

Allan Sekula

FROM JUNE 14 TO SEPTEMBER 25, 2017



Allan Sekula. Collective Sisyphus draws a straight line between *Fish Story* (1989–95), one of his better-known photographic essays, and his last work project *Ship of Fools / The Dockers' Museum* (2010–13). Along this trajectory, we find *Deep Six / Passer au bleu* (1996/98) and the film *Lottery of the Sea* (2006). In all of them Sekula laments the loss of the sea due to a global economy that favors a connected world. Sekula's work will be remembered as one of modern photography's biggest efforts to erect a monument – a far from grandiloquent one – to the cosmopolitan proletariat.

Fish Story, 1989–95

Chapter 1

Fish Story

1988–93 | 18 Cibachrome prints and 2 text panels | Collection Fonds régional d'art contemporain Bretagne, Rennes

1-2. Boy looking at his mother. Staten Island ferry. New York harbor. February 1990.

3,6. Welder's booth in bankrupt Todd Shipyard. Two years after closing. Los Angeles harbor. San Pedro, California. July 1991.

4-5. Pipe fitters finishing the engine room of a tuna-fishing boat. Campbell Shipyard. San Diego harbor. August 1991.

7. Remnants of a movie set. Abandoned shipyard. Los Angeles harbor. Terminal Island, California. January 1993.

8. The rechristened *Exxon Valdez* awaiting sea trials after repairs. National Steel and Shipbuilding Company. San Diego harbor. August 1990.

9. "Lead Fish." Variant of a conference room designed for the Chiat/Day advertising agency. Architect: Frank Gehry. Installation at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. May 1988.

10. Remnants of a Roman harbor near Minturno, Italy. June 1992.

11. Hammerhead crane unloading forty-foot containers from Asian ports. American President Lines terminal. Los Angeles harbor. San Pedro, California. November 1992.

12-13. Shipyard-workers' housing—built during the Second World War—being moved from San Pedro to South-Central Los Angeles. May 1990.

14. Koreatown, Los Angeles. April 1992.

15. Workers cleaning up chemical spill after refinery explosion. Los Angeles harbor. Wilmington, California. October 1992.

16. Abandoned shipyard used by Marine Corps Expeditionary Force for "counter-terrorist" exercises. Los Angeles harbor. Terminal Island, California. November 1992.

17. "Pancake," a former shipyard sandblaster, scavenging copper from waterfront scrapyard. Los Angeles harbor. Terminal Island, California. November 1992.

18. Testing robot truck designed to move containers within automated ECT/Sea-Land cargo terminal. Maasvlakte, Port of Rotterdam, Netherlands. September 1992.

1 Growing up in a harbor predisposes one to retain quaint ideas about matter and thought. I'm speaking only for myself here, although I suspect that a certain stubborn and pessimistic insistence on the primacy of material forces is part of a common culture of harbor residents. This crude materialism is underwritten by disaster. Ships explode, leak, sink, collide. Accidents happen every day. Gravity is recognized as a force. By contrast, airline companies encourage the omnipotence of thought. This is the reason why the commissioner of airports for the city of Los Angeles is paid much more than the commissioner of harbors. The airport commissioner has to think very hard, day and night, to keep all the planes in the air.

2 In the past, harbor residents were deluded by their senses into thinking that a global economy could be seen and heard and smelled. The wealth of nations would slide by in the channel. One learned a biased national physiognomy of vessels: Norwegian ships are neat and Greek ships are grimy. Things are more confused now. A scratchy recording of the Norwegian national anthem blares out from a loudspeaker at the Sailors' Church on the bluff above the channel. The container ship being greeted flies a Bahamian flag of convenience. It was built by Koreans laboring long hours in the giant shipyards of Ulsan. The crew, underpaid and overworked, could be Honduran or Filipino. Only the captain hears a familiar melody.

3 What one sees in a harbor is the concrete movement of goods. This movement can be explained in its totality only through recourse to abstraction. Marx tells us this, even if no one is listening anymore. If the stock market is the site in which the abstract character of money rules, the harbor is the site in which material goods appear in bulk, in the very flux of exchange. Use values slide by in the channel; the Ark is no longer a bestiary but an encyclopedia of trade and industry. This is the reason for the antique mercantile charm of harbors. But the more regularized, literally containerized, the movement of goods in harbors, that is, the more rationalized and automated, the more the harbor comes to resemble the stock market. A crucial phenomenological point here is the suppression of smell. Goods that once reeked—guano, gypsum, steamed tuna, hemp, molasses—now flow or are boxed. The boxes, viewed in vertical elevation, have the proportions of slightly elongated banknotes. The contents anonymous: electronic

components, the worldly belongings of military dependents, cocaine, scrap paper (who could know?) hidden behind the corrugated sheet steel walls emblazoned with the logos of the global shipping corporations: Evergreen, Matson, American President, Mitsui, Hanjin, Hyundai.

4 Space is transformed. The ocean floor is wired for sound. Fishing boats disappear in the Irish Sea, dragged to the bottom by submarines. Businessmen on airplanes read exciting novels about sonar. Water-front brothels are demolished or remodeled as condominiums. Shipyards are converted into movie sets. Harbors are now less *havens* (as they were for the Dutch) than accelerated turning-basins for supertankers and container ships. The old harbor front, its links to a common culture shattered by unemployment, is now reclaimed for a bourgeois reverie on the mercantile past. Heavy metals accumulate in the silt. Busboys fight over scarce spoons in front of a plate-glass window overlooking the harbor. The backwater becomes a frontwater. Everyone wants a glimpse of the sea.

