

# Hospitium—The Lampedusa Project

## A project by Tanja Boukal

Curatorial advice: Tina Teufel

### Introduction

Lampedusa is not just one island—it is many worlds existing in parallel. It is a sanctuary for migrants escaping perilous journeys, a holiday destination for tourists seeking leisure, and a home for its residents who navigate the delicate balance between these realities.

Tanja Boukal's "Lampedusa Project" explores these layered identities, shining a light on the island as a microcosm of global challenges. Through art, she delves into Lampedusa's ambiguity as a refuge and a leisure destination, examining how migration, tourism, as well as the lived experiences of its residents shape its identity. This year-long project invites to reflect on the unseen connections between these worlds, highlighting the pressures on Lampedusa's people to speak for the unspoken and to reconcile the irreconcilable. Drawing upon the ancient Greco-Roman concept of hospitality (Hospitium), which highlights the sacred connection between host and guest, the project examines the complex relationship between individuals, society, and the environment on Lampedusa. It reflects on the island's transformation over the past decades. By examining the island's elusive identity, Boukal amplifies the voices of those navigating these layered realities.

### Work Methods: Building Connections

Boukal's approach emphasizes collaboration and immersion, fostering meaningful connections between art, history, and the local community. Only through repeated long-term stays on the island can she build the trust necessary to engage deeply with its people and understand the complex dynamics that define life on Lampedusa.

Boukal works closely with curator Tina Teufel, who serves as a consultant, to create site-specific works grounded in local narratives and experiences. Jakob Brossmann, director of the acclaimed documentary *Lampedusa in Inverno*, joins the project to examine how the island has evolved since his film ten years ago, which captured a pivotal moment in its history. His expertise provides a visual and historical lens to the exploration of Lampedusa's changing identity.

The artist's residencies on Lampedusa include three key pillars:

- **Conversations and Activities**

Boukal actively engages with the people of Lampedusa, listening to their stories and striving to understand the complexity of life on the island. She also organizes workshops, creating spaces where individuals who might not normally interact, can sit together, share experiences, and build connections through collective creativity.

- **Community work**

- Engaging with locals, from learning net repair with fishermen to working with schools on a photographic journey to rediscover the island's past.

- Collaboration with organizations like \*Agricola\* (a cooperative focused on sustainable vegetable farming) and \*Maldusa\* (a cultural association supporting infrastructures for migrant solidarity) help to uncover and document stories of resilience and transformation.
- Participation in refugee care at the pier provides essential support and highlights the humanitarian aspect of the island's identity.

- **Scientific Research**

Collaborations with historians, anthropologists, psychologists, and journalists uncover Lampedusa's layered social and political history. The "Archivio Storico Lampedusa" serves as a vital resource for documents on the island's past and present.

## Artistic Themes and Aims: Lampedusa as a Microcosm

Lampedusa embodies a unique position, serving as both an isolated island and a deeply interconnected symbol of Europe's migration and tourism challenges. Its identity is shaped by centuries of cultural exchange, migration routes, and its role as a landing point, reflecting the broader tensions of European migration policies. The island's paradox becomes starkly evident in summer, when its role as a humanitarian refuge is overlapped by its transformation from a quiet island with just over 6,000 inhabitants into a bustling tourist hotspot, straining local resources and creating a complex interplay between its roles. This seasonal influx highlights the pressing need to question the sustainability of tourism and its impact on residents, migrants, and the environment. At the same time, Lampedusa serves as a poignant mirror of Europe's declining solidarity and collective compassion, contrasting its historical role as a safe harbor with more recent responses to migration. Through her work, Tanja Boukal draws connections to her previous projects, such as "The Melilla Project" and "The Aegean Project," situating Lampedusa within the larger narrative of fortified borders and human resilience in the Mediterranean. By framing Lampedusa as a microcosm of these broader issues, the artist invites reflection on the interconnectedness of local and global, past and present, and the shared responsibility to reimagine Europe's humanitarian and environmental future. Tanja Boukal offers an invitation to see the island not as a remote place but as a mirror reflecting Europe's shared challenges, choices, and humanity.

## Highlights of planned activities

The project culminates in three major events, each reflecting its themes of connection, care, and transformation:

### 1. **Repairment Festival** (Title: *RiparAbile*)

A week-long celebration of practical and metaphorical healing, fostering repair and renewal across communities.

### 2. **Bridge of Light** (Title: *La Via dell'Altro*)

A striking light installation between Via Roma and Molo Favalaro bridging the dual faces of Lampedusa—migration and tourism—illuminating the connections and contrasts between them.

