

EXHIBITION

THE BLACK WHALE 10th Anniversary of MARCO

5 October 2012 – 31 March 2013



DATES

5 October 2012 – 31 March 2013

VENUE

Exhibition galleries on the ground floor

OPENING HOURS

Tuesday to Saturday (including bank holidays) from 11am to 2:30pm and from 5pm to 9pm
Sunday from 11am to 2:30pm

PRODUCTION

MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

CURATOR

Pedro de Llano

Image: Ceto Barbato [Conradi Gesneri. *Historiae animalium liber III qui est de piscium et aquatilium animantium natura*, 1558, p. 246]

INTRODUCTION

THE BLACK WHALE is an exhibition project arising from the coincidence between the opening day of MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo, and the disaster provoked by the *Prestige* oil-tanker in November 13 2002, to recall those convulsive days in order to tackle some of the most trigger issues of our time: nature exploitation, colonialism, the history of modernity, the myth of an endless progress, maritime commerce, globalization, social movements or war.

EXHIBITED WORKS

The exhibition is structured into several thematic axis interweaved throughout the spaces on the ground floor, and combines plenty of documentary materials — newspapers, photographs, objects, testimonials, videos, graphic material... — together with over fifty artistic proposals in different formats ranging from historical pieces to earlier paintings, photographs, sculptures, videos, films, drawings and installation works.

Performance by Obradoiro Vocal A Vila de Pontearreas

On Friday, October 5 at 9pm, during the opening events agenda, one of the exhibition galleries will receive the performance of 'Obradoiro Vocal A Vila de Pontearreas', serving as an activation of the work *The Postpetrolistic Internationale* (2009-2012), by artists Christina Hemauer & Roman Keller.

ARTISTS

- Alexander Apóstol** (Caracas, Venezuela, 1969. Lives and works in Madrid and Caracas)
- Marcela Armas** (Durango, México, 1976. Lives and works in México D. F.)
- Bernadette Corporation** (Collective established in 1994 in Manhattan, New York)
- Bernardo Bertolucci** (Parma, Italia, 1941)
- Ursula Biemann** (Zurich, Switzerland, 1955. Lives and works in Zurich)
- Andrea Bowers** (Wilmington, Ohio, 1965. Lives and works in Los Angeles, California)
- CLUI [Center for the Land Use Interpretation]** (Collective established in 1994 in Los Angeles, California)
- Mark Dion** (New Bedford, Massachusetts, 1961. Lives and works in New York)
- Carles Guerra** (Amposta, Tarragona, 1965. Lives and works in Barcelona)
- Hans Haacke** (Colonia, Germany, 1936. Lives and works in New York)
- Romuald Hazoumè** (Porto Novo, Republic of Benin, 1962. Lives and works in Porto Novo)
- Drew Heitzler** (Charleston, South Carolina, 1972. Lives and works in Los Angeles, California)
- Christina Hemauer & Roman Keller** (Zurich, Switzerland, 1973/1979. Live and work in Zurich)
- Werner Herzog** (Munich, Germany, 1942. Lives and works in Munich)
- Peter Hutton** (Detroit, Michigan, 1944. Lives and works in Tivoli, New York)
- Iratxe Jaio & Klaas van Gorkum** (Markina-Xemein, Vizcaya, 1976 / Delft, Holland, 1975. Live and work in Rotterdam, Holland)
- Xurxo Lobato** (A Coruña, 1956. Lives and works in A Coruña)
- Man [Manfred Gnädinger]** (Radolfzell, Germany, 1936 - Camelle, A Coruña, 2002)
- Damián Ortega** (México D. F., 1967. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany)
- Georges Osodi** (Lagos, Nigeria, 1974. Lives and works in Lagos and London, United Kingdom)
- Alberte Pagán** (O Carballiño, Ourense, 1965. Lives and works in Porto do Son, A Coruña)
- Antón Patiño** (Monforte de Lemos, Lugo, 1957. Lives and works in Madrid)
- El Roto** (Madrid, 1947. Lives and works in Madrid)
- Analia Saban** (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1980. Lives and works in Los Angeles, California)
- Ken Saro-Wiwa** (Bori, Nigeria, 1941 – Lagos, Nigeria, 1995)
- Allan Sekula** (Erie, Pennsylvania, 1951. Lives and works in Los Angeles, California)
- Manuel Sendón** (A Coruña, 1951. Lives and works in Vigo)
- Robert Smithson** (Passaic, New Jersey, 1938 – Amarillo, Texas, 1973)
- Phel Steinmetz** (Des Plaines, Illinois. Lives and works in Los Angeles, California)
- Michael Stevenson** (Inglewood, New Zealand, 1964. Lives and works in Berlin)
- Rirkrit Tiravanija** (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1961. Lives and works in New York, Berlin and Bangkok)
- The Yes Men** (Andy Bichlbaum & Mike Bonanno)
- xurban_collective [Güven Incirlioglu & Hakan Topal]** (Collective established in 2000. Live and work in New York, Izmir and Istanbul)



