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INTRODUCTION

Engaging with the arts and education in the Mediterranean is not unlike walking an intellectual tightrope. Or better still, such an undertaking could be compared to traversing a mesh made of scores of tightropes that intersect each other like a delicate weave, alternating between moments of respite and dizzying gaps or dilemmas. This network of tensions hovers over a space that simultaneously exists and does not exist, a space that can be located geographically quite easily but refuses to allow itself to be defined rationally. It is a space that is replete with collective and individual narratives and desires, yet the sheer number and diversity of its singularities obstruct a clear view of the 'whole picture'.

We know that the region that this small collection of essays attempts to engage with—the Mediterranean—is a dynamic and complex one. As Braudel wrote, this landlocked sea "cannot be contained within our measurements and classifications", while "no simple narrative of how things happened would be appropriate to its history" (Braudel 1995, p. 17). We also know that the subjects we are studying within this geographical context—art and art education—are equally vast, varied and complex. The genealogies of art and the training of artists and their values vary widely across the Mediterranean and cannot be summarised without slipping into bias—that academic sin of omission that even the most scrupulous amongst us occasionally commit without being aware of it.

Writing about Egyptian artists in the first decade of the twenty-first century, for instance, one scholar argued that many European and American critics, curators and scholars still tend to assume that artists living in non-Western contexts can be assessed according to Western, generally secular, criteria and hierarchies of artistic value (despite their postmodernist or post-colonialist pretensions), and this predisposition leads many to conclude that artists and artistic production in Egypt and the Middle East "are not quite there yet" (Winegar 2006, p. 4). Moreover, artists in North African countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria are often criticised for 'faking' Western art quite willingly, producing European ersatz works of art that Tunisian poet and novelist Abdelwahab Meddeb has described as "a submissive art, a by-product of Western painting, supported by ministers of culture" (Bernadac and Meddeb 2007, p. 48). The real issue, however, is that so many heterogeneous realities that exist around the Arab world are still circumscribed by a reductive, colonial attitude that mentally lumps them all into a single artistic league. Works by artists based in 'marginal' contexts are also subjected to simplistic interpretations or appropriations that fit Western agendas—a strategy that could lead to a barely disguised "politically motivated colonisation of art and ideas" (Kholeif 2012, p. 8), as may have been the case with the Egyptian media artist and art educator Ahmed Basiony, killed while protesting in Tahrir Square in January 2011 and presented that same year in the Egyptian pavilion of the Venice Biennial as a 'martyr'.

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The towns and cities along the coasts of the Mediterranean display different facets of such imbalances of power and intellectual dilemmas: from perceived centres of the arts like Venice and Barcelona to vast, relatively neglected or misunderstood territories like Northern Africa and finally, places that in recent years have appeared in the media as new or even thriving art markets, like Istanbul. Such tensions, which typically express themselves as vexing choices between the new and the insular or between a perceived independence from market-driven, Western models and a more acquiescent submissiveness to them, are not experienced uniformly across the Mediterranean. These disparate experiences of the art world obviously hold sway over young people's aspirations and also affect curricular developments and educational systems, particularly the higher education sector. While some scholars believe that there are few, if any, crucial differences between the teaching of the visual arts in Islamic countries in the region and art education in the West (for example, Shaban 2007, p. 195), the different cultural and political contexts as well as histories of artistic practices and status of disciplines such as art history and theory across the region present some very diverse frameworks in which educational methodologies are being applied, and therefore make it difficult for scholars to draw relevant conclusions about the region as a whole.

The power dynamics that are characteristic of the local/global dichotomy particularly in postcolonial contexts are hardly the only factors that restrict such comparisons. Different experiences of conflict in Mediterranean contexts incite further debates and considerations amongst art educators about ways of coming to terms with such struggles, and present us with distinct approaches that do not only vary between one country and another but also within the same context. Art educators in Israel, for example, have been found to follow quite different paths when confronted by their students' experiences of violence and grief, either evading these experiences altogether or addressing them directly or indirectly (Cohen-Evron 2008).

Other contested areas that are experienced diversely and could be researched further for their relevance to art educators across the Mediterranean include faith, tourism, national identity, cultural diversity, immigration, educational policy and the role of art education in community development. While themes like cultural diversity appear rather frequently in national and even international studies, research that focuses specifically on art education in the Mediterranean macro context is relatively scarce. Comparative or comprehensive publications of a more global nature have appeared from time to time (Freedman and Hernández 1998; Bamford 2006; Bresler 2007; Eça and Mason 2008), yet tend to present national case studies or commentaries side by side rather than try to draw comparisons. Similarly, a publication on art education in the Mediterranean cannot smoothen out the region's inconsistencies by resorting to a positivist, reductive paradigm because what is so intriguing about the Mediterranean is the plurality of practices, histories, languages and experiences that share its waters and "it is precisely the atonal, ultimately dissonant character of our region that holds out an emancipatory pedagogic promise" (Sultana 2012, p. 24).

