LETTER OF MARQUE

16.09.2022–22.01.2023

DANIEL GARCÍA ANDÚJAR

Daniel García Andújar, *Juguete de los hados* [Forced by the Fates], 2022 (video still). Video, single-channel, colour, sound. Duration: 6' 25". Courtesy of the artist

SAILING LAKE AVERNO: SILENCE AND MIGRATION

Imma Prieto

> Forced by the Fates to wander round the seas
> of the world, year in, year out.
> —*Aeneid*, Virgil

> Why do I see myself captive in a foreign land?
> I have lost... my beloved freedom...
> —*Romance del cautivo* [Romance of the Captive],
> Deseado Mercadal

Violence has formed part of the way we have established relations with other people and communities outside our own. Dealing with expulsion points us at the action of throwing out, but this gesture of identity—here we refer to the identity of the person expelled—lies something more profound, to do with the desire to make the other disappear, not only from what we consider to be our own territory but from life itself. Etymologically, *expulsion* comes from the Latin *expulsare*, which in turn comes from *expellere*, made up of the prefix *ex-* (out) and the verb *pellere* (push, throw), and it is interesting to recall that *pellere* is related to the Indo-European root *pel*, which forms part of the Spanish word *'apellido'*, which means surname. Expulsion is therefore intrinsically linked to casting out the most intimate part of a person, in terms of their culture, customs and ideas. If recognising that their name is what identifies and signifies a human being, eliminating it means effacing their existence. This leads one to consider why concentration camp inmates immediately have their name taken away and are assigned a number. Or, to bring us back to the present, deaths in the Mediterranean are

still counted in figures, ignoring the fact that we are talking about people with names, customs and ideas of their own. Dealing with expulsion, flight or exile involves stopping to think about whether these actions mean a change in the nature of our life or a voyage that might be interrupted by death. Sailing the Mediterranean is a venture loaded with historical, political and social meaning. It means taking on board a host of presences and absences, the bearers of buried and drowned stories, it means being prepared to see how time continues to transmit an imagery that points to conflict and exile.

"Letter of Marque" is the title of the exhibition presented by Andújar this season with unpublished material and work, referring to the permit that licensed piracy without punishment, while hinting that it involves something of abandonment, pillage and loss. Under this title, Andújar has conducted research work in order to present different pieces alluding to a shared time and place, so opening up a denunciation of the silences that have so much characterised our past and our present.

The letter of marque was a kind of document granted in the past that conferred the right to plunder ships from enemy countries, i.e. state permission to rob and humiliate the other. While it was abolished in 1896, vestiges of this permissiveness remain, especially with regard to human rights. Out of this inherit realities, Daniel García Andújar opens up a space for thinking in several directions: the migratory flows that have criss-crossed the Mediterranean throughout history, especially when these were for social and political reasons; analysis of the difference between banishment or flight from one land to another across the sea. Finally, recognising and thinking about the deaths that in a way are not just permitted but encouraged.

Thinking about the Mediterranean as an autonomous space, i.e. as a locus, raises a series of paradoxes derived from permissiveness in the past and present. In fact,

it becomes a symbol of the actions of humanity over time. Today's societies continue to function within neoliberal, patriarchal structures. To point to theft, exploitation and abuse is to underline how the trampling of living beings rights has only increased—and continues to do so. Material and stories that offer us the chance to be a place, to become a space and to reclaim memories. Faced with the impossibility of dealing with all the silences, he brings together a visual corpus that refers to different times, pieces that form a historical thread and point to a non-ending: from the tales of the *Aeneid* to the latest victims to perish during the crossing to Europe.

The exhibition puts together a kind of symbolic mosaic or archive that makes it possible to trace conflict and pain through over three hundred images. It deals with the need to revise and rewrite history, to recognise how theft and pillage happen not only when a letter of marque is granted but also in official histories—and above all when we strip people of their rights, their memory and their identity. History is full of the systematic robbery that goes with—and has always gone with—forced migration and exile. It is this exile status that demands the dignity of which it has been deprived and to return to the place where those involved should always have lived. Daniel García Andújar recovers and recreates a place that, even though we are familiar with it, is presented here for the first time in this way: the Mediterranean. Thinking about the *Mare Nostrum*, as the Romans called it, means taking on board all those voyages, diasporas and migrations. It means retrieving other lives, many of them lost and silenced. Thinking about the Mediterranean as an *insula*, an isolated but identified place, is both surprising and unsettling. It means bringing to light other tales that dialogue with this update to the letter of marque, establishing a metaphor that accepts the theft not only of goods but also of basic rights.

Among the many narratives unearthed, a figure that stands out is that of Deseado Mercadal (Maó, 1911–2000), a writer, journalist and musician who was part of the resistance on Menorca during the Spanish Civil War and edited the socialist newspaper *Justicia Social*. On fleeing from the Francoist régime he was interned in several concentration camps in north Africa and southern France. Subsequently, in 1948, he returned from Algeria to Spain as an exile, until he was allowed to return to his birthplace, Menorca, in 1965. Different documentaries and some of the books he wrote are displayed as a homage, together with the recently-published book we are presenting by Daniel García Andújar, which represents the most comprehensive visual publication to date about the presence of Republican prisoners in concentration camps on the Mediterranean coast. Alongside this are Graeco-Roman legends that play a visionary role, like the video *Juguete de los hados* [Forced by the Fates] (2022), shot on the coast of the Balearic Islands and showing Poseidon sailing the sea in a cage on a refugee boat.