Fish Story, 1989–95

Chapter 2

Loaves and Fishes

1990–92 | 8 Cibachrome prints and 2 text panels | Collection Michel Rein, Paris

19. Welder working on a fast combat support ship for the U.S. Navy. National Steel and Shipbuilding Company. San Diego, California. August 1990.

20. U.S. Army VII Corps en route from Stuttgart to the Persian Gulf. Prins Johan Friso haven, Rotterdam, Netherlands. December 1990.

21. Foundry in the former Lenin Shipyard. Gdansk, Poland. November 1990.

22. Welders working in a privatized section of the former Lenin Shipyard. Gdansk, Poland. November 1990.

23. Palace of Culture and Science. Warsaw, Poland. November 1990.

24. Unemployment office. Gdansk, Poland. November 1990.

25. Lottery determining equitable distribution of work. "La

Coordinadora" dockers' union dispatch hall. Barcelona, Spain. November 1990.

26. Man salvaging bricks from a demolished waterfront warehouse. Rijnhaven. Rotterdam, the Netherlands. September 1992.

A German friend wrote me early in January 1991, just before the war in the Persian Gulf: "You should try to photograph over determined ports, like Haifa and Basra." Her insight, that some ports are fulcrums of history, the levers many, and the results unpredictable, was written in the abstract shorthand of an intellectual. But she shares the materialist curiosity of people who work in and between ports, such as the Danish sailors who discovered that Israel was secretly shipping American weapons to Iran in the 1980s. *A crate breaks, spilling its contents.* But that's too easy an image of sudden disclosure, at once archaic and cinematic, given that sailors rarely see the thrice-packaged cargo they carry nowadays. *A ship is mysteriously renamed.* Someone crosschecks cargo manifests, notices a pattern in erratic offshore movements, and begins to construct a story, a suspicious sequence of events, where before there were only lists and voyages, a repetitive and routine industrial series.

Sailors and dockers are in a position to see the global patterns of intrigue hidden in the mundane details of commerce. Sometimes the evidence is in fact bizarrely close at hand: *Weapons for the Iraqis in the forward hold. Weapons for the Iranians in the aft hold.* Spanish dockers in Barcelona laugh at the irony of loading cargo with antagonistic destinations. For a moment the global supply network is comically localized, as pictorially condensed as a good political cartoon. Better to scuttle the ship at the dock. But limpet mines are tools of governments, not of workers.

At the very least, governments find it necessary to dispute the testimony of maritime workers. Ronald Reagan, the symbolic Archimedes of a new world of uninhibited capital flows, worried about the stories being told in 1986. The Great Anecdotalist presumably had a good ear for yarns: these "quite exciting" reports "attributed to Danish sailors" about shipload after shipload of weapons moving from the Israeli Red Sea port of Eilat to the Iranian Persian Gulf port of Bandar Abbas were best countered with an almost royalist affirmation of presidential authority: "Well now you're going to hear the facts from a White House source, and you know my name."¹

This was not the first time that Reagan had worried about the maritime trades. As he launched his political career in the 1960s, Reagan recalled his experience as a conservative trade unionist in Hollywood in the late 1940s, and claimed that the secret Communist labor strategy at the time had been to bring the Hollywood unions under the control of the West Coast longshoremen. The longshoremen were led by Australian-born Harry Bridges, who, in Reagan's words, had been "often

accused but never convicted of Communist membership." The future president concluded with a sly aside: "The only item which was unclear to me—then and now—was how longshoremen could make movies."²

We know now that actors can make politics. The next question to be asked is this: How do governments—and the actors who speak for governments—move cargo? How do they do it without stories being told by those who do the work? Could the desire for the fully automated movement of goods also be a desire for silence, for the tyranny of a single anecdote?

1. "Transcript of Remarks by Reagan about Iran," *New York Times*, November 14, 1986, p. A8. Speech written by Patrick Buchanan in consultation with the National Security Council staff. Attribution from the archives of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Simi Valley, California.
2. Ronald Reagan with Richard G. Hubler, *Where's the Rest of Me? The Ronald Reagan Story* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1965), pp. 161, 164.

Fish Story, 1989–95

Chapter 3

Middle Passage

–1994 | 22 Cibachrome prints and 4 text panels | Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection, Vienna

27. Detail. Inclinometer. Mid-Atlantic.

28. Panorama. Mid-Atlantic.

29. Chief mate checking temperatures of refrigerated containers. Mid-Atlantic.

30. Filling a lifeboat with water equivalent to the weight of crew to test the movement of the boat before departure. Port Elizabeth, New Jersey.

31. Third assistant engineer working on the engine while underway.

32. Engine-room wiper's ear protection.

33. Figurine based on the television series *Star Trek* mounted on engine-room control console.

34-36. Conclusion of search for

the disabled and drifting sailboat *Happy Ending*.

37. Pornographic scrimshaw carving on a whale's tooth. Maritime Museum Prins Hendrik, Rotterdam.

38. Model simulating the movement of the sea. Maritime Museum Prins Hendrik, Rotterdam.

39. Able-bodied seaman chipping paint. Mid-Atlantic.

40, 41. Bosun driving the forward winch. Mooring at ECT/Sea-Land Terminal, Maasvlakte, Port of Rotterdam.