### 3. Exhibition (Title: *Nessun' Isola*)

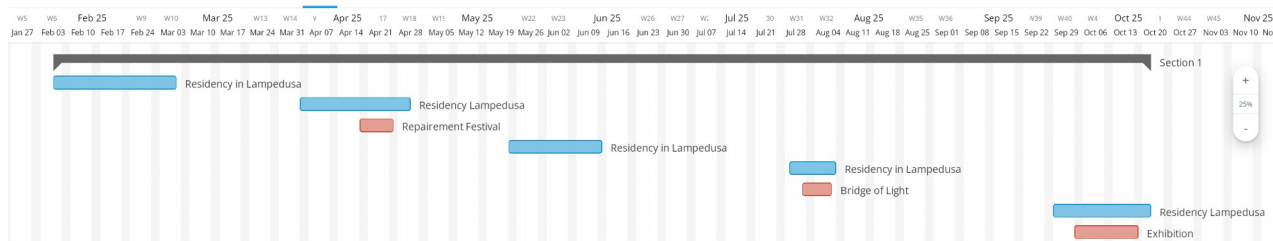
This presentation, realized after a year of in-depth research and experience on Lampedusa, presents works that reveal the lived realities of residents, migrants, and visitors, reflecting the island's enduring role as a cultural crossroads. The title, "Nessun' Isola" (No Island), underscores the project's core idea of challenging insularity, rooted in Lampedusa's rich and evolving tapestry of human stories.

### Involved locations

Most of the locations have been contacted so far. The locations should be organized by the organization of "Agrigento 2025, Italian Capital of Culture", if not otherwise stated.

- Repairment Festival (organized by Tanja Boukal):
  - Library Ibbby, Via Roma 34
  - Agricola Mpidusa
  - Cala Palme, the beach in front of Lungomare Luigi Rizzo
  - Nature Reserve
  - Belvedere di Lampedusa (End of Via Roma)
  - Open Air on Via Roma
- Bridge of Light: Belvedere di Lampedusa (End of Via Roma)
- Exhibition: Museo Archeologico delle Isole Pelagie (TBC)

### Timeframe/Schedule



Research & Preparation Residencies are planned for February 4/March and Mai/June 2025. Main Events will happen in April, August, and October 2025.

## THE MAIN EVENTS IN DETAIL

### Repairment Festival

**Title:** RiparAbile

**Locations:**

- Library Ibbby
- Agricola Mpidusa
- Cala Palme, the beach in front of Lungomare Luigi Rizzo
- Belvedere di Lampedusa
- Nature Reserve di Lampedusa
- Open Air on Via Roma

**Period:** April 21–25, 2025



### Concept

The title “*RibarAbile*” is a wordplay combining *riparare* (to repair) and *abile* (able, capable). It captures the spirit of possibility and shared agency at the heart of the festival. Rather than focusing on what is broken, *RibarAbile* emphasizes the capacity of a community to come together, respond to challenges, and imagine new ways forward.

This week-long festival offers space for different parts of Lampedusa’s society to meet, work, and reflect together—fishermen and schoolchildren, farmers and artists, migrants and long-time residents. Through walks, workshops, and shared meals, the program explores not only what could be repaired, but how ideas, perspectives, and experiences can combine to shape something stronger.

### Artistic Themes and Aims

Workshops, dialogues, and communal activities encourage participants to reflect on these divisions and collaborate in mending them. Whether through repairing tangible objects or nurturing relationships, the festival envisions a future where brokenness gives way to strength, unity, and shared hope.

## Program Highlights: *RiparAbile*

The Repairment Festival opens with a diverse set of participatory activities exploring the theme of “repair”—physically, socially, and symbolically. Through workshops, excursions, and shared moments, the program invites residents and visitors to reflect on Lampedusa’s many layers and how we can care for both the island and each other.

- ***Fixing Tapes – Sound and Storytelling Workshop***

Led by the Palermo-based collective Maghweb, the workshop takes place over several days at the Ibbby Library on Via Roma. Participants begin by forming a listening group and exploring the basics of audio storytelling. They learn to use microphones, record sounds and voices, and prepare audio pieces that reflect the realities of life on the island. As the workshop progresses, they collect interviews and impressions under the theme “Listening to the Island.”

- ***Nature Walks and Ecological Exploration***

In collaboration with the Archivio Storico Lampedusa, three guided excursions offer a chance to connect with the island’s landscapes and histories.

