

Island, The  
Wind Constantly  
Dr Stella Baraklianou

# Island, The Wind Constantly Dr Stella Baraklianou



# Project Description

Practice-based research project exploring ideas of escapism and travel. Experimentation in photographic and installation practice which was shown in a group exhibition at Aperture Foundation, New York and a subsequent solo exhibition at the gallery Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun, Leeds.

**Project Duration:**

January 2016 – May 2017

**Funder:**

Supported by School Research Funding.

Barakianou, S., "Sun Lounger" detail (2017), Mylar weave steel frame  
70x53x1,86 cm, Edition 1/2, 1 Artists proof

# Research Aims & Objectives

## Research Aims:

- To creatively investigate, through photographic and sculptural means, the concept of escapism in the context of contemporary art. Informed by contemporary and historical literary and philosophical ideas concerning notions of paradise and utopia.
- To expand the use of sculptural installation contexts for the presentation of photographic work, testing out new materials and methods in a photographic practice.
- To explore innovative uses of laser-cut Mylar as a reflective surface for digital printing in photographic installations.



"Island: the wind constantly" (2017), Installation view  
Solo exhibition  
Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun, Leeds, May 2017

# Research Context



"Island: the wind constantly" (2017), Installation view  
Solo exhibition  
Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun, Leeds, May 2017

Combining photography, fundamentally a medium of light, with the physical use of reflective materials to stage, transform, shape and manipulate light, *Island: the wind constantly* was a culmination of three to four years of studio work, an international residency and a major group international exhibition.

The themes explored were those of escapism and utopia. The artefacts produced, a set of photographic works and installations. The material experimentation involved the highly reflective material, also known under the trademark, Mylar.

The artist expanded the use and applications of the material, in several ways: firstly, as a reflector, in the photographic studio. Lighting still-life objects, the golden side of the material was utilised, in order to achieve a certain effect that emulates the golden glow of an afternoon sunset on a beach. Secondly, in an innovative and imaginative way, by laser-cutting the fine material to produce the map of "Utopia." Lastly, as an installation/sculptural piece, in the form of the "Sun Lounger."

The practice was informed by researching the literature and narratives of the utopian island community and idyllic notions associated with the sun and sand of the Mediterranean in the popular imagination.

Concepts of escapism, utopia and paradise often appear in parallel and have been at the core of philosophical and literary projects. The most influential medieval project to elaborate on the ideals of utopia, as well as of an ideal society, was Thomas More's treatise *Utopia* (1516). Baraklianou appropriated the wood cut illustration from one of the first publications of the book, taken from the British Library in London, in order to render it in a digital format. This was subsequently laser-cut into the silver side of the reflective material.

Personal autobiographical references to Greek islands and the Mediterranean were explored in the context of references to J.G. Ballard's *Vermilion Sands* (1973), in which the author articulates sci-fi futuristic dreamscapes on a Mediterranean coast: "an over-lit desert resort, with large skies .. in the 3,000 mile-long linear city stretching from Gibraltar to Glyfada beach, along the northern shores of the Mediterranean".



Baraklianou, S., (2016) "Mantel Vase: reversible" digital photograph (40x40cm) and reflective material on plinth, Installation at Banff Project Space, Banff Centre for Creative Arts, Canada



Baraklianou, S., (2016) "Projected Stage Set: Cool tone" 130cmx140x35cm, digital photographic prints, wooden frame from recycled wood and reflective material Installation at Banff Project Space, Banff Centre for Creative Arts, Canada

# Research Methods & Process

The processes and methods of the project involved an exploration of the potential of the use of double-sided reflective Mylar, the subject of ongoing research that was also explored during Baraklianou's residency at Banff Center for the Arts, Alberta, Canada in early-2016. Its use in the lighting of still-life objects in the studio and also as a key material in the construction of the installation works reflects, literally, the relationship of the digital to the material in a process of mirroring or doubling. The reflective material is a reference to communication, and outer-space exploration. Mylar was a material developed in the US and found applications in the first satellites, developed by the Bell Labs, as part of their Echo project (1959-1960), the first project to achieve outer-space satellite communications. NASA further utilised it as an insulation material for their spacecrafts. Soon after, artists followed, most notably, Andy Warhol in his *Silver Clouds* (1968). Warhol worked with Bell Labs scientist, Billy Kluver, an engineer who was also part of the EAT, artists and scientists' collaborative network.



Baraklianou, S., (2016) "Mantel Vase: reversible" detail from installation, Installation at Banff Project Space, Banff Centre for Creative Arts, Canada

The material has been used by contemporary artists, including Tara Donovan (*Untitled (Mylar)* 2011) and Kori Newkirk in his installation "For a dark day (red) triptych, 2015), amongst others. The primary process of photography and digital printing was expanded in this research through testing new materials and methods for the production of reflected images, together with an expansion of the photographic practice into sculptural installation. Set on a fictional island, the solo exhibition in which these artefacts were brought together explored ideas of escapism and reflections through the material experimentation in photographic and installation practice.