42. Raising the U.S. flag in Rotterdam.

43. Chair in owner's stateroom.

44. Shipboard vendor's display in the crews' mess. Port of Rotterdam.

45. The *Sea-Land Quality* dockside at automated ECT/Sea-Land Terminal. Port of Rotterdam.

46. Models of ships in vitrine with linear scale. Maritime Museum Prins Hendrik, Rotterdam.

47. David Brown telephones his wife in Jacksonville from ECT/Sea-Land Terminal, Port of Rotterdam.

48. The *Sea-Land Quality* departing Rotterdam for Bremerhaven.

Voyage 167 of the container ship M/V *Sea-Land Quality* from Elizabeth, New Jersey, to Rotterdam, November 1993.

Note: the exhibition selection has more photographs (48) than in the *Fish Story* official catalogue (44), and numbering therefore differs.

GHOST SHIP

Le Corps d'un Américain découvert à bord d'un voilier à la dérive

FALMOUTH. – Le corps d'un Américain de 63 ans mort dans des circonstances mystérieuses a été retrouvé samedi à bord d'un voilier dérivant à plus de 1.000 kilomètres au sud-ouest des côtes britanniques, tandis que sa femme ne se trouvait plus à bord. Les gardes-côtes ont précisé que le "Happy End" était enregistré dans l'Alabama et qu'il avait quitté les côtes américaines le 1^{er} novembre à destination de l'Irlande avec à son bord le propriétaire du bateau, Gerald Hardesty et son épouse Carol, âgée de 60 ans. Un membre d'équipage d'un porte-container américain, le "Sealand Quality", a pu monter sur le voilier repéré à la dérive vendredi par un cargo norvégien et voir le corps du propriétaire du bateau, Gerald Hardesty, mort selon lui depuis deux ou trois jours.

Enlarged photocopy of clipping from unidentified Cherbourg newspaper brought aboard by the North Sea pilot and posted by the captain without translation in the officers' and crew's mess rooms, *Sea-Land Quality*.

As the crew filed back into the house from the main deck after the memorial service for the two Americans, the usually taciturn captain announced to no one in particular and everyone in general: "Well, that should put an end to all the ghost stories that have been going around."

FIRE AND EMERGENCY
Muster at boat station

ABANDON SHIP
Muster at boat station

NUCLEAR, BIOLOGICAL, CHEMICAL WARFARE
Remain in stateroom

Notice engraved on steel plate bolted to stateroom bulkhead, *Sea-Land Quality*.

THE BOSUN'S STORY

"Black-and-white photos tell the truth. That's why insurance companies use them."

WORKERS' MUSEUM

Question?
De-flagging.
Is it true
Sea-Land will
use Russian officers
with Vietnamese crew?

They are digging
up Jack Kennedy
to see if he's rolled
in his grave.

They couldn't beat us
so they'll unemploy us!

God bless corporate America.

Handwritten message on yellow legal pad, engine-room bulletin board, *Sea-Land Quality*.

Launched in 1984, the *Sea-Land Quality* was one of the first ships built at the Daewoo shipyard on the island of Keoje off the southeast coast of South Korea, and one of a series of "econ-ships" commissioned by the now-defunct United States Lines of Malcom McLean, the trucking executive who initiated containerized cargo movement in 1956. These were the biggest container ships built to date, deliberately slow: exercises in economies of scale, cheap construction, and conservative fuel use.

When an American crew picked up the first of these ships from the Daewoo dockyard, completed the sea trials, and began the voyage back across the Pacific, they discovered in the nooks and crannies of the new ship a curious inventory of discarded tools used in the building of the vessel: crude hammers made by welding a heavy bolt onto the end of a length of pipe, wrenches cut roughly by torch from scraps of deck plate. Awed by this evidence of an improvisatory iron-age approach to ship building, which corresponded to their earlier impressions of the often-lethal brutality of Korean industrial methods, they gathered the tools into a small display in the crew's lounge, christening it "The Korean Workers' Museum."

American elites have cultivated a fantastic fear of superior Asian intelligence; in doing so they obscure their own continued cleverness. For their part, American workers fear the mythic Asian brain and something else: an imagined capacity for limitless overwork under miserable condi-

tions. The first assistant engineer, once a Navy commando in Vietnam, fears being replaced by former enemies. Veering abruptly from the right-wing paranoia of the politician Ross Perot to the left-wing paranoia of filmmaker Oliver Stone, his diatribe is less farfetched than it seems. Shipping companies increasingly turn to flag-of-convenience registry, a legal loophole that allows for the hiring of cheaper, usually Asian, crews. American ship-owners have long favored Liberia and Panama, two notoriously independent nations, for these registry services, services which require an infrastructure roughly equivalent to that needed for commemorative stamp issues. Now Sea-Land threatens to turn to the newest bastion of paper sovereignty, the Marshall Islands, otherwise renowned as a cluster of irradiated coral atolls devastated by American thermonuclear testing in the 1950s.

And thus the general spirit of the ship was one of mournful and weary anticipation of unemployment, heightened by a pervasive insomnia caused by the vibration of the low-speed Hyundai-Sulzer diesel running at 100 RPM, the speed of an amphetamine-driven human heart.

