Press release
April 8, 2025

becoming ocean

a social conversation about the Ocean

From May 8 to August 24, 2025, Villa Arson, TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary and Tara Ocean Foundation present *Becoming Ocean: a social conversation about the Ocean*, a major exhibition exploring the main challenges facing the Ocean in a choral way. More than 20 international artists are taking part in the exhibition, to be held at the Villa Arson, through critical and documentary approaches as well as more sensory, poetic or speculative expressions.

The exhibition is part of the program for the Nice Biennial of Arts and the Ocean, organized by the City of Nice as part of the United Nations Conference on the Oceans (UNOC3) to be held in Nice from June 9 to 13, 2025.

Artists : Allora & Calzadilla, Antoine Bertin, Samuel Bollendorff, Seba Calfuqueo, Stephanie Comilang, Anne Duk Hee Jordan, Simone Fattal, Nicolas Floc'h, Max Hooper Schneider, Kapwani Kiwanga, Sonia Levy, Armin Linke, Courtney Desiree Morris, Asunción Molinos Gordo, Ingo Niermann, Diana Policarpo, Christian Sardet and the Macronautes, Robertina Šebjanič, Allan Sekula, Janaina Tschäpe, Laure Winants, Susanne M. Winterling.

Curators

Hélène Guenin, Director of the Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain de Nice (MAMAC)
Chus Martínez, Associate Curator – TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary
Sébastien Ruiz, General Secretary of the Tara Ocean Foundation
Marie-Ann Yemsi, Director of the Villa Arson art center

An exhibition co-produced by

villa arson nice

Thyssen Bornemisza Art Contemporary

Fondation tara océan explore and share

With the collaboration of

As part of

Nice 2025 Biennale des Arts et de l'Océan

Bloomberg Philanthropies

VILLE DE NICE

Becoming Ocean: a social conversation about the Ocean is an exhibition co-curated by three international institutions – Villa Arson, TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary and Tara Ocean Foundation – underlining the essential role of collaboration and the conviction that art and culture are drivers of social and environmental change.

Becoming Ocean will feature artworks from the TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection and from the Tara Ocean Foundation's artists-in-residence program as well as a collaboration of the Schmidt Ocean Institute.

The exhibition reflects on our understanding and ignorance of the Ocean and its future. It is a manifestation of the values and methods shared by the participant institutions to bring from the art perspective and through its uncountable forms, an open social conversation about the ocean challenges that we all face as a planet and our opportunity to rethink our connection with the Ocean and act differently for its preservation. The massive fishing effects, the pollution that affects the bodies of water, the progressive increase of the oceanic shipping, the imminent ecological risks that could trigger to allow the activity of the deep sea mining industry, and the negative effects that all these human actions have on the marine biodiversity are the results of the contemporary human relation with the ocean...but, is there any other possible relation that we can imagine, or even regenerate from the past?

For the past few decades, art and artists have been actively working to foster an understanding of climate change from the perspective of Nature. Art has played (and still plays) a crucial role in translating abstract and complex planetary phenomena, as well as large-scale systemic global changes, into narrative imagery, first-person storytelling, and Indigenous perspectives, helping us to name and experience these challenges. Artists have stepped beyond their studios and traditional workspaces to collaborate with experts, policymakers, and scientists, forging a shared horizon where we can strive for a genuine encounter with nature and its interests. Artists—coming from diverse backgrounds and contexts—have been inventing exercises and gestures that address the rupture caused by colonial and capitalist greed, paving the way for the birth of a new history. A history defined by better choices and a deeper connection to the mythical dimensions of the ocean, whose echoes reach our present from ancient times. The purpose of *Becoming Ocean* is to immerse ourselves humbly in these meaningful approaches.

The exhibition opens with an installation by Courtney Desiree Morris, an altar that welcomes us by connecting with the ancestral traditions of respect for the ocean as the birthplace of all living things. *Becoming Ocean* brings together diverse voices to initiate a social conversation, offering personal perspectives on global issues such as industrial fishing and global shipping across the ocean (Allan Sekula) or the colonial past and neo-colonial present (Stéphanie Comilang), where the ocean and the stories it holds serve as a map of colonial histories through the tracking of natural biodiversity (Diana Policarpo).

