The fifth installment of Manifesta, the European Biennale of Contemporary Art, took place this year in the Basque country under the direction of curators Massimiliano Gioni and Marta Kausma. The exhibition was staged across two very different urban sites, which although linked by a short bus ride are worlds apart in terms of economic and social infrastructure. This duality is mirrored by the fact that each site has two names. In Euskera, the language of the Basques and one of the official European languages, the word "tosaia" is used to refer to the place Donostia and Pasai da but in the more familiar Castilian (Spanish) they are better known as San Sebastian and Pasajes San Pedro. Donostia-San Sebastian and Pasai-Pasaijan San Pedro seem to be among the most geographically visible peripheral sites chosen by Manifesta. Basque culture, in spite of its geographical small scale, is in many ways at the heart of contemporary European identity, not least because it constitutes an ex-isting national boundary by extending from Northern Spain into South Western France. The region's claims for political autonomy, rooted in a strong sense of ethnic and linguistic identity, are by no means unique and Julio Medem's recent documentary The Basque Ball - Skin Against Stone proposes parallels with Northern Ireland, while retaining an awareness of the specificity of the Basque conflict.

The Basque setting links Manifesta 5 to a number of other artistic projects staged in contested territory. From a North American perspective, an obvious parallel could be drawn with Jaffe's exhibition of public art taking place in San Diego and Tijuana for the fifth time in 2005. Manifesta, however, is a nomadic event and since its debut at Nantes in 1990, it has traveled to Luxembourg (1996), Ljubljana (2000) and Frankfurt (2002). By constantly shifting site, it has laid claim to a flexible and self-referential model of curatorial practice, and has sought to foster exchange between local configurations and external networks. This article examines some of these claims, reference to the curatorial and artistic strategies employed in the Basque country and recent critical writing about nomadic art practice.

In the Basque setting, Manifesta 5's status as a nomadic outsider is complicated by the ties that bind it to the art world, and it has sometimes seemed to act as a compliment to the mainstream for both artists and curators. The International Foundation Manifesta, permanently based in Amsterdam, includes amongst its membership several prominent art world figures, such as Francesco Bonami, curator of Manifesta 3 and sub-director of the Venice Biennale in 2003. It is perhaps no coincidence that nomadic art practices also found their way into Venice under Bonami's direction, in the shape of the Utopia Station project curated by Rirkrit Tiravanija. These art world connections are not hidden and Manifesta has continually reconfigured its position in relation to centers of power.

The third installment in Ljubljana, for example, focused attention on relatively marginalized Eastern European art practices. In Ljubljana the fourth took place much closer to the art market. Staged in Frankfurt in 2003 in partnership with Documenta 12, it sought to explore relationships with a younger generation of institutionally-based curators. This strategy was not uniformly well received; however, and some critics suggested that Manifesta 4 was overshadowed by Documenta 12, the more established event (see Tarim Biddle's review in Art Monthly, 15, July-August 2004). In fact, the Documenta 12 was marked by a particular thematic emphasis on the politics of place and identity. In addition to new installations by Chantal Akerman and Isaac Julien, it incorporated a number of influential film and video documentaries from the 1980s (such as the Black Audio Film Collective's Handsworth Songs, 1986).

The curators of Manifesta 5 have, in turn, revisited some of the formal and thematic territory covered in Documenta 12. The exhibition includes a considerable number of video documentaries, exploring overtly political themes such as the globalization of labor and the history of the territorial conflict along the Israeli-Palestinian border. Manifesta 5 seems less assured, however, in locating historical precedents for this type of practice and the exhibition features very few works produced prior to the 1990s. Among the most important are Marcel Brood - thaer's 1973 slide piece Bateau Tahitien, a journey through the fragments of a maritime painting, and several films by Ian Ader, selected in Donostia and in Pasai da. Given the quas-mythical status heacquired since his disappearance at sea in 1975, Ader would seem to be a key figure for contemporary artistic and curatorial negotiations of nomadism. The evident contrast between his work and Broodthaer's is also intriguing because of the way in which it foreshadows subsequent developments in art practice.

James Meyer has documented the emergence of nomadism as a focus for contemporary art in the 1990s in "Nomadic Figures of Travel in Contemporary Art" (see Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn, ed. Alex Coles, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000, 30-66). Meyer suggests that artistic negotiations of travel fall into two categories. He opposes the "lyrical" nomadism exemplified by Rirkrit Tiravanija to a more overtly critical model, represented by artists such as Renée Green and Christian Philipp Muller. While lyrical nomadism brings a certain arbitrariness to its exploration of the everyday, the critical current tends to locate travel with reference to specific geographic and historical contexts. According to Green and Muller seem to share something of the political engagement with place that is documented by Lucy Lippard in The Lure of the Local (New Press, 1995), a semi-autobiographical account of site-specific art since the 1980s. Yet even critical nomadic practice often tends to lack the activist, and collectivist dimensions foregrounded by Lippard.
al traffic arriving via Bilbao Airport (another architectural showcase). The siting of the exhibition in the disparate urban spaces of Donostia and in PasaiDono provides a means of exploring the interaction between touristy and industrial urban identities, and an opportunity for reflection on the dynamics of gentrification. Donostia is a prosperous and elegant seaside town, favored by Spanish and French tourists, and it has composed such of the aggressive development that has birthed the resorts of the Costa del Sol. The stereotypical resident is wealthy and retired and property values are very high, apparently surmounted only by Barcelona and Madrid.