WALKING IN CIRCLES

Port Elizabeth-Norfolk-Rotterdam-Bremerhaven-Felixstowe-Le Havre-Boston-Port Elizabeth. While crisscrossing the North Atlantic, David Brown works twelve hours a day for a month at a time, putting in an extra watch of work on deck from 0800 to noon, chipping and painting, standing watch at the wheel from noon to 1600, then back at the wheel from midnight to 0400. The extra watch at overtime pay allows him to earn "just enough to make the trip worthwhile," considering his family in Jacksonville and the fact that despite his years as a merchant sailor, the scarcity of American-flag ships means that he usually works for only six to nine months out of twelve.

A day before landfall, nearing the end of his watch and restless from standing in one place for four hours, Brown leaves the wheel on autopilot and begins to describe Ethiopian dockworkers unloading a cargo of grain, gaunt and wiry men walking in circles carrying huge sacks on their backs. Brown stoops and begins to pantomime a precise memory of their movement, pacing a repetitious circle in front of the navigation computer, bent over in the ancient stance of the stevedore, assuming the burdened posture found in the monochromatic floor mosaics still visible amid the ru-

ins of the Roman port of Ostia Antica, called into life wherever there were or are no machines to lift the weight of cargo.

Haunted by this image of sheer Sisyphean toil, Brown turns abruptly to the case of a hypothetical worker who loses his job to automation: "First he lose his sanity, then his car, then his house." The circle narrows and one world falls into the vortex of the other.

"SIBERIA"

For the crew, this crossing is the first to make port at the new robot terminal built on the ever-expanding landfill at the outer reaches of the River Maas. The Dutch engineer responsible for designing the system of automated cranes and trucks that gives the ECT/Sea-Land Terminal an eerie depopulated aspect even in pleasant weather remarked that the new method is "much more comfortable than when you have a lot of individuals under the crane. They say hello to each other, they talk to each other." He warned me away from the path of the robot trucks: "Watch out, they don't see you!"

In winter, the outer dike wall does little to shield the ship and the dock from the North Sea wind. A freezing forty-five-minute hike through the container stacks and across the sandy soil leads to the solitary truckers' bar nestled up against the dike at the foot of a row of roaring windmills. Beyond that, it's a half-hour van drive to the nearest store, a duty-free shop surrounded by oil tanks in the Botlek, where Russian and Filipino sailors remind Americans what it means to comb the shelves for bargains. But the nickname for this new port of call—barren, cold, and far from everything regarded as interesting and human—had stuck earlier, in the middle of the Atlantic, as someone recalled a farewell visit a month earlier to a familiar neighborhood bar just outside the old terminal twenty-five kilometers upriver toward Rotterdam. It is no longer possible, as it was three centuries ago on the River Maas, to infer the warmth of a still life from a picture of a wooden ship full of whale blubber.



Fish Story, 1989–95

Chapter 5

Message in a Bottle

1992/94 | 7 Cibachrome prints and 2 text panels | Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection, Vienna

72. Jewelry store. Rúa Príncipe.

73. Shop occupied by women clerks for eighteen months in dispute over pay. Rúa Príncipe.

74. Fish-market women at the close of the morning auction. Puerto Pesquero.

75. Dockers unloading shipload of frozen fish from Argentina.

76. Workers gathering on the waterfront at the end of a nationwide general strike opposing the socialist government's cutbacks in unemployed benefits.

77. Unsuccessful fishing for sardines off the Portuguese coast.

78. Pallet fire.

Puerto Vigo, Galicia, Spain, May 1992.

For Jules Verne, there is no place that cannot be illuminated. Moonlight cuts through the waves and gives the ocean floor the pale luminosity of a romantic ruin. When moonlight fails, electricity cuts in. But the sunken galleons on the floor of Vigo Bay, the secret source of Captain Nemo's mysterious insurrectionary wealth, are never described within Verne's text, although they are pictured in two of the illustrations of the first French edition of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. Within the written narrative, which is elsewhere replete with such scenes, there is no underwater tableau, no landscape, no town on the shore.

Nemo's sunken treasure remains both invisible and frozen in its connection to historic plunder, to the process of what Marx called "primitive accumulation." For Verne, this lost fraction of the wealth that came to fuel the emergence of modern Europe is confiscated by a magical fable of inheritance: "It was for him and him alone America had given up her precious metals. He was heir direct, without anyone to share, in those treasures torn from the Incas and from the conquered of Ferdinand Cortez."¹

Nemo's wealth, despite his patronage of revolutionary movements, remains liable to the charge of barrenness. His project is blocked on the one side by aristocratic nostalgia and on the other by an abstract and futuristic motto of perpetual flux within flux: *mobilis in mobili*. The Galician writer Ferrin has grasped the irony of Nemo's scavenging in the waters off Vigo. Wealth always leaves Vigo, whether in the form of fish, granite, or sheer emigrant labor power. Nemo, no exception to this rule, is for Ferrin quite simply a "nihilist," another external, destructive demiurge.²

For all his genius as a naval engineer, Nemo is also a philosophical idealist. Matter is always subordinated to will and to thought. Nemo embodies the secret idealism of all science fiction. He can flaunt the laws of economics because his relation to wealth is consistently magical. Verne's narrator observes that Nemo's voluminous library aboard the *Nautilus* contained "not one single work on political economy; that subject appeared to be strictly proscribed."³ Nemo's answer to the misery of the land lies in the imaginary preindustrial plentitude of the sea.

