MeLa Books

MUSEUM MULTI-PLICITIES

Field Actions and Research by Design

edited by
Luca Basso Peressut
Cristina F. Colombo
and Gennaro Postiglione

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Acknowledgments

"The Memory of the Sea": Exhibiting a Museum

→ **ANNA CHIARA CIMOLI**

AFTERWORD BY DARIO CIEOL

→ **SERENDIPITY AND THE SEA MEMORY MUSEUM**

In order to analyse the "The Memory of the Sea" project, I have to take a step back and briefly describe how I discovered into this unique place and the multilayered stories it tells.

The main focus of my research within the MeLa Project concerns migration museums and their interpretations: their communication strategies, layout, as well as the participatory practices they do—or do not—encourage (Cimoli 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b). My interest, in particular, concerns the way these museums represent recent and contemporary immigration, blending it with more general anthropological concepts such as migration, mobility, the perceptions of the frontiers, citizenship, identity, etc. (Basso Peressut and Pozzi 2012; Basso Peressut, Lanz, and Postiglione 2013; Ferrara 2012; Whitehead, Eckersley, and Mason 2012; Noack 2013).

Although the world of migration museums is a very diverse one, it is still possible to find a few common patterns. Simplifying a little, I would argue that many of these museums—which grew from the reconstruction or the restoration of historical premises where the history of emigration took place—rely on the historical charm of the building (Baur 2009). They often hint at milieu reconstructions, which reveal a certain taste for Titanic-like interiors and seem to be much appreciated by audiences. In Germany, and in northern Europe in general, where heritage tourism from the USA is quite common, this is quite a general trend, often comprising parties in 19th century costume and other initiatives of this kind (Macdonald 2013; Teulières and Toux 2008).

PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 1.19 — *"The Memory of the Sea," Museo Preistorico Etnografico "L. Pigorini," Rome, Italy (1–15 December 2012). Photo by Mariella Brenna.*

Other very common features in these museums are their focus on archives and genealogy, which translates as some kind of genealogical epidemic, with the addition of the layout genre "old luggage plus screen," dictated by the desire to refer to a somewhat romantic past, without neglecting contemporary technologies. This way, curators seem to think, "we won't deceive anybody."

But what about the other side of the coin? What about the countries emigrants are leaving from today? In fact, most European migration museums were created, more or less with a delay of a decade, in reaction to those in the USA, Canada and Australia. This story was written first in the "new worlds" and at a later stage in the countries of origin. It is a matter of shifting the point of view. Who keeps track of contemporary emigration, for example from northern Africa to Europe? Artists, of course, and this is the first and maybe the most obvious answer: putting contemporary art in a prime position is the choice made, for example, by the Cité de l'Histoire de l'Immigration in Paris (Renard and Poinsot 2011; Cimoli and Buonasorte 2012). Families also keep a living memory of emigration, but on a very personal and intimate level. This becomes public discourse only when emigration turns into a tragedy.

It was evident since the beginning of my exploration that underlying this main research field was another one, somewhat more difficult to investigate, but in my opinion, just as interesting and important, and definitely complementary to the first. The main questions surrounding this parallel research were: how can a country keep and implement a museological memory of emigration in real time, and through what tools? Who is in charge of documenting, cataloguing, preserving and studying it? What technical devices, and more than that, what cultural process could facilitate this memory preservation? What is the role of museums in this regard?

During a seminar concerning the "The Journey as Rebellion: A New Aesthetics of the Frontier" by Italian blogger and writer Gabriele Del Grande,[1] I came across the story of Mohsen Lihidheb and his Sea Memory Museum, located in Zarzis, in southern Tunisia. I then started doing a preliminary research about that museum, dictated only by my curiosity.

When the call for ideas, "Idee migranti," was published by the Museo Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini (Luigi Pigorini National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography) in Rome in 2012, I immediately thought that it might be a good occasion to display what the Sea Memory Museum is and to deepen the reflection on this quite exceptional place and the multiple meanings it conveys. The call for ideas was launched as a contest for installations, performances and conferences to be organised in parallel with the exhibition "(S)oggetti migranti" (20th September 2012–4th March 2013), curated in the framework of the European Project "Réseau Européen des Associations de Diasporas & Musées d'Ethnographie"

(READ-ME 2). My proposal, concerning a photographic exhibition as well as a conference, was accepted.

After the first display in Rome (1st–15th December 2012), the exhibition moved at the Galata–Sea and Migrations Museum in Genoa. On that occasion, a conference was organised as well. Another step of my project's itinerary was held in Bergamo, at the Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art (GAMeC). The last stage so far took place at the Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines in Dudelange (Luxembourg), from 8th May to 27th July 2014. This event is described in the last paragraph of this chapter by the Centre's curator, Dario Cieol.

→ **WHAT THE SEA REMEMBERS**

Mohsen Lihidheb gathers and assembles in the Sea Memory Museum objects, turning them into installations that are subject to continuous change and dynamic interpretation. These objects include shells, fish skeletons, ropes, bottles, toys, clothes, anything interesting brought in by the sea. The museum therefore represents an artistic operation, and not just a work of preservation.

Even though the history of the *harraga* (the undocumented, or "illegal" emigrants) is not the main focus of the Sea Memory Museum, though this narrative still plays an enormous part. The encounter with Mamadou, the corpse of one of the emigrants who could not reach Europe and drowned en route, somehow marked a turning point in the collection. The sea currents brought him back to Africa, back from where he left. Lihidheb organised the burial of Mamadou and created a sculpture in the museum dedicated to him, which now acts as a polar star amongst the collection's objects.

Sometimes, the making of these installations turns them into performances, testimonial actions, or some sort of laic rituals in a memory of the missing. This is the case, for example, for what Lihidheb called the "Marriage of the Siren." One day, Lihidheb had found a little red jacket with black embroidery on the seashore. Its absolute elegance and femininity, but also the emptiness and unkept promises it evoked, presented an open question to him. He therefore organised a laic marriage, so as to give to the "siren" what she had been deprived of by an abrupt interruption.

