

- 1 llegal, those who risk their lives to make the crossing to Europe.
- 2 Tangier/Tarifa: 13 km and <http://watchthemed.net>
- 3 “Vogue la Galère, traffic des migrants”, by Andrea Palladino and Andrea Tornago, p.12, *Le Monde*, 6 February 2015.
- 4 La Línea is the most polluted town in Spain, according to the WHO, Manuel Planelles / Cándido Romaguera Sevilla / La Línea de la Concepción 24 MAY 2014
- 5 [http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2014/05/24/actualidad/1400953564\\_377787.html](http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2014/05/24/actualidad/1400953564_377787.html)  
Franco Cassano. *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean*. Spanish translation by Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011.

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To the artists

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## LA MER AU MILIEU DES TERRES // MARE MEDI TERRANEUM

Ali Cherri, Marcel Dinahet, Lara Fluxà, Chourouk Hriech, Bouchra Khalili, Yazan Khalili, Farah Khelil, Ange Leccia, Rogelio López Cuenca, Geoffroy Mathieu & Bertrand Stofleth, Antoni Muntadas, Hervé Paraponaris, Marco Poloni, Zineb Sedira, Oriol Vilanova, Yorgos Zois

The Mediterranean, etymologically speaking the “mare midi terra”, or sea in the middle of the land, is presented as an apparently closed basin which actually opens up to the west via the Strait of Gibraltar. A space that has always been at a crossroads of cultures - Mesopotamian, Carthaginian, Berber, Semitic, Persian, Phoenician, Greek and Roman - and a cradle for religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Moreover this sea was and is the economic and cultural base of incipient nations favoured by the maritime interchanges that enabled the supremacy of the so-called Western civilisation. Regions of diversity which question the idea of frontier, transforming the models of identity and political figures that emerged from revolutionary events.

The aim of this curatorial project is not to illustrate the area around this sea, but to offer a profound reflection on these regions whose history stretches back over thousands of years, proposing that we become potential actors in a natural evolution and new cultural development that has taken place in the Mediterranean context. This complex climax of situations privileges reasoned observation, knowledge and negotiation, which are still the essential driving forces behind encounters between worlds that are ignorant of one another and which reveal themselves in these waters. Whilst the Mediterranean is the largest cemetery in the world, the density of fluvial and economic interchanges generates losses and profits and their ecological, economic, political and social consequences are accelerating at a frenzied pace.

The exhibition “La Mer au Milieu des Terres // Mare Medi Terraneum” contemplates the entire coast of the Mediterranean as a living being, both for those who live on it and those who pass through it. The experience of this exhibition allows us to look towards issues that have scarcely been debated, such as disillusionment in European politics, the Arab spring and environmental, industrial and tourism legacies. The language of the artists selected seeks to return a certain dignity to people through the strength of observation and imagery and their everyday actions.

The incessant swaying of the flow of images in the video by **Ange Leccia** shows the indefinite nature of these waters in constant movement. From the gaseous to the solid state, the coast marks the limit between the dry and the wet, the balance and the imbalance that are analysed by **Lara Fluxà**, whose investigations focus on

elements that mainly characterise the sea, its nuances of instability and the salinity of its waters.

The tourist inside of us suffers the ecological and political interferences. If we observe the misery and injustice of the worlds that co-exist, we cannot fail to verify the underlying friction there is in Lampedusa or Cyprus, as represented in the photo-montage of **Marco Poloni** or seen in the video by **Marcel Dinahet**, who has violated the forbidden lands of northern Europe, in Cyprus, where territorial disagreements give rise to unbearable situations involving both candidates for emigration and those indigenous to the coasts of southern Europe.

Also, seen from the African continent, for decades now a considerable number of people have been “risking their necks”. In the form of conversations, the artist **Antoni Muntadas** has expressed what fears are made of, the explicit and implicit personal motives of people in their desperation, people who in some cases are also relatives of the *harragas*.<sup>1</sup> The main characters, who can no longer find their dignity, discreetly express their bewilderment.

