

## TEXTE CATALOGUE

# ***EVERYWHERE BUT NOW***

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Mediterranean Sea is much more than geography. It is, and always has been, a melting pot of peoples, cultures and mentalities, an open door on three continents, Africa, Asia, and Europe. In the west, Gibraltar connects the Mediterranean with the Atlantic Ocean. In the northeast, the Marmara Sea, the Dardanelles, and the Bosphorus link it with the Black Sea and Central Asia. The Suez Canal connects the Mediterranean with the Red Sea in the southeast.

Several civilizations have contributed to political, economic, artistic and technological growth around the *Mesogeios* (Μεσόγειος). Its shores are laboratories of comprehension and perplexity; and of differences between nations, religions, and cultures. Its surroundings continue to be filled with contrasts of all kinds – between wealth and poverty, political stability and insecurity – deepening inequalities within and between communities, and pressures between urban and rural dwellers.

The Mediterranean has seen millions of war dead and continues to be battered by a succession of crises and civil wars. The Middle East has been torn by almost a fifty years of conflicts that erupted after the World War II and the violence has wounded its natural environment. Internal wars destroyed almost all the forests of cedars that characterized Lebanon for millennia. The war in Syria is decimating the population and spreading material destruction throughout that historic land. Oil spills often pollute the Mediterranean Sea and damage its ecosystems. Every year, fires ravage its coasts destroying olive groves, vineyards and countryside.

Currently, the Mediterranean region is disoriented with its people struggling against economic upheavals and crises of national identity.

To the question: can we consider artistic creation as a valuable source of identified resistance and a modern challenge? In other words, which is and will be the role of art in the visible transformation of our contemporary world? What artistic approach could inspire and mobilize people to build a more just society?

The exercise of reason is to create, develop and implement projects. This is what the ancient Greeks called *Techne* (τέχνη), Art.

For example, we know that contemporary trends are becoming so powerful as to destroy natural balance to the point of endangering life on our planet. Those trends include transformation of the environment, which is adversely influencing the human being and the human race. How can the transformation of the environment have no

effect on the human being and the human race outright? I believe that art, in crying out against violation of the sources that have nurtured it for thousands of years, can raise awareness, more than all the international conferences on Environment and on Climate Change. In fact, if by nature we do not mean only the landscape, trees and animals, but also the body of memories, desires and inspirations that shape human consciousness and create images, then we can say that the depletion and pollution of nature impoverishes also the imagination and pollutes the soul.

## **I AM REBEL, THEREFORE WE ARE**

“Men are free only in the moment in which they act, neither before nor after,” according to Hannah Arendt. Right now during this writing, people in Turkey and Brazil are experiencing the epiphany of freedom and justice with protests that wake up conflict at the center of our lived experience.

Only the immediacy of revolt can create spaces in which freedom may suddenly appear in the world. That is because the global expansion of technocapitalism, the stunned power of repetitive information on public opinion and the financial and political crisis are creating conditions incapable of producing real oppositions to trivialization and conformism.

In the *Treaty of Rebel*, Ernst Jünger describes the rebel as an independent and free man of action, “whoever the law of his nature puts in relation to freedom, a relation that in time brings him to a revolt against automatism and a refusal to accept its ethical consequence, fatalism”. In fact, he described the artist’s condition who, to be true to art, is an intrinsic Rebel or is nothing.

Who is a Rebel? A man who says no. Revolt is born from the loss of patience. First, it submits the idea of equality: an equal footing between the master and the subject; then it explodes into rebellion. However, the rebellious person is not bathed in resentments, hatred or contempt. His or her revolt gives birth to humane values.

“I’m rebel, therefore we are” says Albert Camus. The revolt eradicates man of loneliness because it is collective; it is the “adventure of all”. Yet, the experience of revolt is an experience of asceticism. The myth of Prometheus, Achilles (with Patroclus), Oedipus and Antigone, are archetypes of ancient revolts as is the revolt of Spartacus. Revolt is the purest expression of freedom and turns into the face of hope. The revolutionary has the desire to “change the world” (Marx), while the rebel wants “change of life” (Rimbaud).

*La Pensée de Midi* refers to Camus’ dream of light, which characterizes his Mediterranean. There, the Mediterranean tradition rises to unrivaled value; it turns into a fundamental opposition. “The deep conflict of this century stands between the German dreams and the Mediterranean tradition...”

Against this backdrop, *Everywhere but Now* broadens the concept of *hic* and *nunc* by emphasizing thoughts emanating from a vision that adheres to the ideals of existentialism. It recognizes the human condition’s fragility in the context of “being

there” – the *Dasein* of Heidegger. It underlines the fundamental character of *Dasein* as being-in-the-world – as taking the entire world as a common horizon of human values in action.

## **SHARED CULTURAL MULTIPLICITY**

As a current step in the long Mediterranean tradition, *Everywhere but Now* extols a vision that includes unifying separations among people through art to broaden individual and collective freedoms. It wants to nudge humankind towards higher realizations to improve our troubled world.

A highlight of that tradition occurred in the thirteenth century when an extraordinary embrace between the East and West of the Mediterranean coasts took place in Damascus. That meeting was between one of Sufism's greatest poets and theologians Jalal al-Din Rumi from Konya, Turkey and the mystic and philosopher Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi from Murcia in Spain.