Improvised and conceived in the absence of the public, such actions become substitutes, compensations which might fill the void left by death, and aid in the grieving process on behalf of those who cannot do so, with no grave to speak of. As Lihidheb recalls:

> One day I came across a red, embroidered bolero, such as a bullfighter's or that of a tiger tamer, recently deposited by the waves on the beaches of El-bibane and probably belonged to a girl of the group of the *harraga*, the illegal immigrants. Then I felt a sharp pain at the thought of this victim, still a child, innocent, in the prime of life. I took the jacket with a lot of respect and put it on a long tree trunk that I had already lifted on the roof of my car.

1   The seminar was organised in the framework of the Teatro degli Incontri Festival, and took place at the Casa della Carità (House of Charity) in Milan from 4th–6th June 2012.

As if to signal an extraordinary load, I drove very slowly, with no sudden movements, and when I crossed the city of Zarzis to reach my village, Soui-hel, I honked all the way as in a real wedding procession. People looked at me surprised, although they are used to my folly. In front of my museum, the noisy procession paused a sign of great respect for this new fairy, who came into an area of peace and dreaming. (Lihidheb 2013, 36–37)

This text, as well as poems and other shorts prices of prose, were recently published in Germany in a little book entitled *Mamadou et le silence de la mer* (2013). Writing, in fact, is also an essential part of Lihidheb's creativity. Blogs seem to be just the perfect place to host his reflections and thoughts.[2]

Installations, performances, poems, blogs are all part of the same "super-curatorial" project, the complexity of which struck me profoundly. Simplifying slightly, I would summarise the main features of the Sea Memory Museum as follows:

→ Cross-border, transnational dimension. There are comings and goings from Africa to Europe, from Tunisia to Italy and vice-versa. The direction of contemporary migrations by boat in that part of the Mediterranean, northbound, is here reversed. Things go back to Africa that didn't want to leave the continent. A mixture of consumerism, despair, or nonchalance as in the case of the bottles thrown into the water is interpreted here, and without any form of judgment but through the lens of art, empathy and creativity.

→ Private/public dimension: where does the *private* collection end, where does the *museum* begin? We may call it a contemporary *wunderkammer*, but unlike the ancient *wunderkammern*, here the educational aspect is very important: children from schools go there to see the dolphin's skull, as well as the messages in the bottles.

→ An absolutely cost-free gesture. The museum is open to everybody, is free, and does not depend on funding whatsoever.

→ Intertwining of different linguistic media, corresponding to different stages of the interpretative work: environmental action (collecting/gathering); visual art (assemblage/sculpture); poetry (as some sort of ex-post catalogue).

→ Dynamic dimension, which means no assemblage or exhibit is fixed; everything is subject to constant re-organisation and re-interpretation. In this respect, real curatorial work is done over and over, since rethinking the collection in a dynamic way is at the core of all museum work.

2   See websites: http://zarziszitazarzis.blogspot.com; http://bastaharraga-boughmiga.blogspot.it; http://zarzisasppz.blogspot.it; http://azizi-bouazizi.skyrock.com (in arabic); http://boughmiga.skyblog. com. News about the museum can also be found at http://art.artistes-sf.org/mohsen, and http://zarzis-sea.skyblog.com.

How to display such complexity in an exhibition? It would have been interesting, if ambitious, to work on the same multilayered language as that of the Sea Memory Museum, but this would have required more time and space. The choice was to describe the museum through the eyes of two different photographers, so as to suggest, visually, the multiplicity of possible interpretations of the place. I selected the work of two photographers—Alessandro Brasile and Mattia Insolera[3]—mostly due to their different approaches to Lihidheb's museum and artistic process. The contrast between the two photographic languages, or visions, represented in my opinion, a means of capturing the complexity I knew would inevitably be sacrificed in the little gallery space—a mezzanine in the Oceania section of the Pigorini Museum with just one usable wall on which to hang the pictures.

Brasile, in his feature dating from 2007, commissioned by the weekly magazine *Il Venerdì di Repubblica*,[4] describes the museum like an anthropologist, emphasising the connection between the museum itself and the territory—stressing in particular the inclusion of nature. The open-air museum is represented in its chaos, much as a workshop where things happen constantly—a studio more than a gallery. Messy, wild, "dirty," in Brasile's view the museum is is a place where nature and human meet, not always peacefully. Contradictions, frictions between human's desires, as well as destiny and pain: no easy happy end is available here. Through the pictures, the visitor can imagine the attempt to make sense, over and over: Lihidheb's incessant work is nothing but an empathic attempt to inflate meaning where there seems to be none. Dispersed objects find a provisional harmony when assembled; the emphasis is on the process of meaning-making and re-making over and over.

Mattia Insolera's reportage in Zarzis is part of a series called *The Path of the Righteous Man*, inscribed in a broader project called "Transmediterranea" (2010).[5] In his pictures, a high emotional temperature and a strong sense of the sacred are displayed. Time seems to be suspended and the atmosphere perfectly still. A silent tension animates the images. Here Lihidheb is neither a workman nor a craftsman but a man of compassion, a lay celebrant. He gives form to chaos, turns death into life. He is a *modulor*: a contemporary "homo ad circulum et ad quadratum." His activity is put in dialogue with that of Vincenzo Lombardo, the gravedigger in Lampedusa, his brother in compassion with a similar sense of responsibility towards the dead, to whom he dedicated a touching poem (Lihidheb 2013, 77–78).

I then contacted a film-maker based in Strasbourg, Fitouri Belhiba, a friend of Lihidheb's, also from Zarzis. He agreed to participate in the exhibition with a video from 2004, *Sacrées bouteilles*, to be broadcast in a loop.
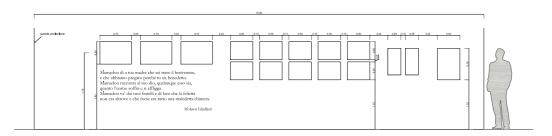
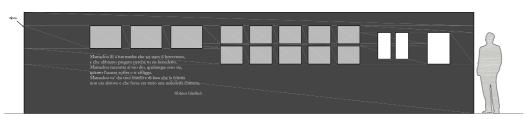3   See websites: http://www.alessandrobrasile.com, and http://www.mattiainsolera.net.