The exhibition is completed with the series of drawings "Mediterraneum. Atlas. Puertos" [Mediterraneum. Atlas. Ports] (2022), "Patente de Corso. Atlas" [Letter of Marque. Atlas] (2022) and "Migrantes desaparecidos registrados en el Mediterráneo desde 2014" [Missing migrants recorded in the Mediterranean since 2014] (2022) and the videos *Tráfico* [Traffic], *Corsarios* [Privateers] and *Mare Nostrum, al-Baḥr al-Mutawāsiṭ,* طس اوتم لا رحبلا *Ak Deniz*, shown in the shadow of the refugee boat Baya Rimes. "Mediterráneum. Atlas. Puertos" presents the hundred and seventy-three ports recorded in the Mediterranean, old maps showing migrant routes in red, a symbolic sea of blood lost beneath the waves. "Migrantes desaparecidos registrados en el Mediterráneo desde 2014" shows the names of those effaced with maximum simplicity, listing them one by one to denounce today's outrageous migration

policies. The "Patente de corso, Atlas" series, after which the project is named, presents a host of images ranging from period documents showing imprisonments or deaths to photographs of torture of concentration camp inmates. García Andújar has also recreated an imaginary world that establishes a parallel between the violence inflicted on prisoners and our relations with other peoples, again showing a parallel between past and present when it comes to confronting the presence of difference. In fact, falling back on the metaphor of the letter of marque reveals that the exercise of violence cannot be separated from our deeds and behaviour: "The idea that the exercise of violence, in particular the practice of privateering, forms a fundamental axis of Mediterranean connections in the modern period, seems obvious to me. However, up to now this standpoint has not been adopted to conduct an overall examination of how different territories connect between them in the Mediterranean region."[1]

The set of material is enveloped in a kind of whispering from another time, the sound piece *Dante Alighieri-Inferno* (2022), which again creates a twist that pushes us out into temporal suspension. One inevitably thinks of the painting by Eugène Delacroix *Dante et Virgile aux enfers* [Dante and Virgil in Hell] (1822), with decomposing bodies surrounding the boat in which the two figures are sailing on Lake Averno. Bodies like those of the thousands of people drowned at sea, in this sea that separates two lands, just as its name—which means 'middle sea'—says. Bodies flung from cliffs for political or ideological

1. Douki, Caroline y Minard, Philippe, "Histoire globale, histoires connectées : un changement d'échelle", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 54-4 bis, 2007, pp. 7-21; Werner, Michael y Zimmermann, Bénédicte, "Beyond comparison: Histoire croisée and the challenge of reflexivity", History and Theory, vol. 45, 2006, pp. 30-50

reasons, bodies drowned in storms while making the crossing in search of a dream of dignity and bodies cast out from other lands out of fear of their very presence.

This piece began with a quote from the *Aeneid*, without forgetting its predecessor, Homer's *Iliad*, which best represents the fury and violence of these treacherous waters. It tells of Poseidon's betrayal of Zeus, always at the whim of Fates. In fact, this betrayal between peers is interesting, as one of the classical archetypes that continue to steer the course of the modern day. The project brings out the historical heritage that accompanies us and sets us apart, that gratuitous violence with which we deal with conflicts, and above all it denounces the nepotism with which we establish a relationship that is unequal from the start. Setting out from these precepts, it points out the lack of historical honesty and, above all, the monstrous way in which human beings relate to one another.

VETUS MARE

Tomás Andújar

The defeated Trojans who fled their city in flames, following Aeneas into the sunset as they left behind their burning homes, their parents' tombs and the altars to their gods, were the same people as those who will leave Libya tomorrow and head north, dazzled by the prospect of a brighter future. In 1939 the vanquished men and women who crowded together on ships setting sail from Alicante to Oran, from Maó to France, were essentially the same people as those who arrived in Mallorca, Almería or Murcia yesterday and last month after making the crossing on boats from Algeria.

The fertile sea that gave birth to our civilisation is crisscrossed with scars, exiles, defeats and uprootings. War, hunger, fanaticism, persecution, misery, exclusion and greed, the most destructive impulses and passions, fill the sails, work the oars and turn the propellers in an incessant back and forth across the old sea. The gods and vessels might come and go, the names of the ports, kings, ministers, weapons, tools and languages might change, but every single minute that the middle sea has existed, somebody somewhere has set sail, crushed by what they are leaving behind and fearful of what lies ahead. Tireless people and peoples from along the coast and from further inland forge vanishing paths over the sea as they cross, driven by the primordial human urge to survive, which knows neither good nor bad.

