

ΠΡΕΣΒΕΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΟΣ
ΗΝΩΜΕΝΟ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟ



EMBASSY OF GREECE
UNITED KINGDOM

NEON

DOOMED COMPANIONS UNSUBSTANTIAL SHADES

07 OCTOBER—
12 NOVEMBER
2022

HELLENIC
RESIDENCE

ELLIE ANTONIOU
IRINI BACHLITZANAKI
SAVVAS CHRISTODOULIDES
NIKOS KESSANLIS
KAROLINA KRASOULI
AMANDA KYRITSOPOULOU

STATHIS LOGOTHETIS
MARO MICHALAKAKOS
YORGOS PETROU
ERICA SCOURTI
STEFANIA STROUZA
ANTREA TZOUROVITS

CURATED BY
AKIS KOKKINOS

DOOMED COMPANIONS, UNSUBSTANTIAL SHADES

Doomed companions, unsubstantial shades is an intergenerational group exhibition presented by NEON Organization at the Hellenic Residence in London. The show introduces an encounter between the legacy of the Greek poet, diplomat and Nobel laureate George Seferis and the work of twelve Greek-speaking contemporary artists reflecting on the themes of identity, nostalgia and trauma in the current socio-political condition.

Poet, essayist, diarist and novelist George Seferis (1900-1971) was one of the most significant Greek writers of the 20th century. Born in Smyrna, Georgios Seferiadis studied law in Paris and served his country as a professional diplomat abroad, ending his career as Ambassador to the United Kingdom, with his house and office located at 51 Upper Brook Street. Parallel to his public life, and under the pen name of Seferis, he developed a distinct lyrical voice exploring the poetic possibilities of the Greek demotic language through recurring themes of exile and nostalgia for the homeland. In 1963 he won the Nobel Prize, with the citation paying tribute to him as the most worthy representative 'of the Greece of today'¹.

Doomed companions, unsubstantial shades confronts the personal and professional experiences, worldview and oeuvre of George Seferis to provide loose conceptual frameworks and spatio-temporal implications of diasporic life. The exhibition touches upon the politics, codes, and forms of language, unpacks the notion of the 'divided self' and engages with historical geopolitical events and their aftermaths – translating Seferis's cosmology into the complex grammars of contemporary culture.

The invited artists all share a common language and migrant experiences, echoing the great poet's ideology of national identity based on linguistic and cultural bonds rather than racial theories, while also resisting any monolithic or homogeneous representation.

Doomed companions, unsubstantial shades invites visitors to navigate across two floors of the Residence, immerse themselves in the hauntologies of its modern past, embodied in the architectural and decorative setting, and explore eighteen contemporary artworks over a plurality of mediums including historically significant pieces as well as two new commissions.

The exhibition borrows its title from Seferis's poem *Solidarity* from his collection *Logbook I* (1940) proposing alternative futures based on collectivity, alliances and interdependency, while defying systemic failures. At a time where the aftermaths of Brexit resonate within the arts and education sectors, creating thresholds to new streams of European creative forces to enter and live in the UK, *Doomed companions, unsubstantial shades* celebrates the polyphony of contemporary diasporic culture while allowing us to re-imagine new ways of belonging. Even though the specificity of Greek culture is prominent, the questions asked by the artists are globally relevant, fostering the search for humanity within an age of myopic, territorial-driven monocultural imagination.

¹ Roderick Beaton, 2003, *George Seferis: Waiting for the Angel: A Biography* (Yale University Press)

Akis Kokkinos
Curator

GROUND FLOOR

SITTING ROOM

Yorgos Petrou

(tongue) remains protected,
2022

Paper, plaster, concrete,
rubber, fabric, tape, resin,
wood, cotton, earthenware
Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist,
commissioned by NEON

Seferis visited Cyprus three times during 1953-1955. Fascinated by the country, Cyprus became a source of inspiration for him and a place where his feelings for Greek culture were expanded. A few years later, between 1957-1962, Seferis served in London as Greek Ambassador to the United Kingdom, a period of geopolitical intensity between Greece, England, Turkey and Cyprus. In 1959, Cyprus became an independent state, with Seferis playing a crucial role in that historical event.

The exhibition begins here, in the waiting room, where liminal connotations are juxtaposed with the cultural, historical and geographical significance of the island.

