

Editorial-Creative Writing and Arts

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The Mediterranean is as much a “territory of imagination,” as Serenella Iovino says in her introduction, as a geographical location. Hence the enigmatic, colourful mirage on this issue’s cover, a mural by Malagan painter Santiago Fernandez Aragüez, entitled “Ilusión óptica en el mar”—an optical illusion in the sea. In the Mediterranean, sea and land are interdependent, history, myth and the present feed into each other, and while the landscape is heavily manipulated and transformed throughout the centuries (see the introduction), its inhabitants may nevertheless insist on their strong sense of place and identity. It is in this context that the mirage of a bright pink-and-orange town may suddenly emerge from the waves, to evoke the mythical reality of the region.

Most essays in this issue explore the complexity of the Mediterranean in an academic manner. This time, the Creative Writing and Art section decided to opt for a more explicit focus on regional, popular and folk expressions. These forms of art often bring out the personal, mythical, spiritual and surreal dimensions that exceed the official discourses on national or regional identity. Building on a long tradition in which the environment itself was endowed with mythical and spiritual meaning, the art in this issue tries to capture the people’s intimate experience of the sensual, often cruel spaces they inhabit and labour on an everyday basis. This alternative sense of space—a dwelling perspective, as Timothy Ingold might say—is crucial to understand this region that exceeds all one-dimensional national or cultural definitions.

Artist Santiago Fernandez Aragüez (1950) was born and raised in Vélez-Málaga, Andalusia. He studied Industrial Engineering, Teaching, Fine Arts, Philosophy and Physical Education, while he simultaneously built a successful career as an Olympic hockey-player. He has exhibited his work in Spain and abroad, and already received the Premio Nacional Ejército de Pintura in 1978. He is also well-known for his colourful wall paintings for public buildings, such as schools; in this way, by creating a direct communication with his audience, he lets his work to be a part of communal life. His art is often concerned with the landscape of his native region, Axarquía. Aragüez supports schools and education in many different ways. He has been working within the educational field for some decades, as a teacher and in different advisory, managerial and academic functions. For a good overview of his remarkable work, see <http://www.artnet.com/artists/fernando+de+la+rosa/past-auction-results>

A different approach can be found in Carme Casulá’s poetic photographic exploration of the dark deep heart of the Mediterranean landscape—literally. The Mediterranean is a highly unstable geological area, but it is not just volcanoes that remind us of the fact that the region is built on, and depends on, a violent, living underworld. For centuries, miners have worked in the dangerous subterranean

complexes to ensure the region's economic survival. Casulá shows that the lives of the Spanish miners are shaped by their life-long underground labour—and she can only express this intimate link between human life and deep environment through poetic, even dreamlike images.

For those of us who have not had the luck to travel the Mediterranean in person, we offer you a few photos made by an Italian traveler, Christian Arpaia, who explored the region as a sailor and mountain biker, impressed by its instability and multiplicity. Arpaia (Pompeii, 1969) is an architect and a photographer. He has worked in Naples, Milan, and Venice, collaborating in projects directed by prestigious architects such as Renzo Piano and Rem Koolhaas. A collector of places, a passionate reader, and a sailor, he's a practitioner of extreme mountain biking and tries to orient himself to the stars. This ardent traveler tells us that his pictures aim at capturing the Mediterranean presences in South-Italy, and he explains: "These presences include elemental instability, natural-cultural metamorphoses, and silences." The pictures of his *Suite Meridiana* were taken in the Bay of Naples (except the Trees/Nomadic Presences 2, which evoke Panarea, Aeolian Islands).

In addition to the visual art, you will find a unique story that invites you to experience the Maltese sensual landscape, and the traditional religious discourse that marks Maltese culture. Its author, professor Oliver Friggieri (Floriana, Malta, 1947), is a very well-known, often awarded Maltese writer, and one of the leading figures in Maltese literature and language. After studying Maltese, Italian and Philosophy, he obtained his PhD at the Royal University of Malta (1978), where he became full professor of the Department of Maltese in 1990. He has established a Maltese publishing house (Klabb Kotba Maltin), became editor of the Journal of Maltese Studies and of international literary circles, in addition to his many other contributions to Maltese literary life. He has published numerous books of poetry, literary criticism, short stories, biographies, and translations into Maltese. Among his publications is *The History of Maltese Literature*, and the first full-scale dictionary of literary terms in Maltese (1996), which serves as a handbook of Maltese literature. Professor Friggieri is a pioneer of Maltese literature and language in different ways: in 1985, he wrote the first oratorio in Maltese, organised the first National Congress on Maltese Culture (1989) and wrote the first cantata in Maltese. For his work, he received numerous national and international awards, and he was appointed Member of the National Order of Merit (Government of Malta, 1999).

The story we were kindly allowed to publish in this issue is a translation of a Maltese story set in the particular Maltese environment, which is here evoked through the intimate experience of two of its local inhabitants, a mother and her son. The story sketches the natural environment as intertwined with traditional local customs, including a strong sense of religion, that shape family life. Though Maltese culture is unique, our readers may be seduced in imagining this landscape through Santiago Fernandez Aragüez' bright, mythical colours, even if the Maltese story offers a less bright and more painful impression of Mediterranean life. However, both art works foreground the multiple layers of Mediterranean life: the sensuality of its landscape, the troubles of

everyday life, and its spiritual and mythological dimensions. We hope that the colourful mosaic of this Creative Writing and Art section will convey that vibrant complexity.