4   The photographs were displayed in 2007 at the SalinaDocFest: a festival of documentary films held every summer in Salina, Sicily.

5   The photograph feature was done in collaboration with Medici Senza Frontiere (Doctors without Borders) and published on *E!*, the Emergency magazine.

IMGS. 1.21–23 — *"The Memory of the Sea," Museo Preistorico Etnografico "L. Pigorini," Rome, Italy. Photos by Anna Chiara Cimoli.*

IMG. 1.20 — *"The Memory of the Sea," Museo Preistorico Etnografico "L. Pigorini," Rome, Italy. Layout of the exhibition by Anna Chiara Cimoli.*

Regarding the budget, the time and the human resources available, to-gether with the MeLa group, we decided to create a very simple and clear layout, based on an ideal itinerary: leading from a short introductory text, which would explain the context, the route would continue to Brasile's pictures; then to Insolera's; then to an excerpt of a poem by Lihidheb, dedicated to Mamadou in adhesive letters. Belhiba's video would be the last step.[6]

The ten pictures by Brasile were hung close to each other in two super-posed rows. This solution, negotiated with the photographer himself, offered the visitor—though maybe not consciously—a panorama of the museum from morning to sunset: exactly the time it had taken to do the shooting.

The three pictures by Insolera, printed in bigger dimension (50x70 cm against 40x50 cm), were hung with a wider interval. Showing three di-mensions of Lihidheb's work—objects, landscape, human being—these images gave a thoroughly different interpretation from those of Brasile by evidencing the sacred, somehow non-temporal atmosphere of the place, as well as some sort of magical, spiritual component. The choice of the pictures was also discussed with the photographer.

The opening seminar, which took place on 1st December 2012, was the occasion for a dialogue with Alessandro Brasile and Gabriele Del Grande, introduced by Vito Lattanzi, director of the museum. Brasile described his experience of the Sea Memory Museum, and commented on his photographic translation of the place, also showing pictures that were not featured in the exhibition. Del Grande's talk was based mainly on materials from his blog (http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com). His first-hand knowledge, acquired during time spent in Arab countries as a journalist and writer, as well as his deep knowledge of Arabic, made Del

6   Mariella Brenna helped me both in designing and in mounting the exhibition. I am also thankful to architects Carmen Carbone and Marco Muscogiuri, who gave me useful insights about the layout, and to Rosa Anna Di Lella, who took care of the organisation and the communication.

Grande's talk very enriching. His reflections were focused on the concept of the representation of the frontier: through texts of pop or rap songs; slogans sung in stadiums in the occasion of football matches; viral videos on the web; and other forms of "unauthorised" mass culture expressions. Through these elements, Del Grande gave an overview of what he calls the "aesthetic of the frontier."[7] In particular, he analysed the role of the web and of social media in spreading information regarding emigration to Europe from certain African countries.

The second stage of the exhibition took place at the Galata–Sea and Migration Museum in Genoa (6th–28th February 2013),[8] and in a sense, represented a reproduction of the previous one, but with a different pace. The bigger space here allowed a completely different layout, narrative and highlights. The space was a huge rectangular room with windows facing south. A new image by Mattia Insolera was added: one with Mohsen Lihidheb in prayer in front of an installation made out of the clothes found on the seashore. This picture, printed in bigger dimensions than the others (120x90 cm), was given the place of honour, just at the end of the room, facing the entrance.

The opening seminar, entitled "The representation of migrations in the Mediterranean at the time of the Arab Spring," hosted my reflection about the place of the Sea Memory Museum among the migration museums and the sites of consciousness—stressing its peculiarity and its uniqueness—as well as a speech by the freelance journalist, Stefano Pasta,[9] whose reflections about migration and its representation in newspapers and the media has been crucial to my research. Pasta discussed the role played by social media and other communicative tools during the Maghreb revolutions.

The third step of the exhibition took place at the GAMeC, the Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art in Bergamo, from 3rd–7th July 2013 in the occasion of the European Border Studies Conference *Mapping Conceptual Change in Thinking European Borders*, a joint conference of the EU-FP7 projects EUBORDERSCAPES and EUBORDER-REGIONS. The conference was organised by the University of Eastern Finland in cooperation with the University of Bergamo.

The opening of the exhibition acted as the welcoming event of the conference. Giovanna Brambilla Ranise, the gallery's head of education, welcomed the public with a short speech about the social agency of the

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7   Gabriele De Grande used the expression "a new aesthetic of the frontier" in the title of a conference he held at the Fondazione Casa della Carità in Milan in June 2012: "Il viaggio come ribellione. Una nuova estetica della frontiera."

8   Galata curator, Nicla Buonasorte, has seen the exhibition in Rome and proposed to bring it to Genoa. Her collaboration, together with Pierangelo Campodonico (the museum's director), Maria Paola Profumo (President of the Fondazione Musei del Mare e della Navigazione) and all the museum staff, was extremely important, and I am very grateful for that.

9   Stefano Pasta collaborates in particular with *Famiglia Cristiana* and with "La Città Nuova," the blog of the *Corriere della Sera* dedicated to the "new Italians," available online.

IMG. 1.24 — *"The Memory of the Sea," Galata–Sea and Migration Museum in Genoa, Italy (6–28 February 2013). View of the opening seminar "The representation of migrations in the Mediterranean at the time of the Arab Spring," with Anna Chiara Cimoli and Stefano Pasta. Photo by Mariella Brenna.*

IMGS. 1.25–26 — *"The Memory of the Sea," Galata–Sea and Migration Museum in Genoa, Italy. Photos by Anna Chiara Cimoli.*

IMG. 1.27 — *"The Memory of the Sea,"* GaMEC, *the Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, Bergamo, Italy (3–7 July 2013). Visitors watching the short film* The Postman of the Mediterranean *(2013) by Kami Fares and Giulia Ardizzone. Photo by Anna Chiara Cimoli.*

museum and its peculiar interest in the theme of migration and transnationalism. I would like to underline how open, flexible and welcoming the museum was to the project. Together with its very strong social involvement—comprising activities with the migrants, courses for cultural mediators with diverse backgrounds, as well as workshops in the prison and other initiatives of the kind (Brambilla Ranise 2009)—the museum proved to be extremely helpful and collaborative from every point of view.