(tongue) remains protected is a new commission and site-specific installation by artist Yorgos Petrou. An excavation into their personal history, this work, consisting of sculptures, found objects, and photographic prints, examines the complex relationships between land, language and the value of the human body under the male and colonial gaze.

The plurality of materialities within the installation follows re-emerging patterns and forms while it initiates dialogical constellations with pre-existing decorative elements in the room, transmitting new strands of meaning and proposing a new lexicon for cultural value, hierarchy and preservation.

SEFERIS OFFICE

Karolina KRASOULI

Omitted Center,

2015 - ongoing

7 envelopes, watercolor
on paper

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

The Residence acted as both home and office for the great modern poet. Seferis's office has been left untouched since his departure, and includes photographs of him and his wife, Maria (Maro) Zannou from the 1960s. The heavy wooden desk, the chandelier and general atmosphere of the room take us back in time to reflect on ideologies of Seferis's time that have now faded away.

Karolina Krasouli is an artist highly inspired by poetry and the literary world where the writer's stationery often takes new meaning as part of her visual vocabulary. Presented here, some fragments of her work *Omitted Center*, invite us into the world of mailing culture, with Krasouli developing a series of modified unsent envelopes. The pastel watercolours on paper become symbols haunted by an absence, signs of the transience of time. The envelopes summon an assemblage of emotions, regaining its material form while re-claiming its diminishing value.

CORRIDOR & DINING ROOM

Nikos Kessanlis

Untitled (Gesture), 1961
Readymade object, tissue, wire
200 x 21 cm
Presented as part of the
D.Daskalopoulos Collection
Gift to Tate

Stathis Logothetis

Torso, 1981
Wood, string, canvas
121 x 45 x 10 cm
Part of the D.Daskalopoulos
Collection Gift to EMST

Maro Michalakakos

The Fortune Teller, 1999
Velvet, upholstered gilt
wood settee
60 x 120 x 55 cm
D.Daskalopoulos Collection

Antrea Tzourovits

Rattle - #1, 2021
Steel round bars, 6 Spalding
basketballs - size 7, black
Electrostatic painting
247 x 55 x 55 cm
Courtesy the artist

Rattle - #2, 2021
Steel round bars, 2 Spalding
basketballs - size 5 and 7,
black Electrostatic painting
90 x 28 x 28 cm
Courtesy the artist

From the Corridor to the Dining Room, visitors encounter works by four artists from different generations. Wartime and post-war experiences, personal and collective memory and trauma, are some of the darker sides of diasporic life and migration that Seferis also lived to experience. The anthropocentric view in this room harmonises with Seferis's worldview in the search for the human condition, suggesting poetic methodologies on solidarity, kinship and healing under the current global uncertainty.

Nikos Kessanlis, a pioneering artist of the Greek post-war era, disrupts the cosmology of the academic painting discourse with a deconstructed toilet flush, here hanging from the ceiling of the corridor. As suggested by its title, the work is a 'gesture' towards the idealised view of modernisation, and towards resistance of consumerist culture that emerged along with the birth of the metropolitan city. The traces of urban and industrial environments become part of Kessanlis's artistic language, reflecting the era of the 1960s and the wider exploration of visual vocabulary of that period.

Reflecting on post-war fear and uncertainty, Stathis Logothetis's wider practice explored conditions of destruction and re-creation, pressure and tension in the essence of humanity. The hung three-dimensional painting, called *Torso*, made out of inexpensive and worn materials in combination with the vivid red colour of the work highlights the inevitable passage of time in relation to the suffered, wounded social body. The canvas suggests human skin, an extension of the artist and a process of self-knowledge eliminating the boundaries between life and art.

Questions of life and death, interdependence and story-telling are also fused in *The Fortune Teller*, a work by Maro Michalakakos. As a child growing up in her family's antique shop, Michalakakos used to construct speculative narratives around the arriving objects, unpacking the hidden relationships of the adults. The red velvet surface of the gilt wood sofa, a material synonymous to the artist's practice, has been shaved, forming a helix of three hands, disrupting boundaries of class and divinity. The intense process-making of shaving draws on the artist's research of revealing the woven tissue of the premium material, its secrets and pulsating knots as it reaches an end.

An artist from a younger generation, Antrea Tzourovits, presents two of his sculptural series called *Rattle*. In 1998, Serbia and Montenegro (Former Yugoslavia), the artist's country of origin, won the Basketball World Championship, hosted in Greece. A few months later, America and NATO launched airstrikes in the artist's homeland, forcing him and his family to flee to Greece. Tzourovits merges traumatic and triumphant national events to unpack complex mechanisms of memory under the status of the war refugee. The title of the works reveals a sensorial reaction to the temporalities shaped by fear and pain and refuel the precarious environment of the future.