SUMMARY OF THE EXHIBITION PROJECT

This year 2012, MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo, celebrates its 10th anniversary opened to public. THE BLACK WHALE is an exhibition project conceived to commemorate this event, which arises from coincidence between this date and the sinking of the *Prestige* oil-tanker in the Galician coast — 240 miles West of Finisterre — back on the 13th of November 2002, the Museum's opening day.

Ten years after that, the crisis provoked by the *Prestige* catastrophe becomes part of the museum, and is taken as the starting point and catalyze of this exhibition project. THE BLACK WHALE takes this historical event as the starting point to recall and document those convulsive days in order to tackle some of the most trigger issues of our time: nature exploitation, colonialism, the history of modernity, the myth of an endless progress, maritime commerce, globalization, social movements or war.

The exhibition is organized into several spatial and chronological axis interweaved through a *parcours* throughout the galleries on the ground floor, which combines art works and documentary materials. The main hall is the starting point, which displays two highly symbolic pieces: a cetacean skull intervened by *Man* — “the German from Camelle”, whose premonitory dream inspired the title *The Black Whale* — together with the only existing remains of the oil-tanker.

From here on, the rotunda of the panopticon displays a sculpture by Damián Ortega as the central piece, surrounded by various works alluding to historical precedents from the 70's (Steinmetz, Hutton) and from nowadays (Saban). Works by Ortega and Saban show a disturbing visionary capacity unexpectedly connecting the unstable balance of an oil-dependent society with the collapse of the financial economics, also announcing other works by Latin-American artists present in the exhibition.

The first room is devoted to the *Prestige* as a historical event; its context, sinking and effects. Paintings by Antón Patiño from the 80's dialogue with the so known photograph by Xurxo Lobato and with a whole collection of materials — newspapers, photographs, objects, testimonials, videos, graphic material — taken as documents and point of departure for the different lines which converge in other spaces. One of them leads us to the works next-door, referring to episodes related to the oil industry in the American Continent (CLUI, Armas, Apóstol), its impact on communities and its effects on the landscape.

Another core of the exhibition layout is displayed in the second patio, with the background of Allan Sekula's works — contextualising the sinking of the *Prestige* in a crucial historical moment, i. e. the turn of the century — shown together with a photographic series by Manuel Sendón, the banner by Bowers and Müller as a symbol of the activism in Alaska, and the critical burden of the film by Alberte Pagán, screened at the bottom of the gallery.

Herzog's view in his film *Lessons of Darkness* acts as a backdrop in the following gallery, displaying several proposals related to the Middle East (Biemann, xurban_collective), and the documental series by Bertolucci, which can be read as a symbolic antecedent to this context.



Together with symbolic pieces about whale hunting and drawings by El Roto, the third patio shelters the sculpture series of animals covered in tar by Mark Dion, which is combined with Robert Smithson's view of the concepts of sediment and memory, contributing to enhance the idea of oil as a myth of an unrecognizable society when this raw material disappears.

Another room focuses on the African Continent with the piece by Hans Haacke and the works by authors such as Osodi and Hazoumè, which have tackle the abuses caused by oil companies in Nigeria, all of them centred in the figure of Nigerian poet and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa. Osodi and Hazoumè turn into images the reality that Saro-Wiwa had to face and update the issue that Haacke perceived by the early 80's. At the bottom of this room, Tiravanija's mural which reads 'Less Oil More Courage' functions as a utopian call of hope and action in a future full of uncertainty.