For this phase of the project, Fitouri Belhiba's video work was replaced by a more recent one, *Il postino del Mediterraneo* (2013), by Kamikairy Fares and Giulia Ardizzone, whom I had seen on the *La Repubblica* website during the preparation period of the exhibition.

After the vernissage, the documentary film *Mare chiuso*, by Andrea Segre and Stefano Liberti, was also shown, on the university premises. This was then followed by a discussion concerning "Mediterranean Euro-African Borderscapes: Representations, Experiences, and Policies," which provided the occasion to open a dialogue between myself, Stefano Liberti and the public about the liquid Mediterranean borders, their representation, and the recent Italian migration policies. The discussion was moderated by Chiara Brambilla from the University of Bergamo, who was also the organiser and coordinator of the conference.[10]

The GAMeC and the University in Bergamo supported me in the experimental use of two tools, aimed at involving the public and having them express opinions and prejudices, ask questions or simply share experiences and viewpoints. The first one was part of the exhibition itself, and originated from the "topos" of the message in the bottle, symbolic of Lihidheb's work, as well as that of the whole reflection about the circularity of meanings, vectors and ideas throughout the Mediterranean.

The hundreds of bottles collected over time won him a Guinness World Record; besides that, whenever he finds a message in a bottle, he does his best to look for the sender and get in touch with him or her. Important human relations were born this way.

In the exhibition space, some twenty empty plastic bottles were left on a table, together with sheets and pens. Visitors were then invited to write their own "message in the bottle" to Lihidheb. This was intended to provide the means for the public to take the floor, leaving a trace of their own passage in the exhibition; also, this method allowed us to collect the visitors' impressions, and at the same time to "thank" Lihidheb for all the work done. Messages of hope, encouragement, human fraternity were the more frequent (among more trivial ones). At the end of the exhibition the more meaningful were scanned and sent to the artist.

The museum agreed to co-organise, on a Saturday afternoon, an event we called the "Dialogues Around the Memory of the Journey." Participants in the dialogue were asked to bring along an object that reminded them of a journey, be it real, imaginary or sentimental, and to share its story. The format was ironically borrowed from the speed-dating model: personal and brief face-to-face encounters which can start from a given topic, in order to break the ice. The idea goes somewhat in the same direction as the *Living Library*, a format designed in northern Europe to foster reflection about prejudice and discrimination through personal encounters.[11]

The invitation to participate, diffused via e-mail by the museum's press office, read as follows:

> The format of the event is borrowed, not without irony, from speed-dating: providing brief but intense meetings, which allow everyone to talk to everyone else face-to-face. In fact, there is a lot of talk about migrations, but meeting people behind their roles is not so obvious. The protagonists, here, are the migrants, who have travel stories to tell and who, by reading them again and again, update and transform them from an inert material, forever linked to the past, into a malleable substance that can be interpreted in the light of the present life and the projects for the future. Yet everybody, migrant or not, is invited to take an active part: each participant will speak and listen in turn, always in a face-to-face dynamic. Everyone, in fact, has got a story to tell, as well as material or immaterial objects linked to a particular journey. It is neither about exoticism nor folklore, on the contrary, we meet and let ourselves be met in an informal way around something that is shared by everybody. All participants are invited to bring along an object evoking an important journey (be it a journey in space, as well as human, personal, affective or professional…). The objects will be displayed in the museum's room just for the afternoon, therefore composing a sort of "pop-up" collection. Afterwards

10   I am extremely grateful to Chiara Brambilla, who invited me to take part in the conference with the Sea Memory Museum project, and to Giovanna Brambilla Ranise who welcomed Chiara's proposal to host the exhibition at the GAMeC.

11   For an overview of a recent Italian experience see: http://bibliotecavivente.wordpress.com. I have taken part myself into that experience, both as an organiser and as a participant, and found it methodologically extremely powerful in order to break stereotypes and make people share their visions in a "protected" and non-hostile way. About the *Living Library* format see also *Biblioteche di libri e biblioteche di volti* (Maggi, Meardi and Zanelli 2011).

IMGS. 1.28–30 — *"The Memory of the Sea," GaMEC, the Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, Bergamo, Italy. "Dialogues Around the Memory of the Journey": face-to-face encounters between museum educators, volunteers and visitors. Photos by Anna Chiara Cimoli.*

they will be given back to their owners. (http://www.mela-project.eu/events/details/migrating-objects-dialogues-on-the-memory-of-the-journey)

Despite the fact that a summery Saturday afternoon is not the moment when the GAMeC is more crowded, the experience was very enriching and fruitful. Four museum educators with different migration backgrounds—all trained within the framework of the GAMeC courses and with a long experience in the field—came along and animated voluntarily the afternoon with great generosity. Another heritage educator with a migratory background, trained in the framework of the FAI (Fondo Ambiente Italiano) courses, came from Milan and spent the afternoon with us. The rest of the public was composed partly by persons involved in the conference (organisers, researchers, students) and partly—even though lesser—by occasional visitors, with a total of about 30 people.

Among the objects brought were photographs; objects referring to immaterial journeys (e.g. role games); and some very personal items such as an amazing tissue handwritten with natural pigments, used as a protection ritual in the Muslim tradition in Iraq. This last item was brought by one of the museum educators, who recounted the story of how her mother used to bless her, her children and her husband every time she went back home.

Some elements helped evaluate the impact of this activity. The first is the fact that most of the people spent a long time in the exhibition room—at least one hour, but most often more. Another element is the fact that, having experienced a dialogue with one mediator, most of the visitors decided to undertake a new conversation with another one. No one, among those "invited," refused to take part into the activity (some tourists, though, just passed by without even stopping).

Participants, as a sign of thankfulness and acknowledgement of their effort, were then given a certificate stating: "The museum certifies that Mrs./Miss/Mr. … spent the afternoon of 6th July sharing his/her story and listening to the person sitting in front of him/her." The contrast between the "formal" layout of the certificate and the irony of the message was intended to stress the rarity of an afternoon where people just listen to each other, gratuitously, just for the pleasure of it.