FIRST FLOOR

RECEPTION AREA

Karolina Krasouli

Arrival, 2021
Oil, gesso, graphite and
thread on canvas
435 x 253 cm
Courtesy the artist

Amanda Kyritsopoulou

I've never had a pet, 2017
Moving image on TV screen
with headsets
3:19 min
Courtesy the artist

Throughout his life, Seferiades lived in various countries due to his profession as diplomat, including Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the UK. The tyranny to protect his artistic work from his diplomatic life gave birth to his pen name Seferis and the emergence of the 'divided self'. The performativity across multiple identities and the movement from one to the other creates a fertile space to explore vital questions related to the experience contemporary artists face by living between countries, places and sometimes, professions. Politics of language, nostalgia for the homeland, tradition and labour are some topics explored on this floor that Seferis also shared throughout his oeuvre.

Karolina Krasouli's *Arrival* is a large-scale artwork that operates within the limits between sculpture and painting, craft and art, figuration and abstraction. It is an outcome of countless hours of artistic labour, painting, folding, composing and sewing multiple fragments into a central piece. Within the context of the exhibition, the piece invites us to teleport into non-spaces, spaces that resonate with our multiple identities, feelings, and emotions that we carry as we move into a new place of arrival.

In the three-minute moving-image piece, titled *I've never had a pet*, Amanda Kyritsopoulou captures the constitution of a capitalist metropolitan city, choreographed by promises, desires and sacrifices. Through a pseudo-psychogeographic tour around the city, the artist becomes an ideal resident in London. Performing in a British accent, Kyritsopoulou recounts daily tasks and training she undertakes, always 'fast and with gracefulness', to follow the city's norms. The synchronicity between

the re-photographed, close-up, stock images and the text, as well as the dubbed supermarket sound, imitates children's programmes like 'Dora the Explorer', revealing invisible modes of learning and indoctrination into a consumerist culture.

Erica Scourti's *Clean Sheets* is a series of works made when the artist was stuck in Athens during the pandemic. As part of her morning routine, she would write a journal on her bed sheets with marker pens, creating a layered patchwork of text, a record of a daily practice and a mass of now unreadable language. Through the performative, autobiographic process-making, *Clean Sheets* explores the spatial dimensions of linguistics in visual and embodied realms. Evading translation and rational meaning, the piece cultivates a practice of confession, erasure and catharsis for the artist. Displayed as curtains in the house, the piece serves as a 'clean', protected space from the public eye outdoors.

Hung on the wall, *Lord's Chair* – a large-scale silkscreen series by Irini Bachlitzanaki – depict three plastic garden chairs sunbathing, an ode to tradition and nostalgia for Greek culture and climate. In dialogue with them, two sculptural pieces of European plug adaptors sit together with a felted UK plug socket. The presented works belong to the artist's wider research, highly informed by ways of exploring the representation of objects, our relationship with the material world while re-considering our associations with the familiar. The act of translation across dimensions, images and materials evokes questions on the void that emerges from that deviance and, in the context of the exhibition, invite us to re-think the socio-cultural elements that resist translation when living abroad.

Erica Scourti

Clean Sheets, 2020-21
Dry-cleaned sheets with
marker pens
60 x 40 x 65 cm
Courtesy the artist

Irini Bachlitzanaki

Lord's chair #1, 2021
Lord's chair #2, 2021
Lord's chair #3, 2021
Silkscreen on paper
137 x 102 cm
Courtesy the artist

Socket Socket #2, 2021
Digital embroidery on wool
felt
30 x 23 x 10 cm
Courtesy the artist

*Summer to Winter and
Winter to Summer
(Plug adaptors)*, 2021
Tinted plaster (Giluform)
5 x 9.5 x 8.5 cm (each)
Courtesy the artist

Ellie Antoniou

glimmer in the absorbent; a desire for luminosity and the manipulation of night, 2022