The exhibition comes to an end with a selection of works and documental material on the person of *Man*, together with Michael Stevenson's video, which turns reality into fable. Images of the last works by *Man* before his death, on the 28th of December 2002, personalise the sourness of the artist and of a whole society. The man who over forty years lived as a hermit in a desert island and suffered when the terrible "black whale" destroyed his paradise also puts an end to the exhibition layout.



CURATORIAL TEXT

"THE BLACK WHALE is an exhibition project which arises from the crisis provoked by the accident of the *Prestige* oil-tanker. On a first stage, its purpose is to remember and document an event which was central for Galicia and Spain, in the tenth anniversary of the oil-tanker sinking — 240 miles West of Finisterrae. The black tide which devastated and contaminated the Galician coasts — from November 13th 2002 to well-advanced 2003 — was the trigger for a social mobilization which demanded that something of its kind would happen 'Never More' ('Nunca Máis'; this sentence became a widely known slogan in Galician language). The protests that followed in Galicia for several months, against the lack of maritime control run parallel to the demonstrations occurred in Spain by then, denouncing the Spanish participation in the second Iraq war (provoked, in a way, for the control of oil resources in the Middle East).

The exhibition departs from this specific reality —one of the most intense social and political moments in the last decades in Spain — to contextualize and interpret it on a wider spectre. Taking the oil industry and the multiple factors surrounding it as one of the main visible or physical manifestations of contemporary societies, the project opens itself to subjects as diverse as nature exploitation, colonialism, the history of modernity, the myth of an endless progress, maritime commerce, globalization, or war.

Taking the aforementioned as a starting point, the exhibition develops these ideas both spatially and temporally, in two vectors interweaved through a *parcours* which combines art works and documentary materials. Together with episodes related to Galicia: from the sinking of the *Urquiola* oil-tanker in 1976 to present — with an emphasis on the *Prestige*, the project gathers works connected to places as distant as Alaska, Iraq, Mexico, Venezuela, Caucasus, or Nigeria.

From a chronological point of view, the project addresses multiple historical moments, swinging from the remote past from which oil comes ("that Arcanum trash-yard which positions and still leads geopolitics nowadays", according to Xavier Rubert de Ventós), to a *Sci-Fi* future. This extreme temporal simultaneity bestows the project with a singular richness of meaning, since it makes co-exist the geological, archaeological, and entropic discourses of Robert Smithson (e. g.), the hallucinated vision of apocalypses that Werner Herzog filmed while documenting the Kuwaiti oil fields on flames after the first Gulf War, in 1991, or the social criticism rooted on the present by authors like Allan Sekula, Alberte Pagan or Ursula Biemann, among others.

This combination of space and time helps the appearance of a whole constellation of meanings which exceed by far the mere exploitative or distributive activities characteristic of the oil industry: environmental, ecological, geopolitical, economical, colonial, and activist issues go together with poetic notions such as risk, decadence, the epic of a search for resources on unlikely horizons, or the task, bound to fail, but heroic (like Sisyphus myth), of those who fought against tragedies provoked by repeated spills in places like Galicia, Alaska, the French coast, or the Mexican Gulf.



With the constant, repetitive and suffocating reference of oil — such a vulgar, viscous, and heavy element, regarding its materiality; but attractive, plastically, and symbolically, from the point of view of its meaning — the summa of the artists' works build a project in which the visual goes together with narration, theatricality, and even a filmic experience, which transmits with spectacularity, drama, and emotion, a whole web of discourses and contents which deal with some of the most urgent issues of our times.

Hence, the original insight into a local event aims to become a panoramic vision of the contemporary world nowadays, of its recent and remote past, and its uncertain future. The *Prestige* shipwreck and the catastrophe that it caused in the Spanish coast transform themselves into a universal myth. The exhibition departs from the material — from a fact — in order to elaborate an account which places itself mid-way from historical objectivity, and the subjective, critical, romantic, and sometimes sublime visions of artists.