Traces of the deep memory of that passage can be found in the epic tale of Odysseus, which contains the seed of all following narratives, and in the story of Aeneas' wanderings, the mythical justification for the Roman Mediterranean Empire, as well as threading their way through the subtext of thousands of history books extolling national

glories, conquests and triumphs. But tales and treaties are dominated by fantasies and intrepid feats in which the heroes achieve their goals and triumph in the end, albeit suffering adversity and hardship along the way. The adage that history is written by the victors is true for official accounts and for much of literature, but it is not the whole truth. The conquerors' story might be the main tributary to the sea of memory, but the same sea is also fed by many other rivers, and time moulds currents and coasts, the sands of what happened and what endures.

The Dying Days of the Republic

Reading between the lines of the academic and literary history of the 20th century—a period whose page we are still waiting to turn—and overshadowed by the sheer volume of monstrosities of the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, we find another episode to add to the endless current of Mediterranean exiles displaced by war, the same current that carried the Trojans. From early February to the last day of March 1939, thousands of Spanish Republicans fled from the east coast of the peninsula and Menorca on board ships bound for North Africa, above all Algeria, then a province of France, a nation supposedly guided by the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The greatest exodus of Republicans fleeing the by now unstoppable advance of Franco's troops took place across the Pyrenees between January and February 1939, the year that would henceforth be celebrated as marking the final victory of the military uprising against the Republic. Some half a million people crossed the mountains in the depths of winter to seek exile in the neighbouring republic, which, despite having a leftwing government, had refused to give any support to their Spanish comrades and then responded to the avalanche of desperate refugees by interning most of them in concentration camps. After the

fall of Catalonia, however, the route across the Pyrenees was cut off, and the remaining Republican forces were trapped in the southeast corner of the peninsula.

From early February to late March, at least 65 ships, mostly small fishing boats and merchant vessels, as well as the odd large cargo ship, left from ports along the east coast, from Valencia down to Almería, bound for North Africa, mostly heading for Oran, the most Spanish of Algerian cities. This Republican exodus brought some 8,000 people to the French possessions in the Maghreb. In addition to civilian vessels, three cruisers, eight destroyers and several other smaller craft from the Republican fleet based in Cartagena also set sail in a southeasterly direction with some 3,800 soldiers and 400 family members on board. This episode in the flight of the fleet had consequences on the final chapter of the war, in that it drained the Republic's now tattered resources and swelled the ranks of the North African exiles by some 1,500 soldiers who refused to accompany their ships and the remaining soldiers back to Spain at the end of the conflict.

The port of Alicante was the most symbolic space, in terms of volume and human drama, of this agonising escape in the final days of the war, the narrow end of a blocked funnel, the Second Republic's last remaining scrap of land. Some 20,000 people, above all men who held compromising political or military positions, although without having been first in command, as well as women with children who were understandably fearful of the victors' ire, filled the quaysides as they waited for English and French ships to take them to safety. But few vessels arrived and most of those that did appear lacked captains bold enough to dodge Franco's naval blockade and rescue the defeated dregs of the losing side. One ship that has earned its page in history is the *Stanbrook*, which left Alicante for Oran on 28 March full to the brim with 3,000 people on board.

Valencian writer Max Aub described the death throes of the Republic in the port of Alicante in his novel *Campo de los almendros* [Almond Grove Camp], the last in his series on the Spanish Civil War. The book takes its title from the name of the concentration camp in which 15,000 men were interned after becoming trapped on the quayside and taken captive by Franco's troops on 1 April 1939, when Franco proclaimed that the remains of the Red Army had been captured and disarmed, thus bringing to an end the first act of the massacre.

Deseado's Memory

On a far smaller scale, and in somewhat different circumstances to those in Alicante, the Republican exodus from the Balearic Islands took place from Menorca. After resisting the military uprising in July 1936, the island had remained loyal to the democratic government despite being pounded by the Italian Aviazione Legionaria based on Mallorca. In the first days of February 1939, resistance finally crumbled.

Deseado Mercadal, a trained musician and committed member of the Socialist Party who had played an active role in the Republican cause as editor of the newspaper *Justicia Social* [Social Justice], published *La Guerra Civil en Menorca* [The Civil War in Menorca] in 1994, eleven years after publishing *Yo estuve en Kenadza. Nueve años de exilio* [I Was at Kenadza: Nine Years of Exile]. In both books, which can be read in reverse order as two parts of a single work, the author tells of his personal experience and keenly documents what happened around him on the island during the war, without ever shying away from revealing crimes committed by some on his own side, and then describes his forced exile in North Africa, where he suffered the arbitrary punishment of being imprisoned in a French concentration camp, where some 15,000 Spanish Republicans were interned for purely ideological reasons.

Deseado's harrowing experience is shot through with suffering—uprooting, dangers, anguish, humiliations, hunger and severe exploitation—but fortune saved him from the deadly fate of many of his fellow prisoners. He lived in hell but survived without any fatal burns; he shared the hardships of the prisoners toiling in the carbon mines in Kenadza, on the edge of the Algerian Sahara, close to the Moroccan border, but was saved by "the luck of being a musician", as he titled one of the chapters in his memoires of exile.

