

## SLIDE 1 – Title Slide

### *MESAORIA / MESARYA – Land between mountains*

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*Presentation for*

*Thinking Like a Mountain: Recalibrating how we understand art and planet*

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## SLIDE 2 – Linda Lien’s view of Agios Sozomenos

Our presentation focuses on a small area just south-east of Nicosia that centres on Agios Sozomenos and Potamia and the Northern settlement of Tymvou / Kirkklar, taking in a section of the Mesaoria / Mesarya Plain, and the Gialias River. This landscape, and the tiny area of wilding around Agios Sozomenos, has proved a richly layered environment in which to think beyond its recent past to an ancient time: to think about the landscape as archive; and how our readings of such places sit within a geological timespan that’s beyond our full comprehension, with an ecology possibly ambivalent to our presence.

## SLIDE 3 – Book Image

To briefly outline the format of this presentation: we’ll be reading directly from a poetic work – *‘Mesaoria–Mesarya: land between mountains’* – a text generated from observations noted during numerous visits to the area over a period of 2 years. In the process of the poem’s unfolding, we’ll refer to two site-responsive works we generated: firstly, *‘Woodlands, Charcoal and Copper’*, in Agios Sozomenos; and secondly, *‘One River–Two Walks: Potamia–Kirkklar’*, in Potamia, both sited in 2018. Alongside the poem, these works weave together the complex histories we traced within the landscape. Before that, however, we’ll provide a critical context that, hopefully, gives insight into the ideas that inform what we do.

## SLIDE 4 – Agios Sozomenos – four views

We are interested in questioning how art can draw attention to a rhizomatic, interconnected plane of being that embraces, as Timothy Morton argues, the human and the more-than-human. Our methods include uncovering knowledge through research but, most importantly, fieldwork in order to develop a relation with site and place through what is observed and what is experienced: a form of auto-ethnography that embraces phenomenology. We have come to understand place not as a fixed edifice but in a state of flux or *becoming*: an emerging palimpsest of readings, experiences, events and timescales that reflects Karen Barad’s sense of entanglement.

### SLIDE 5 - Four CCFT projects

We use a strategy that we developed with colleagues from the Creative Centre for Fluid Territories (known as CCFT): an international, interdisciplinary group founded in 2016, involving artists, designers and architects working in Norway, England, Scotland and Cyprus. We have no fixed centre but meet in chosen locations to undertake practice-led projects (which we call ‘*Travelling Colloquia*’ and ‘*Nomadic Dialogues*’), in which we involve people with both specialist and, importantly, local knowledge. Here, in Cyprus, we’ve worked with Yiorgos Hadjichristou and colleagues from the Architecture Department at the University of Nicosia, as well as with Urban Gorillas, Cyprus Buffer Fringe Festival, and the Home for Co-operation, to locate projects within public spaces. We learn through these dialogues, and the artworks we make provide the conduit through which we can create new narratives for perceptions of place and belonging (as opposed to occupation). These ‘Nomadic Dialogues’, therefore, are both a method and an outcome.

Through our practice, we have been investigating concepts of territory, agency, boundaries, borders, marginal-, waste- or hinter-lands – or, what Ignasi de Solà-Morales calls *terrain vagues* – in defining or contributing to perceptions of a place. These are locations or places interpreted by Stavros Stavrides as being, “marked by a feeling of strangeness”.

### SLIDE 6 - Spikey Bush

We explore these *feelings* by employing Jane Rendell’s strategy of writing and observing with both a “subjective and objective” voice; by using distance and intimacy as modes of speaking; and of “doing, undoing and overdoing” our engagement with place. This allows for a complex layering; linguistic and temporal. While this strategy may have aspects of the rationalisation of place (as space) it is also coloured with subjectivity, phenomenological experience and intuitive insight gained through multiple visits to document a site. In the act of returning we become familiar with a place, at the same time as experiencing it as other.

### SLIDE 7 - Ant Hole

This state of *otherness* – of both ourselves and the place – errs towards what Morton terms, as the ‘*strange stranger*’. A sense of nature, the more-than-human, and of place, that allows the familiar to be accompanied by, or jolted by, the realisation of otherness. An otherness that in Freud’s terms might be described as *unheimlich*: things that might appear familiar but that can never be fully understood, including ourselves.

At the same time as paying attention to rational language to understand meaning, however, we argue that it is equally important to pay attention to the deep silence that resides at the core of things of the world. A cosmic silence, as David Hinton argues, from which we emerge and into which we dissolve. A silence that, as the philosopher Maurice Blanchot has said, lies at the very heart of each thing and each word, whether written, spoken or sung; the originating silence that comes before the first breath and after the last. And, as Charles Olson asserts in his seminal essay on poetry and language, *Projective Verse*, an originating silence that exists within our very being: within our consciousness and within the breath itself. Within *all* things.