- ***Un gioco per l’isola (A Game for the Island) – Bocce Court Revival***

At Cala Palme, a disused bocce court will be restored by the local team under the guidance of artist Tanja Boukal. The symbolic repair of this space is both a playful and political gesture—reviving a cherished local tradition and reclaiming public space for inter-generational exchange and community joy. The inauguration of the court marks a moment of festive togetherness and civic imagination.

- ***Due rive, un confine (Two Shores, One Border) – Reflections on Borders and Belonging***

This evening gathering offers a space for deep conversation about the visible and invisible boundaries shaping life on Lampedusa. Set outdoors between symbolic locations of arrival and everyday life, the event is hosted by Maldusa, a cultural association committed to supporting freedom of movement and migrant solidarity. The session invites participants to explore how borders are drawn—and how they might be reimagined. It is an invitation to see Lampedusa not as the end of a journey, but as a space where coexistence is still being negotiated, day by day.

- ***Radici di Resilienza – Roots of Resilience***

Held at Agricola Mpidusa’s cooperative farm, this workshop offers a hands-on experience of cultivating local vegetables. Participants will learn practical planting techniques and engage in conversations about food sovereignty, labor conditions, and the impact of industrial agriculture. The workshop highlights how local farming can become a form of resistance—preserving knowledge, strengthening community bonds, and addressing ecological imbalances.

- ***A tavola, è pronto! – A Shared Closing Dinner***

To close the festival week, everyone is invited to a long table set along Via Roma for a collective meal where each participant brings something to share. This final gathering offers a moment to reflect on the experiences of the past days, exchange impressions, and celebrate new connections. Stories, food, and friendships come together—reminding everyone that repair also happens around the table.



## Bridge of Light

**Title:** La Via dell'Altro

**Location:** Belvedere di Lampedusa (End of Via Roma)

**Period:** One week between 2.8. and 18.8.2025 (exact date to be confirmed)



### Concept

**"La Via dell'Altro" (The Way of the Other)** captures the essence of connection and contrast on Lampedusa—a bridge of light uniting two worlds that coexist yet remain unaware of each other. The installation spans from Via Roma, a lively promenade filled with tourists enjoying their holidays and locals alike, to Molo Favalaro, where migrants arrive seeking safety. Through its laser beams, the artwork metaphorically builds "the way of the other," highlighting the unseen ties between these opposing realities. It challenges the viewer to reflect on empathy, coexistence, and the invisible bridges that bind human experiences, even when they seem worlds apart.



## Artistic Themes and Aims

The installation delves into the layered identity of Lampedusa, an island caught between isolation and connection. Known both as a remote outpost and a vital bridge between continents, Lampedusa's character has been shaped by centuries of cultural exchange and its modern role within European migration policies. Today, this identity is further challenged by a booming tourism industry and an approach to ongoing migration so thoroughly concealed that visitors see virtually no trace of it."

With over 250,000 visitors annually, the island's population swells from 6,300 residents to more than 20,000 during peak summer months. This seasonal influx of tourists has transformed Via Roma into a bustling promenade filled with restaurants, shops, and leisure activities, masking the island's role as a landing point for migrants. Changes to the management of migrant reception facilities, including modifications at the hotspot and Molo Favalaro, have rendered migration nearly invisible to visitors, even though arrivals continue. This concealment separates the realities of tourism and migration, deepening the disconnect between these two worlds.

The strain on resources highlights a troubling imbalance: Lampedusa is celebrated as a paradise but burdened as a humanitarian frontier. The installation invites the viewer to consider how this tourism overload affects not only the migrants and local residents but also the island's environment. By bridging these disparate worlds, the artwork questions the sustainability of a system that often prioritizes profit over solidarity.

## Installation

The installation is realized through a precise interplay of technology and artistic vision. High-powered laser beams are positioned strategically to connect two key locations on Lampedusa: Molo Favalaro, the migrants' arrival point, and Via Roma, the vibrant hub of tourist activity. These beams stretch across the port, forming an ephemeral yet impactful "bridge of light." The lasers are programmed to pulse gently, creating a dynamic effect that evokes movement and connection. The installation is designed to be visible both from the ground and the air, ensuring that its message of unity and contrast resonates with locals, visitors, and anyone observing Lampedusa's unique geography. The minimalist use of light ensures minimal environmental impact while leaving a profound visual and emotional imprint on the audience.

## Commemoration Events

Several NGOs actively engaged in refugee work will organize public open-air lectures and activities at Belvedere di Lampedusa. These events aim to provide a deeper understanding of the ongoing activities and humanitarian challenges at Molo Favalaro, the primary landing point for migrants arriving on the island. By sharing firsthand accounts, data, and critical perspectives, the organizers seek to illuminate the hidden realities of migration that remain unseen by many, especially tourists.