Yo estuve en Kenadza is a simple yet piercing account that provides valuable documentary evidence for a dark chapter in the story of the Republican exile and the Second World War that has remained in the shadows of history. Deseado recounted his own experience to give a voice to some of his less fortunate companions, such as Francisco Poza, a compatriot of his from Maó tortured to death at Hadjerat M'Guil punishment camp. Of the thousands of men imprisoned and condemned to forced labour by France in Algeria and Morocco—taken prisoner after crossing the sea in an attempt to free themselves from the repression of Spanish fascism or crossing the Pyrenees only to be deported to Africa—only a very few were able to set down their story in writing. And Deseado's memoires are some of the richest in detail and some of the most meticulously documented. By modestly self-publishing his book, he did his bit to help ensure that we never forget:

> There are still a few dozen of us Menorcans left who had to undergo the harsh punishment of exile. Any one of us could tell the painful story of those years which we would gladly wipe from our mind and spirit without a trace if such an act, in addition to being impossible, weren't also misguided and unjust, because

someone has tell those who weren't there about the unimaginable ordeal that so many thousands of us had to endure...

Because the stale stench of death brushed by all of us, shrouding some with its freezing cloak and passing others by, perhaps so that they might one day tell others about that piteous, fateful drama.

These words by Deseado Mercadal from his preface to *Yo estuve en Kenadza* encapsulate the purpose of writing his account. When he says "someone has tell those who weren't there", he suggests that memory is both a duty for those who experienced events firsthand and also a right for those who weren't there themselves but who need to learn about them as a matter of justice.

Aub, in the Footsteps of Aeneas and Ulysses

In the book that Daniel García Andújar has created for this exhibition, Deseado is centre stage. Although his is a minor personal story, a mere bubble in the course of the great river of the 20th century, neither particularly dramatic nor remarkably heroic, perhaps for that very reason it offers a fitting metaphor of the vicissitudes of thousands of men and women forced into exile. Deseado crossed the sea from Menorca to Algiers, but was turned away and put on board a ship bound for France, where he was interned in an open-air prison on the beach in Argelès, the largest and most shameful jail in that country's history. He only spent a single night there before escaping and stowing himself away on board a ship back to Algeria, where he ended up again a prisoner, this time in a concentration camp for Spanish, French and Central European leftwing sympathisers, together with Jews punished in accordance with the Nazis' race laws. Mercadal's story encapsulates the experience of hundreds of fellow Menorcans and tens of thousands of fellow Spaniards, and shares key features with all those caught up in the immemorial flow to which Daniel García Andújar dedicates «Letter of Marque».

The book on the Republican exile in North Africa and the exhibition as a whole are also a eulogy to memory as a pillar of cultures and a tool for justice, memory as a duty of survivors and a right of those who still have their life ahead of them.

Max Aub embodies this force of memory better than anyone. Born to Jewish parents—a German father and a French mother—he was, in this order, a writer, a Spaniard and a socialist, and as a playwright he became one of the leading intellectuals of the Second Republic. Staunchly committed to democracy and fiercely opposed to fascism, he held a series of important positions, including Secretary General of the Consejo Nacional del Teatro, and played a truly historic role as cultural attaché to the Spanish embassy in Paris by commissioning Alberto Sánchez, Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso to create artwork for the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris Expo. He personally handed Picasso the money to be paid to cover the costs of creating *Guernica*.

He left Spain in early 1939 and, once the icy welcome from Republican France had hardened into outright persecution and repression after the country fell to the Nazis, Aub was detained and deported to the concentration camp at Djelfa, in Algeria. He crossed the sea as a prisoner, like many of the Republicans imprisoned in the French camps in Africa, to join those who had come to the southern shores of the Mediterranean directly from Spain. Behind barbed wire, under the canvas of the military tents in which they lived in the middle of the stony high plateau of the Atlas Mountains, he began to write *Diario de Djelfa* [Djelfa Diary], a collection of poems on captivity, hunger, thirst and torture, as well as nostalgic and evocative memories of the Spain he had seen blossom and explode in under a decade. This raw, hard-hitting book full of screaming

wounds and burning rage was published in 1944 in Mexico, where Aub remained in exile for the rest of his life, after managing to leave Djelfa and board a ship to Casablanca in September 1942.

His tireless drive to tell the story of the Spanish tragedy led to a series of six books on the war under the heading *El laberinto mágico* [The Magic Labyrinth], starting in 1943 with *Campo cerrado* [Closed Camp] and ending in 1968 with *Campo de los almendros*, a masterpiece on the Spanish Civil War. In 1943, with several French camps in Africa still active, Aub published two short stories about Djelfa and the same year, with the Second World War still raging, he published *San Juan* [Saint John], a tragedy that captures the drama of the vanquished who have been uprooted from their land—in this case Jews, but which could easily be exiled Spaniards—a group of men and women wandering the Mediterranean in search of refuge, condemned to be foreigners wherever they go and who end up perishing in a shipwreck, welcomed into the arms of death, to whom no-one is a foreigner.

