



HELLENIC PARLIAMENT

NEON

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PRESS RELEASE

**A collaboration between the Hellenic Parliament and NEON
Cultural Programme of Contemporary Art 2021
Former Public Tobacco Factory – Hellenic Parliament Library & Printing House
Exhibition *Portals*
Curated by Elina Kountouri, Director, NEON and Madeleine Grynsztejn, Pritzker Director,
Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago
June – December 2021**

The Cultural Program of Contemporary Art 2021

The Hellenic Parliament and NEON will together implement the Cultural Programme of Contemporary Art 2021, which will take place at the former Public Tobacco Factory – Hellenic Parliament Library & Printing House, at 218 Lenorman Street, from June to December 2021.

The collaboration between the two bodies is taking place as part of the national events of the anniversary year 2021, commemorating 200 years since Greece's liberation from the Ottoman Empire in 1821. At the same time, this joint project is happening during a pandemic that has shaken international societies and is threatening the functioning of countries and institutions worldwide. In this light, the two bodies are working together in order to highlight, at a national and international level, the dynamics of democratic institutions in the face of the challenges of today's social reality through contemporary artistic creation.

The historic site of the Tobacco Factory, a symbol of Greece's industrialisation and progress, emerges as a modern cultural core and is the ideal setting for the development of new artistic ideas whose points of reference include historical landmarks, social change, the concept of freedom, and a new reality for humanity in a world that has become volatile due to modern challenges and global threats.

In the context of NEON and the Hellenic Parliament's partnership, the Tobacco Factory is being remodelled with funding from NEON, thus creating **a new, very promising and emblematic cultural venue** of great aesthetic and functional value.

"During the landmark Peace Conference held by the victors of World War I in Paris, Greece made not only territorial claims, but also took the opportunity to present an image of the country – aside from one of tradition and history – to the eyes of the international art-loving audience of the French capital. On 2 September 1919, at the renown La Boétie art gallery in Paris, the then Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos inaugurated an exhibition of 200 paintings and sculptures by the "Omáda Téchni" (Art Group), an association of young Greek artists of the time who were linked to the avant-garde and Modernism.

Associating the exhibition with the successful political and diplomatic processes of the Peace Conference had to do with the feelings of confidence and renewal which, at that time, were blowing through Greece's political and artistic landscape.

One century later, Greece now looks back celebratorily and reflectively on the 200 years since the successful revolution of 1821 against the Ottoman Empire which led to the creation of the Modern Greek State.

The Hellenic Parliament, which has represented the Greek people since 1844, participates in these events in various ways. Publications, conferences, research projects and exhibitions have already begun and will culminate in the anniversary year of 2021.

This initiative of knowledge and honour has again, as in 1919, its artistic aspect. With the pioneering organisation NEON we are co-organising a cultural programme of contemporary art that aims at something similar to the exhibition of 1919 at 64 Rue la Boétie, to highlight how Greece, its history and its prospects inspire the contemporary, domestic and international avant-garde. At the monumental site of an old stone Tobacco Factory which today houses the priceless library of the Hellenic Parliament, a dialogue of messages and understandings will be held between artists and the public.

This artistic event is inspired mainly by the Greece of today; it is organised by a partnership between the private and public sector, and it is addressed to a public that will freely shape its own interpretation.

In an unexpectedly bizarre and prolonged pandemic era, art can and does liberate. In this same way, the message that today's Greece can inspire the most contemporary and remarkable potential of art is also liberating.

This is how Greece, besides its irrefutably inspiring past, can also establish an inspiring present and future."

Constantine A. Tassoulas, President of the Hellenic Parliament

Our collaboration with the country's leading democratic institution, the Hellenic Parliament, confirms in the best possible way the vision, the professionalism and dedication to NEON's goal sought during its seven years of operation. Indeed, this time of particular importance for Greece, approaching the landmark year of 2021, gives us the chance to reflect upon the historical course we have taken and perhaps how through the study of this course we will come to appreciate what older generations would call "our destiny". This reflection on national self-awareness, part of a global environment of reflection, is promoted in its own way by the exhibition we are presenting. Through this effort, we seek to highlight the important developmental dimension of art, to underscore our contemporary creativity, to promote models of collaboration and to implement an unparalleled project that is worthy of a modern and developed progressive society.

Dimitris Daskalopoulos, founder NEON

THE TOBACCO FACTORY

The Lenorman Street Tobacco Factory was the second Public Tobacco Factory in Athens, built by the Greek State. Construction works began in 1928 and was completed in 1930. It boasts a total area of approximately 19,000m². The Athens Tobacco Factory housed many small tobacco companies and cigarette and cigar manufacturing and packaging companies. Also, storage facilities, a Customs Office and dining rooms operated on the premises as well as an apartment to host the factory guard. Over time, the building embodied a number of different uses and accommodated varying inhabitants over different periods, including a prison, refugee housing, and, during the second half of the 20th century, various public services such as the Court of Auditors, the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Finance. In 1989 the building along with its mechanical equipment was declared a protected monument by the Ministry of Culture. In 2000 it was transferred in its entirety to the Hellenic Parliament. The restoration of the facades was completed in 2008 and the steel and glass-plate roof of the atrium in 2016. Today part of the building houses the Hellenic Parliament Library and Printing House.

