

FLYING OVER
THE ABYSS
Η ΥΠΕΡΒΑΣΗ
ΤΗΣ ΑΒΥΣΣΟΣ

CURATORS: DIMITRIS PALEOCRASSAS, MARIA MARANGOY

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ATHENS CONSERVATOIRE

NEON

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MONDAY–TUESDAY CLOSED

WEDNESDAY–THURSDAY–FRIDAY 12.00–20.00

SATURDAY–SUNDAY 11.00–19.00

All works exhibited are courtesy of the D.Daskalopoulos Collection.

Our warmest thanks to the D.Daskalopoulos Collection and Nikos Kazantzakis Museum for their generous loans to the exhibition.

Marina Abramović
Alexis Akritchakis
Matthew Barney
Hans Bellmer
Lynda Benglis
John Bock
Louise Bourgeois
Heidi Bucher
Vlassis Caniaris
Paul Chan
Savvas Christodoulides
Abraham Cruzvillegas
Stavros Gasparatos
Gilbert & George
Robert Gober
Asta Gröting
Jenny Holzer
Kostas Ioannidis
Mike Kelley
Martin Kippenberger
Giorgos Koumendakis
Sherrie Levine
Stathis Logothetis
Ana Mendieta
Maro Michalakakos
Bruce Nauman
Aliko Palaska
Ioanna Pantazopoulou
Doris Salcedo
Kiki Smith
Paul Thek
Costas Tsoclis
Mark Wallinger
Gary Webb

In an interview with Tahydromos magazine, published March 2, 1957, Nikos Kazantzakis when asked by the journalist, Yolanda Terencio, “are you content?”, he responded, “I am happy because I can work; for I have no ambition, no hatred; for my heart is uncontaminated. When working spiritually, one never gets ill, never gets old – that is the secret: alas, should one give up one’s work. Five minutes past one’s death, the brain is still functioning”.

What does Nikos Kazantzakis share in common with the contemporary artistic creativity? NEON through the exhibition *Flying over the Abyss* commences a dialogue on the power of time, the meaning of moral obligation and the luminous interval between birth and death.

The exhibition draws upon Kazantzakis’ rebellious personality, stance and faculty of speech, as expressed in his *The Saviors of God*, by presenting the emblematic artworks of 34 contemporary artists who, in their turn, clashed against the stereotypical thought of their times.

The exhibition is presented at the Athens Conservatoire, at the newly renovated space that remained hidden for decades. The renovation of the space is a gift of NEON to the Athens Conservatoire and the cultural scene of Athens. From the middle of November 2016 onwards the exhibition opens for the Athenian audience following a tour in 2015 at the Contemporary Art Centre of Thessaloniki and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete, located at Rethymnon.

It is the first time that the manuscript of *The Saviors of God* by Kazantzakis is presented along side an exhibition.

The exhibition in Athens, is enriched by a new commissioned sound installation by NEON to Giorgos Koumendakis and Stavros Gasparatos. The new work, titled *Passage through the Abyss*, marks a constructive collaboration between NEON and the Alternative Stage of the Greek National Opera, in the framework of the exhibition.

The mild, dreamlike handwriting in the manuscript of *The Saviors of God*, being presented in the exhibition, is bridged with Louise Bourgeois’ traumatic childhood, the experiential video installation of Marina Abramović, the in-between journey of Vlassis Caniaris and Alexis Akriothakis’ tendency for escapism. For this very bridge of thought, kudos should be acknowledged, along with expressed gratitude, to art historian, Dimitris Paleocrassas, as well as to Maria Marangou, Artistic Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete, co-curators of this transcending effort. We would also like to express our warmest thanks to the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum and, especially, the President of the Museum, Stelios Matzapetakis, for lending the manuscript of *The Saviors of God*. For the access permission to the D.Daskalopoulos Collection, treasured tank of thought and enrichment, much is owed to Ioanna Vryzaki. For the excellent cooperation, we extend our warm gratitude to Nikos Tsouchlos, Director of the Athens Conservatoire, the composer George Koumendakis, Director of the Alternative Stage of the Greek National Opera and composer Stavros Gasparatos. This exhibition could not be realized without the supervision of Afroditi Bontzorlou and the ongoing commitment of the members of the NEON team, Irini Kiachtypi, Alkistis Dimaki, Irene Kalliga, Mika Makrymichalou, Malvina Deligianni, Dimitris Gorgogiannis, Nafsika Papadopoulou, Akis Kokkinos, Dossy Iordanidou,

Eftychia Tsakou, as well as Margarita Dima from the D.Daskalopoulos Collection. Many thanks to our collaborators from AK-A architects, the Alternative Stage of the Greek National Opera and the Hellenic Children’s Museum for their contribution.

NEON anticipates, through the *Flying over the Abyss* exhibition, to make the unsuspecting visitor, the one who is, perhaps, not acquainted with the works and the course of action of the creators of contemporary art, encountered with the subtle power of spiritual and pragmatic generation, thus exhorting to one’s reading anew of one’s “luminous interval”. Finally, we wholeheartedly thank Dimitris Daskalopoulos, inspirer and founder of NEON and the D.Daskalopoulos Collection, whose secret in art is to “alas, should one give up one’s work”.

Elina Kountouri
Director, NEON

“Anyone facing the abyss shouldn’t be surprised if he can fly”¹

Humans. Fallible and faulty. Can soar to the miraculous. At the same time and over time. For that flash of a trajectory from birth to death. Borne to a carte blanche upon which is imprinted all subsequent inky messy stains. The First Exit is a bloody one, the first red wet trauma of many more to be rehearsed. The theater of the Abyss is about to begin.

“We come from a dark abyss, we end in a dark abyss, and we call the luminous interval life. As soon as we are born the return begins, at once the setting forth and the coming back; we die in every moment. Because of this many have cried out: The goal of life is death! But as soon as we are born we begin the struggle to create, to compose, to turn matter into life; we are born in every moment. Because of this many have cried out: The goal of ephemeral life is immortality! In the temporary living organism these two streams collide: (a) the ascent toward composition, toward life, toward immortality; (b) the descent toward decomposition, toward matter, toward death.”²

There are two choices, options that can be exercised even in the instantaneous distance between two consecutive seconds: one may dive into or one may fly over the abyss. That pendulum measures time in the passage of life. A path whose inevitability towards a... certain end makes one achingly struggle for moments frozen in time; momentous bursts of life-affirming creativity inscribed in eternity. That primeval force of creativity that births us into the world needs to be reenacted in explosions of the miraculous that will console us with the illusion of shimmering immortality. It is all biology after all, a human being is an animal designed to the pinnacle of evolution, towards joining a soul mate in elemental procreation. Luckily or not, us humans are equipped to do this through an act of love. It’s the evolutionary differentiation of our biological nature. And more than that.

In short, because after all it is a nanosecond brief instant of Life: we enter this world through the trauma of birth; we struggle with the cumbersome baggage of our psychic heritage that has been saddled on us involuntarily. And once in a while we marvel at others’ or our moments of creativity, serendipitously conjoined with the spirit of the eternal. At the twilight of that life, we hopefully might, just conceivably come to peace with returning to the abyss.

