



LE GOUVERNEMENT  
DU GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG  
Ministère de la Culture

CASINO LUXEMBOURG  
Forum d'art contemporain



La Biennale di Venezia

58. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

58<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia  
Luxembourg Pavilion, 11 May – 24 November 2019

# Marco Godinho

## Written by Water

CURATOR

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ASSISTANT CURATOR

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### Press release

**Marco Godinho was selected to represent Luxembourg at the 58<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia with his project *Written by Water*.**

In line with the main themes that guide his artistic approach, Marco Godinho's work for the Luxembourg Pavilion looks at the relationships that mankind entertains with the sea. Always in search of new horizons, the Portuguese-born artist is a nomadic explorer of the geographical, political and philosophical margins and boundaries of the world in which he lives.

Throughout the centuries, the sea has fascinated humans and given birth to countless legends and projections, prompting men and women to embark on daring exploratory journeys that have durably changed and defined our perception of the world. Yet beneath the romantic veneer of an epic space that kindles the imagination lurks a more complex geopolitical dimension.

The beginning of the twenty-first century will forever be marked by the waves of migration from South to North. *Written by Water* is an odyssey that takes the reverse path of today's migratory routes across the Mediterranean, the cradle of modern society and birthplace of founding narratives that underpin our common heritage. In his installation for the Luxembourg Pavilion, Godinho creates an organic landscape imbued with its own temporality. Here, the sea appears as a world in perpetual motion in which the thoughts and memories associated with it become unspecified nomadic variables, a space onto which spectators can project their own stories cued by the elements assembled by the artist.

In the eponymous subproject, composed of notebooks that the artist has temporarily submerged in the water of the Mediterranean sea, the traditional

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form of the written travel accounts makes way for a flowing narrative charged with evocative potential. Its author is the sea itself, whose recollections are left to naturally 'inscribe' themselves onto the pages of the artist's notebooks. Only the sea knows what each of these soaked, undulating pages suffused with a distinctive individuality contains.

Another integral part of Godinho's installation, *A Permanent Sea inside Us* examines personal stories in connection with the mindscape of the sea. For many people, the sea is merely a distant reality or fiction, with which they have never entertained an actual relationship, and probably never will. For them, it remains a myth or something impossible. Others, in turn, know it all too well for having placed their hopes and fate in it. What kind of portrait emerges from all these personal stories? How can we (re)think the sea based on these multiple individual abstractions?

*Written by Water* invites viewers into a kind of analogue deep-learning experience. It is through their introspection and immersion in these volatile 'living memories' assembled by the artist himself that these seemingly lost stories will be perpetually rewritten.

### **Luxembourg's presence at the *Arsenale***

For the Biennale Arte 2019, the Luxembourg Pavilion joins the *Arsenale*. Leaving the Ca' del Duca, the private home that had been hosting its exhibitions since 1999, it has moved to the first floor of the *Sala d'Armi*. Thanks to this new location, the Luxembourg Pavilion sits right in the throbbing heart of the Biennale.

### **Jury**

In the spring of 2018, a jury composed of Emma Lavigne (Director, Centre Pompidou-Metz), Danielle Igniti (Director, CCR opderschmelz, art galleries of the City of Dudelange), Suzanne Cotter (Director, Mudam Luxembourg), Frank-Thorsten Moll (Director, IKOB Eupen) and Kevin Muhlen (Director, Casino Luxembourg – Forum d'art contemporain) unanimously selected Marco Godinho to represent Luxembourg at the Biennale Arte 2019. With their choice, the jury wished to "honour the prolific work of Marco Godinho and his remarkable presence on the national and international artistic stage for the last decade. The invitation to conceive the Luxembourg Pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2019 will allow him to realise a new and ambitious artistic project and expand his field of action in the years to come. His participation in this internationally recognised event – as well as the increased visibility of the Luxembourg Pavilion in the *Arsenale* – will give him an opportunity to further expand his professional network".