If Nemo has no respect for terrestrial economies, the booksellers and readers of Vigo have either too little or too much respect for Nemo. In the outdoor stalls that are set up from time to time on the Praza de Compostela one can buy inexpensive paperback editions in Spanish, but not in Galician, of most of Verne's novels. Among them, *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* is nowhere to be found. I am tempted to think that here, under

the canvas tarp and the swinging electric light two blocks from the waterfront, amongst the used volumes devoted to Velázquez and the several translations of the American inspirational writer Dale Carnegie, the indifference of Verne and his hero Nemo is reciprocated. And this reciprocated indifference is a function of an economic attitude: the distrust borne toward submarines by those who work the surface of the sea.

1. Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, H. Frith (trans.). London: Everyman's Library, 1908, reprint 1992, pp. 189–90.

2. Xose Luis Mendez Ferrin, "Dialogue between Lampedusa and Sponsor: on the face and reverse side of the town of Vigo," Ian Emmett (trans.), in Julio Gil, Vigo: *Fronteira do alén*. (Vigo: Ir Indo Edicions, n.d.), p. 17.

3. *Twenty Thousand Leagues*, p. 52.

Deep Six / Passer au bleu

1996/98 | 33 photographies Cibachrome mat imprimées sur papier marouflé
| 33 Cibachrome matt photographs printed on stuck paper | Musée des
Beaux-Arts, Calais

Passer au bleu, 1er volet: Les droits de l'homme

Deep Six, part 1: The Rights of Man

1-3.
*Centrale nucléaire et
usine d'aluminium de
Gravelines* (triptyque)

*Nuclear power station
and aluminum factory,
Gravelines* (triptych)

4-6.
Dunkerque (triptyque) (Le Guyane,
Une 2 CV Citroën, Un sémaphore)

Dunkerque (triptych) (The Guyane,
Citroën 2 CV, Semaphore)

7-8.
*Gare maritime désaffectée
à Douvres* (diptyque)

*Abandoned Dover marine
station* (diptych)

9-11.
*Dockers chargeant un cargo
sucrier à Calais* (triptyque)

*Dockers loading sugar
ship, Calais* (triptych)

12-13.
*Le parc Thomas Paine à New
York et Un pêcheur de morues
à Douvres* (diptyque)

*Thomas Paine Park, New York City
and cod fisher, Dover* (diptych)

Passer au bleu, 2ème volet: La nef des fous

Deep Six, part 2: Ship of Fools

14.
Le Renoir, Sea France [Trois
ingénieurs mécaniciens]

Sea France Renoir
[Three engineers]

15.
Le Renoir, Sea France [Un caissier]

Sea France Renoir [Cashier]

16.
Le Renoir, Sea France

[Fermeture des portes]

Sea France Renoir
[Closing the gate]

17.
Le Renoir, Sea France [La
relève de l'équipage]

Sea France Renoir [Crew change]

18.
Le Renoir, Sea France [Agent
de sécurité britannique dans
la boutique hors taxes]

Sea France Renoir [British
security guard in duty free shop]

19.
Le Renoir, Sea France
[Couple de passagers]

Sea France Renoir
[Traveling couple]

20.
Le Renoir, Sea France [Deux
jeunes filles au bar]

Sea France Renoir [Two
girls at the bar]

Passer au bleu

J'avais tout juste un peu plus de seize ans, aucune expérience, le goût de l'aventure et l'esprit enfiévré par l'héroïsme factice d'un maître d'école qui avait servi dans la marine, quand j'entrepris de sculpter ma destinée, et m'embarquai sur un navire corsaire, le *Terrible* du capitaine La Mort.

Thomas Paine, *Les Droits de l'homme*.

J'allais souvent nager dans le golfe du Mexique, près de Corpus Christi, parcourant trois ou quatre kilomètres au milieu des bancs de marsouins, qui plongeaient, décrivaient de grands cercles autour de moi, puis s'éloignaient. Soudain, je sentais sous moi la mer redoutable et toute la vie secrète qu'elle abrite. Je me disais que j'allais mourir de frayeur avant de pouvoir regagner la terre ferme. [...] J'étais aussi terrorisée que si on m'avait lâchée brusquement parmi les monstres d'une période préglaciaire. [...] J'aime l'océan, mais à la façon dont les chrétiens de la vieille école aiment leur Dieu : en tremblant de peur.

Katherine Ann Porter à Caroline Gordon,
le 28 août 1931.

L'idée, ce serait de réaliser des éditions fictives des *Droits de l'homme* de Thomas Paine (1791-1792) et de *La Nef des fous* de Katherine Ann Porter (1962), illustrées chacune par un ensemble de photographies en hors-texte. Les deux livres seraient pré-

sentés sous un même étui, associés l'un à l'autre en lieu et place des ouvrages antérieurs auxquels on les rattache habituellement.

Le roman de Katherine Porter remplacerait ainsi les *Réflexions sur la Révolution française* d'Edmund Burke (1790), le plaidoyer royaliste qui avait provoqué la riposte républicaine de Thomas Paine. De son côté, le livre de Thomas Paine remplacerait l'incunable xylographique dont s'est inspirée Katherine Porter, *La Nef des fous*, ou *Das Narrenschiff*, de Sébastien Brant (1494). (Dans la satire de Sébastien Brant, le premier fou sur la fameuse nef est le collectionneur de livres.)

