



APNEA

Apnea explores the dimension of the emotions of migrants who venture out to cross the sea. Apnea proposes an inner itinerary that we can all recognise: a cartography of feelings and fears mapped using interactive immersive technologies and an exhibition of objects that were salvaged from the sea.



APNEA. THE ETERNAL TIME OF ABSENCE

Vanessa Vozzo

It is arrogant to want to speak about migrants: in fact, we are arrogant. We ourselves have no right to comment: we shall never know how it feels to risk our lives to cross the sea or the desert. We shall never know what really happens, what situation the people who move out of desperation leave behind them, where they will go, what they are looking for. We are ignorant because our bodies do not perceive: they do not understand. They do not know. We are the lucky ones. And our minds speculate. But what can we say? Or, what can we do? Because the fact is that can say and do something: we must. Even if we don't know what. We know what we are, because we are alive: we can start from there. But we need to know more. A lot more.

So that's it: a very rough sketch of the first superficial thoughts that come to mind when you decide to tackle an issue like that of the "migrants who cross the sea in search of a new life", as you nestle back, sitting comfortably on your sofa.

When we decided to create this work, we were living in a profound, blessed ignorance of a topic about which, at the very same time, we felt a profound need to express ourselves. To be-

come more aware. To take it onto the scene of the young students where we teach and to share it with them. Lest we forget. And for many other reasons, some of them intimate and even personal. Some of them hard to grasp. Some of them caused by the primitive fear of the void and of absence.

We also felt profoundly that, in this case, by using art combined with technology, in particular immersive and interactive technologies, we would be able us to get our message across while remaining in silence ourselves. To raise awareness, starting from each one's personal and emotional involvement.

That blessed ignorance is now a thing of the past, maybe. It has morphed into confused ignorance, into laconic, disturbed listening, into anger and horror. Into anything but knowledge. Personally, all I know is that, when I close my eyes and imagine a body on the seabed, I see myself, too, suspended, contracted, alone. And I am seized by a profound fear if I think that I cannot get back to the surface. That's it: *Apnea* evolves from this irrational sensation of bringing the memory of people we do not know back to the light of day, using the objects they have lost. But *Apnea* also springs from what we see and what we imagine, a subtle trick of perception that stimulates us to look more closely and at the same time suggests what we suppose is not always real.

APNEA: THE AUDIO-VISUAL CONTENTS

Vanessa Vozzo - Stefano Sburlati

Most of *Apnea's* audio-visual contents were shot in Lampedusa.

LAMPEDUSA Everywhere you go in Lampedusa, there is a briny flavour to the air. The foreigners you see when you look around are only summer tourists. The open sea looks clear and calm, the beaches are magnificent and you can eat fresh fish every day. Some people say that the island has a special energy all of its own, something that wraps itself around you, acting as a lure that induces you to come back time and again. We went there and went back again. And then we went back again.



Yet there are signs in Lampedusa: boats that have been abandoned or confiscated, bearing Arabic script, protest slogans written on the walls, people who know and tell you about it and other who keep so resolutely silent that you pick up the words they are thinking. And then there are the ones who lie. There are helicopters in the sky at night and police vans full of people. Then there are moments when all the tragedy is broadcast

through megaphones distributed across the island, such as during the procession that we watched. Lampedusa bears the marks of the tragedy of the people who have been shipwrecked in their attempt to reach the island, but it also bears the beauty of a timeless place.





THE EVOCATIVE POWER OF OBJECTS *Re: record of the listing and confiscation of the personal effects found on corpse N° XXX, comprising: one pair of metal earrings; 1 US \$ 100 banknote; one amulet; one sheet with handwritten telephone numbers.*

It is for these objects that we go to Lampedusa. They are not just random objects: they are the objects belonging to the victims of some of the shipwrecks that have taken place just off the coast of Lampedusa, in particular one that happened on 3 October 2013.

We spent days alone with these objects in the archaeological museum, filming them and photographing them. And we never stopped imagining the people they belonged to. Hearing their voices, seeing their faces, imagining their breathing, their legs, their postures, their hands. These objects conjure up their owners' lives, yet they are wrapped up in nothingness. «They ought to be returned to the victims' relatives», says Valerio Cataldi, the journalist who founded the 3 October Committee that takes care of them and invited us to go to the island.

These objects are part of an identity that moves, that travels with them. Yet they remain suspended in the void.