### **Casino Luxembourg – Forum d'art contemporain**

Luxembourg's participation in the Biennale Arte 2019 is organised and coordinated by the Ministry of Culture of Luxembourg in a revolving partnership with Casino Luxembourg – Forum d'art contemporain and Mudam Luxembourg. The 2013 and 2015 editions were organised by Mudam, while Casino Luxembourg is in charge of the 2017 and 2019 contributions. A flagship institution for contemporary art in Luxembourg and abroad, Casino Luxembourg is exclusively dedicated to art in the making. Focusing on production rather than collecting and conservation, it supports and nurtures experimentation and risk-taking as inherent characteristics of creativity.

COMMISSIONER



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For the past fifteen years he has been unfolding a singular universe, reflecting on our subjective experience of time and space. He shows a sensitive approach to post-conceptual practice, questions of exile, memory, and geography inspired by his own experience of nomadic life, suspended between different languages and cultures and nourished by literature and poetry. From installations and videos to his writings and collaborative pieces, his work forms a map of a world shaped by personal experiences and multiculturalism.

**Selection of solo exhibitions since 2006:**

Fonderie Darling, Montreal, Canada (2018), MAMAC – Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain, Nice, France (2016), MNAC – Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado, Lisbon, Portugal (2015), Centre d'art Nei Liicht, Dudelange, Luxembourg (2015), Museo Universitario Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia (2013), Centre d'art contemporain – Faux Mouvement, Metz, France (2013), Casino Luxembourg – Forum d'art contemporain, Luxembourg (2013), Neuer Kunstverein Aschaffenburg, Germany (2012)

**Selection of group exhibitions:**

Les Abattoirs, Musée – Frac Occitanie Toulouse, France (2019), TheCube Project Space & VT Artsalon, Taipei, Taiwan (2018), Magasin des Horizons, Grenoble, France (2018), CCK – Centro Cultural Kirchner, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2018), Société, Brussels, Belgium (2018), Institut Français de Saint-Louis on the occasion of Biennale de Dakar, Senegal (2018), Biennale de Lyon, France (2017), Galleria Alberta Pane, Venice (2017), MAC Val – Musée d'art contemporain du Val-de-Marne, France (2017), ARGOS – Center for Art and Media, Brussels, Belgium (2017), Centre d'art contemporain – Quartier Général, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland (2017), Grey Noise Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates (2016), CAC – Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga, Spain (2016), Mudam Luxembourg, Luxembourg (2015-2016), Wyspa Institute of Art, Gdansk Shipyard, Poland (2014), Bienal Video y artes mediales, Santiago de Chile, Chile (2013), Josée Bienvenu Gallery, New York (2013), Centre Pompidou-Metz & Frac Lorraine, Metz, France (2013), Fondation Berardo, Lisbon, Portugal (2011), Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales, Montevideo, Uruguay (2011), Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France (2011), Rencontres d'Arles, Arles, France (2010), Domaine Pommery, Reims, France (2008)

**Public collections:**

MNAC – Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado, Lisbon, Portugal; Mudam Luxembourg, Luxembourg; Fondation pour L'Art Contemporain, Claudine & Jean-Marc Salomon, France; CAC – Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga, Spain; CNAP – Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris, France; MNHA – Musée national d'histoire et d'art, Luxembourg; Villa Vauban, Luxembourg; Frac Franche-Comté, Besançon, France; Frac Lorraine, Metz, France; Frac Franche-Comté, Besançon, France; Frac Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur, Marseille, France; Frac Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, France; Frac Poitou-Charentes, Angoulême, France; Frac Limousin, Limoges, France

**1 BETWEEN TWO WAVES, 2019**

**Environment, approximate dimensions 21 x 7 x 4.70 m**

Upon entering the Luxembourg Pavilion, visitors are immersed in a setting that adapts to the architectural scale of the Sale d'Armi. Acting simultaneously as artwork, spatial environment and interface containing all the elements that make up *Written by Water*, it was conceived as a kind of living organism that unfolds in the Sale d'Armi from north to south.

