

# The Ocean Manifesto

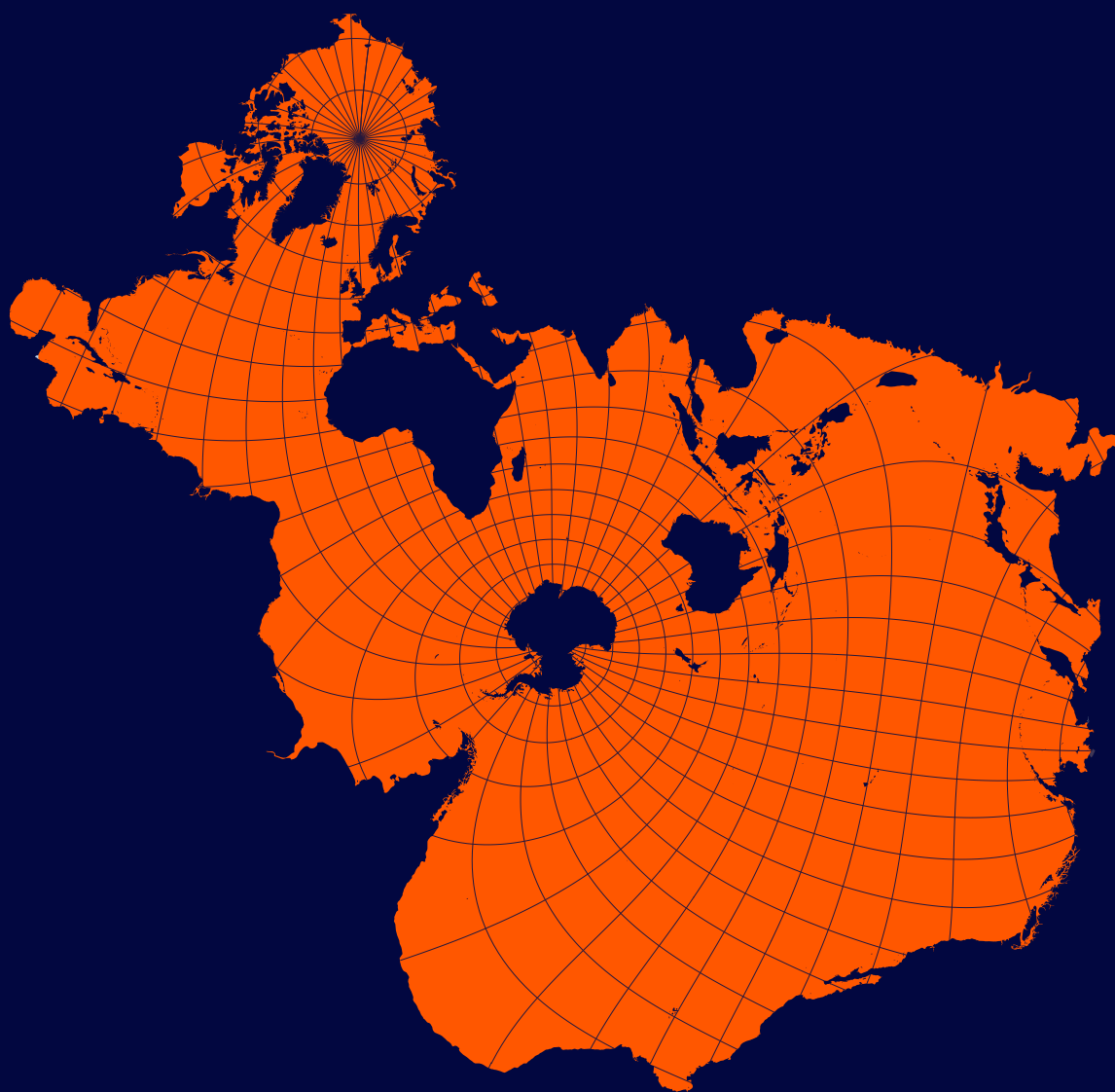


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*lerato laka le a pbela le a pbela le a pbela/My love is alive, is alive, is alive*, 2022, Three-channel video installation, color, sound, 17 min

# Marina Gioti

**Born in  
Greece  
in 1972**

“The sea is full of hidden, overlooked stories that I am attempting to salvage and bring to the surface.”

Marina Gioti is a Greek visual artist based in Athens. With a background in chemical engineering, environmental management, and filmmaking, her multimedia and research-based practice is enriched by her multidisciplinary training. Through her work, she aims to question established narratives and historiography by presenting new perspectives on the past.