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist,

commissioned by NEON

Stefania Strouza

Anatolia, 2012

Plastic waste bag, spray paint, lace

100 x 75 cm

Courtesy the artist and

a.antonopoulou.art

Savvas Christodoulides

He loved nature, 2008

Ceramic figure, tree trunk, wrapped in paper

188 x 50 x 30 cm

Part of the D.Daskalopoulos

Collection Gift to EMST

Ellie Antoniou presents *glimmer in the absorbent; a desire for luminosity and the manipulation of night* - a new commission that explores the state of coexisting identities within the framework of 21st century technology. Touching upon the screen-based cultures and the emergence of the hybrid self, Antoniou examines the simultaneity of the ego in relation to time and space in a sculptural installation constituted by multiple metal plates. The reflection and transition of the artificial light construct environments of absence and presence, limbo states questioning replicas of the self in the form of an abstract landscape. An extract from Seferis's *Erotikos Logos*, 'dawn breaks in the heavens', scored into the metal plate, highlights the artist's interest in subtraction, fostering relations between light and shadow, translation and meaning.

Anatolia belongs to Stefania Strouza's long-term research on the myth of Medea. In the context of the exhibition, Strouza encounters the homeland of Seferis, Anatolia, juxtaposing mythical, geographical and ecological connotations into Asia's western-most peninsula, and places the presented cultural object within the historical framework of mapping. *Anatolia* explores the multiplicity that emerges from such navigational tools while commenting on the decorative and repetitive element of contextualisation. By applying to a plastic waste bag the sealing technique usually used on canvases, and by adding and removing coloured parts, the painting honours randomness and worthlessness in art and opens a dialogue with the wider frame of the building's walls.

In *He loved nature*, Savvas Christodoulides explores Seferis's ideology on the representation

of the human figures in art deriving from nature's measure and the emotion that the figure holds. Based on a tree trunk, a porcelain figurine is bound by white paper, reinforcing the need to wrap the sculpture as a symbol of preserving culture. The aesthetic of middle-class décor touches upon the conversion of triviality into value. Possibly, a reconstruction of the sculptural discourse that follows the conditions of the perishable, and a reconfiguration of preciousness towards the white marble, its history and promises.

HELLENIC RESIDENCE

51, UPPER BROOK STR., LONDON, W1K 2BT

51 Upper Brook Street History

The building at 51 Upper Brook Street was a gift of Helena Schilizzi-Venizelos to the Greek state, at a time when Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos was in London for lengthy periods during the negotiations for the Treaty of Sevres which followed the First World War. Situated in one of the most central parts of London, in Mayfair, the building was built in 1731 by the architect R. G. Hammond, who was responsible for a number of other buildings in the area, owned by the Duke of Westminster. During the period 1731-1920 it had served as the residence of members of the House of Lords and distinguished judges. It was fully renovated in 1905. From 1920 it is the Official Residence of the Greek Ambassador. During the years 1920 to 1975 the Chancery was also housed there. The original design has been preserved, including the office used by George Seferis. In 2000, on the occasion of the poet's 100th anniversary, a commemorative Blue Plaque was erected by the English Heritage.

NEON

NEON is a nonprofit organization that works to bring contemporary culture closer to everyone. It is committed to broadening the appreciation, understanding and creation of contemporary art in Greece and to the belief that this is a key tool for growth and development. 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 art has to stimulate, inspire and affect the individual and society at large. NEON constructively collaborates with cultural institutions and supports the programs of public and private institutions to enhance increased access and inventive interaction with contemporary art.

BIOGRAPHIES

Ellie Antoniou

Ellie Antoniou (b. 1995, Birmingham, UK) lives and works between London and Athens. Interested in how we navigate the physical and virtual layers of the spectrum of reality, her practice explores the irreducibly complex relation to time through the lens of technology. Antoniou's sculptural process spans from mild steel to virtual environments. She is the recipient of a NEON Postgraduate Scholarship (2018-2019).

Irini Bachlitzanaki

Irini Bachlitzanaki (b. 1984, Athens, Greece) lives and works in London. Inspired by material culture and the biographies of objects, Bachlitzanaki combines a range of material processes to interrogate the relationship of sculpture to other forms of representation and also the relationship of making works of art to different forms of production, artefacts and commodities. She is the recipient of a NEON Postgraduate Scholarship (2017-2020).

Savvas Christodoulides

Savvas Christodoulides (b. 1961, Pafos, Cyprus) lives and works in Nicosia. By matching objects, he manages to attribute to them a new semantic and morphic dimension. His work lies in the creation of constructions where selected materials' new positions and adaptations guarantee social consensus proposals exhibiting a poetic and mnemonic feature.