Blurring the boundaries between desire and materiality, suggesting a playful set-up of escapism and fantasy, Mylar is used as a lighting tool in the studio practice, serving as a reflector in a variety of ways. The reflective material plays a central role not only in the lighting of the still-life objects in the studio (starfish, shell), but also later on, as part of the installation in the gallery space. It is a methodology of the *reversible*, rooted in the highly reflective material and communicating a certain mirroring or doubling, literally, but also in terms of the methodology, signalling a transformation from digital to material and vice-versa.

The still-life photograph *Starfish* (digital photographic print, 50 x 50cm) was placed as a mirror-reflection opposite *Reflector* (laser-cut Mylar, 50 x 50cm). *Starfish* was photographed in such a way in the studio as to create golden shadows cast from the reflector. The same gesture is then replicated in the gallery space, by placing the photograph alongside the reflector and casting the reflection in real-time so that a sense of reversal of time as well as light occurred. The reflection of the starfish thus animates and creates the setting for an active engagement with the photograph, one that extends the stilling or freezing of time, otherwise associated with still-life genre.



Baraklianou, S., Starfish (2017), digital c-type print, 50x50cm  
Solo exhibition  
Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun, Leeds, May 2017

Baraklianou, S., Starfish & Reflector, (2017), 50x50cm  
Solo exhibition  
Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun, Leeds, May 2017





The material was woven into *Sun-Lounger* (24 x 65 x 186cm). The kind of sun lounger typically found on Mediterranean beaches is presented as a shiny object of illusion and fantasy. The aluminium frame is coated in the reflective material, from strips that emulate the fabric that would have otherwise normally existed on the bed frame. *Sun Lounger* thus becomes a reference to the holiday, taken out of context of the beach and into the gallery space, exploring materials and structures that transform the utility of an object into something devoid of value and use, yet invested with dreams and desires.

It was paired with the *Map of Utopia* (30 x 40cm), based on the original woodcut illustration from the first edition of Thomas More's treatise, published by Arte Theodorici Martini, Louvain and held at the British Library. The original woodcut illustration was digitally rendered and laser-cut into Mylar reflective material. More's illustration has become here an abstracted mass of lines and curves, cut onto the silver side of the Mylar. On this 'Island, tourists and locals have left and only the constant wind blows on a deserted beach and the hedonistic paradise has disappeared. In this fictive setting traces are left about in the wind and the sand but too subtle for the naked eye to see. A still life photograph, *Shell* (40 x 40cm), was placed on the gallery wall adjacent to the map. The shells and starfish are ancient memorabilia of a once paradise. Time seems to have come to a standstill in the deserted beach.

The production techniques brought together here are novel and experimental, merging photography and digital printing with reflective materials and sculptural installation, and the work invites the viewer to contemplate a glimpse into a paradise, fashioned from space materials, in a transportation into another world of fantasy and fiction.



Baraklianou, S., Map: Utopia (2017), 30x40cm, Edition 1/2  
laser-cut transfer from original 1889 woodcut illustration Thomas More's Utopia'  
Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun, Leeds, May 2017

# Research Outcomes & Dissemination



Baraklianou, S., "Sun Lounger" detail (2017), Mylar weave steel frame  
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## **Artist in Residency, "New Materiality"**

Banff Centre for the Creative Arts, Alberta, Canada, January-February 2016.

## **Photography is Magic**

Aperture Foundation, New York, 14 July-11 August 2016.

A group exhibition of fifty international artists working within the expanded field of experimental photography, curated by Charlotte Cotton.

<https://aperture.org/exhibition/2016-aperture-summer-open-photography-magic/>

## **Island: The Wind Constantly**

Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun, Leeds, UK, 28 April-2 May 2017.

A solo exhibition commissioned by the artists-run gallery STCFTHOTS. The exhibition was reviewed by Karen Tobias-Green in Corridor 8 magazine:

<https://corridor8.co.uk/article/stella-baraklianou-island-wind-constantly/>

The works *Starfish* and *Reflector* were also exhibited at

**This Must Be**, a group exhibition at Grosvenor Gallery, Manchester, February 2019.

<https://manchesterwire.co.uk/photography-exhibition-this-must-be-the-place-at-mmu-grosvenor-gallery/>

As above, the works *Starfish* and *Reflector* were exhibited at a solo booth at **FotoTallinn**, Art Fair, 27th - 29th September 2019, Tallinn, Estonia.

<https://www.fototallinn.ee/en/participant/stella-baraklianou-2/>

Stella Baraklianou



Textual information, likely a title or description of the artwork.



**Output Type:**

Original artistic works, creative body of enquiry, solo exhibition, contribution to collaborative group exhibitions