

water@leeds SPRING

Report of Activity

Gill Park, School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, Supervisor(s) Griselda Pollock and Gail Day, University of Leeds

Date of activity: October 2015

My water@leeds SPRING grant enabled me to visit the Istanbul Biennial, a major exhibition of contemporary art based on the theme of SALTWATER. Beginning with Istanbul's position on the edge of the River Bosphorous at the intersection of Europe and Asia, the biennial used Saltwater as a metaphor through which to explore a set of urgent themes pertinent to our contemporary context. These include, borders and migration; maritime economics; the preservation of life; the possibilities of organic and non-linear forms; the transference of energy through waves and the flows of knowledge between art and other disciplines.

By attending the Istanbul Biennial, I developed new knowledge of contemporary art practice that is responding to the theme of SALTWATER. This included Adrian Villar-Rojas monumental art work *The Most Beautiful of all Mothers*, Tacita Deans' *Salt (a collection)* and Grace Schwindt's sound and sculptural installation *Little Birds and a Demon*, which dealt in extraordinary ways with WATER, in relation to themes of materiality, bodies, travel, environmental crisis, migration, life, death. By visiting the biennial I extended my knowledge of the way in which the international art field is responding to the age of the so-called anthropocene – the geological epoch characterized by the significant impact of humans upon the planet – marked by rising SEA levels across the globe. As a result of the visit I embarked on two projects: one was a programme of public film screenings titled 'Images and Journeys' which sought to depict the journeys migrants make across the sea to other parts of the globe. I also co-curated an exhibition of work by artist Grace Schwindt in Spain (Feb–May 2016), which responded to the maritime context of Northern Spain. Thirdly, I reported on my visit to Istanbul at a roundtable 'Curatorial Consortium' looking at international art biennials. I have also been pursuing opportunities to extend my research into the way artists are responding to the politics of the sea. In light of this I have applied for a curatorial residency in in the High North of Europe

The focus of my research is to understand feminist strategies of art making and curating. In order to complete the task of research into the current context I wanted to visit the Istanbul Biennial, in order to witness a major output of the prominent feminist curator Carolyn Christov Bakargiev. The SPRING award fund enabled me to travel to the Istanbul Biennial, which otherwise would not have happened due to lack of resources. As proposed, the majority of the SPRING grant was spent on travel and accommodation. The remainder of the grant paid for an evaluative event.



Adrian Villar-Rojas, *The Most Beautiful of all Mothers*, 2015, Image: Gill Park.