

Clément Cogitore Ferdinanda, the Ephemeral Island

From 10th December 2025 to 20th September 2026
Mucem, Fort Saint-Jean – Georges Henri Rivière Building (320 m²)

Curatorship	Kathryn Weir, art historian and general exhibition curator
Curators	Hélia Paukner, heritage curator, Head of the Contemporary Art Section, Mucem Enguerrand Lascols, heritage curator, Domestic Life Section, Mucem
Scenography	Benjamin Saint-Maxent



Ferdinanda : Prémonitions, 2022 (video still)
Clément Cogitore
Film 16 mm, silent, 4min 24s.
Mucem, Marseille
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Between the end of June and the middle of July 1831, underwater volcanic activity gave rise to a new island in the Mediterranean, in the Sicilian Channel across from Tunisia. While sailors and coastal dwellers feared the awakening of a sea monster, the nascent land aroused the curiosity of scientists and the desire of European powers amid their colonial expansion. Within weeks, the island was claimed for its strategic position by Great Britain, France and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, among others. The rivalry, however, was short-lived: barely six months after its appearance, the newly formed island vanished beneath the waves of the Mediterranean. Its many names remain recorded in European archives, "Ferdinanda" for the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in honour of King Ferdinand II of Bourbon, "Julia" for the French in reference to the July Monarchy, and "Graham" for the British after Sir James Graham, First Lord of the Admiralty. Still resting today a few metres below the surface, the basaltic rock is closely monitored by seismologists. Could a fresh eruption cause it to rise again, and once more provoke geopolitical manoeuvres, and the logics of exploitation and exclusion wielded by imperial powers?

Through the films, videos and photographs created for the exhibition, Clément Cogitore, both artist and philosopher, speculates on the birth, disappearance and possible return of the volcano. Suspended between documentary and fiction, his metaphorical intuition draws together premonitions, folk beliefs, archival fragments, scientific readings and cartographic traces. In his hands, "Ferdinanda" becomes a mirror of different ways of engaging with the world, and of futures yet to unfold.

In Cogitore's multifaceted narrative, "Ferdinanda" becomes a submerged utopia and dystopia all at once, a space of infinite potential from which the artist invites us to rethink the vast expanse of the "middle sea".

Biography

Born in 1983 in Colmar, Clément Cogitore has developed a practice at the crossroads of contemporary art and cinema. A resident at the French Academy in Rome, Villa Medici in 2012, he was awarded the Fondation d'entreprise Ricard Prize for Contemporary Art in 2016 and the Marcel Duchamp Prize in 2018, while his first two feature films were selected and honoured at the Cannes Festival, in Critics' Week. In 2019, his staging of *Les Indes galantes* by Jean-Philippe Rameau at the Paris Opera, for the institution's 350th anniversary, brought his work to the attention of a broader public.

First presented at MADRE (Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, in Naples, from 24 June to 12 September 2022), the exhibition will take on a new form in Marseille, enriched by previously unseen archives, a scenographic concept created especially for this venue and an expanded exhibition catalogue.

Among the fifty or so works and documents on view at the Mucem (including 16 mm film, video, photography, graphic art, archival records and painting) six works by Clément Cogitore will be featured, five of which have never before been shown in France, thanks to public and private loans from both French and international collections.

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