Taking the shape of a monumental wave that rises above visitors' heads, *Between Two Waves* evokes the sea but also brings to mind a work of nomadic architecture,

an open shelter for anyone seeking refuge. The space is subject to its own temporality, reflecting a constant balancing movement between the exploration of an external state and an inner tension. It stages a world unto its own, an ecosystem with its own rhythms and new modes of celebration and rituals. The various elements of the space cannot be seen at once, thus leaving room for ephemerality and uncertainty.

## **2 WRITTEN BY WATER, 2013–2019**

### **Notebooks immersed in different places in the Mediterranean Sea, colour videos, duration and dimensions variable**

In addition to being the overall title of the Luxembourg Pavilion, *Written by Water* is also the name of a long-term project initiated by the artist and the title of the work that occupies the south-facing inclined plane of the installation, the only spot in the pavilion exposed to daylight. The work consists of a collection of hundreds of empty notebooks, which the artist has immersed in different places in the Mediterranean Sea during his travels, letting each page soak up the memory of the water.

Forming a library of invisible stories written by the sea, this work invites visitors to 'read' the poetic traces of the artist's journeys around the Mediterranean borders, to transitional spaces fraught with palpable tensions on either side of the divide. Marco Godinho's project started in 2013 in the Bay of Gibraltar. The notebooks presented here are the traces of actions carried out between 2013 and 2019 in Ceuta, Djerba, Carthage, Lampedusa, Catania, Marseille, Nice, Ventimiglia, Umag, Trieste and the Lido of Venice.

## **3 LEFT TO THEIR OWN FATE (ODYSSEY), 2019**

### **Immersive architectural and light intervention, complete edition in three volumes of Homer's *Odyssey*, HD video, duration and dimensions variable**

*Left to Their Own Fate* is first of all an action performed by the artist's brother, the actor Fábio Godinho, on three initiatory journeys to various places on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea (Strait of Gibraltar/Tunis, Carthage, Djerba/Trieste and Istria). While travelling, Fábio silently read all three volumes of the complete text of Homer's *Odyssey*, considered one of the founding poems of European civilisation.

During his travels, Ulysses, a forced migrant and exile, must face the violence of the sea. But his journey is also about losing one's sense of orientation, seemingly endless periods of waiting and the perils of returning home – resonating with the fate of today's migrants and the lack of perspectives of a generation facing uncertain times. Each time he finished reading a page of the *Odyssey*, Fábio tore it out and, in a gesture of offering, turned it over to the sea, to nature. The pages flew away and thus continued their journey, each following its own destiny.

This experience in the field gave rise to a video in which documentary and fiction are inextricably intertwined, resulting in an uncertain intermediary state. The video of the journeys is projected at monumental scale onto the northern side of the pavilion. The image is visible from both the outside and the inside, creating a zone of coexistence and sharing. Once inside the pavilion, visitors discover a cut in the wall, placed at a very precise height. Depending on the light in the pavilion, they can occasionally spot the three empty book volumes behind this cut, separated by a one-way mirror. The cut extends to the parallel room, where it no longer holds any material content, retaining only its luminous, ephemeral presence.

## **4 A PERMANENT SEA INSIDE US, 2019**

### **Immersive sound and light installation, HD video, duration and dimensions variable**

*A Permanent Sea Inside Us* looks at personal narratives generated by the sea.

For many people, the sea is merely a distant reality or fiction, with which they have never entertained an actual relationship, and probably never will. For them, it remains a myth or something impossible. Others, in turn, know it all too well for having placed their hopes and fate in it. What kind of portrait emerges from all these personal stories? How can we (re)think the sea based on these multiple individual abstractions? *A Permanent Sea Inside Us* is an immersive sound and light installation in the innermost part of the pavilion. Unfolding according to its own timeline, it can only be experienced at certain moments; visitors who are unaware of its presence are therefore likely to miss it.

The sound material for this work was collected largely during interviews and meetings held in Luxembourg – a country that has no coastline – with various local communities (visually impaired and blind people, migrants, exiles). Marco Godinho made his library of notebooks from *Written by Water* available to visually impaired people, who ‘read’ and explored with their hands the invisible stories written by the sea. Simple testimonies are transformed into dreamlike narratives that echo the countless imaginary worlds linked to the sea, to water, to the horizon and to infinity, but also to the fear of the sea and the fascination it holds. The voices become sound bodies. In an amnesic world ruled by new technologies, orality, the voice and memory, which is transmitted through speech, are more important than ever.