Works for the improvement of part of the historic building (ground floor north and northwest wing, the atrium and the former Customs Office) are currently carried out by NEON and were determined and approved in collaboration with Parliament's Technical Services Department and its departments. More specifically, apart from the general construction works, cleaning of premises, dismantling of unsound and unused material, repairing, renovation and painting, all the above spaces are being equipped with updated infrastructure. The works carried out include extension works for the installation of the electricity network, rehabilitation works of the water supply and sewerage network, reinforcement of the fire protection and fire detection network, installation of exhibition lighting, creation and activation of wi-fi network for the public and visitors, improvement of the air-conditioning system, extension of the security systems and additions to allow accessibility to more areas for people with disabilities. Moreover, the

restrooms, auxiliary reception and personnel areas are also being refurbished. All of the above equipment will remain as a donation to the building.

The cost of the improvement will come to approximately 1 million euros and is funded in its entirety by NEON and its founder Dimitris Daskalopoulos.

As part of the Cultural Programme of Contemporary Art 2021, the restored site of the former Public Tobacco Factory – Hellenic Parliament Library and Printing House will become an outstanding contemporary, cultural and social centre, open to all, offering a dynamic space for meeting and exchanging ideas.

EXHIBITION PORTALS

From June to December 2021, it will host the **contemporary art exhibition *Portals*** organised by NEON, curated by Elina Kountouri, Director, NEON, and Madeleine Grynsztejn, Pritzker Director, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Prompted by the anniversary year 2021, *Portals* will develop messages, ideas and reflection on the new reality that is formed each time through revolution and upheaval. A total of 40 artists from Greece and abroad – including newly commissioned works - will explore this different reality through themes such as Movement, the Communal, Connection, and Home.

Portals will include programmes about the building of the Tobacco Factory and its history that will be developed in collaboration with the Hellenic Parliament departments. Moreover, a series of talks and educational programmes along with an online 'portal' will operate along with the physical presentation of the works.

The full exhibition programme will be announced in the following months by the curators.

In 2021 NEON, in partnership with the Hellenic Parliament, will present an international contemporary art exhibition entitled Portals.

The exhibition aims to highlight how this particular moment takes us through a "portal". When we emerge on the other side, we will need to reaffirm - for the sake of future generations - our commitment to certain values: the rule of law, human rights and democracy. The global scale of the challenges and consequences of the pandemic make this reaffirmation imperative.

Elina Kountouri, Director, NEON

In 2020 the global community was riven by paradox: human beings, forced to isolate themselves from one another, became keenly aware of their interdependency. Mandated to stay at home, people suddenly found themselves in a hyper-localized environment, in inverse proportion to a deeply networked, international world. Physical connection, a life-affirming social need, became a potentially deadly engagement. This moment of paradox has led to many revelatory truths and accelerated change. Contemporary art is fuel for such an evolution. Indeed, art is crucial in times like these, illuminating who we are, giving shape to our experiences, broadening our perspectives, and guiding us toward the society we wish to be. The founder of NEON, Dimitris Daskalopoulos, has always understood the powerful role of art and culture in this way, and his organization is perfectly suited to convey that power. As the Pritzker Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, I am honored to have been invited by NEON's Director, Elina Kountouri, to curate this exhibition with her. NEON's exhibitions, curated by Kountouri and always guided by the spirit and philosophy of Daskalopoulos, are world-renowned exemplars of cultural production, each one a perfect match of art and environment. And there is no richer environment than Greece. The setting for this exhibition, Athens's former Public Tobacco Factory, now the home of the Hellenic Parliament Library, is remarkable for its deep economic, political, intellectual, and historic roots. Deepening these connections is the fact that the exhibition will open on the occasion of the bicentennial of Greece's liberation in 1821. Contemporary art thrives in a context so profoundly resonant; it marries the past to the present while reconciling our prevailing paradoxes and pointing to the future.

Madeleine Grynsztejn, Pritzker Director, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

NOTES TO EDITORS

About NEON

NEON is a nonprofit organisation that works to bring contemporary culture closer to everyone. It is committed to broadening the appreciation, understanding and creation of contemporary art in Greece, while activating sites that often remain culturally undiscovered, in collaboration with cultural institutions. NEON's strategy is to highlight these emblematic spaces and bring them to the forefront of cultural action, in an effort to enhance the daily life of the contemporary citizen through meetings with contemporary art in the city. NEON has implemented important infrastructural projects in places where it has organised exhibitions, in order to substantially improve and further utilise these spaces, such as the Athens Conservatory, the National Observatory of Athens, and the Archaeological Museum of Mykonos.

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 art has to stimulate, inspire and affect the individual and society at large. NEON constructively collaborates with cultural institutions and supports the programmes of public and private institutions to enhance increased access and inventive interaction with contemporary art.

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