For the time being, let us partake of the greatness of infinitely more immortal words:

“This ultimate stage of our spiritual exercise is called Silence. Not because its contents are the ultimate inexpressible despair or the ultimate inexpressible joy and hope. Nor because it is the ultimate knowledge which does not condescend to speak, or the ultimate ignorance which cannot. Silence means: every person, after completing his service in all labors, reaches finally the highest summit of

endeavor, beyond every labor, where he no longer struggles or shouts, where he ripens fully in silence, indestructibly, eternally, with the entire Universe. There he merges with the Abyss and nestles within it like the seed of man in the womb of woman. [...] How can you reach the womb of the Abyss to make it fruitful? This cannot be expressed, cannot be narrowed into words, cannot be subjected to laws; every man is completely free and has his own special liberation. No form of instruction exists, no Savior exists to open up the road. No road exists to be opened. Every person, ascending above and beyond his own head, escapes from his small brain, so crammed with perplexities. Within profound Silence, erect, fearless, in pain and in play, ascending ceaselessly from peak to peak, knowing that the height has no ending, sing this proud and magical incantation as you hang over the Abyss.”³

Dimitris Paleocrassas
Art Historian - Curator

¹ Title of a work by Martin Kippenberger, “Wer sich dem Abgrund stellt, soll sich nicht wundern, wenn er fliegen kann”, 1983.

² Kazantzakis Nikos, (2012-09-04). *Saviors of God* (Kindle Locations 481-486), Kindle Edition. Simon & Schuster. Translation Kimon Friar.

³ *ibid* 1191 – 1198.

Athens Conservatoire. Third version.

Every space encloses its individual qualities in a way so that this exhibition composes a new prospect for the curator and the audience. The 'possessor', though, the 'holy' book can carry all these different paths, while maintaining its power.

Tracing a human being's natural course from life to death, the exhibition *Flying over the Abyss* follows, in a way, the flow of the universal text of *The Saviors of God* by that great Cretan, Nikos Kazantzakis. It neither illustrates, nor narrates. The text, concretely actual and precious, in its original manuscript, does remain complete in its roundness and maximum in its creative artistry. Unraveled comes along the harrowing of the other, not alienated, yet refreshing moments of the contemporary artistic creation.

In the exhibition, works by Greek and international artists share in, pointing out the trauma of birth, the luminous interval of life and creativity, and death.

The transcendence, the flapping within or over the "abyss", has been an ontological issue from Aristotle to Epicurus, and up to Kazantzakis, having maintained an indissolubly contemporary argument to those who ponder. And, of course, great is the importance of this ontological search and the elements of doubt it encompasses in the course of art history and the development of a visual artist, either it is expected from Raphael or Rothko, or even for that matter, from the anonymous performer who pushes, sans audience, his own method in the streets of the city.

Art does not exist without the audience, although it is created in absolute solitude. Could one imagine the artist in the process of creating along with friends, around a table with smiling happy people, similar to the artwork by Highmore, *Mr. Oldham and his Guests?* The solitary writer, Kazantzakis, meets with the contemporary artists, not as an accompaniment but in the same way that the ancient Greek language intersected with contemporary languages. Through linguistic exchanges and loans that do not imitate nor describe the other language, on the contrary, they express the powerful inner sound of angst of every era.

The need for transcendence, as we lead through the first decades of the third millennium, at its limits, with the fears violence create nowadays, the impoverishment of the populace, the paucity of traditional social structures, the lack of vision. Whatever the victory, the transcendence must be that of defeating the "ἐπέκεινα" (going beyond). The significance of an artwork is defined by the allure of its relationship with ascendancy.

Gratitude is expressed for the opportunity to relate with the artworks of the exhibition *Flying over the Abyss* and to the NEON team, to Elina Kountouri, Director of the NEON Organization and, of course, to the D.Daskalopoulos Collection and Dimitris Daskalopoulos for giving us this prospect.

Maria Marangou

Artistic Director, Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete

Casting about for the meaning of life, death, onus, responsibility, while comprehending the values of paramount importance along with the significance of predestination, one ought to free one's mind, it being controlled by the body, the matter. One ought to be ascetic and in constant struggle with the mind.

Kazantzakis held such power, which allowed him, through constant struggling for truth, not only to "see" and philosophize upon the sublimation of matter to intellect, to spirit, yet, also, to impress it upon one of his magnum opi, *The Saviors of God* ("Ascesis").

This work of his touched all but the sensitive souls and inspired many a generation of artists in the fields of music, theater and the visual arts, who, subsequently, bestowed upon us exceptional works of art.

We are thrilled that NEON attempted to bring together the intellect and philosophy within the work of Nikos Kazantzakis with contemporary art. Athens, following Thessaloniki and Rethymnon now hosts major works by great artists, distinguished for their gamut and cultural value.

As President of the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum, I would like to express our happiness for the opportunity which is given to all of you to enjoy this magnificent exhibition, and even, on a more personal matter, my elation that the Museum has had the opportunity to support this initiative.

Stelios Matzapetakis

President, Nikos Kazantzakis Museum

ROOM 1

GENESIS / TRAUMA

Hans Bellmer

1902-1975
La Demi-Poupée, 1972
Wood and paint
40 x 120 cm
Edition 2/9

Hans Bellmer's *La Demi-Poupée* is one of the very rare versions of his iconic doll sculptures still in existence. The first of these dolls was made in 1933 but is now lost. It was, however, amply documented in Bellmer's well-known photographic works from this period. In these photographs the artist would manoeuvre the distorted limbs of the doll into a wide range of angles and positions before photographing it, with the intent of imparting an aura of grave dysfunction in the wake of some painful and catastrophic dismemberment. Dolls of course function as a signifier of childhood but their Poupée renditions, in both their sculptural and photographic forms, evoke deeply rooted social (and perhaps personal) psychoanalytical traumas.

Louise Bourgeois

1911-2010
The Birth, 2007
Gouache on paper
59.7 x 45.7 cm

Louise Bourgeois' drawing *The Birth*, 2007, is a work representative of her lifelong preoccupations with the female body as the locus of both trauma and creativity. Her upbringing in the midst of a highly dysfunctional family is a texture book example of the ravages that parenthood can inflict on sensitive young souls. Her whole oeuvre is an attempt through art creation, to become reconciled to that trauma which begins with birth. In the drawing both the image itself and the signifying title evoke the primeval fact of human existence. Her signature usage of the colour red, as can be seen in many of her late drawings, adds visceral impact to the raw physicality of the traumatic yet creative act of procreation.

Gilbert & George

b. 1943, b. 1942
Coming, 1975
Nine gelatin silver prints in artist's frames
185 x 154 cm

In the autumn of 1975, Gilbert & George have an orgasm of an artwork. For the still conservative social mores of the seventies (relative to today at least), depicting the moment of orgasm and

its liquid outpouring, was an act of anarchic, Duchampian confrontation. This is not, however, an exercise in silly provocation showcasing human sperm. It is as primal and elemental as can be: it is the explosive moment when all creation erupts, it is the beginning of Life or Art. It is Birth.

It is also beautifully done. Its formal attributes harmonize perfectly with its content of the Big Bang instant of human and artistic creation. The starkness of the monochrome and its strict geometry is unusual for Gilbert & George, but so well suited towards the expressive needs of this elemental burst. The sperm blobs are rhythmically interspersed within the symmetry of the two artists' images, rendering an apocalyptic cruciform. On the right hand side they are giving us the British gesture of *fuck you*. On the left side, could their hands be forming a vagina?