Nikos Kessanlis

Nikos Kessanlis (1930, Thessaloniki, Greece - 2004, Athens, Greece) was one of the pioneering post-war artists active in Europe and Greece. During his lifetime he experimented with materials, techniques and media beyond painting, exploring the significance of gesture in space, the structure of images and the possibilities of their mechanical reproduction as well as the activation of the viewer in their interpretation. As a rector of the Athens School of Fine Arts he contributed in a fundamental way to its regeneration.

Akis Kokkinos

Akis Kokkinos (b. 1991, Athens, Greece) lives and works between London and Chios Island. He is an independent curator and founding Director of DEO projects. His practice is focused on ways to disrupt the 'objective' and institutional by introducing or supporting other less appreciated and recognised forms of knowledge. Through

multidisciplinary discourses, eco-feminist, non-western approaches, and other non-rational thoughts and philosophies, his practice focuses on the less spoken, invisible or liminal. He is the recipient of a NEON Postgraduate Scholarship (2018-2019).

Karolina Krasouli

Karolina Krasouli (b. 1984, Athens, Greece) lives and works between Athens and Paris. Whether in painting, photography, or film, her works explore the intersection of abstraction and figuration. Through a process of reading and writing, she extracts a set of operations for 'rewriting' meanings and sensations, seeking to invent a novel language.

Amanda Kyritsopoulou

Amanda Kyritsopoulou (b. 1989, Athens, Greece) lives and works in London. Through a combination of photography, text, sculpture and moving image, Kyritsopoulou borrows from design, sport, and lifestyle expressing an attraction to everyday life for the anxious urban species. She fishes for patterns between objects, bodies and thoughts. She is the recipient of a NEON Postgraduate Scholarship (2019-2020).

Stathis Logothetis

Stathis Logothetis [1925, Pyrgos, Eastern Rumelia (today Burgas, Bulgaria) – 1997, Athens, Greece] studied violin until 1952, when he changed to painting and after several experiments, he started violently damaging the canvas, and repairing it afterwards with needle and string. The essence of damage and repair, of Action and Reaction cannot only be found at the heart of many human activities, but may be found even in the processes of nature. Consequently, Logothetis more and more incorporated processes of decay and dissolution in his last works, giving space to these processes to take place by nature itself.

Maro Michalakakos

Maro Michalakakos (b. 1967, Athens, Greece), lives and works in Athens. Her often large-scale works interweave family memories with references to evoke issues of power, sovereign domination, force and the inextricable notions of life and death. Her artistic universe exists at the very edge of dreams, has an apparent calmness deliberately placed between reality and imagination.

Yorgos Petrou

Yorgos Petrou (b. 1981, Pafos, Cyprus) is a London-based artist whose practice spans from sculpture to perfor-

mance, photography, film and writing to make interventions into sites of geographical, historical, and mythical significance. Their politically subtle and layered approach to art-making aims to transform theory, reading and understanding into materials that travel freely between the pieces.

Erica Scourti

Erica Scourti (b. 1980, Athens, Greece) lives and works in Athens and London. Across a range of media, including performance, video, text and fabric, her works explore self-narration intimately imbricated with collectivity.

Stefania Strouza

Stefania Strouza (b. 1982, Pyrgos, Greece) lives and works in Athens. Her practice examines cultural narratives of different time periods and how these, through their interrelations, produce new hybrid identities. The artist creates sculptural works that draw associations between the symbolic world of objects and notions of temporality, corporeality and geography. She is the recipient of a NEON PhD Scholarship (2020).

Antrea Tzourovits

Antrea Tzourovits (b. 1987, Danilovgrad, Serbia Montenegro) lives and works in London and Athens. He works with sculpture, painting, installation, video and music. He adopts familiar material and popular symbols within the technical handling of the work so that the imagery itself can resonate with the viewer, emphasising the poetic-philosophical content of objects and situations. He is the recipient of a NEON Postgraduate Scholarship (2021).

DOOMED COMPANIONS UNSUBSTANTIAL SHADES

OPENING HOURS

THURSDAY - FRIDAY: 18.00-21.00

SATURDAY 11.00-14.00

THE EXHIBITION CONTINUES ON THE
GROUND FLOOR AND THE FIRST FLOOR

FREE ENTRANCE

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VISITORS MUST SHOW A VALID ID OR OTHER OFFICIAL
PHOTO IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENT
(DRIVER'S LICENSE, PASSPORT) UPON ENTRY.

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