

# NEON

## PRESS RELEASE

**NEON presents**  
**Paul Chan: *Odysseus and the Bathers***  
**at the Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens**  
**5 July – 14 October 2018**

**Curated by Sam Thorne**

NEON is pleased to present an exhibition of New York-based artist Paul Chan in Athens, Greece, guest-curated by Sam Thorne, Director of Nottingham Contemporary.

*Odysseus and the Bathers* at the Museum of Cycladic Art presents a body of new and recent works, which the artist calls “breathers” and “bathers”. Each figure is composed of a fabric “body” designed by Chan and attached to specially modified fans. These kinetic sculptural works act like moving images in three dimensions. Incorporating techniques that combine fashion, drawing and physics, Chan manipulates how the figures move by composing the internal architecture of the bodies so they direct the airflow from the fans to create different kinds of motion. The “bathers” will be joined by gouache fabric pieces, works on paper and maquettes.

The Museum of Cycladic Art is a compelling setting for these works, which are heavily indebted to ancient Greek philosophy. In *De Anima*, one of the major works of Aristotle, he writes, “Knowledge is for that which moves by that which moves.” For a number of classical philosophers, from Heraclitus onward, there was a relationship between life, consciousness or spirit, and movement. There is also a strong connection between breath and how it “animates” the living in spirit and in form. Chan’s “breathers” are sometimes loosely titled after a classical philosopher or ancient intellectual movement combined with various types of wordplay.

Artists have explored the motif of the “bather” throughout history. In the late 19th and 20th centuries, artists like Cezanne and Matisse took up the motif to express evolving notions about the body, sexuality and nudity, one’s relationship to nature, and much else besides. Chan takes up this age-old motif in order to redescribe the constellation of themes and ideas the “bather” embodies for what is turning out to be a dismal 21st century. The “breathers” fulfill Chan’s stated desire to turn away from screen images. Finding new ways to create moving-image works beyond the “frame” is, according to Chan, what progress might look like.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a full-colour Greek/English catalogue, co-published by NEON and Badlands Unlimited, and designed by Kobi Benezri. The publication will include Chan’s essay “Odysseus as Artist” and a new essay by Thorne. Chan’s essay lays out the terms and claims of “polytropism”, an Anglicized version of the Greek term “polytropos”, a term that – in Homer – is often ascribed to the cunning Odysseus. “Polytropism” is the notion Chan has developed that conceptualizes the binding relationship between reason and creativity. A conversation between Professor Nicholas Chr. Stampolidis, Director of the Museum of Cycladic Art, and Elina Kountouri, Director of NEON, on the notion of “polytropism” will also be included in the catalogue.

In collaboration with the U.S. Embassy in Athens.

## Notes to editors

**NEON**, founded in 2013 by collector and entrepreneur Dimitris Daskalopoulos, breaks with the convention that limits the contemporary art foundation of a collector to a single place. NEON's space is the city. It acts on a multitude of initiatives, spaces, and civic and social contexts. It seeks to expose the ability contemporary culture has to stimulate, inspire, and affect the individual and society at large. NEON collaborates with cultural institutions and supports the programs of public and private institutions to enhance increased access and inventive interaction with contemporary art. Every year, NEON presents an important international artist's exhibition at the Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens for which they invite a guest curator. NEON's previous exhibition guest curators include Douglas Fogle (Mike Kelley 2017–2018) and Paolo Colombo (Mario Merz, 2015–2016). [www.neon.org.gr](http://www.neon.org.gr)

**Paul Chan** (born Hong Kong 1973) is an artist who lives in New York. He is the winner of the Hugo Boss Prize in 2014, a biennial award honouring artists who have made a visionary contribution to contemporary art. A survey entitled *Selected Works* was mounted by Schaulager in Basel, Switzerland (April 11–October 19, 2014). His work has been exhibited widely in many international shows including: *Plato in LA*, the Getty Villa, Los Angeles, 2018; Documenta 13, Kassel, 2012; *Before The Law*, Ludwig Museum, Cologne, 2011–12; *Making Worlds*, 53rd Venice Biennale, Venice, 2009; *Medium Religion*, ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2008; *Traces du sacré*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2008; 16th Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, 2008; 10th International Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, 2007; and the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of Art, New York, 2006. Solo exhibitions include: *My Laws are My Whores*, The Renaissance Society and the University of Chicago, Chicago, 2009; *Paul Chan: Three Easy Pieces*, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, 2008; *Paul Chan: The 7 Lights*, Serpentine Gallery, London and New Museum, New York 2007–2008.

In 2002, Chan was a part of Voices in the Wilderness, an American aid group that broke U.S. sanctions and federal law by working in Baghdad before the U.S. invasion and occupation. In 2004 he garnered police attention for The People's Guide to the Republican National Convention, a free map distributed throughout New York to help protesters to get in or out of the way of the RNC. In 2007, Chan collaborated with the Classical Theatre of Harlem and Creative Time to produce a site-specific outdoor presentation of Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot* in New Orleans. Chan's essays and interviews have appeared in Artforum, frieze, Flash Art, October, Tate etc, Parkett, Texte Zur Kunst, Bomb, and other magazines and journals. Chan founded the independent press Badlands Unlimited in 2010.

**Sam Thorne** is the director of Nottingham Contemporary. From 2014–16, he was artistic director of Tate St Ives; prior to that, he was associate editor at frieze magazine, where he is currently a contributing editor. In 2013, he co-founded Open School East, a free-to-attend study programme in London; his book, *School*, was published by Sternberg Press in 2017. Thorne has curated and co-curated a number of exhibitions, including: *As Above, So Below* (2017), Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; *That Continuous Thing* (2017), Tate St Ives; and *From Ear to Ear to Eye* (2017–18), Nottingham Contemporary. He has organized solo exhibitions with artists including Marguerite Humeau, Lara Favaretto and Wu Tsang. Thorne is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of History of Art at the University of Nottingham, and has been a visiting tutor at the Royal College of Art in London, where is currently a PhD supervisor.

### Museum of Cycladic Art opening hours:

Monday - Wednesday - Friday - Saturday: 10:00 – 17:00

Thursday: 10:00 – 20:00

Sunday: 11:00 – 17:00

Tuesday: closed

### Press Enquiries

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