Thomas Paine et Katherine Porter appartiennent respectivement à la première et à la dernière génération d'auteurs américains dont l'écriture s'est nourrie des traversées au long cours. Tous deux ont acquis une sorte de matérialisme affectueux, conséquence du mal de mer.

Thomas Paine a un rapport très concret avec la navigation. Sa connaissance intime de l'univers des marins élimine de son imagination littéraire toutes les métaphores nautiques. Il préfère comparer la politique aux effets de trompe-l'œil de la peinture et du théâtre.

Pour Katherine Porter, qui nage, voyage et observe finement les autres, le bateau est avant tout un théâtre métaphorique de la politique, de la tyrannie et de la promiscuité, où se donne en spectacle une nature humaine moins bonne que ne le pensait Thomas Paine.

21.
Le Renoir, Sea France [Décor
photographique, portrait
de Jeanne Moreau]

Sea France Renoir [Photo decor,
portrait of Jeanne Moreau]

22.
Le Renoir, Sea France
[Bureau de change]

Sea France Renoir
[Currency exchange]

23.
Le Renoir, Sea France [Baiser
du bout des doigts]

Sea France Renoir [Faux kiss]

24.
*Musée des Beaux-Arts et de la
Dentelle, Calais* [Des Marines]

*Musée des Beaux-Arts et de la
Dentelle, Calais* [Marine paintings]

25.
Le Renoir, Sea France [Décor
photographique, reproductions
de Cézanne et de Renoir]

Sea France Renoir [Photo
decor, Cézanne and
Renoir reproductions]

26.
Le Renoir, Sea France
[Risque d'électrocution]

Sea France Renoir
[Electrical hazard]

27.
Rue de Venise à Paris
[Femme en rouge]

Rue de Venise, Paris
[Woman in red]

28.
Le Renoir, Sea France [Deux
membres de l'équipage]

Sea France Renoir
[Two crewmen]

29.
*Manifestation du Front National
devant l'Hôtel de Ville de Paris*
*National Front Demonstration,
Hôtel de Ville, Paris*

30.
La Place de la Bastille à Paris
[Femme au pistolet]

Place de la Bastille, Paris
[Woman with gun]

31.
*Le Musée de la Marine à
Paris* [Enfant et esclave]

Musée de la Marine, Paris
[Boy and slave]

32.
*Garçon sur les quais
désaffectés à Boulogne*

*Boy on abandoned
waterfront, Boulogne*

33.
Le Renoir, Sea France [Écran
vidéo dans la salle des machines
à l'approche de Douvres]

Sea France Renoir [Engine room
video, approaching Dover]

Passer au bleu, 1er volet. Les Droits de l'homme

Une grande majorité de l'humanité se trouve rejetée bassement à l'arrière-plan de la réalité humaine, pour mieux mettre en avant et faire reluire les marionnettes de l'État et de l'aristocratie.

Les Droits de l'homme.

Deep Six. 2e volet. La Nef des fous

Il savait bien quelle lie du genre humain son navire, comme tous les navires, transportait d'escale en escale à travers le monde : des flambeurs, des voleurs, des trafiquants, des espions, des expulsés et des réfugiés politiques, des clandestins, des dealers, toute cette faune misérable de l'entrepont qui va d'un pays à l'autre, tels les rats porteurs de la peste, qui grouille, rôde et ébranle la belle ordonnance des cultures et civilisations du monde entier.

La Nef des fous.

Les légendes entre crochets ont une valeur purement descriptive, et ne doivent pas être considérées comme des titres de photographies prises isolément. Pour plus de commodité, le titre complet de toutes les photographies intitulées *Le Renoir de la compagnie Sea France effectuant la liaison entre Douvres et Calais* est abrégé en *Le Renoir, Sea France*.

Deep Six

... little more than sixteen years of age, raw and adventurous, and heated with the false heroism of a [school]master who had served in a man-of-war, I began the carver of my own fortune, and entered on board the Terrible privateer, Captain Death.

Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*.

I used to swim about two miles out in the Gulf of Mexico near Corpus Christi, and whole schools of porpoises used to dive by, parting and sweeping around me and out to sea, and suddenly I would feel under me the awful waters and the unknowable life in them, and it seemed I would surely die of terror before I could get back to land. . . It was as dreadful as if you might be set down suddenly in a preglacial age in a wilderness of monsters. . . I love the sea, but as an old-fashioned Christian loved God—with fear and trembling.

Katherine Ann Porter to Caroline Gordon, August 28, 1931.

This is the idea: imaginary editions of *The Rights of Man* by Thomas Paine (1791–92) and *Ship of Fools* (1962) by Katherine Ann Porter, each illustrated by a set of photographs that would be kept separate from the text. The two books would be slipcased together, thus changing the usual association of each of these books with another prior book.

Porter's novel would replace Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), the royalist polemic that had prompted Paine's republican response. And Paine's book would in turn substitute for the woodcut-illustrated book that had inspired Porter, Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* of 1494. (In Brant's book, the first fool on the ship of fools is the collector of books.)

Paine and Porter belong, respectively, to the first and last generations of American writers to have been formed by the long duration of sea travel. They shared a sympathetic materialism, born of seasickness.

Paine thought practically about ships. His sailor's familiarity with the maritime world purged nautical metaphors from his literary imagination. His favored metaphors for politics were drawn instead from the illusionism of painting and theatre.