The artistic duo who embarked on their career in the early seventies, predicated their art-making on a conceptual twist of them being what they labeled *Living Sculptures*. As such, they assumed the role of performers acting out artistic creation. Or, as in *Coming*, 1975, they give an orgasmic performance. After all, this is the instant of ultimate fulfillment when everything else is forgotten and the soul is flooded with peace and love. The rest is Art History: they became hugely influential on subsequent generations of artists, especially so in Britain.

Mike Kelley

1954-2012
Glorious Wound, 1986
Acrylic on cotton with wig
203 x 119 cm

Mike Kelley is known for his psychoanalytical excavations of deeply held and hidden traumas that usually emanate from a twisted childhood. He plumbs the depths of the psyche to uncover those slashes of pain in the mostly unfulfilled hope that they might therapeutically heal. His *Glorious Wound*, 1986, is a frozen signifier of that most elemental part of the human anatomy, a vagina, the site of procreation and of the act of sex. Its red outline radiates the aura of trauma, while at the same time the 'Glorious' of the title attempts to sweeten the pain. Towards the same aim he also caps the red-brimming wound with a spray-painted clown's wig, in the bittersweet hope that the gravity of the situation might be alleviated.

Mike Kelley

1954-2012
Untitled, 1990
Two rag dolls sewn together
77 x 33 x 8 cm

Mike Kelley is known for his psychoanalytical excavations of deeply held and hidden traumas that usually emanate from a twisted childhood. He plumbs the depths of the psyche to uncover those slashes of pain in the mostly unfulfilled hope that they might therapeutically heal. *Untitled*, 1990, is composed of two children's dolls that are conjoined together in some sort of twisted mutation. According to psychoanalysis, with which Kelley was very familiar, the newly-born's trauma of

separation from its mother is a defining moment. The child subsequently tries to re-establish its "broken" relation with the mother/womb, by interacting with a plush toy that comforts it. It is the first tentative step in the child's arduous path of social interaction. In a poignant gesture, the artist metaphorically re-enacts this process by sewing two rag dolls together, i.e. re-connecting.

Sherrie Levine

b. 1947

After Courbet: 1-18, 2009

18 postcards on mat board

50.8 x 40.6 cm

Sherrie Levine's *After Courbet: 1-18, 2009*, is another example of this American artist's longstanding conceptual strategy of appropriating pre-existing important works by male artists from the realm of art history. In this case, she has framed 18 postcards from the museum shop at the Musee d'Orsay, Paris, which depict the famous Gustave Courbet painting *Origin du Monde* from 1866. The original painting was an ode to creativity, artistic or otherwise, and created a scandal at the time. Levine's appropriative strategy is twofold and consists of making the artistic decision to select a particular image, in this case a painting by Courbet, or even more significantly for her practice, its already appropriated museum postcard, and reframe it. In fact, Levine based the listed dimensions of her work as the size of the frame as opposed to the postcard, thereby underscoring her process: she made the cognitive selection and then framed it, i.e. contextualized it in the larger frame dimensions. This strategy speaks to questions of the origin of creativity, the role of the artist in a world already full of images, as well as to our consumption of great works through the process of reproduction. Last but not least, it is a full frontal assault on our eyes forcing us to view where we came from.

Stathis Logothetis

1925-1997

Triptych (Tríntuxo), 1972

Acrylic on canvas, in three parts

Each: 150 x 75 cm

This iconic Logothetis work, formerly in the historic Desmos Gallery Collection, is one of the works that originated from his famous multi-day performance at the seaside resort of Porto-Rafti in 1975. During those days he buried pieces of **fire**-colored canvas in the **earth**, submerged them in the **water** of the sea and then dried them by hanging them in the **wind**: the four Pre-Socratic elements of Greek philosophers. He then wrapped the canvas around his body, sew it and subsequently incorporated it on stretchers. The resulting works, such as this one, emanate a feeling of wounded trauma that has partially healed, metaphorically creating bodily witnesses of scarred tissue, abject remnants that pose as memories of traumatic events. It is also worthwhile noting the connection with Kazantzakis in the context of this exhibition: the great Cretan writer defined his unique concept of *Razza* (which translates poorly as Race) as the agglomeration of archetypal influences of ancestry, upbringing, history, culture, geography, all influential baggage that impacts on an individual's psyche. As such, it is fascinating to observe that Logothetis is creating art through his sublimation of Ancient Greek philosophy, a component of his *Razza*.

Ana Mendieta

1948-1985

Untitled (Blood Sign #1), 1974

Super-8 colour, silent film transferred to DVD

running time 4 minutes 40 seconds

Edition 4/6

Ana Mendieta's soft but yet jagged gestures elicit a poetry of sorts. With the baggage of her Cuban and Catholic heritage, she integrates indigenous magic and religious ritual into the shamanic role of Earth Goddess she assumes. In the current work, she smears blood on the wall delineating her own body and morphs her own selfhood as an artist painting. At the end she writes in blood "There is a devil inside me". The shocking, bloody gesture harks back to shamanic sacrifices, but clearly heralds another magical event of traumatic birth: I, The Artist am being born.

ROOM 2

LIFE STRUGGLE: AN AFFIRMATION

Marina Abramović

b. 1946

Cleaning the Mirror #1, 1995

Five-channel colour video installation with sound and five television monitors

284.5 x 62.2 x 48.3 cm

Artist's proof 2/2, edition of 3

Marina Abramović, the high priestess of Performance Art, has consistently persevered over the decades of her practice in situating her selfhood in circumstances exposed to bodily harm and/or danger, tests of endurance or emotionally laden patient meditation. The extremes of physical and psychological endurance are deeply mined to expose uncharted lodes of emotional states. As with Kazantzakis, the dark fear of voyaging into the abyss is to be overcome, or at least, negotiated with in a never-ending life struggle. In this video installation she is viewed while painstakingly attempting a Sisyphean task of cleaning a skeleton. Abramović was inspired to perform this from Tibetan Buddhist rituals where monks are obliged to dance or sleep with corpses. The aim of this exercise is to attain familiarity with death, the great leveller. In many ways, and Kazantzakis certainly spoke of a few, the whole of life can be viewed as a struggle against the fear of one's mortality. Viewed from that perspective, the artist is battling with the bones of her own inner self, a body that shall inevitably lose its flesh and decay. However, the flash of this creative act of struggle has been captured for posterity forever.

Heidi Bucher

1926-1993

Türfalle, Obermühle (Ahnenhaus), 1980-82

Mother-of-pearl, latex, wood, textile

33 x 20 x 8 cm

Heidi Bucher's practice consistently persevered with one performative mode of art production. She would embalm architectural features of houses' rooms, such as doors, cupboards or even whole rooms, in gauze sheets soaked in rubber. The sheets would solidify and acquire the imprint of the object, only to be then released and acquire their newly found life as artworks. The process constitutes a sequential emptying and birthing of life, a metaphorical breathing in and out of a life force: the rooms were once inhabited by humans, whose presence is squeezed out by the casting process only to acquire a new life inscribed in the artwork for posterity. It should be noted that her particular affinity to rooms and their elements is at least partially explained by her incarceration in mental health hospitals.