Drawing on his numerous experiences, the artist developed a mantra-like chant based on voices, a kind of ‘sung itinerary’. These voices, as Bruce Chatwin wrote in *The Songlines*, the story of an initiatory journey into Aboriginal culture, “let us explore a tradition perpetuated over several generations: that of songs describing physical and symbolic landmarks of Australia’s vast expanses – oral maps that enable listeners to walk in the footsteps of the ancestors”.

The interior of the pavilion thus becomes a place of meditation turned towards inner experience and a spiritual and philosophical quest. The acoustic environment is interspersed with the breathing sound of an accordion that is pushed to its limits in an attempt to induce a trance-like state reminiscent of shamanic rituals. The songs also nod to Homer, the blind singing *aoidos* (poet), as well as to the stories of Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentine writer who became gradually blind and who entertained a special, intimate relationship with memory, sight and orality.

## **5 OBLIVION (WATER), 2019**

**Aqua vitae from Portugal and Luxembourg, jujube fruit from Korea, blown glass bottles, cork, metal, one-way mirror, light system, ongoing work**

*Oblivion (Water)* is a work that evolves throughout the Biennale, which lasts approximately seven months. This is the ideal length of time to macerate Korean jujube fruit in Luxembourgish and Portuguese brandy, which is thus turned into a placebo. Between the opening ritual (first day of maceration) and the ending ceremony (tasting event on the last day of the Biennale), the exhibition space becomes the site of a process during which the work is developed and transformed.

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Ulysses arrives on the island of the *lotophagi*, or “lotus-eaters” (now Djerba in Tunisia), who feed on the lotus flower, ‘the fruit that brings oblivion to those who eat it’. It stands for a particular threat to all explorers: that of ‘so kind a welcome’, so hospitable a land that one no longer wants to return home. As soon as the sailors eat the fruit, their desire to return home vanishes.

According to researchers, the fruit of oblivion might well be the jujube (probably native to Asia, it appeared in Africa more than 4,000 years ago). In search of the wondrous fruit, Godinho first travelled to Djerba, but when he failed to find any jujube (it was not the right season), he decided to try his luck in Korea, an important jujube producer as well as the country of origin of his partner. In *Oblivion (Water)*, Godinho begins by deconstructing his own (Portuguese-Luxembourgish) identity and offers all

those who taste the liquid to open up more to the other and forget the sectarianisms of identity and nationalism – open up to what is foreign, open up to the world and ‘claim the right to opacity’, as Édouard Glissant put it, for whom ‘the only way to fight globalisation [is] not by withdrawing into oneself, into one’s own condition, but by establishing relations with the other. And this is a real dimension of Utopia.’

The blown glass bottles, in which the liquid of forgetfulness macerates, are an attempt to materialise the shape of the glassmaker’s breath. The irregular, organic forms are all similar, yet each has its own identity. Suspended behind a one-way mirror, the bottle placed within the scenographic installation is visible at times, caught between the reflection of the mirror and its transparency.

## **6 SEE ANOTHER SEA, 2019**

### **Poem, time (201 days), ongoing work**

The poem *See Another Sea* consists of 201 verses, one for each day of the Biennale. In the pavilion, the poem is revealed to the public in daily fragments, almost imperceptibly. Each verse is an invitation, a gesture of hospitality that encourages visitors to come inside the pavilion and engage in dialogue with Alberto, its invigilator and guardian.

Alberto will be wearing a white t-shirt with a different verse on it for every day of the Biennale. Thanks to this ‘infra-thin’ gesture, the exhibition almost imperceptibly changes day by day. As the invigilator, guardian and guide of the pavilion, Alberto is the first witness – and living memory – of the public’s reaction to the work. Indeed, more than the work itself, what counts are the reactions and experiences it prompts. Alberto thus follows spectators on their personal journey through the pavilion. Between mantra and haiku, *See Another Sea* epitomises the spirit of the pavilion, which in an essential breath attempts to touch upon the evanescence of things by appealing to all senses.