At first, I thought that the disparity between the number of Italians and of those with a migratory background would weaken a bit, the transformative power of the encounters—changing the nature of the interaction. I later realised that in fact, this dynamic permitted the group to go deeper into ideas of difference; of what each of us means by "journey"; of negotiating one's point of view. It was not about being a migrant or not, rather, it was about experiences that go beyond one's origin, and encompass everybody.

Elena Montanari from MeLa kindly recorded some of the dialogues, providing a useful tool for further reflection.

→ **PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION**[12]

According to Lihidheb, an ecologic conscience and a sense of responsibility towards the migrants go hand in hand and can have enormous educational implications. The playful dimension of the Zarzis museum, despite the seriousness of the themes therein, becomes central here. Lihidheb is also used to working with youngsters: some of his installations were made in collaboration with the so-called "Ninjas of the Sea"—a group of teenagers living in the area, whose sensibility towards nature and other human beings is a source of inspiration for Lihidheb.

The overall project, since the beginning, is that more pictures are added at any stage, so that the exhibition grows with its history, gaining more complexity and depth. At the same time, its aim is not to become a mere visual diary of an artistic experience, but rather a tool for reflecting on the representation of migrations. It is therefore crucial to accompany the pictures with "live" experiences: dialogues, readings, workshops, and so on.

The project for Dudelange comprises an assemblage workshop with school children. This follows in the vein of Lihidheb himself, who uses all the tools of his creativity, assembles and disassembles objects, discoveries and words—giving sense to the time spent by the shore, a time of meditation and artistic action. But the meaning is not found once and forever. He then starts over, mounting and dismounting, matching, naming, exposing, not for an audience but almost by himself, in an intimate gesture. The doing and redoing of forms through the assemblages, in the Sea Memory Museum, rhymes with the tension to tell the migrants' epic over and over. This is not to add new information to the already disturbing media noise, but rather to accompany the process of recovering from a collective loss through artistic action and the transformative power of creativity. It will be interesting to see how school children react to this proposal.

There is something deeply sacred in this continuous "illogical" activity, and an ancient wisdom. As Brasile recalled in Rome, this empathic, compassionate vision of nature and human life was born out of a radical change in Lihidheb's own life, which passed through a kind of conversion to the values of dignity, simplicity and harmony—giving up a certain behaviour considered bad or damaging.

Besides the personal spirituality—which goes far beyond religion—lies a collective, universal sense of the sacred, based on the healing power of rites, words, actions re-told and re-done, over and over. The epic of the journey by sea is an integral part of the cultures that developed by the water. As Del Grande recalled in his talk at the Pigorini Museum, in North African countries this kind of narrative coincides with the story of Tariq ibn Ziyad, the conqueror of Spain in the 8th century, who ordered that the boats be burned after their arrival, since there is no return as the loser: you win or you die. This famous speech, which is still circulating today,

resonates with the ritual gesture of burning the passport before getting on the boat. Those who take the boat are the *harraga*, those who burn their passport, as well as the frontiers: the same expression is used for both cases. Interestingly, Del Grande suggested that while some European museums give a passport to the visitors of migration museums, so as to identify with a peculiar biography, in order to tell the story of the *harraga* it would make sense to give a passport as well as a lighter to burn it.

The little exhibition, which at its beginning numbered 13 pictures and one video, will hopefully become richer and offer more interpretative layers in future. As a provisional evaluation, it proved to be an effective tool for discussion and reflection, rather than just a visual source, as it was originally intended. In fact, the pictures speak when integrated with dialogue, discussion and confrontation. The visual material also works as a reagent when projected in a personal dimension, and applied to one's experience of migration, diversity and displacement: this was the sense of the "Dialogues" organised in Bergamo.

The Mediterranean, seen from the museum in Zarzis, has erratic proportions. They would be well described in a map taking into account the routes of the bottles, with their messages without a recipient—so timeless and yet so full of meaning, even today. Del Grande speaks of the "unwritten routes" of the Sicilian fishing boats: an oral mapping that avoids the wrecks of boats to have no hindrance, either physical or bureaucratic. Migration requires both new mapping and new forms of representation (van Houtum 2010 and 2013).

While it took a century to begin to tell the story of emigration from Europe in museums, Lihidheb represents, through his multilayered, articulated curatorial actions, what is happening on the Tunisian coast in real time. His singular voice, poetic and unpretentious, is valuable because it keeps track of a fast-moving story, that no one has the time (or the will) to fix. For those who make it, to the other side of the Mediterranean, a new life begins; for those who do not find a memorial place, an area of research and compassion; perhaps a "site of conscience" for an awareness yet to be built.

Anna Chiara Cimoli

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12   Part of this paragraph comprises some reflections published in my article "Il Museo della memoria del mare: Oggetti testimoniali sulla soglia liquida del Mediterraneo" (Cimoli 2013d).

IMG. 1.31 — *"The Memory of the Sea," CDMH, Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines, Dudelange, Luxembourg (8 May–27 July 2014). Flyer designed by kontext.lu.*

La Mémoire de la Mer. Objets Migrants en Méditerranée.

Une exploration en images par
Mattia Insolera | Alessandro Brasile
Kami Fares

Lieu de l'exposition
Centre de Documentation
sur les Migrations Humaines
Gare-Usines, L-3481 Dudelange

Vernissage
Mercredi, le 7 mai 2014 à 19h

L'exposition sera ouverte
du 8 mai jusqu'au 27 juillet 2014
du jeudi au dimanche
de 15h00 à 18h00

Visites guidées
en dehors de cet horaire
sur demande

produite par: réalisée avec le soutien de: organisée par:

In May 2014 the exhibition "The Memory of the Sea," opened at the Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines (CDMH). In the following chapter, the curator of the Centre, Dario Cieol, describes first the spatial arrangement of the exhibition and the creation of the new digital story booklet related to it. Subsequently, he summarises the manner in which the surrounding activities and educational workshops turned out. In the last paragraph, a conclusion is drawn from the subject areas the exhibition relates during its residency in Luxembourg, followed by a personal delineation of how the exhibition provides hints of the probable upcoming demands for migration museums.

