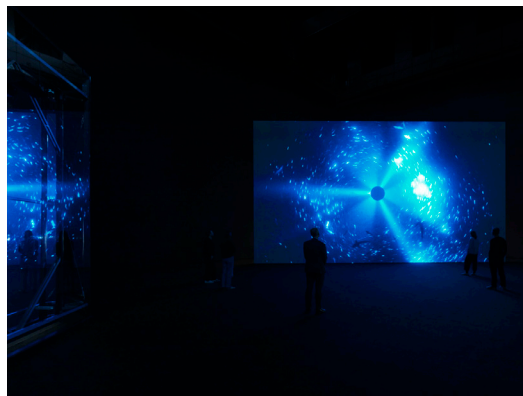
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At Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Julian Charrière constructs a sensory and epistemic environment in which deep-sea ecologies, resource economies, and image regimes collapse into one continuous field.



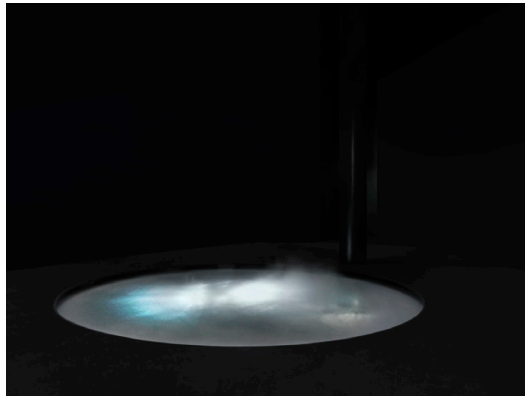
Julian Charrière, *Midnight Zone*, 2024.  
Behind the scenes. © the artist. VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Brieg Dufée.

Walking into Julian Charrière's "Midnight Zone" in Wolfsburg feels like stepping into the backend of our so-called green future, only everything is wet, dark, and strangely seductive. Water stops behaving like a calm, reflective surface and turns into a messy, contradictory substance that seems to hold together colonial histories, energy transitions, and [nightlife.z](#) imaginaries all at once.



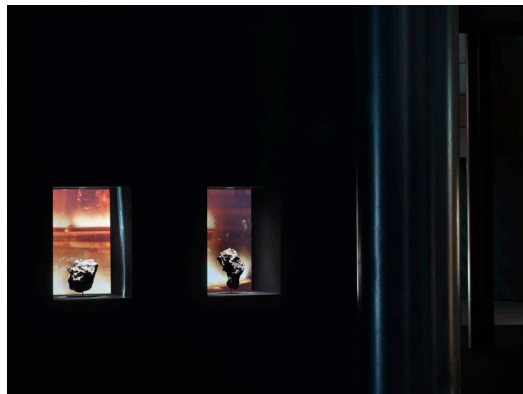
Julian Charrière, *Midnight Zone*, 2024.  
Installation view, *Midnight Zone*,  
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg,  
Germany, 2026. © the artist. VG Bild-  
Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Jens Ziehe.

The first thing you notice is sound: coral reefs talking in clicks and crackles, distant whale songs, an underwater chorus that slowly gets drowned out by human noise. Deeper in the hall, the exhibition suddenly narrows down to one image – a lighthouse Fresnel lens, hanging in space inside a glass pavilion. It reads almost like a club light at first, until its trajectory becomes clear: sunk 1,000 metres into the Clarion-Clipperton Zone, that vast stretch of deep sea between Hawaii and Mexico currently being mapped as a future mining site for polymetallic nodules loaded with nickel, cobalt, copper, and manganese – the metals required for batteries, electric cars, and all the polite fantasies of "clean" tech. In the film, the lens drifts through the dark like a wandering sun, pulling fish out of the black; in Wolfsburg, it throws spinning beams onto mirror-foil walls, haze, and a bass [landscape.z](#) composed of container ships, seismic airguns, and deep-sea extraction recordings. The body registers it like a subwoofer before cognition catches up with its status as a field report.



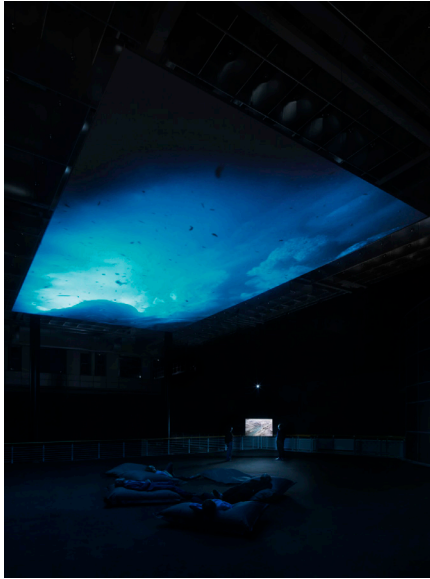
Julian Charrière, *Silent World*, 2019.  
Installation view, *Midnight Zone*,  
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg,  
Germany, 2026. © the artist. VG Bild-  
Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Jens Ziehe.

It's hard to ignore where this is all happening. Outside, the Autostadt continues to stage Volkswagen's world: glass pavilions, electric models on display, the promise that the car can still be the hero if it is simply plugged into the right socket. Inside, Charrière unpacks the flip side: how the same transition z that is supposed to save us leans into a new kind of vertical colonialism, reaching down into one of the least-explored biomes on the planet. Wolfsburg, EV sales curves, electricity prices, cargo routes across the Pacific, and a school of fish circling a light at 4,000 metres depth begin to read as one connected diagram.



Julian Charrière, *Metamorphism*, 2016.  
Installation view, *Midnight Zone*,  
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg,  
Germany, 2026. © the artist. VG Bild-  
Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Jens Ziehe.

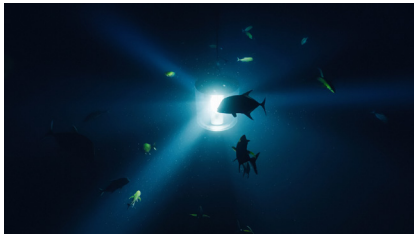
The show fills about 2,000 square metres with 48 works that all carry traces of Charrière's long research trips: months spent with scientists on ships, at Arctic ice edges, in radioactive lagoons, inside those hard-to-reach zones usually encountered only as satellite data or headlines. That fieldwork seeps through in quieter pieces too – freedivers dissolving into the sulphuric chemoclines of Mexican cenotes, an inverse sun glowing from the bottom of a water basin, a vending machine that trades snacks for ammonite fossils spinning geological time behind glass. "Midnight Zone" leaves behind an uneasy shift in scale: the ocean no longer appears as a distant blue backdrop, but as an overworked, over-coded protagonist that keeps asking what exactly is being sacrificed for an allegedly sustainable future.



Julian Charrière. *Pure Waste*, 2021, and *Albedo*, 2025. Installation view, *Midnight Zone*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg, Germany, 2026. © the artist. VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Jens Ziehe.

Rather than staging the ocean as an image, Charrière treats it as an operative space in which perception, extraction, and projection intersect. The exhibition continuously shifts between scales and regimes: from microscopic ecologies to planetary logistics, from embodied sensation to data-driven abstraction. What emerges is less a narrative than a condition – one in which the boundaries between environment, infrastructure, and image dissolve, and where visibility itself becomes a form of control.

The accompanying catalogue *Julian Charrière: Midnight Zone*, published by Museum Tinguely and Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, is available at the museum store and extends the exhibition's inquiry through essays and visual documentation.



Julian Charrière. *Midnight Zone*, 2024. Film still. © the artist. VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



Julian Charrière. *Albedo*, 2025. Film still. © the artist. VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.