In *Türfalle, Obermühle (Ahnenhaus)*, 1980-82, Bucher has cast yet another architectural element, a doorknob from the house she grew up in, an object that is poignantly loaded with symbolism. The act of opening a closed door is rife with emotional content: behind a closed door lurks a dark unknown... perhaps the abyss of one's inner soul? Or alternatively an escape towards a new beginning? And especially since this is the parental abode, also perhaps the process of unlocking the dark rooms that contain the trauma of childhood? The trauma that all humans are fated to struggle with throughout their lives.

Vlassis Caniaris

1928-2011

The Big Swing, 1974

Mixed media

330 x 410 x 150 cm

The Big Swing incorporates one of Caniaris' emblematic dolls but further morphs into a large-scale installation. The doll is framed, conceptually and formally, by a wooden construction that serves to impart the feel of a leaping movement from the swing. The framework with its background curtain establishes a strong theatrical character, a framed presentation of the doll. At the same time, the wooden construction has a somewhat threatening presence as if the viewer is confronted by a scaffold for a hanging. The figure itself and its forward uplifting swing can be construed as a reference to the famous ancient Greek sculpture of the *Victory of Samothrace*, as particularly accentuated by its wings.

One has to situate the work within the context of Caniaris' wider practice and his preoccupation with the phenomenon of Greek emigration of his time, a population movement fraught with existential, social and political upheaval. After all, one can not ignore the facts of Caniaris' personal biography and his emigration to Western Europe. As such, the *The Big Swing* encapsulates a brave move forward (ergo the victorious reference) but nevertheless a dangerous move into the unknown (ergo the threat of the scaffold). The socio-political conditions of Greek society of the time provide a source

spring for the enunciation of that most elemental human condition: a sentient being caught at the cusp of a balancing act between stasis and progress, between safety and danger. The emigrant's plight is situated in the hardships of their home country that compel him/her to uproot themselves in a deeply challenging existential twist, in the hope of a better future abroad in the unknown. The theatrical curtain falls on the home country of the emigrant who is leaping into uncharted territory.

The Big Swing was created at a time of prevalent Greek emigration to other countries for political or economical reasons. It is intriguing to note that in a strangely prophetic manner, it still diachronically echoes today where for the first time in decades, Greeks are again on the road to immigration. Additionally, Greece has now become a frontier state for Europe and consequently is an entry point to the influx of emigrants.

Robert Gober

b. 1954

Untitled, 2000

Lithograph, screen print, mixed media on paper

55.9 x 81.3 cm

Edition 42/47

Gober's prison windows have had a migratory life throughout his oeuvre. They have posed as minimalist prints such as *Untitled*, 2000, but have run the gamut all the way to actual 3-dimensional light installations of the same topic. All, however, are silently powerless signifiers of the dread of an imprisoned existence, a prison constructed in a tortured soul. It is the dark room in which one is forced to encounter the demons of the inner self; a stage set for playing out the Abyss. The prison window, the iconic emblem of bodily and mental constraint, sucks out the freedom of its occupier and leaves just enough light through to vainly sustain the illusion of hope.

Robert Gober

b. 1954

Untitled, 1992-6

Photolithograph on folded French duotone paper

58 x 35 cm

Edition 37/40

In *Untitled*, 1992-6, Robert Gober has undergone a rather transformative performance. He appropriated a page of the New York Times, most of which was devoted to one of those typical advertisements for Saks Fifth Avenue, that temple of retail consumerism. The ad featured a pristinely white-gowned bride, the embodiment of joyful nuptials. But not all is well on the marital bliss front... how did that article on top of the ad sneak in there? Its title "Vatican condones discrimination against homosexuals" is a jarring affront to the wholesomeness of the ad. And for the cognoscenti of Robert Gober, the face of that innocent bride is the face of the artist himself!

Robert Gober

b. 1954

Untitled, 1988

Silver gelatin print

Image: 16 x 24 cm; sheet: 20 x 25 cm

In *Untitled*, 1988, Robert Gober meets *The Blair Witch Project*. Gober's photograph predates the thriller film by many years but they both share that haunting atmosphere of knee wobbling fear. The woods are a metaphorical stand in for a location that harbours, since prehistoric man, the primal fear of a threatening but yet unseen spooky presence. Once again, Gober conjures the mental landscape of a troubled, nightmarish childhood. The disembodied hanging dresses serve to accentuate the sense that something awful has, or is about to happen. It is an abyss where the ghosts of inner demons have the upper hand.

Robert Gober

b. 1954

Untitled, 2002

Four-colour lithograph on arches cover paper

Plate: 119 x 81 cm; sheet: 130 x 91 cm

Edition 51/65

The totality of Robert Gober's work can be thought of as a series of re-created appropriations of everyday objects that constitute a domestic environment, although in his case an often severely distorted, traumatic, and dysfunctional one. Such mundane objects as sinks, childrens' cribs and dollhouses, stacks of newspapers, are handcrafted and presented in a puzzling, discomfiting manner which leaves one wondering about what has gone seriously wrong. In Gober's world, something as simple and pure as a slab of butter becomes imbued with dark sexual undertones. The superficiality of the surface of the domestic object is subverted by an underlying sense that haunts us - a ghost presence of traumatic dysfunction and loss. The calm and stability of the domestic environment that normally nurtures a child, is supplanted by the inner fear of maladjustment. Something has gone horribly awry... and that has a lot to do with the artist's early life growing in a stifling environment of strict Catholicism and its strictures on sexual identity.

In *Untitled*, 2002, the artist uses as his loaded point of departure an existing architectural element, the exterior staircase entrance to the basement of the house (handcrafted by his father) where he was brought up. Not coincidental, the entrance is boarded up - dysfunctional. To the locus of primal children's fears -the basement entrance- are added other scary items: branches and tree trunks in the woods eerily echoing the wooden material of the (creaking?) staircase. Crowning this house of fears is the prison window, the iconic emblem of bodily and mental constraint which leaves just enough light through to vainly sustain the illusion of hope.

Aliki Palaska

b. 1962

Breathing Space, 2015

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Commissioned by NEON Organization for Culture and Development D.Daskalopoulos

Aliki Palaska breathed in and out with her tummy—as of course we all do in that fundamental act of existing. The space between her in and out is cast and creates her *Breathing Space*. A dizzying array of materials serves to embody the breathing space in a flourish of great inventiveness: the tummies enclose a great variety of disparate objects, some of which are ephemeral as is, in the end, the act of breathing. This disparity of materials mirrors the expressive multitude of breathing modalities: each physical or emotional state of our lives is expressed through the variety of breathing, from the calm breath of sleep to the sharp intake of pain. We walk our path of existence on this planet with every moment of it an exercise in life-affirming breaths.

Kiki Smith

b. 1954

Untitled (Pink Bosoms), 1990-92, dated 1990

Complete set of 4 screenprints with gouache on rice paper

Edition 7/16

24 x 32.3 x 1.5 cm

Kiki Smith came of age as an artist in the years that the AIDS epidemic inflicted its toll on humanity broadly and the artistic community particularly. A generation of budding young artists was violently confronted with the fearsome inevitability and goriness of death, an eventuality that is normally absent from the aspiring minds of fearless youth. The workings of the body's inner organs with their diseased bloody liquids entered everyday consciousness in an acute and anguishing fashion. The vulnerabilities impinged by the threat to mortality are sharply exposed to the fore of human existence.

