

Miquel Barceló

Oceanographer

Jun 7 — Oct 13, 2024 | Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Villa Paloma, Monaco

Through a selection of around sixty pieces (paintings, ceramics, embroideries, works on paper), this exhibition offers a fresh look at the prolific output of Miquel Barceló, a Spanish artist who made the sea a central theme of his work.

Visitors are invited to embark on an epic voyage from the beginnings of life (fossil compositions, exoplanets, ocean floors or Earth's crust textures blending into aerial views of the sea's surface, exploration of abysses, shapes and creatures of ocean trenches), to the presence of humans espied behind his seascapes, bestiaries, and numerous *bodegón*-style still lives (diving, sailing, cooking, and so on), via powerful compositions of waves and ceramics inspired by Antiquity. A whole swathe of the oeuvre of one of the greatest contemporary painters, and an echo to the history of oceanography, so dear to the Principality of Monaco.

Since his first solo exhibition in Majorca in 1974, Miquel Barceló has never tired of travelling and developing his artistic practice. However, in his world the sea has always been his favourite element, and has remained a constant aspect of his life from his childhood to his most recent creations.

Often comparing painting to diving without breathing equipment, over the last fifty years he has created an ever-changing body of work in which the art of living is fused with nature and the most diverse influences converge. From the coastlines he visits, he brings back powerful seascapes. From the meals he eats, he derives still lifes that could not be more vigorous. From his underwater explorations, he returns with creatures and principles of symbiosis or biomorphism that allow him to extend his experiments with matter yet further.

This exhibition invites viewers to revisit Miquel Barceló's rich and diverse production, on a journey from the origins of life, taking in the emergence of basic human activities (fishing, sailing, cooking), seascapes, the bestiary of aquatic life that pervades his work, and his ceramics that draw on the tradition of the *bodegón* and the culture of the great Mediterranean maritime empires.

"Barceló's love of the sea, of travel, of discovery and knowledge, made the title of the exhibition in Monaco, a long-standing centre for the study of the oceans, a natural fit: *Miquel Barceló, oceanographer*."

The exhibition, which revisits forty years of art borne by the sea, is constructed in a vertical progression in the Villa Paloma, as if reascending in stages from a dive into the origins of life: exoplanets, fossiliferous compositions, ocean floors or textures of the earth's crust merging with aerial views of maritime surfaces. This is followed by an exploration of the depths and the extraordinary animals they contain, both forms and fauna, all the way to the evocation of a human presence that we first glimpse in the surprising tête-à-tête of a fish and a hook, followed by the return from fishing and still lifes that harken back to the *bodegón* tradition. Ceramics inspired by antiquity take us back to the culture of the great ancient Mediterranean thalassocracies."

— Björn Dahlström, from the exhibition catalogue

Curators : Björn Dahlström, Guillaume de Sardes, Stéphane Vacquier

Scenographer : Christophe Martin