One of those trapped on the drifting boat asks another ill-starred companion:

> Do you really think this is a new path? That's where you're wrong! This is the same path as ever: Adam and Eve knew it well. Weren't they refugees themselves? Didn't God throw them out of Paradise? Or don't you believe in those stories? No? That's when the current started. Or didn't they belong to the same race as you?

In the Middle of the Earth, Our Sea: the Mediterranean, Mare Nostrum

The Spanish Republicans like Aub and Deseado, forced into exile and slavery in Algeria, followed a well-trodden path dating back thousands of years—the same path taken by hundreds of starving Menorcans decades before, the same path taken by Moriscos and Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain centuries before as a result of religious fanaticism, racism and political blindness. In the 16th century, Muslim pirates and corsairs from the south launched dozens of ferocious raids to pillage and plunder the coasts of Mallorca, Ibiza and Menorca that left a highly characteristic mark on how the islands were settled. In turn, in the 17th century, ambitious Christian sailors set sail from the Balearic Islands to plunder and wage war with the support of the crown. Later, Spain, France, Italy and Great Britain colonised North Africa, just as Muslims had invaded almost the entire Iberian Peninsula, just as Rome had conquered and assimilated all the lands washed by the Mediterranean and the rivers that feed it.

The history of our sea—the great sea of kingdoms, states and empires and the lesser sea of the common man and woman—contains everything, and everything must be remembered, including all the suffering and the cruelty of victors, the contradictions and vicissitudes of all that is just.

The life of Albert Camus (1913–1960) captures several of these paradoxes. French Algerian by birth, a *pied-noir*, he had Menorcan ancestry on his mother's side. He began writing as a journalist in his home city of Algiers and criticised the harsh treatment he saw being meted out to refugees fleeing the Spanish Civil War, a cause he had long sympathised with and praised, in contrast to the indifference of most of his compatriots. In addition, his defence of the rights of the Algerian population, second-class citizens in France's North African provinces, made him unpopular in certain sectors of French society. When the Algerian population launched a revolt against the French settlers, sparking a bloody terrorist war, he found himself in the crossfire, his anarchic pacifism deeply misunderstood. When the land of his birth split from his country,

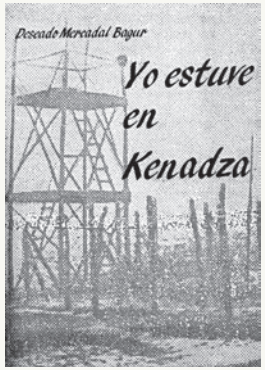
Camus was overwhelmed by a sense of being a foreigner, that deeply felt alienation of those who don't quite belong anywhere, the sorrow of returned exiles and those who live far away from where their heart lies, such as the Spaniards in Africa, France and Mexico who would greet each New Year with the hope that this year would see them return home and bring an end to a suffering remembered by no-one in their country.

Today, just as a hundred years ago and over the course of the last century, people of different races, religions, languages, customs, attire and knowledge cross the sea in an attempt to survive, on a quest to conquer or in search of riches. On the way, their paths cross with the persecuted, the hungry and the enslaved. They each carry with them the essence of their origin, like pollen stuck to their body, which they scatter when they reach their destination, only to pick up new pollen afresh when they arrive.

It was ever so, this is how life on the shores of the Mediterranean has been shaped since time immemorial. From north to south and vice versa, from east to west and west to east, men and women from all shores have weaved their way by chance across the indifferent sea, echoing words by Antonio Machado, who died shattered and exhausted, like so many others, in a port of exile.

Vicent Mestre, *Embarque de los moriscos en el puerto de Denia* [Moriscos Embarking at the Port of Denia], 1612-1613. Oil on canvas, 115 × 178 cm. Fundación Bancaja Collection (1); Vicent Mestre, *Desembarco de los moriscos en el puerto de Orán* [Moriscos Landing at the Port of Oran], 1612-1613. Oil on canvas, 115 × 178 cm. Fundación Bancaja Collection (2)

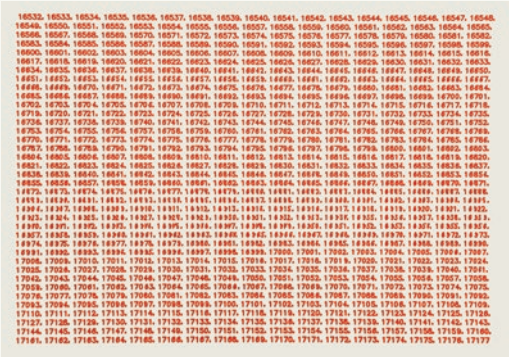
View of the port of Maó with the naval base on the left and the fortress of La Mola in the background, during the Civil War. *Diario Menorca* archive (1); The vessel *Le Mansour* in Oran, 1939 (2)



Deseado Mercadal, Argel, 1939. Courtesy of Mercadal Family (1); Cover of the book by Deseado Mercadal Bagur *Yo estuve en Kenadza* [I was in Kenadza], 1983. Courtesy of Mercadal Family (2); Kenadsa concentration camp, undated (3)