Approached from another perspective, **Rogelio López Cuenca** also shares with us, using infrared cameras, those same feelings of terror that seize the “undocumented” on their Odyssean dream towards more merciful lands like Spain, a stone’s throw away from the European El Dorado<sup>2</sup>. On another scale, that same gut feeling of fear is that caused by the recurrent earthquakes evoked by **Ali Cherri** in some areas of the Mediterranean where tectonic plates are continuously moving, much more than anywhere else in the world. Fatality or destiny, that is the history of this coastline which is not always as welcoming as we have been led to believe.

For **Hervé Paraponaris**, it is a case of dreaming of a better world by imagining that the Mediterranean space could be a subaquatic metro network, with Palma de Mallorca one of the privileged stops. To achieve this, above and beyond utopias, many crossings will still have to be made to El Dorado, as is shown by the price of the passage from Iraq to Europe, which enriches so many intermediaries<sup>3</sup>.

The solutions to this 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Odyssey are on the maps too, and the guiding star sometimes accompanies some migrants on their crossing plagued with dangers and detours, as proposed by the video of **Bouchra Khalili**.

In his photo story set between Palestine and Israel, **Yazan Khalili** evokes the breaking-up of a love story through images and texts, like a line on the landscape that continues and indefinitely projects innumerable longings and desires which are never satisfied.

After the usual disappointment, both in the sphere of love and in everyday life, the reality of the economic crisis in Greece surpasses all the limits of the imaginable to the point of triggering frantic dynamics in a supermarket queue for food rations. In extraordinarily effective film, **Yorgos Zois** asks us how far this situation will go.

The coast is also the eager journeys on the Algerian littoral that **Zineb Sedira** submerges us in with her video, faced with which spectators begin to feel uncomfortable. At every bend in the road, the age of the vehicles and lack of light on roads with as many potholes as the cars have dents in them, coupled with the fear of never arriving at one’s destination, make anguish a permanent feature.

When we realise the legacy we leave behind us with our industrial landscapes, which we can rediscover in the photographic works of **Geoffroy Mathieu** and **Bertrand Stofleth**, and also in the *in situ* drawing by **Chourouk Hriech**, we are filled with another feeling, one of insecurity. another consideration of the Mediterranean waterfront. These artists contribute a different gaze to the contemporary wastelands of our coasts, which have borne (and some of which still do bear) intense industrial activity as in the case of Fos-sur-Mer, in Marseilles. Bauxite ruins the soil and the landscape forever, as occurs with the factories erected by Franco at the entrance of Gibraltar<sup>4</sup>, which rise up like monstrous cathedrals of lights at the gates of the Mediterranean both during the day and at night.

“La mer au Milieu des Terres” is also the phantoms projected by the collection of sublime, disquieting postcards of sunsets by **Oriol Vilanova**, presented on endless horizons, which contrast with the image on constant flow of **Ange Leccia**.

In another language, around the stereotypes that circulate in the Mediterranean and in an extreme reduction of representations of prominent Tunisian tourist destinations, the artist **Farah Khelil** has returned to the places she knows like the back of her hand through postcards gathered in European and North African street markets, as though they were fragments of correspondence, between the message she would like to send and the difficulty of speaking of the histories, past and present, of the coastline.

“Mare Medi Terraneum” tries to give an account of the gaze of contemporary artists over a space which is that of all the civilisations of the world, come together in the shared waters of the Mediterranean. Oblivious to all this, and yet so close to it, current affairs brim over and art proposes a certain necessary distance for this crisis which has, for thousands of years, shackled man to the land and the sea, above or below the waterline.

Let us not forget that, as Franco Cassano points out, “this space has always been a place of genetic and linguistic mixtures that generate a culture, the result of which is also a creolization of the peoples who participate in its construction”. And what about us? How do we experience these fusions? What are we looking for? What is in our head, in our beach bag or in our sociological or cultural studies when we travel around these places?”

Cécile Bourne-Farrell