Illustrating the scope of that embrace, Ibn 'Arabi writes:

*My Heart has become capable of every form:  
It is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monk  
and a temple for idols, and the pilgrim's Ka'ba, and the tables  
of the Tora and the book of the Koran.  
I follow the religion of Love, whichever way his camels take.  
My religion and my faith is the true Love.*

Illustrating the togetherness of the embrace, Rumi writes:

*What can I do Muslims? I do not know myself.  
I am no Christian, no Jew, no Magian, no Mussulman.  
Not of the East, not of the West. Not of the land, not of the sea,  
Not of the Mine of Nature, not of the circling heavens,  
Not of earth, not of water, not of air, not of fire;  
Not of the throne, not of the ground, of existence, of being;  
Not of India, China, Bulgaria, Saqseen;  
Not of the kingdom of the Iraqs, or of Khorasan;  
Not of this world or the next: of heaven or hell;  
Not of Adam, Eve, the garden of Paradise or Eden;  
My place placeless, my trace traceless.  
Neither body nor soul: all is the life of my Beloved . . .*

Earlier, Rabbi Bahya ben Joseph ibn Paquda (also known as Rabbeinu Bachya), the eleventh century Jewish philosopher from Zaragoza, Spain, who wrote in Arabic, said in his *Guide to the Duties of the Heart*:

*The supreme benefit, and the highest good bestowed by the Creator on human beings (after the gift of existence and the perfected faculties of perception and intelligence), is Wisdom. This, indeed, is the very life of their spirits.*

Rarely have Jewish and Muslim thought come so close to each other as in Rabbi Bahya ibn Paquda's teachings: "To see without eyes, to hear without ears..."

Clearly, for centuries the Mediterranean area has been a melting pot of vast currents of thought about humanity and the evolution of human beings – stretching from Asia to the Atlantic Ocean.

The routes that cross the Mediterranean belonged to the merchants, pirates and conquerors but for artists and the poets, they were always routes towards knowledge and creativity. Artists mirrored the unifying threads of spiritual thought and insights that have linked open minds and hearts throughout vast spaces and times. This reminds us that division among people and cultures are artificial. No barriers, whether natural or manmade, have totally succeeded in stifling constructive dialogues between different systems of thought.

Today, methods drawn from a wide range of disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies seek to address strategies of not only acknowledging differences but also aiming toward multiplicity as a vital vehicle of present-day enlightenment and social well-being.

Indeed, the practice of art carries strong potential for superseding cultural boundaries. While new themes emerge, old themes reappear to fuse into a new key of reading and understanding the present through cultural multiplicity.

While modern technology continuously expands the mediums, artists still use bronze and marble, oil paint and encaustic, while filmmakers have become the poets and troubadours of our time. It is on such a constructive basis that art presents itself as an extraordinary bridge between disciplines, a compelling channel for fertile dialogue.

For those who know how to look in-depth, art plays a unique role in the spread of human rights and universal values. Fostering mutual knowledge, art creates endless possibilities of regeneration and personal enrichment, drawing our attention to people and place that we would not have had the opportunity to approach otherwise. At the same time, it enables a better understanding of ourselves and of others, thus taking a first step towards "learning to know what we cannot accept".

## **THE ART EXHIBITION**

Arts have the potential to go beyond linguistic and cultural differences and barriers. Therefore, *Everywhere but Now* closely relates the question of space – of diverse *genius loci* – in the Mediterranean area with the question of time of creation in our contemporary world.

The Central Exhibition of the 4<sup>th</sup> Thessaloniki Biennale is conceived as a space of exchange and confrontation like Mediterranean itself. More than fifty artists from the Mediterranean area, but also from India, Iran, Brazil and Cuba, are presenting original artworks to emphasize that creativity is essential in taking a further step

towards acceptance of our neighbors and our differences. Through their artworks, they reaffirm that dialog can help to overcome prejudice and cultural barriers.

The artworks challenge the past and the present of Thessaloniki by being displayed at diverse and historic locations, including the Archaeological Museum, the Museum of Byzantine Culture, the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art and at the Moni Lazariston, built in 1886 by the monks of the Order of Lazarists, which is now the State Museum hosting the prestigious Russian Avant-Garde of Costakis Collection.

*Everywhere but Now* is displayed also at the emblematic Ottoman monuments of Thessaloniki such as the Alatzá Imaret, a former mosque built in 1484 by Isak Pasha, which was also an institution for the poor (imaret) decorated with colorful stones (alatzá), and the Geni Tzami/Yeni Cami, the last mosque built for the city's Donmeh community in 1902, where the amalgam of influences and styles reveals the mixture of European, Jewish and Islamic culture and the combined identities of its builders.

A new and significant gesture honors the tradition of Thessaloniki of attracting traders from all over the Balkans since the Byzantine era. For the first time, the 4<sup>th</sup> Biennale provides to the Central Exhibition the Periptero 6, a 2500sqm space in the city center, part of the International Trade Fair of Thessaloniki.

Geneva, Milan, Thessaloniki, June 2013