ICOM Italy — International Conference 2026 · Bari

Mediterranean heritage: communities, alliances, common horizons.
Perspectives in the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region.

Beyond the Meridian:
Contemporary Art and the Rewriting of the Italian Mediterranean Imaginary

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keywords

Mediterranean · Post-Meridian · Contemporary Art · Soft Power · National Identity · Mediterranean Studies · Decolonial Curating

abstract

As Fernand Braudel famously noted, the Mediterranean is not a single landscape but "a thousand things together." Today, this complex basin is configured as a dynamic "situated discourse," fundamentally shaped by the power of individual, collective, and national narratives. In Italy, recent historiographical investigations – such as Claudio Fogu's *L'immaginario mediterraneo nella storia d'Italia* (2025) – highlight the possibility to reconstruct how the country has built its national imaginary in deep dialectics with ideas of "Mediterraneanness." Far from being a closed chapter, a new institutional imaginary is being actively constructed right now, driven by the radical changes unfolding in the basin. Within this process, contemporary art has long anticipated and participated in the creation of these narratives; however, its specific contribution often remains on the margins of broader geopolitical and cultural debates.

This study, therefore, seeks to bridge Contemporary Art History with Mediterranean Studies, making artistic narratives legible as active agents in the construction of this shared imaginary. By integrating these disciplines, the research investigates the genealogy of this renewed Mediterranean centrality and questions how cultural institutions currently mobilize these practices to rewrite the region's story.

The theoretical core of this work develops a critical dialectic with the "Pensiero meridiano" (Southern Thought) formulated by the late Bari-based sociologist Franco Cassano. While Cassano proposed the South as an ethical alternative to the North- Atlantic model, this poster advocates for a "post-meridian" perspective. Thirty years later, it is necessary to acknowledge a fragmented reality. A post-meridian approach observes the Mediterranean as an open field of tension and connection, giving voice to diverse contemporary subjectivities.

Through a trans-temporal analysis, the study traces the spatial revolution that marginalized the Mediterranean during oceanic modernity, up to its return as a strategic space post-1989. By addressing the profound temporal stratifications and historical discontinuities of the basin, it maps the crucial curatorial shifts – from the *1989 Havana biennial* and *Magiciens de la Terre* to the rupture of *Documenta 11* (2002) – establishing the Mediterranean as a primary topic and frontier for contemporary curating.

By analyzing this trajectory, the poster highlights how the "Mediterranean focus" has evolved into a strategic asset for institutional programming and cultural diplomacy.
In profound resonance with the themes of the ICOM Italy 2026 Conference, adopting a post-meridian lens provides museum professionals – especially within the stratified Adriatic-Ionian macro-region – with the critical coordinates to overcome enduring historical asymmetries and navigate controversial histories. Ultimately, it allows institutions to avoid the traps of exoticization and pacifying discourses, implementing genuinely decolonial practices that transform the museum into a space of shared horizons, where the profound complexity of the present can be understood and exhibited without simplifications.

visual framework

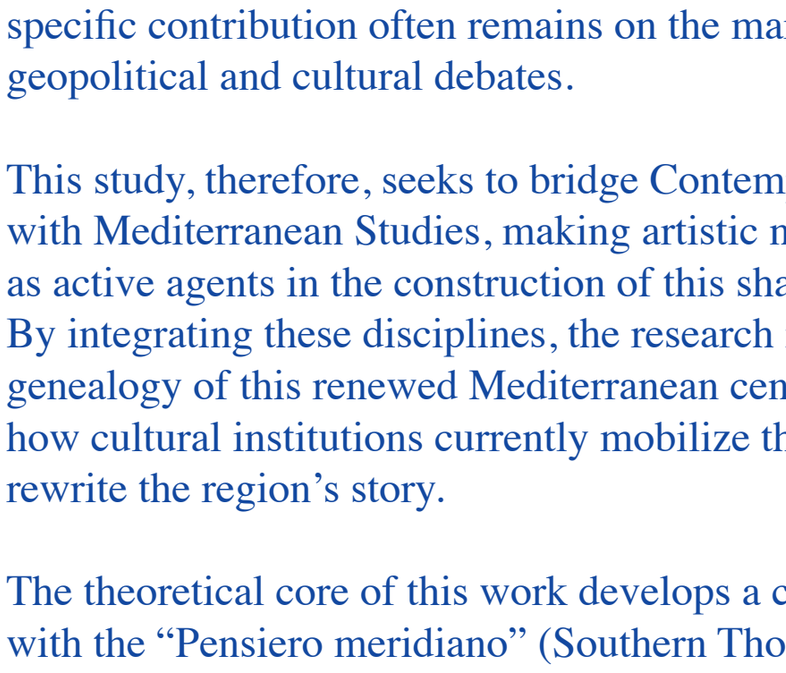


Figure 1. Historical Context: The Oceanic Paradigm
Walter Crane, Imperial Federation, Map of the World Showing the Extent of the Britsh Empire in 1886.