Then one day we met a boy, a survivor of the shipwreck on 3 October 2013, who asked us: «Did you find a white mobile telephone among the objects you photographed?». «Yes», we answered. «That telephone means a lot to me», he said, «a friend of mine hid it in a sock, because we were not allowed to take it on the boat. When we survived, it was that telephone that enabled us to call our relatives». But we did not photograph it.

«And a list of telephone numbers?». «Yes, we saw one of those too: to tell the truth, we saw several». «Maybe one of the ones you saw belonged to the group from Somalia. None of them survived, so nobody could tell their relatives. But one day I thought I ought to come back to Lampedusa to find one of the Somalis' list of telephone numbers and try to call some of them». «We don't know», we answered, «we don't know if one of those lists belonged to a Somali. We didn't think about that while we were taking our photos.»



FILM FOOTAGE SHOT IN THE SEA «The first time I retrieved a corpse was in 1988 or 1989, I don't remember exactly. The last time was on 3 October 2013. I hope I never find another. It's something you can't describe». The speaker is Simone D'Ippolito, a professional diver and the owner of a diving centre who organises underwater excursions for the tourists who flock to Lampedusa. Simone was one of the first to find the 3 October wreck and to help the survivors and that is the only time he appears in *Apnea*, in the 360° video shot underwater. He is a man with a certain stature, someone who is sure of himself. Since he gives us the confidence not to be afraid of the sea, we let him take us down into deep waters, knowing that we will have no difficulty in positioning our 360° movie camera and shooting our footage. But the sea is rough and stormy, so getting our footage takes longer and is more complicated than anticipated.



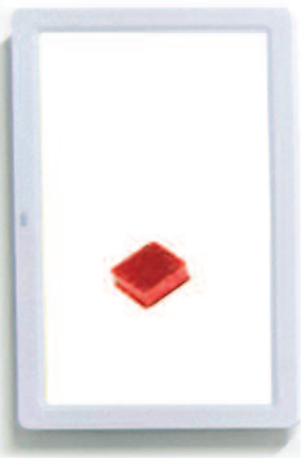
Then a sculpture arrives from Paris. It's of a man who is waiting. And while he waits, he is worn away. It is the work of the artist Rosella Fida. We place it on the seabed: all the fish surround it and we start filming something tragically beautiful.



COMPASSES On the occasion of the Day of Memory and of Hospitality, on 2 October 2016, while we were in Lampedusa to present our work, we had the chance to get to know Laura Pasquero from Doctors Without Borders. She told us: «On some of the boats that we helped when they were in trouble at sea, we found a compass: it would have been given to the people on the boat just as they were leaving Libya, so that they could find their way as they tried to cross the sea towards Italy. The image of these precariously fragile, overcrowded boats feeling their way ahead in the dark of the night with the aid of old compasses makes me think once again of how desperate these people are to undertake such a voyage: a dreadfully dangerous voy-

age that thousands of women, men and children fleeing from warfare and extreme misery decide to undertake, at the risk of their very lives, in search of protection, peace and safety.»

VOICES A great many voice recordings are used in *Apnea*. These voices have been collected in the course of working together with local associations that provide help to refugees, but also voices that are broadcast on the web and are often lost in the ether. Although we have recuperated them, the merit for the incredible labour of collecting them belongs with such organisations as the Human Rights Watch.



THE ARTWORK AND THE USE IT MAKES OF IMMERSIVE AND INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Vanessa Vozzo - Stefano Sburlati

Apnea uses interactive and immersive technologies for the purpose of awareness raising, basing its approach on generating a personal, emotional sense of involvement in each individual, a possibility offered by this kind of technologies. Study and research in this field proved to be crucial to creating the work, enabling us to understand how a body may react to certain kinds of stimuli. This induced us to decide not to develop a hyper-realistic immersive audio-visual environment, but to rely more on symbolism and archetypes to stimulate the perception of a more profound sensory experience.

The visitor's exploratory experience unfolds through three episodes or environments that offer different degrees of immersiveness and interactivity: a journey into our own emotions.

Visitors start this journey with a display of photographs, videos, pieces of writing and original artefacts found on the wrecks (especially the 3 October 2013 wreck) or brought on land by individual migrants. These are taken out of context and located in a procedural soundscape that is recomposed in real time.