This evenings of reflection and education will bring together voices from local organizations, volunteers, and experts who work daily to support those arriving in search of safety. The events will emphasize the resilience of migrants and the efforts of those who assist them. They aim to foster a spirit of solidarity, challenging the public to engage with the complexities of migration and the shared responsibility to uphold human dignity.

## Cultural Value and Impact

At its core, "**La Via dell'Altro**" critiques the decline of collective empathy in Europe. Lampedusa, historically a beacon of safety, now embodies the continent's wavering commitment to humanitarian ideals. Through this immersive artwork, the viewer is encouraged to confront their own role within these shifting dynamics, whether through complicity in indifference or active resistance to it. By making the unseen visible, the installation challenges us to reimagine Lampedusa as more than a divided space—inviting reflection on shared humanity and the fragile connections that bind us all.

## Exhibition

**Title:** "Nessun' Isola"

**Location:** Museo Archeologico delle Isole Pelagie

**Period:** 29.9 – 29.10.2025

**Option:** The exhibition could be transferred to Agrigento as a second venue at the end of October to conclude the project with the end of the 2025 festivities. (TBC)



## Concept

"Nessun' Isola," translating to "No Island," emerges from a reimagining of boundaries and place, questioning the very idea of insularity. Situated on Lampedusa, a Mediterranean island suspended between continents, cultures, and policies, the exhibition reframes the island's role as more than just a geographical point. Here, Lampedusa becomes a prism through which to view the fluid interplay of refuge, control, and the shifting landscapes of European identity—where notions of belonging are continually forged, contested, and redefined. By asserting that there is "no island," the project encourages a deeper inquiry into how identity takes shape at the edges of our worlds, inviting us to reconsider the meaning of home, community, and the ties that bind us together.

## Artistic Themes and Aims

Tanja Boukal presents a collection of new works developed over a year-long engagement with Lampedusa's diverse inhabitants, including long-term residents, recent arrivals, transient visitors, and seasonal tourists. The exhibition explores the island's complex identity as both isolated and interconnected, shaped by European migration policies, touristic overload, and centuries of cultural exchange.



The influx of visitors creates economic opportunities but strains resources, exacerbating tensions between its roles as a humanitarian refuge and a leisure spot. Her work invites reflection on the sustainability of this dynamic and its impact on residents, migrants, and the environment. The exhibition challenges viewers to confront their complicity in these shifts and consider paths toward renewed compassion and coexistence.

Building on themes from her previous works, such as "The Melilla Project" and "The Aegean Project," which examined the human cost of Europe's fortified borders, "Nessun' Isola" positions Lampedusa as a microcosm of broader European tensions. The exhibition reflects on what it means to belong, to welcome, and to coexist in a world increasingly defined by division and displacement.

### Exhibits and Key Features

- **Site-Specific Installations:**  
Textiles or sculptures/installations crafted with local materials, executed with local techniques or based on local occurrences to reflect the intertwining of Lampedusa's natural and human history.
- **Photography Works:**  
Portraits and stories of Lampedusa's residents, migrants, visitors, and tourists, emphasizing shared humanity across boundaries.<sup>9</sup>
- **Archival Elements:**  
Historical artifacts and documents juxtaposed with contemporary works to trace the evolution of the island's role in European history.
- **Interactive Components:**  
Spaces for visitors to share their own reflections on solidarity, migration, and tourism, creating a living archive of responses.

### Venue and Contextual Significance

The Archaeological Museum of Lampedusa provides a poignant backdrop, connecting the island's ancient history with its current geopolitical significance. The museum's location reinforces the exhibition's message: Lampedusa is not merely a geographical point but a site where histories converge, and futures are contested.

### Commemoration Event

A ceremony on October 11 to honor the lives lost in the 2013 shipwreck, linking the exhibition to ongoing dialogues on migration. On this day in 2013, hundreds of migrants lost their lives when a boat capsized off the coast of Lampedusa. Despite the desperate calls for help, Italian authorities delayed rescue operations due to legal ambiguities regarding their responsibility.

### Cultural Value and Impact

"Nessun' Isola" is not only an exhibition but also a call to action, urging Europe to reassess its stance on migration, solidarity, tourism sustainability, and shared humanity. By situating Lampedusa at the heart of this narrative, the exhibition underscores the interconnectedness of past and present, local and global, self and other. This concept resonates with Boukal's artistic vision, offering a deeply reflective and transformative experience for viewers, anchored in the unique and poignant reality of Lampedusa.