The title of the exhibition tries to synthesize all these dimensions and the numerous layers conveyed by the art works. *The black whale* is an expression taken from an interview by artist and hermit known as "El alemán de Camelle" ("the German from Camelle", a.k.a. *Man*). In that interview, Man said that a gigantic black whale appeared to himself on a dream — time before the *Prestige* accident — devastating the "Death Coast", like a western *Godzilla*. A dream that turned out to be premonitory when a few days later, the *Prestige* heeled on a storm, adrift for a week, spilled out its petroleum cargo, and finally sank on a 4,000-meters abyss in the Atlantic Ocean. The image of a mythological beast, which reminds the monstrous creatures that the Roman historian Estrabon placed on the Finisterrae seas, or the white whale in the novel *Moby Dick*, appears as a representation full of symbolism regarding the oil-tanker, its ruinous situation, and its terrible fate.

Equally, as in Herman Melville's novel the tireless search for the whale represented the yearn to cross all the known boundaries for the sake of progress (whale oil was one of the most demanded raw materials in the 19th century), and the craziness that human beings can reach measuring themselves against nature; cases as the *Prestige*, or the more recent Deepwater Horizon, bring to present the same mixture of obsession, greed, exploitation, and arrogance which characterized captain Ahab, the sailors which followed him blindly on his vertiginous odyssey towards disaster and, from an allegorical point of view, the own society, avid of natural resources, they belonged to.

Following *Moby Dick's* spirit and the artists present in the exhibition, THE BLACK WHALE not only pretends to be a discourse about environmental issues, but a metaphor of the complex relations of human beings with nature. Taking up again *Prestige's* history vivifies these debates, connects them to the present cycle of protests worldwide, and highlights the fragility of a progress model, in a critical moment, called to redefine modernity as well as an alternative scale of values."

Pedro de Llano
Exhibition's curator



GENERAL INFORMATION

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Pedro de Llano (Santiago de Compostela, 1977) is an art historian and curator. He received his PHD in art history (2009) from the University of Santiago de Compostela, for an investigation dedicated to Clement Greenberg's criticism, developed at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. He takes part in other research projects at the same university, and has thought in its MA in contemporary art since 2007. He co-edited the book *En tiempo real: El arte mientras tiene lugar* [Real time: Art as it Takes Place, Fundación Luis Seoane, A Coruña, 2001], and was editor of the volume *Wrong Site: Arte y globalización* [Wrong Site. Art and Globalization, Fundación Luis Seoane, 2008]. He has contributed to art magazines — *Exit Express* (Madrid), *Carta* (Madrid), *Afterall Online* (London), and *Texte zur Kunst* (Berlin) — and newspapers as *La Vanguardia* (Barcelona). He has published texts about artists such as Tino Sehgal (Museu Serralves, Porto, 2005), Fernando José Pereira (Anamnese, Porto, 2005), Hans Schabus (*A cidade interpretada*, 2006), John Knight (*Afterall Online*, 2008), Sergio Prego (Galería Soledad Lorenzo, 2009), Stephen Prina (*Afterall Online*, 2009), and Mauro Cerqueira (*Exit Express*, 2011). He curated the exhibitions *The Museum as Medium*, in collaboration with Pablo Fanego, at MARCO, Vigo and Koldo Mitxelena, San Sebastián, 2008; and *In Search of the Miraculous: Thirty Years Later*, focused on Bas Jan Ader's posthumous project, at the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea (CGAC), in Santiago de Compostela, 2010). He is now preparing a book about Bas Jan Ader that will be published in 2013.

COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

Library-Documentation Centre

THE BLACK WHALE. Bibliographic and digital exhibition

5 October 2012 - 31 March 2013

Selection of publications and catalogues related to what happened to the *Prestige* oil spill.

Digital selection of solo and group catalogues of the artists present in the exhibition, and web links to the most outstanding interviews, articles and reports.

Educational programme

'MISSION WHALE (Action!)'. Visits and workshops for school children and families

13 October 2012 - 31 March 2013

Sponsored by DKV Seguros Médicos



INFORMATION AND VISITS

Members of the museum staff are available in the halls to provide visitors with information, in addition to the regular guided tours:

- Every day at 6 pm
- 'A la carte' tours for groups, by appointment at the tel. 986 113 900/11

Should you need further information please contact:
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