In *Untitled (Pink Bosoms)*, 1990-92, dated 1990 (which is also in the Collection of MoMA New York), a woman's hands can be seen squeezing her breasts and ejaculating milk. This act concentrates on the physical presence of the primal bodily liquid of nourishment but the whole vision is presented through a reddish-pink film of colour, a subtle allusion to blood and mortality—the other bodily liquid. Milk that nourishes and blood that signifies the end of mortality, the two liquids establish a dance of opposition that encapsulates the whole struggle of Life.

Kiki Smith

b. 1954

Untitled, 1980-2

Four lightboxes

Dimensions variable

Kiki Smith came of age as an artist in the years that the AIDS epidemic inflicted its toll on humanity broadly and the artistic community particularly. A generation of budding young artists was violently confronted with the fearsome inevitability and goriness of death, an eventuality that is normally absent from the aspiring minds of fearless youth. The workings of the body's inner organs with their diseased bloody liquids entered everyday consciousness in an acute and anguishing fashion. The vulnerabilities impinged by the threat to mortality are sharply exposed to the fore of human existence. In *Untitled*, 1980-2, Kiki Smith bathed her arms and hands in blood, had artist and AIDS activist David Wojnarowicz photograph the choreographed dance of intertwining arms and constructed the present lightboxes.

Kiki Smith

b. 1954

Untitled, 1992

Graphite, on metho-cellulose with hand-dyed Nepalese paper

160 x 47 x 138 cm

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Paul Thek

1933-1988

Untitled (Meat Cable), 1969

Wax, paint, steel cables with turnbuckles

Length: 345.5 cm

Paul Thek was a miracle of an artist. His oeuvre, while spanning the three decades of 60's, 70's and 80's was so far ahead of its time that it has only in recent years acquired the recognition it deserves. This historical reevaluation has been primarily spearheaded by later artists on whom his influence has been tremendous and therefore has been labeled as an "Artist's artist". The inheritors of his mantle include present-day illustrious names such as Robert Gober, Damien Hirst, Kiki Smith, Mike

Kelley to name but a few. He was one of the very first artists of his time (perhaps even the only one) that brought violently and graphically to the fore issues of the frail and mortal human body as a vessel of existentialist struggle. And this was against the grain of the then fashion and apotheosis of Minimalist art, a complete antithesis to Thek's singular baroque signature style. He was also perhaps the first artist to systematically create large-scale installation art. Paul Thek was a sage prophet of Art.

He first came to prominence with his famous *Technological Reliquaries* series which were gory wax sculptures of human bodily parts entombed in the immortality of brightly hued plexiglas cases for eternity. Out of this body of work grew later on the *Meat Cables*, a rare example of which is here on display. They represent his tenacious efforts in exploring the morbidity of human mortality and as also the *Technological Reliquaries*, viewed the human condition as a struggling countdown against the certain onslaught of death. His Catholic upbringing permeated his art-making by evoking an oppressive aura of struggle in this earthly existence that we all lead. Nevertheless, the marvelous fight of Life on Earth, did have, according to the Thek gospel, its shiny moments of carefree naiveté and optimism. Or at least a poignant yearning for a better (after)Life.

ROOM 3

CREATIVITY INTO ETERNITY

Matthew Barney

b. 1967

Drawing Restraint 9, 2005

35mm color film with sound

[Part of *Drawing Restraint 9* installation]

Edition of 10 plus 2 artist's proofs

Matthew Barney is the quintessential artist embodying the limitless propensity of the individual towards creativity. In his case, raw, anarchic, unbridled creativity to the extreme or in one word... insanity. But the miracle of it is that the insanity is modulated just subtly enough to actually make some sort of tangential, free-associative sense of the visual smorgasbord that unfolds in his films. As the world of chaos reels before the eyes of the viewer, some sort of very, very tentative structure seems to appear, might one sense a shimmering mirage of narrative?

Matthew Barney's world is a fairy castle on the top of the hill to which the intrepid strive to gain entry - not easy going... The key to the heavy doors is the understanding that the artist has constructed a language and world of his own space and parameters. In Barney's World, things make sense (or at least a modicum of it) by referencing each other in arbitrary connections and loose repetitions. It is a mythical world where fantastic beasts of the artist's imagination roam freely, where fragmented

figments of his imagination ricochet off each other. Yes, one may draw attention to the references that Barney makes in *Drawing Restraint 9*, 2005: whaling and the affinity of the Japanese soul to it, Japan's defeat at World War Two, the geopolitical importance of that other leviathan, the oil industry. But those serve as just props in Barney's constructed stage settings on which his visual poetry sings. The Grand Theater Master that he is, he seems to be saying only one thing: sit back and enjoy! And indeed one can only marvel with jaw-dropping awe at this infinite expression of creativity.

John Bock

b. 1965

Astronaut, 2003

Digital Video (PAL)

running time 20 minutes 6 seconds

John Bock's oeuvre usually springs from his performances as a point of departure but then embarks on a multi-layered production of performance to film to environments and installations. The most remarkable aspect of his process and especially for the purposes of this exhibition is the high-octane volume of raw, unbridled creativity it emits. It bristles and pops with the expression of sheer, unadulterated, ultra-spontaneous craziness which purposely fails to build a narrative structure but to the contrary throws up cosmic chaos.

The current film *Astronaut*, 2003, is such an example par excellence. There is no linear storyline to it except a seemingly haphazard agglomeration of happenings with the artist himself as protagonist. His rampant imagination appears to have gone amok in diffuse, vague gestures which only on occasion elicit some connections, for example as in the moments he strums the spider web as if accompanying the haunting soundtrack by *The Cure*. One cannot but marvel at this miracle of expressed creativity, the only bulwark humans have against mortality in this world: the staying power of art.

Paul Chan

b. 1973

My birds... trash... the future., 2004

Two channel digital projection installation

Running time 16 minutes 36 seconds

Edition of 5 + 3 APs

Dimensions variable

Paul Chan's *My birds...trash...the future*, 2004, also belongs to the Collection of MoMA, New York and as the accompanying entry in the MoMA catalog says, it is: *Inspired by Francisco de Goya's series of etchings The Disasters of War (1810 – 20) and Samuel Beckett's play Waiting for Godot (1952), the landscape evokes a moral vacuum brought on by the horrors of war. However, it can also be viewed from a broader, more cosmic level of interpretation, especially for the purposes of this exhibition. The film has a veritable cast of protagonists set in an apocalyptic landscape: the digital likenesses of filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini and rapper Biggie Smalls, who act as stand-ins for Beckett's characters, suicide bombers preparing for Armageddon, gruesome hangings, burning oil fields.*

The protagonists' actions within the landscape of Apocalypse, evoke the *moral vacuum* inherent in the horrors that humans are capable of. At the same time, those figures are presented in all the stark vulnerability of naked humankind. Unprotected against the elements of these cataclysmic events, mankind evinces its fundamental weakness and insignificance. However, at the same instant of utter abandon, the human figures somehow magically survive and achieve greatness with the artist's elevation of their vulnerability to an act of creativity. Humanity soars from the minuteness of insignificance to the infinity of the Cosmos through the miracle of creativity. The tiny trajectory of mortal life on Earth is countered by the acts of creativity it leaves behind on this planet. The horrors of the pits of human existence are balanced by the other side of the coin: the generosity of the act of creation that transcends the physical existence of the creator.

