

Maritime Tales: Between Land & Sea  
Zineb Sedira

Exhibition Dates | 07.07 to 01.11.13

Selma Feriani Gallery, Tunis a newly opened new space dedicated to contemporary art and a branch of the eponymous booming London gallery, will showcase this summer the first solo show in Tunisia of London-based artist Zineb Sedira. In *Récits maritimes: entre terre et mer*, Zineb Sedira will present existing and new bodies of work produced in Mauritania, Algeria and Marseille. Through sculptural photography, video and objects, the exhibition speaks of universal experiences and transitional existences. Sedira also addresses environmental, geographical and cultural mobility issues, negotiating between both past and future.

For the past 15 years, Zineb Sedira has enriched the debate around the concepts of modernism, modernity and its manifestations in a more inclusive way. She has also raised awareness on artistic expressions and the contemporary experience in Algeria and its surrounding countries. She initially found inspiration in researching into her identity as a woman of Algerian parents. From autobiographical concerns she gradually shifted her interest to more universal ideas of migrations, memories and transmission. Through portraits, landscape, language and archival research, she developed a polyphonic vocabulary, spanning from fiction and documentary to more poetic and lyrical approaches.

In *Récits Maritimes*, Sedira traces the lines of continuing journeys within the metaphorical borders that space and time in between sea and land encapsulates. Once a virgin strip of sand dragged along from the Western Sahara to the North Atlantic Sea, the coastlines of the peninsula of Nouadhibou (Mauritania) now resemble a desolated post-apocalyptic film set. Damaged and abandoned skeletons of rusted ships, machines, and fragments of engines are anchored either into the water or the sand. Did they start or end their journey here? Did they land or depart from here?

Looking towards the sea, *The Lovers I* and *Shipwrecks: The Death of a Journey III* (2008), are striking images of abandoned shipwrecks, which are fragile floating sculptures threatening to collapse at any time. In the light box *Vue apocalyptique* (2013), one of these vessels crosses the window of an abandoned fort, built by the French during the colonisation of Mauritania, as if the decadent past looks at the derelict present.

Decline of a Journey II (2010) reconfigures a graveyard of motionless modes of transport in an installation of twelve light boxes displayed in a hovering, structure-less arrangement. They seem to have found an eternal home where their *raison d'être* and the end of their existence coexist.

Nouadhibou is the natural habitat of exotic migratory birds that stop here each year. It is also the end of the African journey of candidates for illegal immigration to a promised land. The maritime business has turned this rich ecosystem into an environmental disaster and a waste dump where local communities have developed parallel economies responding to the global demand in metal.

At the end of the journey is a gatekeeper, the one who leads and brings everyone back home. The photograph *Broken Lens* (2011) reminds us of the yellow beam that shines in the dark horizon or a glimmering light breaking from the depths of the sea. In her video piece *Lighthouse in the Sea of Time* (2011) Sedira filmed the surroundings of the lighthouses of Cap Caxine in the outskirts of Algiers, and Cap Sigli in the remote Berber region of Kabylia. Overlooking the sea, the lighthouses built by the French during the colonial times, are existing markers of Algeria's past and future. Through the portrait of a lighthouse keeper, and exploring the logbooks, archives and technical equipment, Sedira transforms the building into a memory keeper and an historical monument of the Algerian modernity. The lighthouses have been and still are the witnesses of Algerian history; having gained its independence in 1962, the French names appearing on the service records and visitors' logbooks give way to Algerian keepers, visitors and locations.

With *Sugar Routes* (2013), Sedira metaphorically summarises the human dilemma and the dynamics of coming, going and remaining that the sea invites us to. Exploring the port of Marseille, the shipping movements of the *Sucre St Louis* factory (the only sugar trade left in France) attracted her attention. Extracted from sugar cane in Brazil, Mauritius, Zambia, Burkina Faso, Cuba, Guyana, Swaziland or Réunion, the sugar that arrives in Marseille echoes the stories of human migrations and the triangle routes of the 19th and 20th centuries. The artist used the same sugar to recreate two emblematic symbols of the movements in the sea: the anchor and the propeller. Gripping the bottom of the sea and holding the ships firmly in place, the anchor anticipates the arrival and the memories to be kept and transmitted. In return, the propeller is the force which drives us to move forward, between countries, or simply towards creating new futures.

*Text by Yasmina Reggad*