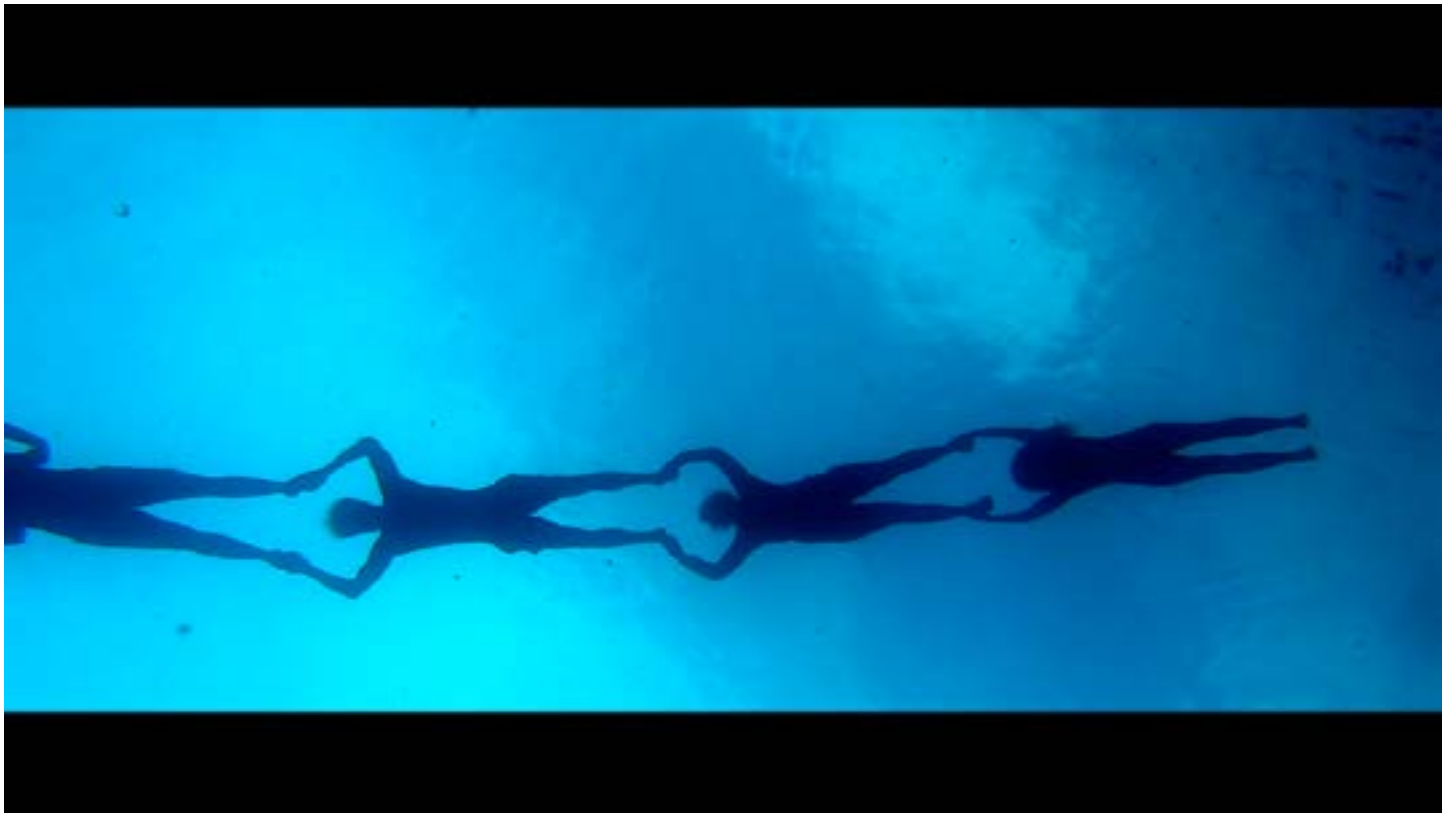
The bond between liquid bodies and humanity emerges as a reflection of our social, economic, cultural, and political history, as exemplified by the elegant and poetic work of sculptor Simone Fattal about the Mediterranean sea. This bond has become brutal in modern times due to aggressive extractivist practices in our relationship with water and the ocean. Artistic approaches such as Armin Linke's photo essay, which investigates the experiences and activism of local landowners and mine-impacted communities affected by seabed mining for copper, gold, zinc, and silver; Seba Calfuqueo's installation, which highlights the suffering of the Mapuche community due to permanent water titles granted to private companies in Chile; and sculptor Kapwani Kiwanga's critical reflection on the intricate interplay between glass production and sand extraction, all contribute to this urgent dialogue.