Spatial arrangement and interactive tools

The architectural space of an exhibition hall sets the spectrum of possible arrangements for prearranged elements of an exhibition. From the three indispensable components of the exhibition, the curators concluded to start with the video of Kami Fares and Giulia Ardizzone in the halls of the CDMH. The decision to start with the video was very influential to the visitor, since the video includes all the necessary information to further explore the other two components: the photographic observations and communications of Alessandro Brasile and Mattia Insolera.

The video-journalistic approach presents to the audience the *ménage-à-trois*—Mohsen Lihidheb, the Sea Memory Museum, its objects—and gives hints about its location. The video was presented on an iPad stand for the audience to be able to forward, rewind or pause it in order to analyse the information. After the ten-minute introduction sequence, the visitor continues with the second part of the exhibition.

Alessandro Brasile's photographs are hanged chronologically; from sunrise to sunset. The photographs appear to me as many fragments of a non-existing hole. Fragments of a place with a plentifulness of sense-giving objects in constant change. The pictures were arranged with an equal distance between them, only varying in height in order to create irregular running waves. The curators chose to hang the pictures with most of the elements on the lowest points of the waves in order to emphasise Brasile's view, as well as to allow guests of every height to appreciate every single detail of the photographs. Like the change of arrangements in the Sea Memory Museum, the waves carry the ambivalence of a constant inflow of unpredictable strength. The composition ends with a no easy happy ending. A disruption from the systematically undulate hung composition constitutes the bigger printed photograph of Mamadou, arranged on one of the museum's walls, all by itself. By reshaping the series of Brasile, actually realised for a different purpose, Brasile's photograph of Mamadou makes a difference. It seems to have an explanatory power specially designed for the curator's aim. Its outstanding placement on a lonely wall increases the probability that the audience will dig deeper into the image.

IMG. 1.32 — *View of the iPad stand located in the museum hall, displaying the video* The postmen of the Mediterranean *(2013) by Kami Fares and Giulia Ardizzone. Photo by Dario Cieol.*

IMG. 1.34 —*Alessandro Brasile's photographs. Photo by Anna Chiara Cimoli.*

IMG. 1.33 — *Two visitors using the iPad installation. Photo by kontext.lu.*

IMG. 1.35 — *A visitor observing Alessandro Brasile's photographs. Photo by kontext.lu.*

An area is left to gather the visitors around and review what has been perceived from the exhibition during the guided tours.

The audience continues through a longer corridor and upstairs. Separated by the empty corridor, the third part of the exhibition constituted of five photographs by Mattia Insolera, commences. As Anna Chiara Cimoli mentioned, the photographs are part of a series of Insolera's "Transmediterranea" project. On his photographs, Insolera illustrates the actors and the places with high contrasted and saturated colors, and with a strong focus on his point of interest. In most of his pictures the three actors are centred in oval fields, creating a sacred atmosphere. In other words, the objects of the museum are treated by their shepherd in a sacred way. It seems like a canonisation of Mohsen Lihidheb, the museum and its objects. Insolera's part of the exhibition bearing the title "Monuments de la Mer" draws parallel between the protagonist in the photographs and the urbanistic implementation of monuments in an old European tradition.

The four photographs taken in the Sea Memory Museum in Zarzis are arranged in a strict way. Lihidheb, represented in the highest photograph, is placed on the left—vertically seen—Golden Section of the wall. The other three smaller photographs are arranged on the same height with an equal distance between them.

When the visitors' eyes move downwards they discover themselves standing on a map of the Mediterranean. Counteracting the common view, the map shows neither national boundaries nor the names of countries; it is reduced to the shape created by the land and the sea. The map can be a helpful tool for guided tours: for example to talk about the water currents in the Mediterranean, distances between continents, borders, islands, or places visited by the audience. The map works as a kind of abstract compass. The four photographs are hung over the north African coast border, whereas the final photograph is located on the opposite wall, separated by the imaginary sea on the map; just above the western European coast.

IMG. 1.36 — *View of the entrance to Mattia Insolera's section. Photo by Anna Chiara Cimoli.*

IMG. 1.37 — *Mattia Insolera's section with a detail of the floor map of the European continent. Photo by kontext.lu.*

This last photographic monument, called *Cimetière de bateaux de Lampedusa* is placed somewhat inconspicuous in the interactional corner.

On the European continent of the map, there is a desk covered with a guest book, several MeLa publications and an oversized glass bottle. The glass bottle is a symbolic reference to the messages in a bottle collected and sent by Mohsen Lihidheb. The visitors can create their own message—may it be painted or written—and put it into the bottle. All messages will be sent to Lihidheb.

Inspired by Lihidheb, the CDMH supported the curators' idea of giving birth to a digital story booklet related to the exhibition. On the first phase it will only be accessible for visitors or groups performing follow-up course work. As Lihidheb clearly points out, he regards the collected objects as a handshake with another person, the digital story booklet allows visitors to express their personal thoughts about an object-related experience; an object to which they assign a change of mind of affections or emotions.

The establishment of the different stories told in the digital booklet have a common source: the object-centredness. By growing and constantly reshaping the crowd-sourced contributions, the initiative could become a digital museum of migration and objects.

Educational workshops and surrounding activities

Educational workshops

The debarkation of an exhibition to another place might create new synergies. The CDMH had the great chance to partner up with other institutions to set up a row of eclectic educational workshops, since the institution itself does not have employees to do so.

The first workshop has been organised by the "Projet Ensemble" (Projet Ensemble 2013). The language courses for adults (Luxembourgish and

IMG. 1.38 — *Mattia Insolera's Cimetière de bateaux de Lampedusa hanging over the writing desk. Photo by Dario Cieol.*

Ceci n'est pas
la mer à boire -
La mer imaginée
par les élèves
de l'École Italie

Jeudi | 26 juin 2014 | 18h30

French) combined their graduation ceremony with a visit to the exhibition. The preparation work consisted of their own collages about their personal experiences associated with the Mediterranean. The tour was held in French and the students were invited to describe the pictures of Brasile and Insolera. Alex, one of the students, described the museum as a monumental wake-up call, stating that if we do not pay attention to our global ecological system in the future our gardens will look like Lihidheb's garden.

