

## **Marseille-Provence 2013 Cross Mediterranean Cooperation**

This article deals with the cross-Mediterranean dimension of Marseille-Provence 2013, European Capital of Culture. It discusses how the project was designed and is currently being implemented in line with the changing situation in the Mediterranean region.

### **Marseille-Provence 2013, *European and Mediterranean***

According to European legislation, a city is not chosen as a European Capital of Culture solely for what it is, but mainly for what it plans to do, over a year that has to be exceptional. The 12-month programme must meet two main criteria:

- European dimension: cities must present the role they have played in European culture, their links with Europe, and their European identity. They must also demonstrate current involvement in European artistic and cultural life, alongside their own specific features.
- City and citizens: cities must present a programme that anticipates large-scale public involvement at both local and European levels.

These two criteria are the basis for all European Capitals of Culture. But what does this mean for Marseille-Provence? Back when the project was being designed in 2006, Bernard Latarjet created a team of professionals to study the region's history and specificities; its strengths and its weaknesses.

Throughout its history, Marseille has been shaped by the exchanges resulting from the city's port activities – the circulation of people and goods. Marseille is home to people who were born here and and people who have taken up residence in the region: Italians, Armenians, Algerians, Comorians, etc. It quickly became clear that the European dimension of the project would reflect Marseille's position between the Mediterranean and Europe.

European and Mediterranean: the title of Marseille-Provence's bid to be named European Capital of Culture 2013 clearly expressed our ambitions for the project. Because Europe is born of the Mediterranean, our bid to the European Union focused on building a hub for dialogue and creativity open to cultures from all around the Mediterranean basin.

Marseille-Provence has been involved in economic, political and social exchanges for the last 2,600 years. We used our unique historical position to convince the European jury of the pressing need to create a space where artists in all disciplines and European and Mediterranean audiences can meet and exchange.

The initial project endorsed the third element of the 1995 Barcelona Process, which broke new ground by considering culture as an essential pillar of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation that created strong links between civil societies. The project had two main focuses, one local and one international. The international dimension was called “Le partage des midis” (Sharing the South) and had four themes: Migrations and Memories, Values and Beliefs, Genders or Genres, and the Sharing of Water.

### **How the project’s cross-Mediterranean dimension has been implemented**

After the city was selected to be the European Capital of Culture in 2008, the programme was developed in partnership with local, national and international cultural organisations in line with criteria set down in the bid document. The association Marseille-Provence 2013, set up to design and implement the project, has a strong coordination role. Part of the final Capital of Culture year programme will be produced directly by Marseille-Provence 2013, however, most is being developed by local cultural organizations and coproduced or labelled by Marseille-Provence 2013.

Marseille already had links to the art scenes on the south and east coasts of the Mediterranean. However, in the last few years, cooperation with these countries has increased. In particular:

- The Mediterranean focus of Marseille-Provence 2013 encourages local organizations to focus on cross-Med cooperation and projects before 2013.
- To develop projects for 2013, meetings to plan and produce projects are necessary. This has resulted in the increased mobility of artists and cultural operators from the Marseille-Provence region and southern Mediterranean countries.
- Marseille-Provence 2013 and local authorities encourage mobility by supporting project development and specific tools. This includes a special mobility fund for Marseille-Provence 2013 organised by the Roberto Cimetta Fund.

Different themes have shaped Marseille-Provence 2013’s international programme. The project is multi-disciplinary, covering different artistic fields such as visual arts, dance, theatre, music, circus, film and less common disciplines such as art in public space and cuisine. References to heritage and traditions will be present in the programme’s exhibitions, which provide a historical view of the Mediterranean and cross-Mediterranean relations. The main focus of Marseille-Provence 2013 is contemporary creation, in particular the contemporary art scenes on the southern and eastern coasts of the Mediterranean and in the Arab world.

The Marseille-Provence 2013 programme has been developed in different ways, including:

- Implementing specific Capital of Culture projects such as the Euro-Mediterranean Ateliers. This key project supports contemporary creation by inviting local, national and mainly international artists to take part in artist residency programmes in the Marseille-Provence region. Further details on this program are provided below.