This bond has become toxic, as revealed in Samuel Bollendorff's work, where beneath the beauty of seascapes, samples taken from these locations tell a very different story. Sonia Levy's underwater filmmaking in the Venice Lagoon, Robertina Šebjanič's installation, which explores the pollution and threat to marine life caused by weapons abandoned on the seabed, and Laure Winants' work, which examines the impact of pollutants on coastlines using sensitive instruments and experimental photographic techniques, all contribute to broadening our understanding of the invisible toxicity hidden beneath the surface. A more poetic approach to this issue can be found in Janaina Tschäpe's photo series or in the iconic sculpture *Petrified Petrol Pump* by Allora & Calzadilla.

But the beauty of healing and restoration offers a powerful message of hope through works such as those by Nicolas Floc'h questioning at the same time on our legitimacy and ethics, but also risks, to intervene in nature by recreating artificially the functioning of a complex biodiversity. These works question our responsibility to react and act before the Ocean's points of no return are reached instead of acting after their destruction. It is precisely in the context of environmental collapse that we find the narrative of the artist Max Hooper Schneider. His work speculates about hypothetical landscapes and forces humankind to abandon morality and think across longer timescales, and not the immediate.

The exhibition also presents more sensory and sensual regards that celebrate marine biodiversity, as the works by Anne Duk Hee Jordan, Chritsian Sardet or Antoine Bertain as well as the inspiring video *Sea Lovers* (2002) by Ingo Niermann, advocating for a more intimate relation with the ocean, as well as pieces that highlight the commitment of local communities to respectful and harmonious relationships with the ocean, as seen in the narrative presented in Susanne M. Winterling's installation.

Becoming Ocean aspires to ignite within us a desire for new ways of living—ways that go beyond merely repairing damage or recovering from wounds, instead fostering a fundamentally different mindset toward the processes that shape both the Ocean and the Earth.



Ingo Niermann: *Sea Lovers*, 2020, video still.
Commissioned by TBA21–Academy. Credit: courtesy of the artist.

Nicolas Floc'h, *La Couleur de l'Eau – La Seine*, 2024 et *Structures productives, récifs artificiels*, 2013-2014
© Benoît Fougeirol

