

# ***SIREN SONGS***

## ***Water as told by artists***

Exhibition from 4 October 2024 to 13 January 2025

For its fall exhibition, the French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici presents a journey around the theme of water through the work of nearly 30 international contemporary artists, including 10 pieces specially commissioned for the show.

Curators: Caroline Courrioux and Sam Stourdzé



# **VILLA MEDICI**

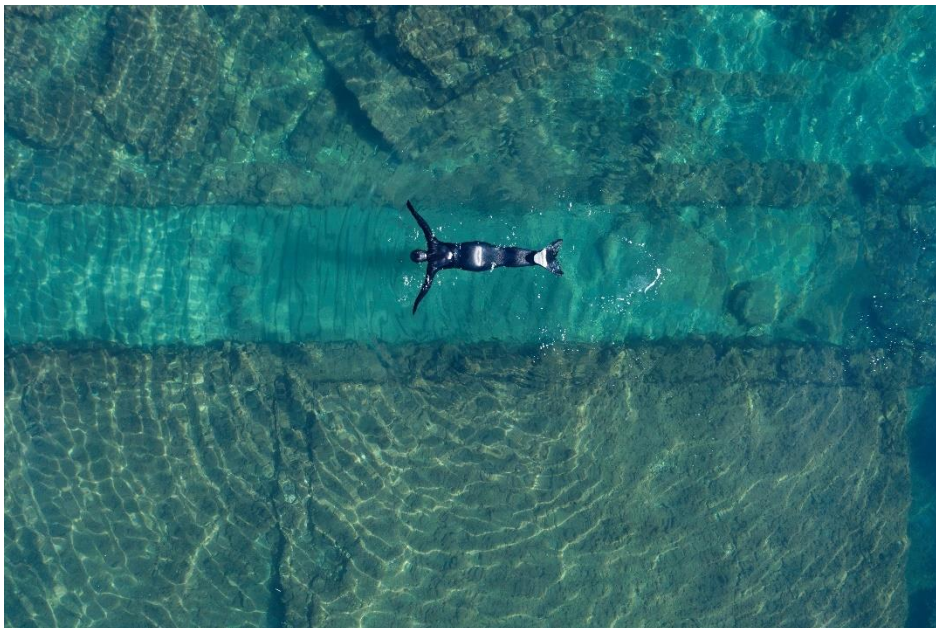
On the ground and in the atmosphere, as both an element and a resource, water constitutes us and overflows the world. Protean in form – rain, seas, droplets, dew, streams, clouds, fog, and tears – it is the essential source of all life. Diverted, extracted, and polluted, water has now become a vital issue in the ongoing ecological crisis. But although it has been conquered, the abyssal depths remain today more mysterious than the Moon, land of dreams, inhabited by fantastic monsters.

Following the exhibition *Stories of Stones* (2023), Villa Medici is continuing its exploration of the elements with ***Siren songs. Water as told by artists.*** From Rome, where water seems eternal, this show brings together the work of **30 international contemporary artists**, including **10 pieces specially commissioned** for the occasion.

This exhibition follows the cycle of water, from sunken civilizations to ritual practices and the troubled waters of trade routes. The hybrid figure of the siren or mermaid, by turns malevolent and protective, half woman, half animal, acts as a guide to navigate between these worlds, from the depths to the surface. Her ambivalence resonates with that of water, a space of metamorphoses, between waters of rejuvenation and of doom.

The show invites us to explore the different states of water through the artists' eyes, from its representation to its political implications, from the commodity transformed into a resource to the metaphorical quest for its source. Diving into this liquid world opens up a host of contradictions, when tales of water's origins intermingle with those that conjure up future times in which it threatens us with flooding and drought, and sea levels rise while rivers run dry.

Water is in crisis, as the artists remind us, steering a course from the polluted waters of cities to the straits of natural spaces, sounding the death knell, tacitly or otherwise, for its reckless use and starting a critical conversation on our collective responsibility to preserve it. Reclaiming ground, flowing, and recapturing the magical properties of water in order to think about our world: such is the thread that *Siren songs Water as told by artists* invites us to follow.



Emilija ŠKARNULYTE, *Sunken Cities*, 2021, Video HD, 5'  
© Emilija Škarnulytė

# The exhibition in seven chapters

## Introduction

\*Laure Prouvost (b. Croix, France, 1978)

## Chapter 1: Diving

Yiannis Maniatakos (b. Flomohori, Greece, 1935)

## Chapter 2: Stories of pearls

Monira Al Qadiri (b. Dakar, Senegal, 1983)

Simone Fattal (b. Damas, Syria, 1942)

Kusukazu Uruguchi (b. Shima, Japan, 1922)

## Chapter 3: Atlantis

\*Mounir Ayache (b. 1991)

Chiyuki Sakagami (b. Hyogo, Japan, 1961)

\*Himali Singh Soin (b. India, 1987)

Emilija Skarnulyte (b. Vilnius, Lithuania, 1987)

Aïcha Snoussi (b. Tunis, Tunisia, 1989)

## Chapter 4: Dark waters

\*Dala Nasser (b. Tyr, Lebanon, 1990)

\*Valentin Noujaim (b. France, 1991) and Maïa Tellit Hawad (b. France)

Pamela Rosenkranz (b. Uri, Switzerland, 1979)

LaToya Ruby Frazier (b. Braddock, Pennsylvania, United States, 1982)

Bassem Saad (b. Beyrouth, Lebanon)

## Chapter 5: Summoning the nymphs

\*Alix Boillot (b. Paris, France, 1992)

