

Geocentric Driftings #2

Sardinia – The Geological Way of Life

"What if culture was nature all along?"

Vicky Kirby

In Sardinia, in the 1960s and 70s, dozens of holiday homes were built in the rocks. Rocks above, rocks below, rocks all around and rocks in the middle of the living room. The author of this geological way of life is Alberto Ponis. He had started out as a Modernist, living in London and designing square buildings, but once back in his homeland the right angles quickly dissolved into the granite. Drawing from the island's deep past, others like him searched for a path between modernity and the archaic, such as Sardinian sculptor Costantino Nivola with his *œuvre* made of sand and cement. In his transatlantic exile, he looked at the history of his birth island and at the present of his American isle, and questioned the boundaries between culture and environment, between art and architecture.

But before Nivola, before Ponis, there was a civilization, the Nuragic culture, that built itself some 4000 years ago out of granite. It scattered stone rings and towers all over the island, many of which still stand today. And then even before the humans, there were others without minds and without hands. Tectonics, which detached Paleozoic granite from mainland Europe some 30 million years ago and carried it through the Mediterranean until it found its current position to become today's Sardinia; and wind; and sand; and water, ceaselessly hitting the island and shaping its form.

During our visit, we will encounter the elements, the ancient humans, the architects and artists. We will witness all of those presences, and their joined influences on the territory of Sardinia, on the form of this big stone in the sea. We will visit boulders sculpted by the elements, and then further carved by the *Homo Sapiens* to bury their dead. We will experience megalithic urbanism from the 20th century, millennia-old towers that have merged with hills, jagged seashores, unfinished columns, sculptures cast in sand, houses in the rocks, sacred springs and swimming pools surrounded by granite.

Looking at those myriads of ways to encounter the geological, meandering between the modern and the prehistoric, questioning archaism as a formal posture, thinking about tourism, 'tradition', prehistory, this seminar week will allow us to reflect on a critical modernity that tried to stay close to the terrestrial.

18-25 March 2023 (incl. round trip by train and boat) - 16 students

Team – An Fonteyne, Galaad Van Daele, Camiel Van Noten

With the participation of Annarita and Alberto Ponis

Cost frame D - CHF 750-1000

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Architecture assembles material and spatial forms that are primarily derived from the geological realm. Mineral substances, metallic ores, hydrocarbons and sediments such as clay, iron, sand, oil, copper, all of which result from terrestrial dynamics reaching beyond the millenary timescales of civilizations.

Yet the practice and history of architecture keep neglecting them, treating them solely as resources or inert mediums to be appropriated and shaped to serve grand architectural visions.

As the climate crisis forces us to reevaluate our ways, and to question our consumption of the terrestrial, how could we finally give geological matter the presence and weight it deserves? How to envisage architecture as being also – or mainly – an emanation of tectonic, metamorphic or sedimentary movements? And what do such considerations open up for our practice?

With this series of seminar weeks, the Dept. of the Ongoing will propose an alternative outlook on architecture, and create opportunities for geocentric reflection and exchange.

