

Nevin Aladag: Art Space Pythagorion, Samos, Greece

September 26, 2014 by Tom Morton



Beeline, 2014, installation view at Art Space Pythagorion, Samos

Like many of the Greek islands in the Eastern Aegean, Samos plays host to two very different types of visitor. By day, tourists arrive on ferries and chartered flights, to soak up sun and sweet Samian wine (beloved of Lord Byron), and perhaps make an improving excursion to the Temple of Hera, solemn consort of Zeus. By night, crowded landing craft float silently towards the beaches. They contain refugees fleeing conflicts in Syria and Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. Some of these boats capsize in the Mykale Strait, a treacherous channel that separates Samos from mainland Turkey, and the rest of the Asian continent. Others are intercepted by Frontex, the EU's border guard. If they do reach safe harbour, it is likely that their passengers' next stop will be an overcrowded detention centre in Vathy, the Island's main port.



Beeline, 2014, installation view at Art Space Pythagorion, Samos

Entitled 'Borderlines', and curated by Marina Fokidis, Nevin Aladağ's solo exhibition at Art Space Pythagorion included several works that took Samos' geographical – and political – boundaries as their departure point. For *Beeline* (2014), the Turkish-German artist wound a series of wooden reels with 1430 metres of black fishing rope, a measurement that mirrored the distance between Samos and the nearby Turkish coast. Invited to perch on the reels, visitors could look out of the gallery's picture window, across the sea towards Asia Minor, and listen to *High Season* (2014), a recording of sunlit beach life (carefree laughter, gently sloshing waves) that faded into an altogether more menacing soundscape, in which anonymous sailors landed, under cover of darkness, on a deserted shore. Nearby, Aladağ's video *Borderline* (2014) featured footage of the churning furrow behind a ship, filmed from its rear deck, creating what we might think of as a kind of maritime drawing, albeit one that, once inscribed, became almost immediately erased. This was interspersed with shots of the ship's GPS position, which showed it to be plotting a course along the marine border between Greece and Turkey. The same waters, we should note, salt the coastlines of both nations. Their fish might be served up in a Samian taverna, or blacken on the grill of an Anatolian *ocakbaşı*.



Borderline, 2014, video, installation view at Art Space Pythagorion, Samos

In addition to these new pieces, made during Aladağ's stay on Samos as the guest of the German Schwartz Foundation, Fokidis also presented a sharply focused, beautifully installed, and carefully considered selection of works from the artist's back catalogue. In her early video *Voice Over* (2006), we see a pair of teenage boys – the children, like Aladağ, of Turkish immigrants to Stuttgart – singing traditional Anatolian love songs, and laments for the lost homeland their parents left behind. Shot with a night vision lens, and dressed in rapper's beanies, they project a toughness that's at odds with the passion of their performances, just as their mournful singing echoes strangely against the bland, somnolent streets of their Northern European home.



Session, 2013, video, installation view at Art Space Pythagorion, Samos

Music – and geographical uprooting – also featured in the video *Session* (2013), the strongest work in the show. Here, a number of percussion instruments beat out a rhythm, seemingly without the aid of a human hand, against the architecture and surrounding deserts of the Emirate of Sharjah. Each of them reflecting the musical heritage of one of the Kingdom's communities of immigrant 'guest workers', these instruments brought the sounds, if not the compositions, of India, Pakistan and Iraq to the Arabian Peninsula. Here Sharjah itself – its canals and its car parks, its trees and its sands – became a performer, playing with alien drums and rattles, bells and tambourines. If *Session* is about power and adaption, about the question of who pays the piper and who calls the tune, it is also about unintended consequences. Like people, music cannot be bound by borderlines. It travels, borne on uncertain winds.