For Porter—swimmer, passenger and astute physiognomist—ships were above all else metaphorical stages for politics, for autocracy and contested intimacy, and for the drama of a human nature less good than that imagined by Paine.

Deep Six, Part 1: The Rights of Man

A vast mass of mankind are degradedly thrown into the background of the human picture, to bring forward, with greater glare, the puppet-show of state and aristocracy.

The Rights of Man.

Deep Six, Part 2: Ship of Fools

He knew well what human trash his ship—all ships—carried to and from all ports of the world: gamblers, thieves, smugglers, spies, political deportees and refugees, stowaways, drug peddlers, all the gutter stuff of the steerage moving like plague rats from one country to another, swarming and ravaging and undermining the hard-won order of the cultures and civilizations of the whole world.

Ship of Fools.

Captions in brackets are given for descriptive purposes only and are not part of the titles of the individual photographs. The complete title listed as *Sea France Renoir* is *Sea France Renoir en route between Dover and Calais*.



Ship of Fools / The Dockers' Museum

Ship of Fools (1999–2000/2010)

Selection of 17 framed chromogenic prints mounted on alu-dibond
| Collection M HKA, Antwerp / Collection Flemish Community

1–10. <i>Crew, Pilot, and Russian Girlfriend (Novorossiysk) 1: Ab</i> (1999–2000/2010)	<i>Crew, Pilot, and Russian Girlfriend (Novorossiysk) 6: Engineer</i> (1999–2000/2010)	11. <i>Drunken Pilot (Koper)</i> (2000/2010)
<i>Crew, Pilot, and Russian Girlfriend (Novorossiysk) 2: Bosun</i> (1999–2000/2010)	<i>Crew, Pilot, and Russian Girlfriend (Novorossiysk) 7: Media Tech</i> (1999–2000/2010)	12–13. <i>Near Collision (Koper)</i> (2000/2010)
<i>Crew, Pilot, and Russian Girlfriend (Novorossiysk) 3: Cook</i> (1999–2000/2010)	<i>Crew, Pilot, and Russian Girlfriend (Novorossiysk) 8: Officer and Girlfriend</i> (1999–2000/2010)	14. <i>Ship Lesson (Durban)</i> (1999/2010)
<i>Crew, Pilot, and Russian Girlfriend (Novorossiysk) 4: Deck Cadet</i> (1999–2000/2010)	<i>Crew, Pilot, and Russian Girlfriend (Novorossiysk) 9: Sober Pilot</i> (1999–2000/2010)	15. <i>Waiting for Work (Santos)</i> (2010)
<i>Crew, Pilot, and Russian Girlfriend (Novorossiysk) 5: Engine Cadet</i> (1999–2000/2010)	<i>Crew, Pilot, and Russian Girlfriend (Novorossiysk) 10: Three Women</i> (1999–2000/2010)	16. <i>Not Working (Santos)</i> (2010)
		17. <i>Working (Santos)</i> (2010)

The Dockers' Museum (2010–2013)

A selection of 'Objects of Interest,' elements from Allan Sekula, *The Dockers' Museum* | Collection M HKA, Antwerp / Collection Flemish Community | At allansekula.ensembles.org (scan the QR code) you will find more information on the research and the display of *Ship of Fools / The Dockers' Museum* (2010–13)

[...] ... the ship was the brainchild of a group of German and British seafarer activists who also happened to be disaffected veterans of Greenpeace, interested in the problem of an international linkage of labor and environmental struggles. Their primary concern was the system of *flag of convenience* shipping, a lawfully ruse invented by American shippers in the 1940s that allows wealthy ship owners to register their vessels in poor nations offering what is often termed *paper sovereignty: a flag for a fee*. The system is rife with abuses, and indeed its very purpose is abuse: shielding exploitative labor conditions and substandard vessels behind a bewildering legal maze.

[...] ... since 1995 key working class resistances to neoliberal policies –reduced social security, casualization of work in the name of “flexibility,” union busting, and privatization of public infrastructure– have come from workers in the transport sector: railway workers in France, dockers in Australia, Chile and Brazil, bus drivers and airline crews in Mexico, delivery drivers in the United States. These battles against the doctrine of the untrammelled market predate Seattle.

[...] The calculated amnesia of the world of international shipping offers a lesson to those who celebrate the postmodern flux of identity. One of the stranger stories of this common practice: in mid passage a captain receives a telex noting that the ship has been sold and must be renamed. The captain politely asks the new name and is told to send a crewman over the side –risky business when underway– to paint out every other letter of the old name. What would Mallarmé make of this? The concrete poetry of the contemporary maritime world, the nominative magic worked out between the telex machine and the paint locker.

[...] The *Global Mariner* had to be a real ship functioning in an exemplary way, to be the Good Ship that social justice demanded other ships should and could be, but it was also an empty vessel carrying nothing but ballast and a message.

[...] This was the *anti-Titanic*. The Glaswegian quartermaster aboard the *Global Mariner*, a wiry veteran seafarer by the name of Jimmy McCauley, made the point very succinctly, referring to the steady aggregate loss of life at sea, crews of twenty at a time on bulk ore carriers that mysteriously break in half, sometimes in calm seas, or the myriad Filipino passengers crammed onto decrepit ferries that capsize or burn in the Sulu Sea: “A *Titanic* happens every year, but no one hears about it.”