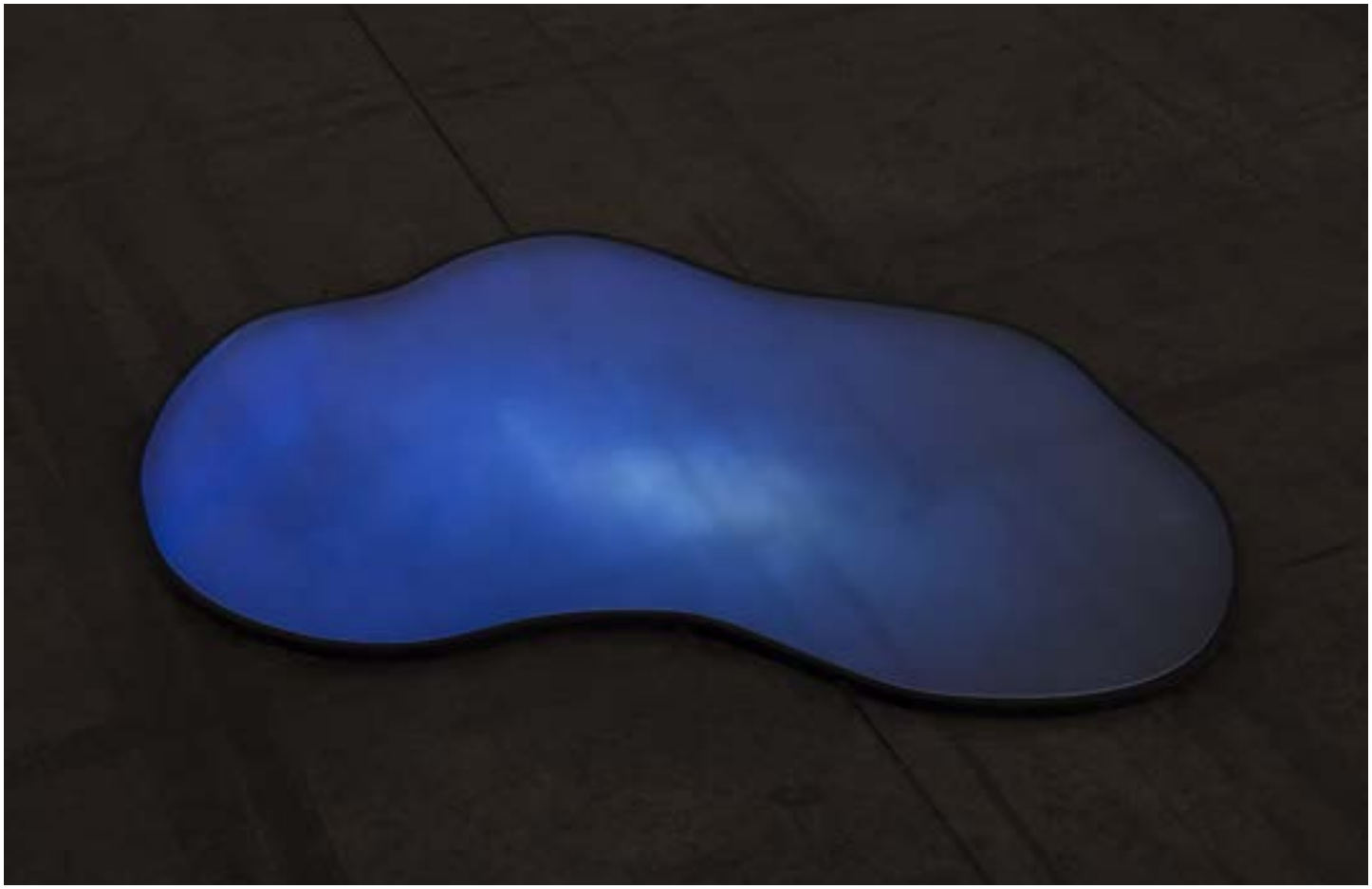
Simone Fattal, *Pearls*, 2023

Seven blown Murano glass pearls, hand engraved. Commissioned by TBA21–Academy. TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection. Installation view: Thus waves come in pairs: Simone Fattal and Petrit Halilaj & Álvaro Urbano. Ocean Space, Venice Italy, 2023 © Gerdastudio

Christian Sardet et les Macronautes, *Le ballet du plancton*, 2020
© Benoît Fougeirol

Seba Calfuqueo, *Ko ta mapu ngey Ka (Water is Also Territory),* 2022

Installation. Single-channel video of the performance at C3A - Roberto Ruiz. TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection.



Antoine Bertin, *Conversation Métabolite*, 2022

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Diana Policarpo, *CiguaTales*, 2022
Still: CiguaTales. TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection.

