

A force that can alter the course of history, the voyage constitutes a richly symbolic territory, capable of assuming many forms and bringing together multiple meanings. From nomadism to migrations, from mythological adventures to pilgrimages, from the crusades to wars of conquest, from the Grand Tour to mass tourism, from scientific explorations on land and sea to the conquest of space and virtual travel, the concept of the voyage changes depending on the era, mirroring its desires, ambitions, fears, and problems. An activity tied to individual development, to the growth of knowledge, to the affirmation or loss of power, or even to the dramatic necessity of escape, as a shared and profoundly human experience, the voyage, in many cultures, represents a source of continuous reference, a broad metaphorical field used to indicate life, death, and the hereafter. At the same time, the concept of the voyage includes the freedom of mental journeys and the boundless territories of fantasy, replacing physical mobility with the ubiquity of the imagination. In art, as in literature and cinema, the voyage is a theme that links numerous investigations and continues to inspire new ones.

The exhibition *From the Earth to the Moon: Metaphors for Travel (Part I)* evokes the title of Jules Verne's famous novel, now rendered even more prophetic by recent polemics regarding the actual conquest of the Moon. The exhibition presents important works by some of contemporary art's leading figures who have found in the voyage a fertile motif of inspiration. The selected works investigate and probe the various accepted meanings of the concept of the voyage, demonstrating the power of the imagination to open up new territories and the capacity of art to furnish models for interpreting reality, or prefiguring it, anticipating

issues that pertain to the future. Presenting the public with a new itinerary, through works that for the most part belong to the Castello's collection, the exhibition offers a preview of a significant number of new acquisitions. Wishing to adequately convey the breadth of the cultural project that the Museum is building, with the help and generous support of the Fondazione CRT Progetto Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, the exhibition is organized in two parts (part I opening on April 4, part II on May 23).

If nomadism was the first condition known to human civilization, within the work of Mario Merz, it becomes a motif of poetic research. Anticipating a tendency that defines the methodology of many artists working today, in the late 1960s, Merz was already theorizing a parallel between the artist and the nomad, emphasizing how both are motivated by the constant need to move from one place to another, endowed with the ability to operate in relationship with new spaces. Merz identified the igloo – an archetypal house and form of transitory architecture – as an ideal artistic form. *Igloo (Tenda di Gheddafi) (Igloo - Gaddafi's Tent)*, 1968-1981 (room 18), covered with jute and as spacious as a real habitable tent, is characterized by the presence of painted spears, another element identified by Merz as a dynamic image.

A symbolic creative force, the concept of movement is investigated by Gilberto Zorio in works that open up new possibilities for the language of sculpture. In many of his pieces, the artist introduces conditions for triggering physical transformations, sometimes manifested through mutations of form. Identified as a vector that has traversed history and has characterized cultures belonging to different eras and places, the canoe is a recurring element in Zorio's oeuvre. In

*Barca nuragica (Nuragic Boat)*, 2000 (room 18), a boat made from woven reeds, traditionally used by Sardinian fishermen, is arranged to initiate a new voyage.

The centrality of the concept of the voyage appears in many cultures that define the structure of life as a path or temporary passage, considering experiences such as the entry into adult life, marriage, or the birth of a child to be "steps" along that path. Metaphorically, death is a "passage" and, ideally, the voyage of the spirit can continue on to another existence beyond the earthly realm. Fundamental questions about the human condition, inserted into a broad cosmic context, appear throughout the work of Anselm Kiefer. In *Cette obscure clarté qui tombe des étoiles (That Obscure Clarity that Falls from the Stars)*, 1996 (room 18), the artist investigates the inexorable path of matter, from decay to new birth. Quoting a verse written in the 17th century by French playwright Pierre Corneille, Kiefer celebrates the poetic force of the oxymoron "obscure clarity," which unites in a single vision the opposing concepts of darkness and light, symbols of death and life.

In ancient epics, the voyage is above all a trial, test, or circular path punctuated by continuous obstacles and dangers, from departure to longed-for return. Since Homer's Ulysses, the voyage has transformed those who undertake it, and no hero can call himself such without having brought to completion a complex itinerary through the terrestrial world and beyond the frontiers of the supernatural. Myth is the broad field to which Enzo Cucchi's imagination turns in *Eroe senza testa (Headless Hero)*, 1981 and *La deriva del vaso (The Drift of the Vase)*, 1984-1985, (room 19). *Vitebsk-Harar*, 1984, instead, links a reference to two cities, destinations for voyages motivated by different purposes. If, indeed, for

Malevich Vitebsk was the place where, in 1919, he aligned himself with the new Soviet government, accepting an administrative post, the Ethiopian city of Harar is the remote destination where Rimbaud arrived in 1880, having transformed himself into a dealer of hides and ivory, following a crisis of faith in poetry.