Lottery of the Sea

2006 | 180 minutes, colour, sound | English, Spanish, Galician, with Spanish subtitles | Direction, camera, narration: Allan Sekula | Editing: Elizabeth Hesik

Lottery of the Sea takes its title from Adam Smith, who, in his famous *Wealth of Nations* (1776), compared the life of the sailor to a lottery. Thus Smith introduces the notion of risk by means of an allegory of the dangers of the sea, especially for those who perform the hardest tasks, although also, to a lesser extent, for those who invest in ships and goods.

The film inquires 'is there a relation between the most dreadful and fearful concept in economics – that of risk – and the category of the sublime in aesthetics?' We know that the sea is a primordial source of the sublime, especially in the eighteenth century.

The film is an unusual diary that ranges from the presumed innocent summer of 2001 to the current 'war on terror,' through a meandering essayistic journey from port to port, shore to shore, and coast to coast.

What does it mean to be a maritime nation?

*To govern the waves?
Or to harvest the sea?*

An American submarine collides with a Japanese trawler. What does this suggest about the division of labour in the Pacific?

How do we remember the old emperor? As a general mounted on his horse? Or as a marine biologist looking through his microscope?

Panama decides whether to increase the width of its canal, over which it now exerts a moderate degree of sovereignty. *How come a diver is better prepared to question this huge swath cutting through the jungle?*

Galicia receives an unwanted gift of crude oil, which provokes subsequent and important questions about the monomania of governments incapable of conceptualising danger in more than one dimension. What can we learn from people's ability to self-organise in the face of disaster and government indifference? *What can the fishermen of Bueu, smeared in oil, tell us about it?*

Once again, Barcelona returns to its seafloor, creating a pseu-

do-public sphere: in the north, property prices rise, while in the south even greater maritime logistics efficiency is achieved. *What do the invisible port workers of the city have to say about democracy from their self-defined position as a 'ghetto'?*

And in the middle of it all we visit blizzards and demonstrations in New York, prehistoric mastodons drifting in Los Angeles, militant percussionists and bewildered construction workers in Lisbon, millionaires or millionaire clones (who can tell them apart?) in Amsterdam and street dogs in Athens, all with the idea of considering in detail an image of the sea, the market and democracy.

Allan Sekula
November 2004

Back to the Drawing Board

Lecture by Dr. Sally Stein, the artist's widow, on maritime themes and discursive crosscurrents in the notebooks of Allan Sekula.

Duration: 40 min. (approx.) | Date: Tuesday 13 June 2017, 19.00 h. | Free admission. Advanced booking: activitats@ftapies.com.

Allan Sekula. Collective Sisyphus. Round table

With the participation of:

Carles Guerra, co-curator, Fundació Antoni Tàpies; Agustín Ortiz, The Green Parrot; Representative of the Barcelona port dockers union; Anja Isabel Schneider, co-curator, M HKA and KU Leuven; Cory Scozzari, TBA21; Hilde Van Gelder, co-curator, KU Leuven; Jeroen Verbeeck, KU Leuven; Daniela Zyman, TBA21

Duration: 1 h. (approx.) | Date: Wednesday 14 June 2017, 19 h. | Free admission. | Advanced booking: activitats@ftapies.com.

Approximations

Guided visit to the exhibitions *Allan Sekula. Collective Sisyphus* and *Antoni Tàpies. Objects*

Duration: 1 h. 15 min. | Date: every Saturday except August, 17 h. | Free admission with entrance ticket to the Museum. | Advanced booking not required. Limited places.

Guided visit to the exhibition Allan Sekula. Collective Sisyphus for the Friends of the Fundació

By Carles Guerra, co-curator of the exhibition *Allan Sekula. Collective Sisyphus* and director of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies.

Duration: 1 h. | Date: 11 July 2017, 18.00 h. | Free admission. | Limited places. Advanced booking: activitats@ftapies.com.

Collective Sisyphus. A Cinema season

The Forgotten Space, 2010

The film follows container cargo aboard ships, barges, trains and trucks, listening to workers, engineers, planners, politicians and those marginalised by the global transport system. As Sekula says: 'Our film is about globalisation and the sea, the "forgotten space" of our modernity.'

Authors: Allan Sekula and Noël Burch. | Duration: 112 min. | Date: 13 September 2017, 18.00 h. | Venue: Fundació Antoni Tàpies. | Free admission with ticket entrance to the Museum.

Tsukiji, 2001

Tsukiji is, in the words of the director, an 'urban symphony' dedicated to the largest fish market in the world, and one of the last surviving proletarian spaces in Tokyo.

Author: Allan Sekula. | Duration: 43 min. | Date: Wednesday 20 September 2017, 18.00 h. | Venue: Fundació Antoni Tàpies. | Free admission with entrance ticket to the Museum.

A Short Film for Laos, 2006–07, and Gala, 2005 (Double bill)

Special session coinciding with the Festival of La Mercè 2017. The films will be introduced by Carles Guerra, co-curator of the exhibition and director of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies. After the screening, a Moritz beer will be offered on the terrace.

Author: Allan Sekula. | Duration: 43 min. (*A Short Film for Laos*) and 24 min. (*Gala*). | Date: Friday 22 September 2017, 18.00 h. | Free admission with ticket entrance to the Museum. Activity in collaboration with Moritz.

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