The water, the sea and the objects are the central elements of the next two episodes, which were devised specifically to enable visitors to achieve an individual experience:

- the first is a space with an interactive projection that refers to a dive to the seabed, to primordial places that conflict with raw, real voices. As visitors move through the audio-visual environment, they modify it in real time.
- the second is a 360° video that enables visitors to plunge into the seas around Lampedusa. The performative dimension here can really take your breath away. Creating this part of the work involved intense periods of research for shooting the footage, editing it, creating the spatial audio and programming a specific player.



THE BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT The *Apnea* project came about when the Fondazione 107 for Contemporary Art came together with the platform of the Interactive Media Art Officine Sintetiche, which involves the CIRMA, the Department of Humanities at the University of Turin and the Department of Cinema Engineering and Communication Media at Turin Polytechnic. The International Castel dei Mondi Festival at Andria later also joined as a supporting partner. In May 2016, the project won the Ora! call for tender issued by the Company of St Paul, which enabled it to launch into a pre-project phase of training and research that led to the organisation of a public event in March 2016.

THE TEAM The artwork develops on an idea devised by Vanessa Vozzo and is curated by Vanessa Vozzo and Stefano Sburlati, who started conducting research about migrants and the sea in 2015. Since January 2016, Stefano and Vanessa have been guiding groups of students and managing complex research in immersive and interactive technologies. Since then, *Apnea* has involved students, researchers and lecturers from Turin Polytechnic and Turin University, as well as extramural professionals: altogether, a large group of more than 20 people.



Fondazione 107 was established in 2009 and works in every form and expression of contemporary art, prioritising its focus on a multidisciplinary, multicultural context, where continuity is furnished by geopolitical issues.

This made it quite natural for Fondazione 107 to decide to join the *Apnea* project and share its aspiration to dialogue with an audience that would be expanded with the aid of advanced technologies, giving a voice to such sensations and emotions as absence, deprivation and a sense of disorientation.

Fondazione 107 has an exhibition venue that occupies 1,500 square metres in a disused industrial building dating to the fifties of the last century.

Federico Piccari
(Fondazione 107 - Contemporary Art Centre)

The University of Turin plays a vital role in its geographical area, not only with its research and training activities, but also by virtue of its function as a place where young students meet with successful practising professionals. This has always been the aim of the Officine Sintetiche platform, which once again offers its good offices in this case to act as a place for exchanging experiences and conducting experiments with languages. Together with the Department of Humanities at the University of Turin, the CIRMA has a positive track record of supporting the activities of the Officine Sintetiche, paving the way for it to be part of this important project. *Apnea* is the result of a process of local networking conducted over the years, which has much to thank Vanessa Vozzo for her tenacious insistence. She and the other generous spirits who created this project have demonstrated that experimenting with idioms becomes all the more significant when it is combined with a civic sense, when it illustrates issues that burst onto our communities with urgency. The tragedy of the migrants whose genocidal numbers assail us so strikingly is also made up of affection and love, of personal objects and stories. The university's presence in *Apnea* is a statement about its civic commitment, raising a voice that we trust will be joined to the many that already clamour to be heard.

Antonio Pizzo
(CIRMA - Università degli Studi di Torino)

Officine Sintetiche, the platform that first generated the *Apnea* project, has spent ten years developing as a place for interdisciplinary experiments and meetings between different professional and academic cultures.

It is an active meeting place, whose results speak more than a thousand words. Students of Cinema Engineering work closely together with those of the Arts, Music and Entertainment, guided by Italian and international experts and researchers, to build experience that truly enables them to increase their skills and gain empowerment. Technological and artistic innovation derives from practices that push the boundaries, explore and dialogue.

Tatiana Mazali
(Politecnico di Torino)

Officina Sintetiche is a platform that has been working since 2006 in the field of Interactive Media Art and new technologies applied to art. officinesintetiche.it



APNEA INTERACTIVE AND IMMERSIVE MEDIA ARTWORK ABOUT MIGRANTS AND THE SEA

The Apnea project takes place in the framework of the Officine Sintetiche Interactive Media Art platform.

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Project Reportage
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Reportage in Lampedusa
Michele Cattani

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Stefano Sbrulati e Vanessa Vozzo

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Giacomo Leonzi (coding)
Stefano Sbrulati (VR 360° video system, contents)
Vanessa Vozzo (interactive software system, contents, production)

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Nicolò Zilocchi

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APNEA

INTERACTIVE AND IMMERSIVE MEDIA ARTWORK
ABOUT MIGRANTS AND THE SEA

Opening Friday 4 November from 6 to 11 pm

05-20 November 2016
Thursday - Sunday from 2 to 7 pm

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