In this collection of essays, most of the contributors refer clearly to the paradox of attempting to condense a heterogeneous region like the Mediterranean into a single volume or 'aesthetic'. Elena Stylianou's chapter on two artists' works that formed part of a curated exhibition in an archaeological museum in Cyprus reminds us that the idea of the Mediterranean is a construction and that its socio-political and cultural borders are constantly shifting. The sea's evasiveness becomes a metaphor for the existence of Cyprus between the East and the West, which is itself mirrored in the artists Angelos Makrides and Phanos Kryiacou and their references to both Western ideas and more contextualised critiques. The artists' interventions around Cypriot artefacts in the context of a museum that was actually formed during colonial rule address and even subvert their own heritage and the ways in which this heritage has been framed by institutional conventions and imperialist narratives. Institutional, national or colonial narratives can also have an impact on educational processes, given that education has traditionally been considered to constitute one of the central goals of museums. The curatorial and artistic re-framing of the artefacts and the museological spaces during the exhibition described by Stylianou, therefore, offer possibilities of broadening the critical dimensions of museum education.

The chapter by Anabela Moura also discusses cultural heritage and its links with history, colonialism, education and identity. Based on a project that brought together academic teams from Portugal, England and Turkey, the chapter focuses on the Portuguese experience and analyses images and statements collected from art and non-art student teachers regarding their national identifications. Moura links these identifications with heroic notions disseminated by the educational system and the media, particularly with Portuguese expansionist aspirations in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (euphemistically called 'Portuguese Discoveries' in school textbooks) and examples from popular culture. This is an intriguing aspect of this paper, because unlike some other contributions in this collection, it reflects the experience of colonisation from the colonisers' perspective. More modern 'heroes' picked by participants in this study included Portuguese singers and football players, and Moura concludes that the strong nationalistic tendencies expressed by their choices are socially constructed and would appear to show that young people in Portugal may not have fully appreciated the significance of living in a multicultural society.

Also contextualised in Portugal, the chapter by Sofia Marques da Silva similarly deals with the question of heritage and, like Elena Stylianou, with a deconstruction of cultural traditions. The focus on a relatively 'peripheral' location in northern Portugal easily adapts itself to similarly peripheral contexts around the Mediterranean, while the author's references to the relationship between emigration and unemployment will certainly be familiar to many readers from around the Mediterranean. Unlike Stylianou, who deals with the work of contemporary visual artists, Sofia Marques da Silva studies the involvement of young people in a traditional dance. What singles out this chapter is the way the author weaves her analysis of the renovation of the dance into a redefinition of traditional gender roles as well as a regional struggle with one's identity and perceived threats to it. The dance of the 'Pauliteiros' becomes the dance of the

'Pauliteiras': young girls are teamed up to make a traditionally male domain their own, changing it and "dis-inheriting the heritage" in the process. Education here is a reconfiguration of identity and a challenge to the 'authority' of tradition.

The following three chapters engage in more philosophical reflections on art education in its contemporary and Mediterranean manifestations. Andri Savva's chapter uses different readings of the theoretical notions *khôra* and *topos* to explore the situatedness of art education, with particular reference to the Mediterranean. While examining the work of contemporary artists from Cyprus, Greece and Palestine like Kyriaki Costa, Maria Papadimitriou and Khalil Rabah, Savva offers insights into the relationships between place, artistic practice and education, reminding us—like other authors do in this collection—that the Mediterranean is an 'in-between' place which remains open-ended and dynamic. According to Savva, the region's particularities, especially the multiple and even contradictory social and political meanings that have accrued around specific localities, can potentially enrich the field of art education by making artists and educators reflect about the margins and histories of the spaces they inhabit and the possibility of democratic dialogue that may lead us beyond these margins and histories.

Raphael Vella's chapter explores the notions of understanding and disagreement in the realms of contemporary art and art education, against the backdrop of the Mediterranean (or 'Mediterraneans', as he calls them) and its specific geo-political, cultural, linguistic and other contexts. Vella applies the notion of *mésentente* in Jacques' Rancière's work and that of the 'radicant' (Nicolas Bourriaud) to the field of art education, proposing a stance that does not reduce our relationship with the 'other' to a question of 'understanding'. Instead, contemporary art and art education constantly bring us face to face with enigmatic and unfamiliar realities and ideas, which are then translated and redefined in the new contexts they encounter. Referring to the work of contemporary artists from the Mediterranean and beyond, the author shows that by coming to terms with our misunderstandings with others, we also come to terms with how we misunderstand ourselves.

Informed by the writings of philosophers and poets as diverse as Eugenio Montale, John Dewey and Søren Kierkegaard, the final chapter by John Baldacchino starts by warning its readers to avoid falling into the identity 'trap' that would have us imagine a common aesthetic shared by communities inhabiting a region as diverse as the Mediterranean. This idea of the 'whole' is precisely what Baldacchino invites us to unlearn, just as the relentless stereotyping of particular territories, economies and peoples in southern Europe must constantly be resisted. Baldacchino argues that these stereotypes and identitarian notions of homogeneity have a common, colonial heritage that a Mediterranean pedagogical aesthetics must distance itself from, and concludes that the internal paradox of trying to define whatever characterises a Mediterranean imaginary cannot be erased because this imaginary is paradoxically 'rooted' in the rootlessness of journeying. Perhaps the sea itself, this mobile site of a thousand journeys, is the most under-rated teacher in the Mediterranean.

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