Samuel Bollendorff, *Les Larmes de Sirènes (série)*, 2024
© Benoît Fougeirol

Max Hooper Schneider, *Sand-Writing Crater,* 2024
Installation view, Max Hooper Schneider, LYSIS FIELD, Pansori – a soundscape of the 21st century, 15th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, South Korea, 2024. Image courtesy of the Artist and Gwangju Biennale.

Allan Sekula, *Lottery of the Sea*, 2006
Single-channel video installation, color, sound 179 min. TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection. Still: Courtesy Allan Sekula Studio.

Armin Linke, *Photoessay Prospecting Ocean*, 2020
TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection

Asuncion Molinos Gordo, *Barco Carguero,* 2016
TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection

Susanne M. Winterling, *Glistening Troubles*, 2017
TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection

Courtney Desiree Morris. *Her Words do not Fall on the Ground*, 2023
TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection

Stéphanie Comilang, *Diaspora ad Astra*, 2020
Commissioned by TBA21–Academy with the support of the Institut Kunst HGK FHNW

Janaina Tschäpe, *Dormant Chloeia*, 2024
TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection

Robertina Šebjanič, *Echoes of the Abyss – Toxic Legacies Of Oceanic Ecologies*, 2024
© Benoît Fougeirol

Anne Duk Hee Jordan, *Ziggy and the starfish*, 2016-2022
TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection. Still: Courtesy from the artist.

Laure Winants, *Synesthésie Océanique*, 2024
© Benoît Fougeirol

Sonia Levy, *We Marry You O Sea as a Sign of True and Perpetual Dominion*, 2023
Commissioned by TBA21–Academy with the support of the S+t+ARTS initiative of the European Commission and the European Marine Board 'EMBracing the Ocean' programme. Still: Courtesy SEPOline.

Kapwani Kiwanga, *Hour Glass #2*, 2022

TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection

villa arson nice

Under the supervision of the French Ministry of Culture and became a legal entity of the University Côte d'Azur in 2020, Villa Arson was conceived in the 1960s by André Malraux, then Minister of Cultural Affairs, as part of a major cultural decentralization programme.

Inaugurated in 1972, Villa Arson was designed from the outset as a highly innovative establishment that fulfilled several essential and complementary functions in support of creation : teaching, research, experimentation, production, distribution, promotion and support. The uniqueness of Villa Arson also lies in the association of its different areas of activity (the contemporary art center, the school, the library, research and residencies), whose actions intersect and enrich experiences.

The Villa Arson art center offers an exhibition program that is broadly open to the international scene and focuses on emerging creation. It aims to highlight the crossroads between creation, research, experimentation and transmission.

Thyssen
Bornemisza
Art Contemporary

TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary is a leading international art and advocacy foundation established in 2002 by philanthropist and art patron Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza. The Foundation stewards the TBA21 Collection and its outreach activities, which include exhibitions as well as educational and public programming. TBA21 Art Contemporary is based in Madrid, working in association with the Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum, and has other important poles of action in Venice (Italy) and Portland (Jamaica). As an advocacy foundation, TBA21 Art Contemporary contributes to the global conversation promoting the role of art and culture in public policy processes, and the opportunity of art and culture as tools for democratic governance especially in ocean and environmental governance. TBA21 Art Contemporary (Observer at the International Seabed Authority - ISA) considers that art is a powerful tool through which to examine and to question the status quo, in order to articulate transformation processes leading to the necessary behavioral change and re-imagined encounters with the world and for the future generations. TBA21–Academy is the foundation's research arm, fostering a deeper relationship with the Ocean and wider ecologies by working as an incubator for transdisciplinary inquiry, artistic production, and environmental advocacy. All activity at TBA21 is collaborative and fundamentally driven by artists and the belief in art and culture as a carrier of social and environmental transformation, ultimately in the service of peace. Reflecting this commitment, TBA21 presents, during UNOC3, a program of activities aiming to facilitate the integration of art and culture in the policy debate and negotiations, in articulation with both the Biennale des Arts de Nice and the Année de la Mer.