Located in the Italian Quartier, the CDMH, constantly looks for interactions and collaborations with other association of the neighborhood. The most recent was with the local elementary school, which approached the CDMH in order to organise an exhibition with children from six to ten years old. Having already scheduled the exhibition "The Memory of the Sea" after a meeting with the curators, the CDMH consented to combine both projects. By opposing initial positions. The idea was to create an analogy between the children's project and Lihidheb's sculptures, which are created with objects he collects from the sea, where he lives. Thus the children were to recreate the sea with objects collected nearby their homes and school, far away from the sea. Since the percentage of foreigners in the Italian Quarter is above the national level almost every children in the neighborhood come from different ethnicities and cultures, making their perceptions of the sea more interesting. According to the teacher, most of them still remember their first experience of a journey to the sea. The project, which is still in progress, shows fish as the most common thing being associated with the sea. Rich in complexity might nonetheless be the different chosen forms of representation. These kinds of dynamic interactions, which allow the kids to let their imagination flow, release the young artist spirit within them.

The guided tours were very dynamic tools to reach different groups. Scholars and student were attending. It was up to the teachers and professors, to use the input to develop further pedagogical activities.[13] The messages written to Mohsen Lihidheb and the use of the digital story booklet give proof of the impact.

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13   Christian Mertens deserves special thanks for his support and his contribution. As a teacher he treated several related subjects (immigration regulations and asylum politics, migration and identity related to personal experiences) with his students after the visit of the exhibition.

IMGS. 1.46–47 — *"Projet Ensemble": guided tour with a class of the Lycée Nic Biever Dudelange. Photos by Christian Mertens.*

IMGS. 1.48–49 — *"Invitation aux Musées – Invitation aux Quartiers": guided tours of the exhibition and the Italian Quartier. Photos by Anna Chiara Cimoli.*

Surrounding activities

Every year the event "Invitation aux Musées" is held in the whole country. The initiative was first brought up by the museums of the City of Luxembourg 17 years ago. Nearly all the museums of the whole country contribute with particular activities for this special occasion. No doubt, this year the CDMH will focus all the events around the MeLa exhibition. The CDMH's programme was composed by a guided tour and a round table.

On May 17th the CDMH invited people to participate to the guided tours—"Invitation aux Musées – Invitation aux Quartiers"—arranged in collaboration with MeLa Project. The aim was to enrich both projects by exploring traces of migration and the sea by combining the guided tours of the exhibition and the Italian Quartier. The public was more than listeners and observers; they were critics who provided specific knowledge about the past of the quarter. A more visible trace of recent migration from the seaside were the signs of the Mediterranean

restaurants. Spontaneous interactions between the participants and the habitants passing by completed a creative Saturday afternoon.

The next day, during the "Invitation aux Musées," a perfect occasion was given by a fourth partner to have some more specific museum talks. For the first time the "Fondation Bassin Minier" organised the "Festival de la Culture Industrielle et de l'Innovation," in collaboration with 27 cultural institutions from the south of Luxembourg. The motto of the festival is *workplaces*. Experts on the fields were invited to participate in a round table on the subject of the representation of migration. The round table was divided in two parts.

First, the migration museums and the Sea Memory Museum were presented as working spaces, with contributions from Anna Chiara Cimoli, Kami Fares and Mattia Insolera. Anna Chiara Cimoli pointed out the struggle of migration museums to promote an interactive approach and exemplified the extraordinariness of the Sea Memory Museum by

IMG. 1.50 — *"Invitation aux Musées": round table with Anna Chiara Cimoli, Mattia Insolera, and Carole Reckinger (left to right). Photo by Dario Cieol.*

its ability to display objects in real time. Unfortunately, due to technical complications, Kami Fares was not able to attend the round table. Nevertheless, the video provided important information to further analyse the Sea Memory Museum as a workplace.

The second part consisted of the interventions of Mattia Insolera and Carole Reckinger. Mattia Insolera focused on his latest project promoted by the Caixa Foundation, Surviving Greece, to document the struggle of young Afghan migrants in Patras, Greece. The photographer elaborated in detail the use of Facebook as a new workspace that allows a more interactive approach with the covert goal to bring together an audience of different social and cultural backgrounds. Despite the often-criticised lack of privacy, the network remains very popular and it is used in many different forms (find distant relatives and childhood friends, share life experiences, insider tips, discovering places, meeting new people, etc.). Insolera, with his day on end photographic reportages, requests to represent migrants also with its common habits for example to other adolescents. Insolera paved the way for the final intervention with the series of photographs he took in the periphery of Patras from a group of young Afghan migrants working in the orange fields.

Carole Reckinger, a political science practitioner and photographer, spoke about the project "Bitter Oranges," a work that is still in progress. In the project the orange orchards in Rosarno (Italy) are observed as the workspace (and surviving space) of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (Bitter Oranges 2013). Seeking for better understanding of the point of view from the people concerned, Carole Reckinger, Diana Reiner and Gilles Reckinger distributed cameras to the people working in orange fields and living in the surrounding areas of the camps. Reckinger concluded that the points of view did not vary much from her own photographs.

A common fact both lecturers pointed out were the low and informal paid wages. Neither in Rosarno nor in Patras could the workers (or working

survivors) gain more than 27 euros per day. It was argued, according to a question from the audience, that unlawful exploitation inside the European Union is hard to be controlled by consumers. A recognised fair trade label for the workplaces inside the European Union does not exist. After two productive hours, the round table came to its end. The discussions gently challenged the attendees to further analyse the topics raised above.

Conclusion

The exihibition "The Memory of the Sea" is a small treasure. In its actual form the exhibition introduces many related subjects, such as:

→ museums as workplaces;
→ the role of the objects in the museum;
→ the practice of steady real time exhibiting;
→ the sea and ecology;
→ migration in the Mediterranean from an object-linked point of view with the ability to avoid contentious political opinions;
→ new migration, memento(s) and recognition.

