

## PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday, 26 May 2015

**NEON and the Whitechapel Gallery present the exhibition Terrapolis at the Garden of French School at Athens. The French School at Athens opens its gardens to the general public for the first time since their establishment in 1846.**



Angus Fairhurst, *The Birth of Consistency*, 2004

## TERRAPOLIS

**Curated by Iwona Blazwick, Director, Whitechapel Gallery**

**27 May - 26 July 2015, Preview 26 May**

**French School at Athens**

A garden of an archaeological institute in Athens provides the backdrop for works of art that reconnect the human with the animal. Echoing the satyrs, sphinxes and centaurs of Greek statuary, contemporary sculptures, installations and films draw on myth, drama and the animal kingdom to suggest a 'bioethics' for the 21st century.

Co-curated by Iwona Blazwick with the NEON Organization, this is the second in a three part series of outdoor art projects that bring significant artists from Greece and around the world into the public realm. NEON consistent to their strategy, continue to activate public space through art & introduce "unkown" historical locations to the general public.

Artists include: Caroline Achaintre, Allora & Calzadilla, Francis Alÿs, Joseph Beuys, Huma Bhabha, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick, Marcus Coates, William Cobbing, Enrico David, Charlotte Dumas, Angus Fairhurst, Studio Ghibli, Tue Greenfort, Asta Gröting, Lucy Gunning, Henrik Håkansson, Anthea Hamilton & Nicholas Byrne, Joan Jonas, Markus Karstieß, Yayoi Kusama, Oliver Laric, Richard Long, Sarah Lucas, Ruth Maclennan, Chris Marker, Marlie Mul, Katja Novitskova, Anatoly Osmolovsky, Norbert Prangenberg, Ugo Rondinone, Peter Wächtler.

New commissions are specially made by: Athanasios Argianas, Eleni Kamma, Dionisis Kavallieratos, Aiki Palaska, Kostas Sahpazis.

TERRAPOLIS, a term proposed by science philosopher Donna Haraway, combines the Latin 'terra' for earth, with the Greek 'polis' for city or citizens. This show

asks 'should we regard animals as citizens'? How do processes of nature, such as metamorphoses relate to the creation of art? How do mythic narratives resonate in contemporary society? And can we recalibrate our relationship with other species?

Figurative works in mediums ranging from bronze to ceramic by 37 mid-century and contemporary artists explore myth, drama, metamorphoses and bioethics.

Artists include Huma Bhabha and Lynn Chadwick who create totemic gods and monsters that symbolise animistic power, giving contemporary form to mythology. Ancient Greek tragedies were counterpoised with 'Satyr Plays', tragi-comic burlesques set in woodland where players wearing masks and animal skins, would mock authority and engage in licentious play. Caroline Achaintre's ceramic masks evoke primal forms and drives, while Angus Fairhurst makes the gorilla - part pantomime character, part existential loner – his alter ego.

Allora and Calzadilla's *Hope Hippo* (2005), sculpted out of mud and mounted by a performer who reads the newspaper and blows a whistle at every story of social injustice, is a tri-partite drama between animal, human and society. Athanasios Argianas invites viewers to become performers by donning masks and making objects into sound instruments combining animism, sculpture and music.

The biological process of metamorphosis is mirrored by sculptural processes such as ceramics and bronze casting. Sarah Lucas' bronze figures transform male and female genitalia into a new entity. Layering resins, wood, fabric and leather, Kostas Sahpazis creates skins where materials are suspended between their original nature and composite creation.

This project coincides with an epoch termed 'the Anthropocene', an era when human activities dominate and threaten the Earth's ecosystems and extinguish other species. Richard Long records the traces of agriculture on the landscape, Marlie Mul looks back at our oily carbon footprint and to a future post-human era when we ourselves will become fossils; while Katja Novitskova looks at the internet as an ecosystem emblemized by exotic birds. Eleni Kamma revives the Renaissance wunderkammer presenting her own cabinet of curiosities of organic forms fused with the cultural world of contemporary Athens.

In a series of large-scale inflatable sculptures originally installed in the disused Poplar Baths in East London during the 2012 Olympics, Hamilton, a sculptor and film maker and Byrne, a painter, mix pop culture and fine art icons. These elisions of human and natural attributes echo Greek myths where gods take on animal or botanical forms to seduce or punish humans.

**Iwona Blazwick, OBE, Director of Whitechapel Gallery**, mentions: *"The NEON Organization- Whitechapel Gallery partnership commissions new works of art from Greek artists and offers a curatorial exchange program between Britain and Greece, bringing the unique vision, resilience and creativity of contemporary Greek artists to international acclaim"*.

**Alexandre Farnoux, Director of the French School at Athens**, *"The exhibition, organized by NEON, offers the opportunity to open the gardens of the French School to the Athenian audience, expressing, in a way, our ties and gratitude towards Athens. In TERRAPOLIS, nature meets the city, animal meets human, art meets science. Dedicated to the study of the human being, this political animal, the French School at Athens offers the ideal environment for these 'beings' created by the artists"*.

**Elina Kountouri, Director of NEON Organization, comments:** *"Through the current volatile environment, NEON focuses its exhibition strategy on three pillars: reinforcing Greek artists by commissioning new works, connecting Greek artistic creativity with the international art scene and offering free access and education to contemporary art to citizens. NEON's strategy is implemented by activating public spaces, as in the exhibitions in the Roman and Ancient Athens Agora in 2014, and private venues of historical significance in Athens as well, that are not accessible to the public"*.

NEON and the Whitechapel Gallery are proud to present TERRAPOLIS, the second major collaboration in Athens between the two organizations following the presentation of 'A Thousand Doors' at the The Gennadius Library of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (4 May – 30 June 2014). NEON works to widen access to contemporary art and is committed to contributing to the vital cultural activity in Athens.

The exhibition is free.

## Notes for Editors

Higher Education and Research. Its purpose is to promote the study of the language, history and all aspects of Hellenism.

- NEON is a non-profit organization based in Athens that works to widen access to contemporary art and culture. Taking its name from the Greek word for 'new', NEON is committed to broadening the appreciation, understanding, and creation of contemporary art in Greece and abroad in the firm belief that it is a tool for growth and development. Founded by art collector and entrepreneur Dimitris Daskalopoulos, and under the Directorship of Elina Kountouri, NEON breaks with the convention that a contemporary art organization should occupy a single space. Instead, NEON employs the open and diverse areas within society to carry out its program. NEON engages with a large, public audience and acts on a variety of projects to expose contemporary art's ability to stimulate and inspire society at large.

- For over a century the Whitechapel Gallery has premiered world-class artists from modern masters such as Pablo Picasso, Gerhard Richter and Cy Twombly to contemporaries such as Sophie Calle, Lucian Freud, Gilbert & George and Isa Genzken. With beautiful galleries, exhibitions, artist commissions, collection displays, historic archives, education resources, inspiring art courses, café/bar and bookshop, the Gallery is open all year round, so there is always something free to see. The Gallery is a touchstone for contemporary art internationally, plays a central role in London's cultural landscape and is pivotal to the continued growth of the world's most vibrant contemporary art quarter. [whitechapelgallery.org](http://whitechapelgallery.org)

- The exhibition will be accompanied by a dedicated publication, educational programs, and screenings of historical films in an open-air cinema within the School and guided tours.

## Visitor Information

TERRAPOLIS, NEON and the Whitechapel Gallery at the École Française d'Athènes, Athens, Greece.

For further information please contact NEON:

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Open 27 May – 26 July 2015

Tuesday – Saturday: 10am – 9pm

Sunday: 12 – 6pm

Monday: Closed

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