## **7 LEFT TO THEIR OWN FATE (ODYSSEY), 2019**

### **Performance, text activation by the actor Fábio Godinho, ongoing from 8 to 10 May 2019 in the pavilion and in Venice**

From 8 to 10 May 2019, during the three days preceding the official opening of the Venice Biennale to the public, the actor Fábio Godinho will silently read one of the three volumes of the integral text of Homer’s *Odyssey* in public. Each time he has finished reading a page, he will tear it out and, in a gesture of offering, hand it to a visitor or let it fall to the ground. The pages will continue their journey, each following its own destiny. Thanks to this dissemination, they form an invisible and infinite constellation of relationships between the people who took home a page of the book.

The performance will begin on the morning of 8 May 2019 when Fábio wakes up, and end on 10 May, when he will have finished reading the last page. During this entire period, he will at all times carry the three volumes with him, even outside the context of the Biennale.

## **8 OBLIVION (COLOUR), 2019**

### **Paint, jujube, variable dimensions**

A few drops of jujube were poured into the paint that was used to cover the interior and exterior walls of the pavilion. This subtle gesture, invisible to the naked eye, turns the painting into a placebo and lends it the power of oblivion. See also *Oblivion (Water)*.

**SEE ANOTHER SEA**

The book *See Another Sea* is a visual and poetic proposition that looks back at the different journeys (Strait of Gibraltar, Tunis, Carthage, Djerba, Trieste, Istria, Lampedusa, Catania, Etna, Marseille, Nice, Ventimiglia...) and collaborations (with blind and visually impaired people, migrants, graphic designers, an illustrator, an actor, an accordionist, a glassblower, a distiller, a sound and light designer, an architect, an ironworker...) made during the preparation of *Written by Water*.

The poem *See Another Sea* counts as many verses as the Venice Biennale counts exhibition days, namely 201. Each day, the poem is revealed to the public in the pavilion, gradually, almost imperceptibly. Between mantra and haiku, the poem epitomises the spirit of the pavilion, which, in an essential breath, attempts to touch upon the evanescence of things by appealing to all the senses.

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|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Format: 150 × 115 mm           | Language: EN            |
| Number of pages: 144           | Number of copies: 1,000 |
| Author: Marco Godinho          | Price: EUR 15           |
| Contents: haikus, col. photos. | ISBN 978-99959-30-93-6  |

**LE MONDE NOMADE DE MR GODINHO**

For fifteen years, the Korean illustrator Keong-A Song has been retracing the adventures of Mr Godinho – the alter ego of artist Marco Godinho as an illustrated character – travelling the world as part of his artistic endeavors. She creates funny little stories and evokes, in her own way, themes and topics that influence the creative work of the artist on a daily basis, as well as anecdotes related to the development, production and implementation of his works. In *The Nomadic World of Mr Godinho*, Keong-A Song illustrates some of the Godinho's artistic and human adventures in about thirty cities around the world (Lisbon, Lampedusa, Taipei, Montreal, Hong Kong, Djerba, Buenos Aires...).

|                                                       |                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Format: 135 × 215 mm                                  | Language: FR            |
| Number of pages: 96                                   | Number of copies: 1,000 |
| Contents: b/w drawings<br>by illustrator Keong-A Song | Price: EUR 15           |
|                                                       | ISBN 978-99959-30-94-3  |

**Sponsor's statement  
Luxembourg – Let's  
make it happen**

Since its launch in October 2016 the initiative *Luxembourg – Let's make it happen* initiative has supported numerous associations, federations and organisations from all sectors of society that subscribe to the values it promotes, namely, openness, dynamism and reliability. By encouraging synergies, it aims to put Luxembourg on the worldwide map and showcase its know-how. Marco Godinho's participation in the Venice Biennale reflects the country's openness and demonstrates its artistic excellence at an international level through its expertise and its emphasis on universal values.