Paul Chan in this artwork, amasses a litany of horrors but the sheer and tragic beauty of his creative act posits an elegiac and poignant catharsis. In a fanciful flight of fantasy and time travel, one may imagine Kazantzakis watching this and nodding his sage head approvingly.

Abraham Cruzvillegas

b. 1968

Autoconstruccion Room, 2009

An installation composed of 15 unique sculptures

Dimensions variable

In this monumental installation Cruzvillegas utilizes as his point of departure the harshness of the socio-economic realities of the urban landscape of Mexico City where he grew up. In the shanty-towns of his native neighborhood, people pressed by the scarcity of materials, use and endlessly recycle whatever objects may be found or culled from their immediate surroundings to build structures for living. Poverty-stricken people at their wits' end because of their inability to buy materials, display a stunning ability of improvisational ingenuity in assembling haphazard modes of habituation. Objects keep on being piled onto others and constructions grow organically as if willed into existence by some sort of self-generating power of creativity whose cycle never ends. This automatic process is given artistic embodiment in the installation with its organic elements, which serve as a poignant witness of the marvelous and unlimited capacity of mankind towards unbridled creativity and growth.

Ioanna Pantazopoulou

b. 1984

R.E. Reconfigured Etiquette, 2012

Tables, chairs, glasses, plates, cutlery, expanding foam, wire, crystals, iron

Dimensions variable

Ioanna Pantazopoulou's *R.E. Reconfigured Etiquette*, 2012, is a frozen explosion of a Big Bang moment. It is the instant when all the objects that comprise a typical dinner environment are caught in an outwards trajectory of arrested moment that photographs the creative act. It is as if the Cosmos is being born despite the fact that the flying parts are mundane accoutrements of the dinner table: the disassembled table, the chairs, the plates and poignantly the chandelier that habitually signifies the formal dinner setting. And all this is bathed in the light of a pre-cosmic, baroque flash. It is the sacred moment of the birth of the creative act.

Mark Wallinger

b. 1959

The Underworld, 2004

21 channel video installation for 21 monitors, sound, continuous loop

Edition 1/2 + 1 AP

Dimensions variable

The Underworld, 2004, is a commissioned video work based on the 1982 BBC TV recording of Giuseppe Verdi's *Requiem* conducted by Claudio Abbado. The musical performance plays on all 21 TV monitors albeit it starts at staggered points for each monitor thereby rendering a dissonant aural chaos of the concert. Requiems are musical pieces that are devoted as a sort of prayer for the salvation of a deceased soul. The Verdi *Requiem* is of course a masterpiece of classical music and Wallinger appropriates the famous creation but disassembles it and gives it a new contemporary form. He bravely does not hesitate to use as his material a work of magnificent quality, a hallmark of creativity that has withstood the passage of eons. The cosmic cacophony of *The Underworld* with its Duchampian inverted monitors reenacts a moment of sublime creation. Even such a Verdi masterpiece can be denied and reiterated in a new form and the artistic process is a witness to the endless loops of humans' archetypal inner urge towards the marvel of creation. The mixing of the staggered soundtracks conjures an infernally endless discord of sound evoking a Dantesque Purgatory. The upside down figures point to the title's *Underworld* and the monitors on the floor seem to signify that those lives are at rock bottom, a hell of great proportions. The humans mourning for a lost soul cannot sink lower into the abyss of grief.

Gary Webb

b. 1973

The Creator Has a Master Plan, 2004

Aluminium, rubber, steel, fabric and fan

190 x 287 x 49 cm

Since his emergence in the early 2000's, Gary Webb has grappled with the usage of materials in the practice of sculpture-making. His deft handling of materials is coupled with an unbridled inventiveness of juxtapositions leading to an end result that is surrealist but nevertheless, beyond that venerable movement into the 21st century.

The title of *The Creator Has a Master Plan, 2004*, begs the double question of whether there exists a Creator and if he/she does indeed have a masterplan, questions that have bothered a vast number of human beings throughout the ages. Lots of existentialist angst has boiled over this quandary, not to mention lots of blood spilt in wars... If there is irony to be detected in the artist's title, it would appear that the answer is buried within the artwork itself: it is a completely arbitrary and irrational agglomeration of materials that seem to point far more towards the direction of random chance rather than the existence of a plan. It seems to be jokingly whispering in our ear that if a Creator does exist, he is prone to such crazy sculpture-making. Or to draw the point to its natural conclusion, the force of creativity is at its best when free from any sort of orthodoxy and rules and it erupts into anarchy. At its extreme, unadulterated form, creativity fashions never-seen-before innovation and invention. In some ways but not exclusively, that is the story of Humankind as it propels itself on the back of innovation throughout the ages.

ROOM 4

TOUCHING THE OTHER

Lynda Benglis

b. 1941

Tres, 1976

Wire mesh, cotton bunting, plaster, sprayed aluminum and copper

61 x 152.4 x 30.5 cm

Greek-American Lynda Benglis first came to the fore in the 60's with work that challenged the patriarchal structure of the art world of the times and centered around issues of femininity and in particular the unique manner of the female touch in handling sculptural materials. In a humorous riposte to the then preeminent Abstract Expressionists and Jackson Pollock who poured painting on canvas on the floor, she poured painting or liquid materials on the floor that would create sculptures. Her oeuvre from that time onwards consisted in a very sensitive and novel exploration of the qualities of materials and how they can be utilized in creating art with a light touch away from the heavy-handed macho handling of her contemporary male artists. Her practice, however, does not exhaust itself in new ways of giving form to sculpture; rather the end products were not only fresh in appearance but also highly evocative of a vague and diffuse organic entity in existence. Life has been breathed into sculpture and frozen in time.

In *Tres, 1976*, she has followed the somewhat standard practice of her sculpture-making of the time: she rolled pieces of canvas around a metallic mesh into limb-like structures, knotted them into shape and then plastered and spray-painted them. The end result is evocatively life-like by positing an organic presence frozen immortally for all eternity. The limb structures appear to be caught in an existential struggle, in a dysfunctional deadlock situation of a cosmic Gordian Knot. More poignantly, in the context of this exhibition room, they also signal an arduous relation of disconnection or an effort at connection: limbs knotted together... will the Knot be tied for eternity or will it become untied?

Savvas Christodoulides

b. 1961

Ladders Joined Together, 2012

Wood, aluminium

220 x 280 x 100 cm

Savvas Christodoulides is a master alchemist at assembling found objects. His foraging for objects is confidently oriented towards selecting objects with emotional baggage, usually to do with memory, loss, nostalgia, the passage of time. After the selection, the alchemical talent comes into play with whimsical, surprising assemblages and juxtapositions of those objects, but with the combination of emotional weight multiplying geometrically. In *Ladders Joined Together, 2012*, the minimalist action of bringing two mere ladders into relational play, evokes volumes of emotional depth: the sculpture is clearly a couple, in fact a couple imbued with the most delicate of tenderness. The tall, sturdy

ladder can initially be perceived as the “strong” part of the sculpture, albeit then one notices that it is supported by the smaller ladder in an infinity self-feeding loop of support. Each ladder will collapse without its Other.