Regarding the divergence between the core exhibition and the outcome of the pedagogical workshops, it can be stated that the common perceptions of objects associated with the sea have definitely been deconstructed. Shells became bottles and boats. The objects in the "Sea Memory Museum" points out different and unperceived ways of how mankind is related to the sea.

May it be the imprints of teeth on the vents of the water tanks, may it be the letters of hope, prayers or other difficult objects to explain, such as shoes and other pieces of clothing. The Sea Memory Museum accumulates fragments of stories related to the practice of crossing the sea. The personal possessions of the sea crossers and castaways can be considered as their last retraceable sign of life or in any case as the last sign of an important stage in their lives.

Insolera series "Monuments de la Mer" underlines the previous comment. The bottles and the clothing washed up to the shores of Zarzis by the currents are collected and formed to monuments by Mohsen Lihidheb. In Lampedusa the boats confiscated by the coast guard involuntarily form another monument of the migration in the Mediterranean. Neither the boat cemeteries nor the reception center for asylum seekers are located in a known or accessible place (Reckinger 2013, 23). It's a rarely requested subject, some kind of the same genre as it has been in the past for the establishment of Immigration and Emigration Museums. But probably the day will come that a rising minority and their descendants will claim a visible recognition of their past.

Dario Cieol

Dario Cieol's text was edited by Gabriela Arias Jeffrey

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Chiara Baravalle is an architect, graduated in 2013 with a Master in Architecture from Politecnico di Milano. Her thesis project, "Liquid Museaum, Hybridization through the Mediterranean coasts," focuses on a travelling museum moving in the Mediterranean Sea and encouraging cultural meetings and contaminations. In February 2013 she was invited, together with Giuseppe Biscottini, to present her thesis at the conference "The Postcolonial Museum: The pressures of memories and the bodies of history," organised by Iain Chambers within MeLa Project. During her studies, she collaborated with Am Progetti in 2008 and Studio Albori in 2011 in Milan and took part in international workshops in collaboration with MACBA Study Center in Barcelona. She also spent a year in Lisbon as an Erasmus student at the Universidade de Lisboa. She is currently working in Milan.

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Dario Cieol is a member of the board of administration of the Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines in Dudelange, Luxembourg. In this voluntary activity he collaborates with curators and institutions (curational host) from other museums and institutions. He elaborates and accompanies in-house activities (such as exhibitions, pedagogical workshops, etc.). At the moment, he is finishing his Magistra Artium in Sociology and Science of Education at the University of Trier, Germany.

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Anna Chiara Cimoli obtained a degree in Art History from the Università Statale di Milano and a Ph.D. in History of Architecture from the Turin Polytechnic. In 1997 she earned a diploma in Museology at the Ecole du Louvre in Paris. She is currently doing research about migration museums in the framework of the MeLa Project, at the Politecnico di Milano research unit. She also works as a museum educator for the Museo del Novecento, Milan, as well

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Elisa Mansutti

Architect, Elisa Mansutti graduated in Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano in 2014 with the thesis "Border Memories: Re-Enacting the Difficult Heritage," supervised by Prof. Gennaro Postiglione. Previously, she attained a degree from the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Udine. She also studied at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. In 2010, together with Luca Pavarin, she won an international competition based in Perth, Australia, to design and oversee the construction of a pavilion to provide shelter for people of the

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Elena Montanari is architect and Ph.D. in "Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design." She graduated from Politecnico di Milano, where she is currently Temporary Professor of Interior Design at the School of Architecture and Society, and Research Fellow at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DAStU). Since 2005, she has been collaborating to didactic activities and contributing to various national and international research projects, developing a versatile, multi-scaled and interdisciplinary approach to the investigation of different fields.

Davide Spallazzo

Post-doc research fellow at the Department Design of the Politecnico di Milano and contract professor at the School of Design of the same university, he carries out his research and teaching activity focusing on the interweaving of design, digital technologies and Cultural Heritage. He studies primarily the use of mobile technology in Cultural Heritage field and mobile gaming as a means to stimulate social engagement and to foster novel learning models during cultural visit. He holds a Ph.D. in Design from Politecnico di Milano and has been involved in several national and international research projects concerning the use mobile technologies and virtual and augmented reality for museums, historic monuments, archives and for tourism.

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Christopher Whitehead

Chris Whitehead is Professor of Museology at Newcastle University and member of the University's Cultural Affairs Steering Group and the Great North Museum's Board. His research activities focus on both historical and contemporary museology. He has published exten-

sively in the field of art museum history, with particular emphases on architecture, display and knowledge construction. His second major strand of activity relates to education and interpretation practices in art museums and galleries, and includes considerable government-funded and policy-relevant research. In the context of musicological study he has strong interests in social constructionism, theories of representation, cultural cartography, time and place, co-production, art theory, disciplinarity and epistemology. He is the author of the following books: *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Ashgate 2005), *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines* (Bloomsbury/Duckworth Academic 2009) and *Interpreting Art in Museums and Galleries* (Routledge 2012).

MeLa* - European Museums in an age of migrations

Research Fields:

RF01: Museums & Identity in History and Contemporaneity
examines the historical and contemporary relationships between museums, places and identities in Europe and the effects of migrations on museum practices.

RF02: Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernity and Museum Practices
transforms the question of memory into an unfolding cultural and historical problematic, in order to promote new critical and practical perspectives.

RF03: Network of Museums, Libraries and Public Cultural Institutions
investigates coordination strategies between museums, libraries and public cultural institutions in relation to European cultural and scientific heritage, migration and integration.

RF04: Curatorial and Artistic Research
explores the work of artists and curators on and with issues of migration, as well as the role of museums and galleries exhibiting this work and disseminating knowledge.

RF05: Exhibition Design, Technology of Representation and Experimental Actions
investigates and experiments innovative communication tools, ICT potentialities, user centred approaches, and the role of architecture and design for the contemporary museum.

RF06: Envisioning 21st Century Museums
fosters theoretical, methodological and operative contributions to the interpretation of diversities and commonalities within European cultural heritage, and proposes enhanced practices for the mission and design of museums in the contemporary multicultural society.

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