We approached Agios Sozomenos realising it falls within the rubric of Morales' definition of *terrain vagues* as [an] everyday area whose "palimpsestic nature" includes, to quote De Certeau, "[an] illusory inertia". In its current appearance as both a remnant of difficult histories and a Natura 2000 site, it is, to quote Stalker's 1996 Manifesto, a place:

"of confrontation and contamination, between the organic and inorganic,  
between nature and artifice".

#### **SLIDE 8 - Geology at the site**

Set in a geological landscape that once lay beneath the sea, Agios Sozomenos exists within a deep timeframe. Even as a ruin, the village reflects its archaeological, industrial, and spiritual histories, as well as the regional developments and colonial occupation over the centuries. Pleistocene geological formations and fossils coexist with archaeological findings and sites dating to the Late Bronze Age (1200 BCE) that evidence the mining and working of copper. By 200 BCE forests still covered large areas of the Mesaoria Plain, but were felled to provide charcoal for copper smelting, as well as timber for shipbuilding. More recently, in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century CE, the rocky backdrop of Agios Sozomenos provided a refuge for the saint, whose name the ruined village now bears. His cave continues to be a site of pilgrimage.

#### **SLIDE 9 - School building**

Each time we've visited the settlement, we paused frequently to take in the stillness there. The village mosque has disappeared entirely. On one relatively high point the roofless relic of the former village school still forms a key focal point: scarred by bullet-holes and graffiti. Nevertheless, our observations can never be internalised in the same way as by people with local knowledge. As Yael Navaro-Yashin writes, her:

*“... informants [locals] ‘traced’ the ruins around them, not just passing them by, but locating them in time and space. ‘Those bullet holes are from 1963,’ they would say, ‘whereas the bullet holes over there are from ‘74.’”*  
(Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space*, 171).

#### **SLIDE 10 - Tyres**

Across the immediate landscape a riot of thistles, thorns, bushes and trees have taken hold. Abandoned objects litter the area: motor tyres and a dilapidated sofa among them at the time of one of our visits. The larger landscape slips away from the limestone cliffs, across the derelict trace of the village onto the great Mesaoria plain: land used for the growing of barley crops which, in the winter months, lies fallow.

Acknowledging that our understandings as travellers is fragmented, subjective, and partial, through the process of our repeated visits, in the two site-specific works that we’ll show, we have recorded fragmentary moments that evolve in their own terms and connect them to other fragments to establish *a new relation*: one that exists in Blanchot’s terms, outside of language and beyond the text – within the phenomenological experience and, as Olson believes, within our very being.

#### **SLIDE 11 - BOOK DETAIL**

PERFORMED READING

Mesaoria -- Mesarya

*a land between mountains*

*inhale -- exhale -- inhale*

*We pause, in our journey  
on these flatlands between mountains  
watching the undulating flight of the hoopoe  
Solomon's crested messenger*

*... first to the north  
and now back toward the south*

• *Agios Sozomenos*

the red earth lands  
begin east from here

**SLIDE 12 - Compacted Earth**

this is a limestone  
region of pale milk-whites  
and fawns  
dry and destitute  
of life at this time of year  
*the harvest long since taken in*

and  
after a long drought  
winds pick up dust  
whirl it around

it is a sleeping  
not a dead land

we pause for coffee

SLIDE 13 - Coffee

- *Potamia*

just inside

*where we choose to sit*

a young mother

her arms enfolding her daughter

leans in her seat against the wall

the café - devoid of decoration with only practical tables and chairs -

is empty

together the woman and girl watch a television

set high up on the wall, in a corner

just outside

under the glass covered porch

men of various ages, sit at separate tables

drink, a few words and an uncomplicated silence ...

we're

in this place

BUT

not of this place

*these pale lands*

*and*

*dark-brown coffee*

*touch our hearts*

**SLIDE 14 - View of riverbed from a bus**

*Potamia*

*Agios Sozomenos*

*Kirklar*

between each  
the Gialias River

from the Makheras Hills

flows north

*dry these several years*

• *The Gialias River*

and on this map  
a thin, persistent,  
blue thread of a line  
crosses the plain  
crosses the border