Asta Gröting

b. 1961

Space between two people having sex, 2008

Silicone

77 x 52 x 106 cm

Asta Gröting’s practice revolves around positing volumes and the empty spaces between them whose presence/absence is always emotionally laden. She casts objects and plays with the positive/negative relations that are configured. Her sculptures are time-frozen snapshots whose voids speak of a felt presence in tones of intimacy, memory, loss. In *Space between two people having sex*, 2008, she sculpts not so much a realistic, literal depiction of the momentous event but rather as she states: in *Space between two people having sex*, the visitor faces «the void between two people along with all the unexpressed, inexpressible and hidden issues that relationships involve». It is the primeval moment of being conjoined with a soul mate, but does that always result in the sublime contact that one longingly desires? The ache for such contact sadly does not always lead to nirvana since there are unexpressed obstacles in between - in the void.

Kostas Ioannidis

b. 1962

Glimpses, 2007

Audiovisual installation

Dimensions variable

In *Glimpses*, 2007, Kostas Ioannidis is intermeshing two apparently separate monologues within his audiovisual installation: the monologue projected on the screen are the words of a woman who is deciding to terminate her relationship with her male companion. The monologue heard from the speakers is that of a man who encounters a woman for the first time and falls in love with her.

The supposedly disparate monologues are actually not that random at all. In some sort of magically serendipitous connection they follow a trajectory where the words meet and the two people bond one moment, only to sever that relationship in the next stance. The vagaries and difficulties of a relationship are thrown up in vivid relief by this coming together and subsequent separation. The lyrical monologues almost become a beautiful dialogue, a poetic oscillation, tantalizingly leaving the end outcome open-ended to the viewer’s slant of interpretation. It looks as if this is not a Happy End but perhaps hopefully it might be?

Maro Michalakakos

b. 1967

Happy Days (Oh Les Beaux Jours), 2012

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Most of Maro Michalakakos’ oeuvre, revolves around her signature style of performatively shaving bits of burgundy velvet with a scalpel, thereby creating images. After years of collecting the shaved remnants of previous artworks, she decided to make an opus of an installation by reanimating those remainders into a new life. The result is a breathtaking juxtaposition of two mountains of shaved velvet that instantly alert the viewer’s perception to the (im)possibility of the two elements joining—as the Greek proverb has it *βουνό με βουνό δεν αμίγει*. Somehow magically, the archetypal relationship of male/female is brought forcefully to the fore as if the two mountains are yearning to lean over and touch each other but sadly are frozen in their rock solid state.

Bruce Nauman

b. 1941

Untitled (Hand Group), 1997

Phosphorous bronze

53.3 x 69.8 x 17.8 cm

Bruce Nauman is a titan of contemporary art whose oeuvre since the 60’s has been hugely influential to subsequent generations. A major concern of his artistic preoccupations is the human body as a vessel of psychological and emotional theatre. Additionally, he posits the body as the prime tool of artistic creativity. As such, hands, the quintessential tools of artistic practice, interest him strongly. Additionally, Nauman imputes to hands great importance as a means of gestural communication and emotional expression and a whole body of his filmic work is also preoccupied with that—hands playing silent music, playing with pencils etc.

With the present work Bruce Nauman delves into the language of the body and, of particular interest to him, the communicative abilities or inabilities of hands. In a sense, the piece feels “undone,” or poised on the verge of wholly becoming—the hands are frozen in a snapshot of movement that can only be released and continued when the viewer’s gaze shifts away. Its bronze surface at once masterfully evokes the look and texture of skin and retains irregularities like bulges and perforations that testify to the casting process, again the artistic process captured in a still image. Last but not least, let us not forget that hands and their touch are the most expressive part of the human anatomy. They touch another hand, they move around the other’s body, they caress a cheek.

ROOM 5

RETURN TO THE ABYSS

Alexis Akriothakis

1939-1994

Untitled, 1982

Wood, light bulbs, mirror

73 x 63 x 10 cm

The late Alexis Akriothakis was a legendary figurehead of contemporary Greek art from the 60's to his death in 1994. His practice roamed over various media, but a central part of his work were the *Suitcase* assemblages made mostly out of found wood. They embodied his yearn for escape (the suitcase one packs for a trip) from the conditions of our sordid lives, albeit packed with a strong dosage of optimism too. He was always "ready to go", prepared to embark on a jaunt that would provide comfort and relief from his complicated life. He took nothing for granted and certainly no prisoners. His *Untitled*, 1982, is an especially evocative suitcase, also doubling as a reference to the Greek tradition of *Anathymata*. This is the old Greek tradition of erecting small sacred structures as a commemoration to the dead of an accident at the site. The light and flower components of the assemblage signify exactly that, a votive offering, a promise to never forget a human life abruptly snuffed out.

Jenny Holzer

b. 1950

Laments (No record of joy), 1989

Black granite

209 x 77 x 62 cm

Jenny Holzer came to prominence from the mid-80's onwards through her novel usage of the power of words which she incorporated in various sculptural forms, primarily stone benches and LED signs displayed in public spaces. These sculptures would have written texts on them that disseminated in the public sphere protest messages about power and violence, oppression, politics, sexuality, all articulated from a feminist slant.

Her current work exhibited here is an example from her emblematic series of public benches whose heavy set granite forms inescapably do invoke the shapes of tombs with their tombstones and in fact, are on occasion referred to as sarcophagi. The tomb-like shape of the bench and its heavy granite stone of close to half a ton evoke the weight of death. That ponderous load, however, engages in a lyrical riposte with the engraved text which talks about that elemental opposite of Death: the procreative act of sex, the most potent resistance humans have against their inevitable mortality.

Martin Kippenberger

1953-1997

The Raft of Medusa, 1996

Suite of 14 lithographs, various sizes, on various papers; each signed and numbered

Each: 58.4 x 47.6 cm

Edition 10/26

The *Medusa* was a French naval ship that was shipwrecked on a voyage to Senegal carrying around four hundred French soldiers. One hundred and fifty of them managed to survive on a raft made from debris of the ship. After a week, only fifteen of them had managed to survive, the rest having died of hardships, accidents, murder and cannibalism. On the thirteenth day, the ship *Argus* rescued the ten survivors who then remained and returned them to France, where they related their shocking and sordid story. The disaster was a serious blow to French national pride, both for the vulnerability of its military force and the depravity of cannibalism. Both Géricault and Kippenberger have focused on the tantalising moment when the *Argus* appeared to be sailing away from the raft while the survivors (or Kippenberger) are desperately waving to attract its attention: that agonising cusp between death and salvation.

From the inspiration of Géricault, Kippenberger, who knew, or at least sensed, his impending death, proceeded to create this set of lithographs, assuming himself the poses of the shipwrecked survivors. In most of them, his watch is obviously apparent as a device that counts time, time that is running out... In one of them, we see words painted in French: "Je suis Meduse", meaning "I am petrified." The creative process of preparing these lithographs embarked from a photo session done by Elfie Semotan, Kippenberger's wife, with the artist simulating the Géricault survivors. Here is a description of the photo shoot by Elfie Semotan:

"There was a moment that I will never forget. It was unbelievable. It felt like I was seeing something, another place, in Martin, he was completely in another world, and I saw a drama, a life drama. Martin could play a part very well, but this was different, this was what he wanted to express. He had totally opened up and let everything out, everything that had hurt him in his life, and in the thought that it could all be over. That's what he got to through the *Medusa* project. Everything came out of him - it was everything he was".⁴

Ana Mendieta

1948-1985

Untitled (Gunpowder Work #2), 1980

Super-8 colour, silent film transferred to DVD

running time 3 minutes 51 seconds

Edition 2/6

Ana Mendieta's soft but yet jagged gestures elicit a poetry of sorts. With the baggage of her Cuban and Catholic heritage, she integrates indigenous magic and religious ritual into the shamanic role of Earth Goddess she assumes. In this film, she has embraced with her body the Earth and by digging

⁴ Susanne Kippenberger "Kippenberger, The Artist and His Families", J & L Books, translated by Damion Searls p. 504

has created a shallow grave of her own outline. She subsequently filled the hole with gunpowder and ignited it. Is this the flash of Death or a body being born anew through flame? If Kazantzakis could have had a dialogue with Mendieta, his answer would be... both!

