

“A DAY AT SEA”

an exhibition by **Gillian Rosselli** and **Martina Gruber**

at **Irma Stern Gallery** in Cape Town, South Africa
opening June 10th 2017



... the sea was terrifying ... terrifying and blue – more blue than it should be

"The Earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the waters."¹

The Argonauts were a band of heroes in Greek mythology, who in the years before the Trojan War, around 1300 BCE accompanied Jason to Colchis in his quest to find the Golden Fleece.

Present – in the 21st Century – refugees from the African Continent and the Middle East replaced the ancient Argonauts in travelling the Mediterranean Sea in a quest for a better life. These sailors of the 21st century - refugees drowning in the Mediterranean – are the protagonists of Gillian Rosselli and Martina Gruber's joint exhibition *A Day by the Sea* opening at the Irma Stern Gallery in Cape Town on June 10th 2017.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR in 2016, some 362.000 people ventured across the sea to Europe, estimating that some 5.000 people died or went missing on the treacherous journey across the Mediterranean waters during that time – an average of 13 women, children and men perishing every day.

Over the past 5 years more than 20,000 people have lost their lives trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea into the European Union. Most are lost at sea, but many bodies have been washed ashore, exposing the tragedy to the beaches of Greece, Italy and Turkey.

Who cares for these dead? Where are they buried? And how can desperate relatives many miles away discover if their missing loved ones are among the drowned?

... you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land ...²

Through their work, Rosselli and Gruber explore the human tragedy on the borders of some of Europe's most beautiful seascapes. In this context, the onlooker will be challenged to feel the spaces between the images of surfers in the water and the image of an overloaded sinking boat.

The body of work put together by the two artists deconstructs the beauty and paradise of the beachside, using this motif to explore the cruel reality beyond the harsh immigration policies implemented by the European Union over the last two decades. In September 2016, Europe moved abruptly away from Angela Merkel's initial welcome policy "*Gemeinsam schaffen wir das!*" - "Together we can do this!" by closing some of its southern borders overnight. Austria's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sebastian Kurz, emphasized Europe's indifference when he said "*Es wird nicht ohne hässliche Bilder gehen*" - literally meaning "some ugly images cannot be avoided." For some these beaches are paradise, for many others the same beach is just a stepping stone on the way to a better 'future life'.

The exhibition invites the onlooker to look deeper than the superficial beauty, to ponder upon the stories encapsulated beneath the blue. Look at an

¹ Genesis 1:2

² "Home" by Warsan Shire

image of a pier in Trieste in beautiful sunset light- a historical place that has existed for centuries, and imagine the boats and explorers that embarked on their journeys long ago to 'discover' the world. Journeys of exploration and exploitation. These images of ancient harbours juxtaposed to images of desperate people trying to make the reverse journey decades later.



Rosselli and Gruber tell the story of this human tragedy taking place on the waters connecting the continents of Africa and Europe by knitting a framework of paintings, mixed media, photographic images, collages and collected objects.

About the Artists

Gillian Rosselli, born and raised in Zimbabwe, is an artist whose deep connection to her country is manifested through her work. Gillian's exhibits and installations reflect her preoccupation with the struggles of the country, as well as her fascination with its natural beauty.

Fostering a close relationship with the earth, Gillian's pieces are inspired by nature and reflect an empathy with and an appreciation of all things it provides. She works with the earth and soil, creating pieces that are three dimensional and interactive, frequently using the medium of collage to explore the link between art, nature and the environment.

Gillian studied Fine Art at the University of Cape Town and has since been working both as an artist and IB Visual Arts Teacher at the Harare International School. Gillian is an award-winning Zimbabwean artist, acknowledged with accolades including the Overall Award in Distinction for Painting from the Zimbabwean National Gallery. Her work features in various public and private collections in Zimbabwe as well as internationally, including the UK, Netherlands, France, Brazil, Sweden, Belgium, South Africa, Austria and Germany.

Website - <http://gillrosselli.com>

Martina Gruber, born and raised in Austria (Europe), is a photographer, entrepreneur and social anthropologist. Much of her professional life has been fuelled by her passion to organise and manage trans-culture projects that span across the divide between separate cultural entities.

Martina is a lover of adventure, exploration, and the unfolding of the journey. She has traversed continents and cultures, finding places that emotionally imprint upon her along the way. Places she has called home include the Austrian capital city Vienna, the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan and the southern region of Africa.

She explores the medium of image and is drawn to the seemingly unremarkable and the wide view. In 2016 Martina won First Price for her submission "Manmade meets Natural" at the "Water and me" - Future Water – Photographic competition in Cape Town.

The exhibition at Irma Stern Gallery in Cape Town in collaboration with Gillian Rosselli is Gruber's debut show as a photographer. Martina currently lives and works in Zimbabwe.

Website - <http://martinagruber.com>