\*Bianca Bondi (b. Johannesburg, South Africa, 1986)

\*Gaëlle Choïsne (b. Cherbourg, France, 1985)

Jumana Emil Abboud (b. Nazareth, 1971)

Klodin Erb (b. Winterthur, Switzerland, 1963)

\*Ariana Papademetropoulos (b. Los Angeles, California, United States, 1990)

## Chapter 6: Tears

Raffaella Naldi Rossano (b. Naples, Italy, 1990)

Rose-Lynn Fisher (b. Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States, 1955)

## Chapter 7: Becoming a drop

Younes Ben Slimane (b. Tunis, Tunisia, 1992)

Hera Büyüktaşçıyan (b. Istanbul, Turkey, 1984)

Alex Cecchetti (b. Terni, Italy, 1977)

Estrid Lutz (b. France, 1989)

Lou Masduraud (b. Montpellier, France, 1990)

\*Madison Bycroft (b. Kaurua Country, Australia, 1987)

\*artists whose pieces have been specially commissioned for the exhibition

# The catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue co-published by Editions Empire and Villa Medici.

## Extract from the exhibition catalogue

“Sirens, or mermaids, are part of our feminist history, and losing sight of this fact leads us to consider them without correlating them to gender, species, race, humanity [...] They force us to focus attention on the question of becoming, on that of life in streams of water that make the world permeable and connected, outside any fantasy of total purification. This should serve not as a model, but as a guide: political, artistic, academic, and above all ethical. Becoming-sirens are intimately linked to our futures and to reinventing the subject in these times of our tragic ecologies.” Myriam Bahaffou

## Catalogue information

28 €

352 pages

Around 170 illustrations

Format: 15.7 x 21.8 cm

ISBN 979-10-95991-39-7

## Authors of the catalogue

Myriam Bahaffou, philosopher; Alix Boillot, artist; Julien d’Huy, historian of myths; Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge, historian of religions; Sarah Rey, historian of Antiquity; Himali Singh Soin, artist; Ala Tannir, architect; Justinien Tribillon, urbanist.

The catalogue includes texts by Seneca and Pliny the Elder.

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# The curators



**Caroline Courrioux** is head of Production of the Exhibitions and Cultural events at Villa Medici since 2021. Specializing in aesthetics and visual studies, she works on the links between contemporary art, ecofeminisms and political imaginaries. She previously supported artists and exhibition projects as production manager of the Rencontres d’Arles (France).



**Sam Stourdzé** is an exhibition curator. Since 2020 he has been the Director of the French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici, of which he is a former Fellow. He previously directed the Rencontres d’Arles (France) and the Musée de l’Élysée in Lausanne.



## Selection of works from the exhibition



Kusukazu URAGUCHI, *Sous l'eau*, 1965, Photography  
Courtesy of the Uraguchi Estate



Klodin ERB, *Mermaids #5* (from the series 'Mermaids'), 2023,  
Ink, oil, acrylic spray paint and acrylic glitter paint on raw canvas 42 x 35  
cm (16 1/2 x 13 3/4 inches) Photo: Stefan Altenburger  
Photography Zürich. Courtesy Bernheim and the artiste



Monira AL QADIRI, *Diver*, 2018, Video HD, 4' (loop), Commissioned by Durub Al Tawaya VI (Abu Dhabi)  
and the 9th Asia, Pacific Triennial (Brisbane), © Monira Al Qadiri

# The French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici



Founded in 1666 by King Louis XIV, it is a French institution that has been housed since 1803 at Villa Medici, a 16th-century villa surrounded by a seven-hectare park on Mount Pincio in the heart of Rome. A national public institution under the authority of the French Ministry of Culture, it fulfills three complementary missions: to welcome artists, creators, researchers of the highest level in residence for long stays of one year or less; to set up a cultural and artistic program that integrates all fields of the arts and creation aimed at a broad public; to conserve, restore, study, and make its built and landscape heritage, as well as its collections, known to the public.

The French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici is directed by Sam Stourdzé.

The French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici is an establishment of the French Ministry of Culture.



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### Images credits in the press release:

Page 1: *Waterlogue, Four to the Floor* (2024) four channel digital 4k video, colour, sound, 24:26 loop. Sound and Music by Louise BSX. Image by Joel White. Featuring performances by Ife Day, Léo Landon Barret, Aez Pinay, Madison Bycroft and Ash. Supported by Creative Australia, Mécènes du Sud, La Becque and Villa Medici

Page 2: Emilija ŠKARNULYTE, *Sunken Cities*, 2021, Video HD, 5', © Emilija Škarnulytė

Page 3: Portrait of Caroline Courrioux © Margherita Nuti

Portrait of Sam Stourdzé © Daniele Molajoli

Page 5:

Top left: Kusakazu URAGUCHI, *Sous l'eau*, 1965, Courtesy of the Uraguchi Estate

Top right: Klodin ERB, *Mermaids #5* (from the series 'Mermaids'), 2023, Ink, oil, acrylic spray paint and acrylic glitter paint on raw canvas 42 x 35 cm (16 1/2 x 13 3/4 inches) Photo: Stefan Altenburger. Photography Zürich. Courtesy Bernheim and the artist.

Below: Monira AL QADIRI, *Diver*, 2018, Vidéo HD, 4' (loop), Commissioned by Durub Al Tawaya VI (Abu Dhabi) and the 9th Asia, Pacific Triennial (Brisbane), © Monira Al Qadiri

Page 6: Villa Medici © Sebastiano Luciano