Daniel García Andújar, *Patente de corso. Atlas* [Letter of Marque. Atlas], 2022 (detail). Robotic drawing, photograph, digital print. Set of 64 pieces of different sizes. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

Daniel García Andújar, *Mare Nostrum*, *al-Baḥr al-Mutawāsiṭ*, البحر المتوسط, *Ak Deniz*, 2022. Print on paper, 43×70,5 cm. Courtesy of the artist



Daniel García Andújar, *Mediterraneum. Atlas. Ports*, 2022 (detail). Robotic drawing, printed on paper. Set of 163 prints, 29,7 × 42 cm each. Courtesy of the artist (1); Daniel García Andújar, *Migrantes desaparecidos registrados en el Mediterráneo desde 2014* [Missing migrants recorded in the Mediterranean since 2014], 2022 (detail). Robotic drawing, printed on paper. Set of 43 prints, 29,7 × 42 cm each. Courtesy of the artist (2)

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Marina Fokidis

We Are Here: Where?

> People everywhere—under very different conditions—are asking themselves, Where are we? The question is historical not geographical. What are we living through? Where are we being taken? What have we lost? How to continue without a plausible vision of the future? Why have we lost any view of what is beyond a lifetime?
>
> The well-heeled experts answer: Globalization. Post-Modernism. Communications Revolution. Economic Liberalism. The terms are tautological and evasive. To the anguished question of Where are we? the experts murmur: Nowhere!
>
> —'Where Are We?', John Berger, October 2002[1]

I met Daniel García Andújar sometime in early 2016. It was at dusk, on a weekday, yet I don't remember the exact month. Those times were more about numbers of people and tents. We met outdoors, on a Mediterranean shore, at dock E1 in the port of Piraeus, in the midst of five thousand people who were trying to find a tent to sleep in and some food to eat. It was cold and windy—the way it gets in Athens every winter—despite its reputation among tourists as a city of eternal summer. Most of the people, except the few in our company and the ones on the rescue team, were fleeing Syria. The situation was unmanageable 'here' and 'there'—and in most 'everywheres' (with a few exceptions). Every day, the number of individuals arriving in Greece

1. John Berger, *Hold Everything Dear: Dispatches on Survival and Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007).

would double or triple. There was no space for them to be hosted, not enough tents, not enough food, no governmental strategy and no financial means to formulate one so as to properly face this unforeseen wave of lives escaping, by the thousands, from the horrors of war. There was just an empty cement dock with a few barracks—here and there—and lots of open public space. The same public space that was later bought (after the refugees were 'removed') by the Chinese multinational shipping company COSCO, which now operates from the Greek port.

At the time, Greece was in its severest moment of financial crisis: on the verge of collapse and under siege from the International Monetary Fund because of its sovereign debt, the country was struggling to 'make it' and stay afloat (like the thousands of people that were crossing the sea to arrive in it). Austerity measures were compounded by the refugee crisis, while, at the same time, the European Union was (once again) guarding its northern borders from these 'new invaders' in need. Eventually, a few wealthier northern countries (fortunately) accepted more refugees than others, but they suffered (and perhaps are still suffering) a political cost exacted by their own voters. The subsequent founding and proliferation of a number of extreme-right parties and governments in Europe may not be entirely inseparable from the (justified) acceptance and (fruitful) integration of non-Western refugees into the so-called European continent. Lately, these countries are also beginning to witness xenophobia —especially against refugees and immigrants from the broader Arabic world. Articulated (loudly) by 'extreme left' movements and other politically polarized *morphómata*, and not just from the authoritarian ultra-right wing, the real hidden message of this vote is intolerance of different cultures, skin colours and religions—even if it may come across differently, masked as solidarity with other (non-Muslim) ethnic groups.

The reason we met was the bi-locational documenta 14. At the end of 2013, Adam Szymczyk's idea of sharing the 'influential' quinquennial between Athens and Kassel was accepted by an international jury of renowned art professionals operating in the name of documenta gGmbH, and there we were: Daniel García Andújar as a participating artist, an 'emancipated' archivist (which he is) searching for correlations between the practices of imperialism(s) and colonization(s); and me, a member of documenta 14's core team, working—as soon as Szymczyk set foot in Athens—towards facilitating this challenging and historical exchange between Athens and Kassel, between southern and northern Europe, between South and North, as well as other orientational binaries.

On those evenings, we weren't going to Piraeus 'to make art'. How could anyone take advantage of a large number of landless, exhausted, 'illegal', 'undesirable' individuals who found themselves on a port dock in the middle of winter having survived the atrocities of war(s), the ruthlessness of smugglers and the waves of the Mediterranean Sea? (Unfortunately, some mega-star artists did just that, but they were not part of our group or of documenta 14.) We were going there, perhaps, to grasp the bare reality and comprehend, at a gut level, how the world works. We were finding it hard not only to be on the safe side of these parallel coinciding 'times' and 'histories' of the human condition but also to be citizens of a part of the world that makes living in other parts so unbearable—to the point of prompting tons of people to risk their lives in order to change their living conditions. The least we could do was to bear witness. And maybe also help a tiny bit where we could, bringing tents, engaging with people and their needs and occasionally prompting and performing private (unspectacular) gestures as a reaction to the unbearable situation. Thomas More's *Utopia* thrown into the Mediterranean Sea, in Piraeus on the night of 11

March 2016, was one such gesture performed by the artist Ross Birrell. I will never forget the sight of the book twisting in the air and finally sinking into the sea in front of a big boat—filled with distressed salt-covered people—just visible on the horizon coming in. For a while after this, we stayed completely silent, observing our surroundings. It felt as if time had slowed down in a peculiar way so as to make every detail visible.