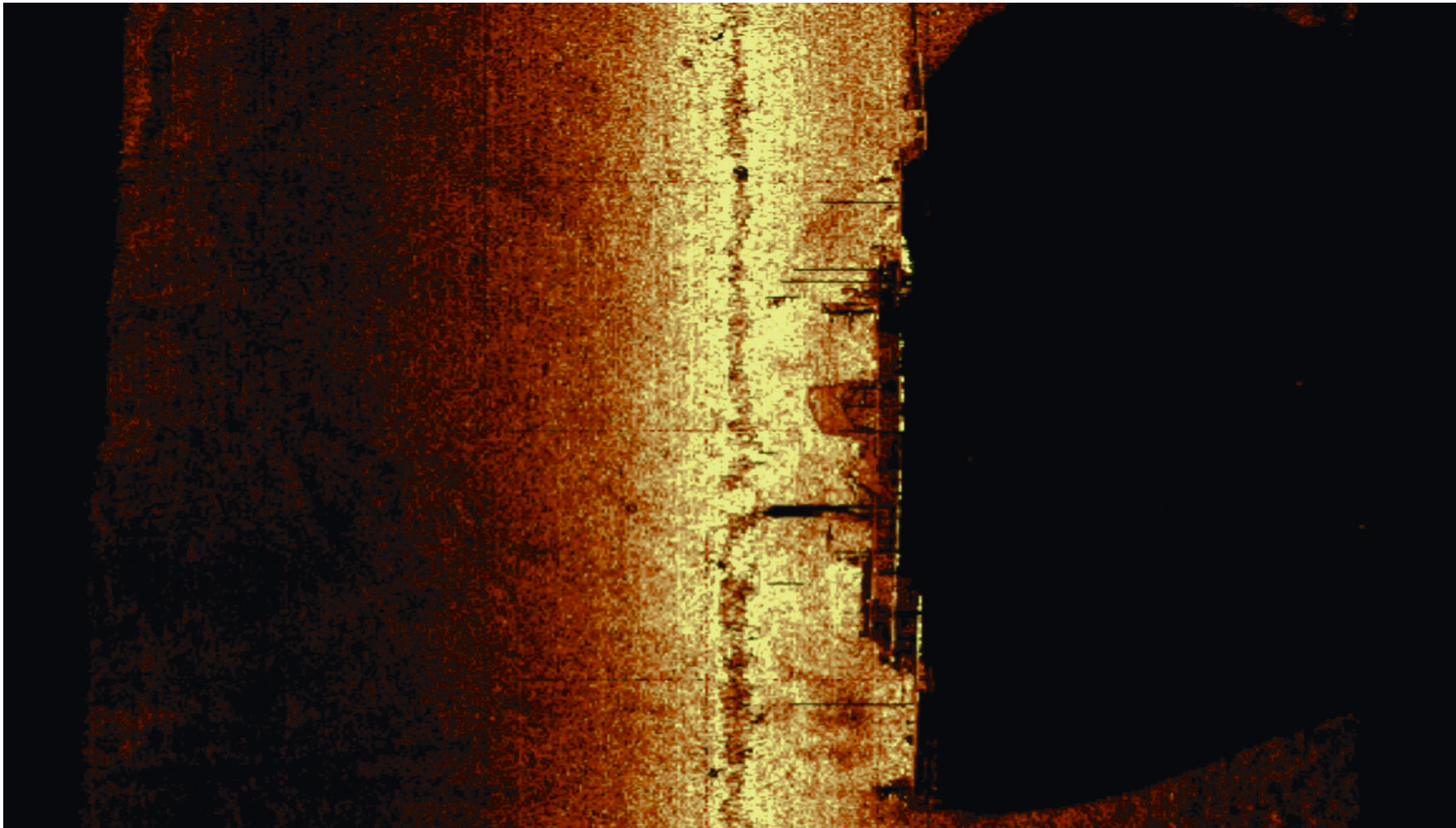
Gioti’s recent investigation and long-term project focus on locating and identifying the many shipwrecks that lie at the bottom of the sea. This endeavor began with *Launching Ceremony* (2021), a video based on archival footage of ceremonial vessel launches. For Gioti, the idea is to trace the journey from the birth of a ship to its demise, working backwards. These shipwrecks carry pieces of the past and symbolize what she perceives as human failures. Examining them allows her to reflect on the human condition and question our relationship with materiality. What should we consider waste, and what should we regard as heritage?