This map illustrates the 19th-century "Oceanic Paradigm" and the resuting marginalization of the Mediterranean basin. It serves as a visual record of how the national and imperial imaginary was constructed via transoceanic routes, effectively de-centering the Mediterranean in favor of colonial expansion.

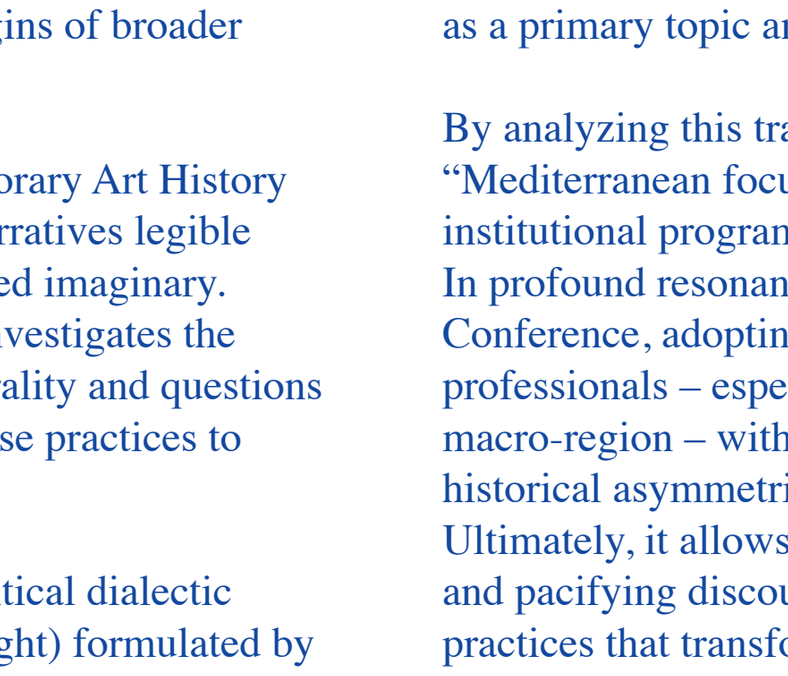


Figure 2. Curatorial Shift: The Decolonial Rupture
Okwui Enwezor at the entrance of the Fridericianum, Documenta 11, Kassel 2002.

A pivotal moment in Contemporary Art History, *Documenta 11* challenged western-centric narratives by establishing the Global South and the Mediterranean as primary curatorial methodologies.This shift moved beyond mere representation to address the structural complexities of a globalized world.

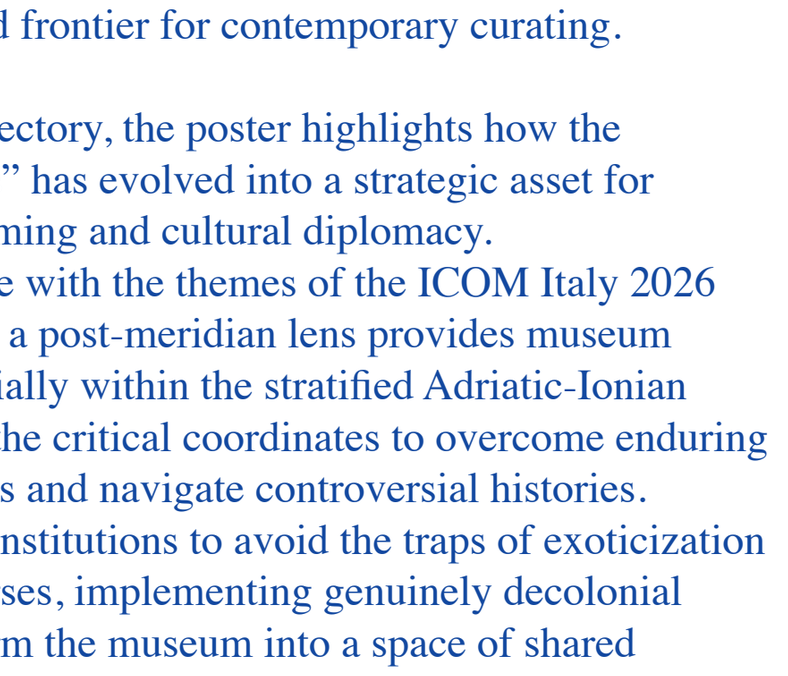


Figure 3. Contemporary Narrative: Embracing Complexity
Invernomuto, Black Mediterranean (2018–ongoing).

Moving away from pacifying or exotucized images, this project explores the Mediterranean as a fragmented space of cross-cultural soundscapes and disputed histories. It exemplifies the "post- meridian" lens by engaging with the difficult present and its multifaceted subjectivities without simplifications.

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