Fondation taraocéan
explore and share

The Tara Ocean Foundation is the first public interest foundation in France dedicated to the Ocean. For over 20 years, it has been striving for a revolution to preserve life, convinced that the Ocean is essential to the equilibrium of our planet. Exploring the Ocean and sharing scientific discoveries to raise collective awareness is at the heart of the foundation's mission. It leads scientific expeditions, in partnership with leading international research laboratories, to study marine biodiversity and understand the impacts of climate change and pollution. It raises public awareness, from the younger generation to political decision-makers. Thanks to its UN Special Observer Status, the foundation plays an active role in international Ocean governance. Exploring, sharing and protecting this living Ocean is more vital than ever. Together, let's defend life. Let's protect the Ocean.
Alongside its scientific work and the dissemination of knowledge to various audiences, the Tara Ocean Foundation has also been welcoming artistic residencies since its very beginning. Initiated thanks to agnès b. and Etienne Bourgois, more than fifty artist residencies have been held on board the schooner since 2004. The artistic residencies aboard the schooner are a unique and inspiring experience for the artists in a continuously changing environment, far from the usual conditions of a traditional artist studio. The artists selected for residency - painters, illustrators, photographers, sculptors, writers, sound and video artists - represent a wide range of artistic fields, helping to make the invisible visible and change our perception of the Ocean.

SCHMIDT OCEAN INSTITUTE

Schmidt Ocean Institute was established in 2009 by Eric and Wendy Schmidt to catalyze the discoveries needed to understand our Ocean, sustain life, and ensure the health of our planet through the pursuit of impactful scientific research and intelligent observation, technological advancement, open sharing of information, and public engagement, all at the highest levels of international excellence. The Schmidt Ocean Institute Artist-at-Sea program, launched in 2015, engages art to illuminate a deeper understanding of and connection with the Ocean. The program is uniquely positioned to facilitate collaborations between artists and the world's leading marine scientists, providing the Research Vessel Falkor (too) as a platform for advanced technology-based ocean research, that lends to artistic exploration and dialogues across disciplines. This artist-led, cross-disciplinary approach encourages explorative perspectives and rekindles a connection to the marine world, sharing new understandings and discoveries that will impact our world today and in the future.

Nice 2025
Biennale
des Arts
et de
l'Océan

VILLE DE NICE

In June 2025, Nice will host the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 2025). This international summit will bring together leaders and governments from around the world to debate and decide on the future of our planet. To mark the occasion, the City of Nice is placing its 6th Biennial of Arts under the banner of the Ocean, uniting cultural players, institutions and partners around this project. Entitled 'The sea around us*', the biennial is a vibrant tribute to Rachel Carson, a great figure in the world of the oceans, a woman of science, literature and commitment to life. The co-curators, Jean-Jacques Aillagon, former French Minister of Culture and Communication, and Hélène Guenin, Director of the MAMAC, are proposing an original program to match the event and its stakes:

- 11 exhibitions with installations and associated events in 7 museums in the city of Nice, as well as at 109, the city's third venue, and at the Villa Arson;
- a trail of works of Art in the city, a major new feature of this edition;
- two international foundations, Tara Ocean Foundation and TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary are also partners.

The exhibition *Becoming Ocean: a social conversation about the Ocean* is one of the main events presented in the city as part of the Biennial.

To find out more : anneedelamer.nice.fr

*Rachel Carson, *La Mer autour de nous*, Domaine Sauvage, Editions Wildproject, 2019 Edition originale The sea around us, 1951 – Avec l'aimable autorisation de Wildproject et de l'Estate Rachel Carson.

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Practical information

Presented at the Villa Arson, the exhibition will be open to the public every day except Tuesday, from 2pm to 6pm (2pm to 7pm in July and August). Admission is free and no reservation is required.

Address:
Villa Arson, 20 avenue Stephen Liégeard, 06100 Nice

Access:
Tramway line n°1 - Station Le Ray
Bus n°8, direction Las Planas / Sappia - station Deux avenues

Outside areas (gardens and terraces) and exhibition rooms are largely accessible to people with reduced mobility.

villa-arson.fr