“The leading global heritage organization, UNESCO, protects wrecks that have sunk over one hundred years ago; therefore, recently wrecked ships are currently in a state of limbo, depending on governments and regional policies towards their removal and

safe decommissioning.” (Marina Gioti’s statement for her exhibition at Galerie Dominique Fiat, Paris, May 2024.) Some ships are abandoned due to corruption, while others are left adrift due to financial or functional problems. Each vessel has its own story that reflects our times, and many, although classified as dangerous shipwrecks, remain in the waters. When tankers sink and cause oil spills, they are simply sealed off but not removed. Moreover, legislation regarding these ships remains unclear. In Greece, for instance, the artist discovered she was not allowed to name the ships in her artwork. Why? Who owns them now, and who is responsible for their decaying hulks?

Gioti’s investigation reminds us that shipwrecks represent the third-largest source of ocean pollution. In total, in 2023, there are an estimated three million sunken and abandoned vessels in the ocean, with over 8,500 classified as “potentially polluting wrecks” dating mostly back to World War I and World War II. These wrecks contain harmful chemical pollutants, unexploded munitions, and tons of heavy fuel oil. Researchers warn that the effects of climate change are likely to accelerate the deterioration of these wrecks, increasing the risk of environmental contamination. However, there is still a lack of data and of international cooperation regarding the topic.

Initially, Marina Gioti focused on the Gulf of Elefsina, near Athens. The bay



*City of Mykonos shipwreck, 2023, Multi beam echosounder video still*



*Ship Graveyard of Eleusis*, 2023, Photographic print

is infamous for the high number of ship graveyards lying at its bottom. It is also a historical and sacred place, where the Eleusinian Mysteries took place. This ritual, referring to the Greek myth of Persephone, can be seen as a myth of regeneration. This concept is key for the artist, who questions the material traces and environmental impact of human activities. How might we envision regeneration, and what can be recovered from these long-term damages?

Marina Gioti collaborated with a team of marine researchers to record and scan the shipwrecks in the Gulf using specific acoustic sonars. “The sea is so loud,” says the artist. “We are just deaf to its voice.” Recognizing the importance of sharing her research in a sensory way, she explores various modes of

presenting her findings. For instance, she used sonar images to create prints displayed within lightboxes and to produce an intriguing video. Observing the images of the sea bottom feels like looking into one’s own body because they resemble medical ultrasound. This perspective highlights the fact that our bodies, like the earth, are composed of about seventy percent water. The prints are both surprising and original, showing a top-down view of the ships. Due to the side-scan sonar, there is a dead zone between the sides, creating a peculiar line in the middle of the print. The outlines of the ships appear to float and radiate like an alien species. Gioti chose to print the images in a golden color to make them attractive and sparkling, enhancing the eerie feeling of the series. Gold, often associated with success,

fittingly contrasts with what she views as human failure. She also plays on the phrase “silence is golden,” hinting at the collective silence surrounding these

stories. Moreover, the glowing golden color could symbolize the multiple chemicals that continuously leak into the sea from these shipwrecks.

## Magalie Grondin

**Born  
in La  
Réunion,  
France  
in 1972**

In the nineteenth century, a zoologist proposed the existence of a submerged continent beneath the Indian Ocean, which he termed Lemuria. This hypothesis was presented as a means to explain the distribution of lemur fossils found in Madagascar and the Indian subcontinent, yet absent from continental Africa and the Middle East. This landmass was envisioned as encompassing all peoples from Africa to Australia and posited as the ancestral home of humans. For the artist Magalie Grondin, this perspective is profoundly inspiring as it suggests the emergence of a new lineage. “We are the descendants of these primal populations,” she says. According to the narrative—subsequently discredited as a scientific statement yet perpetuated as a regional myth—giants from outer space mingled with local lemurs, ultimately giving rise to a mermaid. This figure occupies a central role in Grondin’s latest body of work and research, symbolizing the feminine aspect of decolonization and a form of resistance. She envisions this mermaid traversing islands to share stories with women and empower them.

In 2020, a significant oil spill occurred in Mauritius following the grounding of

a tanker. Hydrocarbons spread, resulting in the pollution of the Mauritian lagoon. In response, the island’s population mobilized, with women cutting their long hair to create a massive sausage and buoys to absorb the oil and mitigate the spill. This event profoundly impacted the artist. She views the solidarity exhibited by these women and their powerful act of cutting their hair to protect their territory as emblematic of the mermaid’s embodiment within each woman, instilling them with strength. Hair serves as a potent symbol, representing both identity and connection. Grondin’s large installation *Déterrés les sorcières* (Digging up the witches) (2024) features cascading black hair, reminiscent of seaweed, as her work intertwines various elements: human bodies are portrayed as both organic and animalistic, while the cosmos and the ocean coalesce into a unified whole. In her drawings, the mermaid is depicted as bald, perhaps signifying her offering of hair.

Grondin’s mermaids appear to float ubiquitously, seemingly taking root in both air and water. She illustrates them within ethereal and abstract landscapes, set against oceanic and cosmic