Indeed utopia is not merely a distant island; it is also the act of mapping, all together, a discursive and territorial space. The question is how to make these spaces correspond to reality, and how to provide an itinerary on the map for any argument they raise. The port of Piraeus, the port of hope, as it was called by many refugees, was the second stop on their long journey. And it definitely seemed like the opposite of More's 'perfect imagery' of the world. There was not an inch of usable indoor or outdoor space that was not occupied by some form of makeshift accommodation. People were sleeping everywhere, and the air was filled with a sense of uncertain 'waiting'. Yet, as Pier Paolo Pasolini stated, 'There is no despair without some small hope.' I remember a prevailing sentiment of expectancy, engraved on everyone's faces, that something would change from day to day, from hour to hour, and eventually countries with solid economies and the financial means for support would allow them in. Even though everyone knew that the borders towards central and northern Europe were hermetically sealed, they were not ready to accept it. How could anyone make sense of that reality anyhow? How could a series of 'semi-constructed' wars and the subsequent impoverishment of most of the population of this planet (for the benefit of a tiny minority) be comprehended, even more so by the direct victims?

Perhaps the reason why all those people arriving in the port did not board the buses that would take them into the state-organized refugee camps was because they

wanted to reassert ownership of their own existence. 'Demonstrating' with their own 'suffering bodies' in plain sight on the docks of a major Mediterranean port could have been their way of protesting for their basic human rights. At the same time, as most of them were coming from topographies where democracy was a subject of constant struggle, they knew what an official camp of this sort might be or become, so they were hesitant and mistrustful of this option. Unfortunately, in many cases they were right. Eventually this 'protest', their impromptu and ephemeral settlement *en plein air*, solely dependent on support from private individuals, activists and other alternative rescue teams, struck up its own routine, which was much more humane than that of many of the official state camps. It was a pure exchange between all those involved: one of those rare moments when love overcomes economy and politics, and all other forms of injustice. When solidarity wins out over barbarism. Yet it did not last long—as these moments usually don't. Witnessing those nights on the port, as a result of the war in Syria (on top of other wars) was an important warning and a reminder of the continuum of hegemony. It informed our work and our lives on multiple and very profound levels.

At the time, García Andújar was working on two projects for documenta 14. One was a series of 82 artefacts evoking the 82 engravings created by the Spanish painter Francisco Goya (1746–1828) between 1810 and 1820 secretly criticizing the violence deployed against the population during the wars between the Napoleonic empire and Spain. The other was an image-text glossary of fascist grammar called *LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii* (2016), shedding light on the military junta in Greece and its connections to other dictatorships. Both projects were conceived as a mode of visual and performative resistance against violence in any shape or form. Similar to the aforementioned situation of a possibly unconscious or secret protest conducted by the

refugees who wanted to make their situation as visible as possible in the port of Piraeus, Daniel's strategy was (and still is) to expose the operating systems and demonstrate their flaws—making them this way perhaps more vulnerable to be defeated and changed by a justified revolution. By bringing the Goya engravings into the 3D printing era, and by translating the fascist language and archives of the dictatorship into the form of a little giveaway book, he highlighted how wars, like any other system of violent domination over others, continue relentlessly not only in their literal form but also through economic means and cultural imperialism.

We Are Here: Nowhere

Today, we find ourselves together again (García Andújar and I) in this text, somewhere between two Mediterranean shores, in Greece and Majorca. By now, many of the people we met in Piraeus will have managed to arrive in their 'desired' destinations—possibly after suffering to the maximum of their capacity and spending their life savings and more to the illegal networks of human traffickers. Some might have been fully integrated, while others may be disappointed and nostalgic for the lands they left behind, which may no longer exist. Some others may have been denied asylum and deported back to where they came from, for better or for worse. The water is the narrative of their lives. The 2015 refugee crisis, the aftermath of the so-called Arab Spring and the Syrian war, was a continuation of many other forced displacements throughout the history of humankind. To list them all would take ages and occupy a great deal of space—and paper.

This time (amongst other works and actions), García Andújar is taking the anti-monument of Poseidon on a journey to the middle of 'nowhere' and at the same time to a very precise point on the map. Is the peculiar, mobile and uncertain 'geography' of the Mediterranean really a 'nowhere'? Or is this nowhere a trait imposed on the sea, which is constantly oscillating between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, and where the violent displacement of people has become the norm and the ultimate score for 'growth' and 'progress'?