Manifesta 5, running throughout the high season from June to September, is not easily ignored by tourists. The 19th century seafood market and shopping areas are festooned with banners bearing the pink exhibition logo and a considerable number of prestigious national and cultural foundations sponsored for the duration of the show, blurring the already fuzzy distinction between art tourism and other forms of cultural consumption. A series of installations and ephemeral events are dispersed across landmark leisure spaces, such as a boathouse below the Aquarium, the summit of Monte Urgull and the Plaza Zubieta in the heart of the city. It was followed by a public parade, led by artist Jeremy Deller and intended to feature a deliberately eccentric array of participants, from the familiar street musicians and clowns to the more esoteric, such as example, ‘single mothers’ and ‘blood donors’.

Many of the installations at the 21st century Museo San Telmo, a former convent converted into an ethnographic museum deal with issues of national identity and history. Entry to the main exhibition is via a courtyard, that houses Algecira- France: Images (1998), a series of 27 framed posters by Marc Quere. The images on the posters are a collection from 19th century ethnographic photographs taken by Felix Moulia, featuring native Algerians posed against a studio backdrop, ostentatiously displaying their authentic costumes and customs. Quere added speech bubbles and positioned the design throughout the Belfond Square of Marseille (a point of reception for many immigrants) in order to solicit comments and responses. These irrelevant, often explicit, additions underscore the extent to which the images remain provocative, and the project as a whole displays much of its impact from its invocation of another context of reception.

The exploration of image and identity in Hitro Steyerl’s film November (2004) uses an even broader range of cultural reference points, from martial arts and Russ Meyer movies to news footage and home videos of political protests. It is structured around Super 8 fragments of a feminist movie begun in 1978 but never completed, featuring the artist’s friend Andrea Wolf as the glamorous leather-clad leader of a biker gang. Steyerl interweaves this material with later images of Wolf, a Kurdish activist who disappeared in 1999. Oscillating between humor, political passion and melancholy, November charts the complexities of popular political struggle, whereby the revolutionary fervor of October gives way to a more nostalgic investment in icon of resistance. Nostalgia (2002) is the film, and the title, of another video work in San Telmo, this time a pseudo-autobiographical document of colonial Mozambique by Maria Lustutano. It is assembled from an array of found sources, including postcards and home movie fragments, with a soundtrack punctuated by snippets of pop, reggae. The film’s profound narration is delivered by a young girl, and instead of engaging with the realities of colonial life from the perspective of the colonized, its account of faraway places moves fluidly between memory and fantasy.

Many of the works sighted in the 19th century Koldo Mitxelena Library and Cultural Center are also concerned with temporal fragmentation and dissolution. These themes are foregrounded in two documentary video works by Sven Augustijn, entitled Johan (2004) and Francois (2005). Portraying patients suffering from aphasia, they document a progressive loss of linguistic memory and coherence. The sculptural and photographic installations in this space range from Angela Tersley’s Glassy Lace coffins that are similarly disjunctive. Recalling Mike Nelson’s Hawaiian narratives, Rule’s surrealist maps and diagrams chart an evolving apocalyptic landscape that is home to nature-loving survivors, freedom-fighters and terrorists. The exhibition at the Koldo Iturralde Art center and waterfront site is perhaps the most cohesive, involving a number of projects that explore the social function of architecture. Vangeli Vahos constructed models inspired by skyscrapers in various films, including Kancha Tower in San Sebastian. Many of these structures are no longer standing yet they remain a powerful focus of urban identity, explored through news clippings and transcripts of online discussions with residents of each city.

The Kursaal is also one of two powerful documentary projects, both characterized by duality. In Route 18 (2009) the Israeli-Palestinian duo Eyam Ghanem and Michel Khiari travel the length of the refugee camp created by a 1956 United Nations partition plan, exploring the local strategies employed by residents on each side of the conflict and relying primarily on interviews for representational strategies amidcut; rather than obscure, the complexities of history and context in this film and in Laura Horelli’s paired videos Helsinki Shipyard and Port San Juan (both 2002). As in the case of Route 18, the film in Manifesta 5, Horelli’s project, derives much of its resonance from its evolution as a public project. Through a series of interviews, Horelli documents the globalization of labor in the cruise ship business, and the design and construction of the ships in Helsinki and on the conditions of employment endured by the international crews that embark and disembark at Port San Juan, Puerto Rico. These two films, as well as those by the artists from up to 30 countries at any one time and boast all of the facilities of a "floating city" except, as one shipbuilder notes, a portlight.

Although Donostia is the administrative center of Manifesta 5, nearby Pasai Dono is home to the largest single exhibition, as well as an ambitious waterfront installation. Several off-site interventions. This small port lacks an accessible beach, and its economy has traditionally depended on the fishing industry, rather than tourism. Pasai Dono clearly lacks Donostia’s exclusive borough, as well as the design and construction of the ships and on the conditions of employment endured by the international crews that embark and disembark at Port San Juan, Puerto Rico. These two films, as well as those by the artists from up to 30 countries at any one time and boast all of the facilities of a “floating city” except, as one shipbuilder notes, a portlight.

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There may be an intrinsic contradiction between self-reflexive curatorial practice and the hierarchical exhibition’s characteristic emphasis on internationalism and novelty, yet Manifesta 5 derives much of its impact from its resistance to naivety, that by employed with General Poitouk, famous for its abstract, minimalist, pastelboard villages for the decoration of Catherine the Great’s courting rooms. Contemporary tourists are, however, more likely to seek out the ‘real’ behind the pastiche, the real, and the installations at Donostia and Pasai Dono are at their best when sensitive to the shifting dynamics of consumerism, which continue to structure the experience of place.

Manifesta 5 took place at Donostia-San Sebastian and Pasai-Donibane-Pasai-Pasajes San Pedro in Spain, from June 15 to September 30, 2004. For further information see http://www.manifesta.eu

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