For numerous artists, travelling represents a way to fuel research and to achieve new inspiration. Following his innate cultural nomadism, in 1971 Alighiero Boetti went on his first journey to Afghanistan, which he would then choose as his second home. In Kabul he began working on his maps of the world, embroidered planispheres where each nation is indicated by its flag. The series as a whole can be considered as a work in progress, since each new map mirrors the slight changes in the geopolitical order, due to new political alliances, wars, or revolutions. The *Map* in the exhibit (room 20), is one of the first two monumental versions made by Boetti between 1971 and 1973.

If the idea of elsewhere is always and primarily a mental image, in some of Giovanni Anselmo's works, the artist employs physical laws, such as gravity, weight, motion, and oscillation, to express tensions toward ideal places. Magnetic needles, as an expression of forces that seem to provide a direction, appear in some of his pieces as early as the late 1960s. Throughout the 1980s, the artist also developed a series entitled *Verso oltremare (Towards Ultramarine)*, 1984 which includes the work exhibited here, made up of a slab of granite and a blue rectangle painted on the wall (room 20). Like a quest for an undefined elsewhere, mentally beyond the walls, the work indicates a desire never satisfied and therefore constant. Throughout his ceaseless cognitive investigations, articulated as an itinerary capable of traversing space and time, Gino De Dominicis finds an ideal

correspondence in religious and philosophical concepts pertaining to ancient cultures, particularly Sumerian, civilization. In numerous works he plumbs the mysteries of myths that date back to the dawn of civilization, frequently drawing inspiration from the figures of Gilgamesh and Urvasi. Gilgamesh is the protagonist of the most ancient epic in the history of mankind, a story that is also one of the first known tales of a voyage. The mythical king of Uruk, an ancient city in present-day Iraq, Gilgamesh made a long and difficult journey in search of the secret of immortality. The experience of the quest is also part of the Indian legend of Urvasi, an immortal creature loved by a mortal man. The exhibited piece (room 21), created in 1988, is part of a group of works inspired by the hypothetical coexistence of the Sumerian king and Urvasi.

In the early 1970s, new electronic technology in the form of portable video cameras provided artists with a new tool for self-awareness and for interpreting the world. Video became a means through which it was possible to investigate reality and attach meaning to voyages that have been undertaken. In *Island Song – Island Monologue*, 1976 (room 23) Charlemagne Palestine focuses the video camera on his own motorcycle and travels the roads along one of the Hawaiian islands. The sounds of his voice mix with the incessant roar of the motor, transmitting the euphoria of the journey and the idea of escape.

Along with concrete movement, the idea of the voyage can also include a mental component, on the basis of which it is possible to go someplace else without moving, devoting one's energies to investigations carried out in the shelter of one's own city or even in one's own home. In the early nineteenth century, Goethe and Schlegel were among those who initiated a method of ethnographic analysis, carried out

from their desks, or at most from the library. Before spending long periods of time among the populations of South America, the artist Lothar Baumgarten was inspired by this tradition and created a series of works, including *Yurupari (Stanza di Rheinsberg)* (*Yurupari - Room in Rheinsberg*), 1984 (room 26). The work presents a view of tropical America, that the artist had initially developed in 1969, within the confines of his studio.

In *This Is a History of New York*, 1988 (room 24), Jem Cohen journeys through New York, the city where he lives. The video is structured as a succession of moments, indicated as Prehistory, the Middle Ages, the Industrial Era, the Age of Reason, and the Space Age. Each temporal section corresponds to different neighborhoods in the city, according to a viewpoint that unites the documentary element with a poetic interpretation.

If the power of the mind can make any situation dynamic, in *Pavimento a occhi chiusi (Floor with Eyes Closed)*, 1997 (room 25), Massimo Bartolini presents the conditions for mental evasion. In this installation, the artist reverses the floor's use to support and enclose the space and the potential function of the window to illuminate and communicate with the outside world.

Rebecca Horn creates parallel universes dominated by mechanical forces and in *Le Miroir du lac (Mirror of the Lake)*, 2004 (room 22), she utilizes information taken from sensory experience to suggest an adventure of the imagination. The work results from a horizontally pivoted mirror with a reflective surface which movement seems to recreate the image of a well.