Doris Salcedo

b. 1958

Atrabiliarios, 1995

Mixed media

73 x 174 x 13 cm

Over the years Doris Salcedo has mounted a sustained critique of the political conditions in her native Columbia. However, she does not merely wear the label of a political artist. Drawing on the bloodied history of her country she manages to create works that transcend the political and speak on a much more personal and emotional level about loss, oppression, death. The lyrical sensitivity and delicate handling by which she achieves this, allow her work to become unbridled from her country's circumstances and float freely upon an ecumenical stage. It is a precarious and subtle balance to achieve: delving into a well of authentic personal experiences lived in one country, but nevertheless attaining relevance for the denizens of the globe. In her series *Atrabiliarios*, 1995, she has entombed shoes of missing persons, victims of the Columbian junta, members of her family being also such "disappeared" victims. With rare artistic deftness, she selects the perfect material, animal skin for both aesthetic and symbolic reasons. Formally she achieves the visual effect of a discernible shoe, but with the translucent animal skin dulling the focus of the object, the luminosity toned down, the abject shoes are fading away into posterity. Symbolically, this animal skin hand-sewn onto a miniature grave box, can the creative act of sewing ever heal the trauma of death of a loved one?

Costas Tsoclis

b. 1930

Danger-Risk of Death, 1968

Iron, rubber, light

Dimensions variable

Costas Tsoclis is a pioneer of Greek Postmodernism, whose groundbreaking work since the sixties was recognized widely and rarely for a Greek artist, abroad. His oeuvre is characterized by a whimsical inventiveness in the juxtaposition of materials. His *Danger-Risk of Death*, 1968, is a representative work with its full effect of surprise, of upsetting the viewer's conventional way of perceiving. The normalcy of an outdoors faucet and garden hose is radically subverted by the detail of the hose ending in a light bulb. The contradictory combination of water and electricity is of course... life-threatening.

Mark Wallinger

b. 1959

Threshold to the Kingdom, 2000

Projected video installation

335.3 x 50.8 cm

Mark Wallinger's *Threshold to the Kingdom*, 2000, is a compelling visual metaphor on mortality. The stark sparseness of the opening shot establishes the setting of a beautifully slowed-down motion of "arrivals" which together with the lyricism of the soundtrack and the suggestive title, make one wonder: "could this be arriving at the afterlife?". In a strange twist of conspiracy theory meets serendipity, the soundtrack is Gregorio Allegri's (1582-1652) *Miserere*, which for years has been performed in the Sistine Chapel during Holy Week. The same Sistine Chapel where Michaelangelo painted the famous ceiling, a detail of which is on the cover of the edition of *The Saviours of God*, surely all this not a coincidence.

Threshold to the Kingdom, 2000, is an incredible magician's trick, conjuring something out of nothing; the most economical and austere of means, slowed-down motion plus a soundtrack, evoke one of the strongest statements on the frailty of the human condition. Humanity is ever-present here in all its mundane moments: a figure is caught yawning, another running and a group embracing. These moments are somehow miraculously elevated to expressions of beauty and tranquility as the figures "arrive" at mortality, or could it be immortality?

ROOM 6

Collaboration between NEON and the Alternative Stage of the Greek National Opera, in the context of the exhibition *Flying over the abyss*, at the Athens Conservatoire.

Giorgos Koumendakis and Stavros Gasparatos

b. 1959, b. 1975

Passage through the Abyss, 2016

Site-specific, sound installation*

The space where NEON presents the exhibition *Flying over the Abyss*, in the unexplored bowels of the Athens Conservatoire, is the starting point as well as the destination of this site-specific sound installation.

Musical themes by Giorgos Koumendakis and Stavros Gasparatos communicate with the sound of the building of the Athens Conservatoire as well as the surrounding areas, underlining and recording the path between the sound of life and the void. The sound installation communicates with the five stages of being, which incorporate the backbone of the exhibition, but is placed in an independent sixth space. The spaces of the Athens Conservatoire are wired and recorded so that their endpoints interact with each other as well as with the musical themes, creating an installation which aims to create a new space-time in the rambling building of the Athens Conservatoire.

Creators: Stavros Gasparatos - Giorgos Koumendakis

Technical Supervisor: Themis Pandelopoulos

Recordings Supervisor: Dimitris Giannopoulos

Technical Advisor - Programming: Alexandros Tsilfidis

**The sound installation, Passage through the Abyss, is a commissioned work by NEON to Giorgos Koumendakis and Stavros Gasparatos, marking the collaboration between NEON and the Alternative Stage of the Greek National Opera, in the framework of the exhibition.*

NEON ORGANIZATION

NEON, is a non-profit organization, which works to bring contemporary culture in Greece closer to everyone. It is committed to broadening the appreciation, understanding, and creation of contemporary art in Greece in the firm belief that this is a key tool for growth and development.

NEON, founded by Dimitris Daskalopoulos, breaks with the convention that limits the contemporary art foundation of a collector and enthusiast to a single place. It is a vibrant and engaging interlocutor with civic and cultural stakeholders and the wider public. It acts on a multitude of initiatives, spaces, civic and social contexts. It seeks to expose the ability contemporary art has to stimulate, inspire and affect the individual and society at large.

NEON realizes its mission through free exhibitions, educational programs, grants and scholarships, talks and events and a creation of a network of international partnerships. NEON constructively collaborates with cultural institutions and supports the program of public and private institutions to enhance increased access and inventive interaction with contemporary art.

THE ATHENS CONSERVATOIRE

The Athens Conservatoire was founded in 1871 and is the country's oldest educational institution for music and drama. In its almost one-and-a-half century of operation the Athens Conservatoire has had as students or teachers such major figures of international acclaim as Spyros Samaras, Dimitris Mitropoulos, Nikos Skalkotas, Maria Callas, Gina Bachauer, Alexandra Trianti, Mikis Theodorakis, Loukas Karytinis, Dimitris Sgouros and many others. Since 1871 the Athens Conservatoire has had a major contribution in Drama as well, operating the first and oldest drama school in Greece; its teachers over the years include such prominent theatre people as Emilios Veakis, Dimitris Rontiris, Costas Mousouris, Dimitris Myrat, etc., and this great tradition is continued to this day.

The Athens Conservatoire is housed in the emblematic building by architect and Professor Ioannis Despotopoulos, a student of Walter Gropius in Weimar, and was the only part of his ambitious plan for the Cultural Centre of Athens to be realized. His design won the first prize in the national architectural competition of 1959, and ranks among the top expressions of the radically modern spirit of Bauhaus. The Athens Conservatoire is currently making a great effort for this important building, which remains unfinished, to be completed and assume its rightful place and prestige among the city's architectural heritage, with the aid of the State and through national, EU as well as private funds.

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