People are constantly moving—by force or by choice—through these waters that divide 'them' as much as they connect 'them'. Yet identities are not free-floating; they are limited by boundaries and borders. The Frontex patrol is as much a part of the Mediterranean as tourist operators, merchants and lifeguards are. For every hundred people swimming in the clear blue waters in the morning there are a similar number of people struggling to stay afloat or even drowning at night. Hope and despair, desire and uprooting, violence and peace, loss and memory, redemption and order, the social and the individual: these all add to the fauna of its seabed.

The Mediterranean has been and continues to be shaped by overlapping forms of colonialism, besides the south-to-south alliances. Wars, conditions of slavery, rape, political violence and oppression in every possible manifestation have never ceased to exist in the region and force people to keep constantly searching for a chance to survive. Many do not make it—they die, or are left to die, by the port authorities in the open sea. More and more European governments are not reporting or even counting the number of dead in 'their' waters. This is the new political strategy. The depths of the Mediterranean Sea are filled with the 'unburied dead'. How can we honour them? The notion of *convivencia* attributed to the coexistence of the three cultures and religions in the Mediterranean is often cited as a highlight of pluralism and mutual respect. Yet, at the same time, European leaders have reduced immigration quotas and tightened security on their land and sea borders. New surveillance technologies

and draconian police control of the borders are now the flip side of the historical multiculturalism in the region.

And why Poseidon? What does it mean today—in an era of regular deadly sea crossings—to commemorate or even worship an audacious god in the body of a hyper-muscular man who can kill us in a split second if he gets angry?

Poseidon was a bipolar god: on the one hand, he created islands and calmed the seas for travellers, while, on the other, he is the god that watched over the colonists, blessing the waters and offering approbation for their conquests. When offended, or simply ignored, he supposedly struck the ground with his trident and caused earthquakes, drownings and shipwrecks. He hated Ulysses and did everything possible to prevent him from returning home to Ithaca for years. Today, military-grade weapons from multiple countries have been named after Poseidon. Examples include the Boeing P-8 Poseidon aircraft and the Russian Poseidon, a nuclear-powered underwater drone. Domination, violent displacement, seizure, possession, patriarchy, white supremacy and appropriation are some of the mythological foundations that 'Western democracy' was founded on. And even if habits and connotations shift over time, these notions are not completely alien to its formation and evolution. 'Abductions' of colours, of rituals, of cultures, of polyphony, of wealth, of 'marbles', of histories and historical objects, of people, of homelands, of human dignity have been performed for the sake of the establishment of an 'enlightened' world. How can we find ways to fight exclusion?

In setting sail with Poseidon on a boat formerly used by refugees, García Andújar proposes, among other things, a catharsis! There is no singular entity or event. Everything is connected with everything else, and it is not easy to unravel and reweave those entanglements in different ways. As Paul Virilio put it, writing about technological progress, 'the invention of the ship was also the invention of the shipwreck'. The gesture of taking the idol of Poseidon on a kind of procession offers an interruption of the vicious cycle of successive crimes. It is an opportunity for deep reflection on the past and, at the same time, a 'reboot' creating a future (or many futures) that diverges from its 'prescribed' course and the control of hegemonic forces.

By mischievous coincidence this text is being written a few days before the opening of documenta 15. (Seven years have gone by since that first meeting with Daniel García Andújar.) In recent months, the few Palestinian artists that are participating in the important exhibition as well as its artistic directors, the Indonesian collective Ruangrupa, have been facing racism in the form of digital and, recently, physical aggression. In April, a set of stickers put on the wall of Ruangrupa's headquarters read 'Freedom instead of Islam! No compromises with barbarism!' and 'Solidarity with Israel'. On 28 May, intruders vandalized one of the installations by a Palestinian artist and left behind a fire extinguisher, as well as cryptic death threats sprayed on the wall. This is extremely alarming to the people taking part in documenta 15—even more so because Kassel, where the exhibition has historically been situated, is just a two-hour drive from Hanau, where a right-wing extremist murdered nine people in a racist killing spree in 2020. Where are we? Nowhere … and that is not meant in geographical terms.

Where do we start if we want to open up a possibility for discursive change to occur? Whose experiences are being narrated, by whom and why? How can we fight asymmetries and unjustified hierarchies in these 'meta' colonial times? How can we respond to the popularity of far-right, authoritarian, nationalist governmental morphologies? What about the formation of one strong alliance that bypasses national restrictions as we have known them so far, and that responds to a new commons based on empathy and resonance shared between specific

localities? What if a set of new 'connectivities' based on common 'worries', as well as a fresh unity based on the notion of 'lack' instead of 'power', were more appropriate and more inclusive?

Everywhere we turn, in the past or the present, at the top or the bottom, on the left or the right, we find wars, a series of endless conquests for control of global wealth and resources and dominion over people. Our histories are filled with crimes that are constantly multiplying at an unbelievable speed. Enough of bloody anniversaries commemorating a string of deadly exercises of power! What we need is a clear space to 'think' and, perhaps, the creation of 'reverse' anniversaries! This exhibition might be one of those.

Letter of Marque
Daniel García Andújar

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