*belying the river's current state*

a pink shading (no green line)  
to denote the presence and  
extent of  
no man's land  
east to west, its shadow cast across the map

an inaccessible land

and yet this border's southlands  
seem, in reality, permeable  
-- everyday -- ordinary --

to be,  
in effect,  
and as they had been in the past  
some-one's land

SLIDE 15 - Riverbed and Eucalyptus

- *Agios Sozomenos*

a falcon drifts  
effortlessly  
across  
blue skies

above the dry river's course

over ancient, weathered rocks

and the time-worn

tombs of *saint* and *sahabas*

*dull sounds*

footfall

on compacted earth

*sharp sounds*

the scraping

of thorns against jeans

*the land's dry song*

we move between breaths



• *Agios Sozomenos*

*and down below the houses*

*lie the barley fields*

**SLIDE 18 - Barley Field and Wall**

in this sharp, forensic light  
the village

*or rather*

*what's left*

slips between

rumour

and

sigh

to become

the slow prolonged

last low murmuring of breath

it is here

that you step from the shadows

come

towards me

out of the past

out of the ruins

a bowl of pomegranates

cradled

in your hands

and we sit at the field's edge

you raise a finger to your mouth

we fall silent

listening

to a *wind*

*that shakes the barley*

light expands

eyes narrow

and

in the silence

the land burns

the fields fade

are veiled

*passed / past*

### SLIDE 19 - Hole and Charcoal

a fine light grit

*colour and weight*

ground down

blown from the surrounding cliff edges

settles throughout this landscape

you smell it

taste it

grind it against your teeth

a taste of what will come

adobe ruins

stucco facings

windows

roofs

gone

*rumour, sigh and the silence become earth again*

lonely remains

that come to the light

scraped meticulously and hesitantly

from the earth

from below the surface

the disappeared

of this land

evening shadows the colour of charcoal

*charcoal*  
*a campfire's remains*

charcoal  
from olivewood  
pinewood  
and now eucalyptus

blackened carbon traces lingering still in a small  
shallow-dug depression  
beside fallow fields

*... the blood of Adonis, it has been said, lies on this land*

SLIDE 20 - GREY - Partial Eclipse

*partial eclipse*  
*and*  
*partial shadows*

SLIDE 20 - RED-Divine Spheres

divine spheres      traces of copper      *smelters' slag*

wild woods  
reduced      cut down  
for charcoal

SLIDE 21 - Overgrown Forests x 4

gone the lands  
of  
the *Queen of Heavens*  
and  
the *Master of Animals*

... on this side

*Agios Sozomenos*

not the place but the saint

a Syrian (?)

no-one knows for certain

a desert hermit                      perhaps

healing the sick

curing those with fever

even after his death

his remains wrapped within the earth

SLIDE 23 - Eucalyptus tree line

- *Kirklar Tekkesi*

*on the other side*

mislaid

*if not lost*

under the *Mesarya's* sleeping plain

sheltered by eucalyptus

*a single line to the south-east*

red roses

a mosque

a tomb-chamber

the resting place

*they say*

of the 'forty' *sahabas*

*and each day they say prayers for all those who have perished alone and  
unknown*

the Gialias' dry river course

and a military camp

both near by

SLIDE 24 - Complete window text

the land opens  
to the left  
a sprawling line of eucalyptus and shade  
to the right

the river-channel  
wide  
freer of undergrowth on this stretch  
easier to navigate

just the slip and roll of river pebbles under foot

SLIDE 25 - Window Text (view)

no water  
we walk  
*against an imaginary current*  
up stream  
returning  
south

in this land  
the sound of the parched earth  
has become a lyric of pale limestone, compacted dust,  
our labouring breath  
our beating hearts  
*and overhead the beat of a hoopoe's wings*

*exhale -- inhale -- exhale*

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## SLIDE 26 - Window Text with people

Events, locations, musings are recalled and laid down in each of these works. A bond between artists and audience is forged for the duration of each work, each memory. Each location or place is momentarily combined or joined as a shared experience of *'being'* - of existential experience - that temporarily brings into proximity feelings of remoteness and closeness, of knowing and unknowing - across time. The works are fragments, not complete moments, creating a *caesura* between two senses of place: one predicated by its nature as a fragment; and the other by an invoked sense of loss. As such, they suggest a series of hinterland-like spaces that can only be glimpsed. A world of experience and phenomena; of thought and feeling. Each work frames a moment that evolves in its own terms whilst relating to other fragments, following an invisible line to a next, and another next, and so on while, in the process, mixing connections to establish a new relation: that which resides beyond or outside of the text, and beyond our comprehension of time. Existing within these multiple moments, we can understand ourselves as part of a larger, entangled, flow of events: that Karen Barad refers to as points of 'intra-action'. And through this entanglement we can arrive, as Timothy Morton says, at a deeper connection with ourselves, with place, and with the ecological and 'more-than-human' world.

## SLIDE 27 - Thanks

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### NOTES

#### **Queen of the Heavens:**

Aphrodite. begun 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE continued into Roman Period.

One name, Astarte, was accepted by the Greeks under the name of Aphrodite. The island of Cyprus, one of Astarte's greatest faith centres, supplied the name Cypris as Aphrodite's most common byname.

#### **Master of Animals / Adonis:**

A pan-like figure who exhibits divine/human mastery over the animals--i.e. nature.

The hybridized iconography stresses divine potency and control over natural forces.

Adonis was consort to Artemis.

Image/statue found in Idalion (modern-day Dali).

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