- Organising partnerships and co-productions with foreign cultural organizations in order to design and implement joint projects.
- Commissioning or giving 'carte blanche' to different artists. This includes artwork for contemporary art exhibitions such as *Ici, Ailleurs* (Here, Elsewhere), music by composers such as Zad Moultaqa (Lebanon) and theatrical pieces by directors like Fadhel Jaibi (Tunisia).
- Developing projects that will travel throughout the Mediterranean region. This includes work by photographers such as Joseph Koudelka and André Mérian, visual arts projects such as *Cadavre Exquis* (Exquisite Corpse), and French author François Beaune's literary project *True Tales of the Mediterranean*.
- Presenting artwork to the widest possible audience.

### **The Euro-Mediterranean Ateliers: one of Marseille-Provence 2013's key projects**

It is impossible to do justice to the complete Marseille-Provence 2013 programme in such a short article. Detailed information can be found on the website [www.mp2013.fr/?lang=en](http://www.mp2013.fr/?lang=en). In the meantime, the Euro-Mediterranean ateliers, central to Marseille-Provence 2013's European Capital of Culture project, are an excellent example of the values underlying the programme. This programme has been developed specifically for Marseille-Provence 2013. It has three main goals:

- To support contemporary creation in the Euro-Mediterranean area.
- To build a creative hub involving businesses, public institutions and associations.
- To incorporate all artistic disciplines.

The ateliers are tailor-made artist residencies encouraging production and dialogue in all creative fields. Around 60 ateliers will be set up in businesses and public structures between 2010 and 2013. The initiative is designed to become permanent, thus making a lasting contribution to contemporary creation.

As part of this project, Wael Shawky, an Egyptian artist, is currently in Aubagne for a six-month residency to develop his new project, the second episode of *Cabaret Crusades*, a film featuring ceramic puppets inspired by Amin Maalouf's book *The Crusades through Arab eyes*. To make these puppets, he will take part in a four-month residency at a clay training centre where he will work with professionals in the clay figurine industry and *Santon* (clay nativity figures) makers. The film will then be shot with SATIS, a university department specializing in sound and image. The final product will be presented at the Kunstfestival in Brussels in 2012, then at Documenta and finally Marseille-Provence 2013.

### **How to take into account the Arab Spring and current events**

At the beginning of this year, the situation changed radically in this region of the world. A new reality, which could not have been predicted a year ago, has emerged as a result of an extraordinary civilian movement revolutionising Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Shockwaves from this movement have affected the region and the world. These revolutions are already influencing artistic practices and intellectual processes in the entire Arab world. This opens up new perspectives in the relations between Europe and the Mediterranean. Above all, it changes the perception that Europe has of the Arab world.

These changes came at a time when the main aspects of the Marseille-Provence 2013 programme had already been decided on (the programme outline was presented at a press conference on 28 February 2011). However, the content was not yet finalized. The Arab Spring allowed us to reflect on these revolutions and question the relevance of our programme. In addition, we have spent and are still spending time exchanging with Arab artists and cultural operators on the changing situation and what would make sense for Marseille-Provence 2013.

By focusing on contemporary creation, Marseille-Provence 2013 has developed a programme in direct partnership with contemporary artists and cultural operators in the Arab world. We have not dealt directly with officials. This is because the Arab world's contemporary art scenes are made up of independent venues and artists, and not so much by officials. Most of these art scenes have been and still are involved in the revolutions. These changes will be reflected in the artwork and projects they prepare for 2013. In addition, although we plan to announce the pre-programme on 12 January 2012, we also plan to maintain some flexibility in order to be able to incorporate new projects and themes. Conference programmes and discussions will be another opportunity to reflect on the latest changes.

These questions were raised with participants at the Informal Meeting, a meeting for independent art and culture venues from the Arab World. This event, organized in partnership with the Young Arab Theatre Fund, took place in Marseille-Provence in October 2011. As representatives from the forty independent venues present agreed, this is naturally an enormously exciting time. However, European engagement with the Arab Spring topic tends to be more of a fad. In other words, cultural organizations tend to plan one-off events with Arab operators, rather than working on long-term partnerships.

In the meantime, many Arab organizations feel that it is too soon to draw generalized conclusions from this period. Most modes of representation cannot encapsulate the ever-changing and unpredictable nature of the Arab Spring movements. While there are enormous possibilities for renewed terms of engagement with Arab artists, they fear the focus shifting from one set of clichés and discursive expectations to another.

Marseille-Provence 2013 will begin in little more than a year. This is a very short period when it comes to organising such a large event. However, it is a very long period when we consider all that might change in the next 12 months. Consequently, it is essential for Marseille-Provence 2013 to be present in the Arab world by exchanging with artists, intellectuals, and organizations, as well as listening to their needs and providing flexible solutions for contemporary creation.

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