The experience of the passage from life to death is investigated in numerous works by Bill Viola. *Isolde's Ascension (The Shape of Light After Death)*, 2005

(room 27 - chapel), belongs to a recent series of video installations that refer to the story of Tristan and Isolde, a medieval epic characterized by constant flights and displacements. The video, which is set in a floating aquatic dimension, depicts the final moments of Isolde's life. Covered in a pure-white garment, the protagonist's body exhales its last breath, before starting out on a final journey, ascending toward unknown depths.

Wars and invasions are among the causes that force individuals, families, and entire populations to abandon their homes, embarking on suicidal voyages or traversing prohibited frontiers. The destruction of war and the disquieting suspension of the frenetic activity of daily life are the features that emerge from the images of Beirut shot by Gabriele Basilico (room 28). Interested in urban landscapes, Basilico's extensive travels include a period spent in Beirut in 1991, a time when political conditions seemed to favor the beginning of a rebuilding process.

In his video installation *Dengdai she de suxing / Waiting for the Snake to Wake Up*, 2005 (room 29), Yang Fudong stages an epic event that could belong in any era. The protagonist is a fleeing soldier, perhaps a prisoner who has suffered defeat, or a deserter, captured and punished by his own army. The cinematographic frames and the soundtrack come together to create an intensely emotional ambience, making palpable the condition of every human being's physical and psychological fragility.

In *Notti e nebbie (Nights and Fogs)*, 1998 (room 30), Mario Airò delineates the image of a lighthouse at night. An indispensable guide for the navigator the lighthouse is depicted at reduced scale, almost as if to suggest that the tranquility of the port is still far off. A reflection that heightens the poetic value of light in

opposition to darkness, the work is made using simple materials, including a slide projector, a wood silhouette, and a light bulb, components intentionally left exposed. The allusions the work suggests open up a dense network of references, ranging from literature to cinema, from art history to everyday experience.

While for some the so-called "horror of domicile" represents an existential choice, for others the abandonment of one's home is a violent and dramatic constraint. The psychological impact of uprooting is one of the themes addressed by Kim Sooja. Exposing herself to experiences she deems essential to the creation of her works, the artist travels continually, and her titles often include the word *Bottari*, a Korean term for the knotted bundle inside which everyday items are transported. During a trip to Africa, on a Nigerian beach whose name is tied to the slave trade, she shot *Bottari Alfa - Beach*, 2001 (room 31). In this work, the inversion between the position of the sky and that of the sea suggests the loss of the most basic coordinates, evoking the drama of those who, abducted from their own world, have been forced to face voyages toward totally unknown destinations.

The complexities of colonialism and the failures of western culture are some of the themes investigated by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen in *From the Entropic Library* (room 32). When they conceived the work, the artists hypothesized an earlier narrative and, thinking about an explorer traveling in Africa with his western cultural baggage, they created a library with books and sheaves of letters. As if it had been abandoned in the midst of the jungle, the library is irremediably eroded by time and about to succumb to entropic disintegration.

In *Mbube*, 2005 (room 33), Roberto Cuoghi investigates the transformations

and irremediable misunderstandings inherent to encounters between different economic powers. The artist used his voice and a series of makeshift tools to improvise an interpretation of a song, choosing it as his "material" because of the way its travels tell a significant story. While the song, in fact, is an extremely familiar piece of popular music, recognized throughout the world, its story is less well-known. Written in the 1940s by Solomon Linda, a Zulu singer and songwriter, *Mbube* was an immediate success in its author's homeland of South Africa. In the 1950s, the rights to the song were acquired by a United States record company, and in the States the song was frequently interpreted and modified by others. Beginning in the 1960s, with the title *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*, it became a worldwide hit. Linda earned 10 shillings for the sale of the song and died with 25 dollars in his bank account. It is estimated that over the years the song has generated over 55 million dollars for the American recording industry.

Marcella Beccaria

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HOURS

Tuesday to Thursday: 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.  
Friday to Sunday: 10 a.m. - 9 p.m.  
Closed on Monday and May 1st, open Easter Monday.

Free guided tours to the exhibition take place on Saturday at 3:30 p.m. and 6 p.m.; Sunday and holidays at 11 a.m., 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.  
Tours covering the history and architecture of the Castello di Rivoli are held on Sunday at 4:30 p.m.  
A shuttle bus service directly links the Fermi Metro station to Castello di Rivoli.

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CASTELLO DI RIVOLI

## From the Earth to the Moon: Metaphors for Travel (Part I)

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