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PRESS RELEASE

CONTEMPLATIONS OF A COLLECTOR

Irini Pari in Conversation with Dimitris Daskalopoulos

Cahiers d'Art Publications

Author: Irini Pari

The book *Contemplations of a Collector: Irini Pari in Conversation with Dimitris Daskalopoulos* is a dialogue about art and life between two partners and art lovers: collector Dimitris Daskalopoulos and Irini Pari.

Concept and author: Irini Pari

Starting from the D.Daskalopoulos Collection – about a hundred works of contemporary art by international artists from the past 40 years – the collector and his partner discuss the freedoms and limitations of collecting art, share the lure of artistic creativity, and take us on a contemplative journey through the existential mystery of life, as it is depicted in the artworks of the collection.

As the author herself says, this book was written “*in the hope that this stroll will be fruitful and entertaining, and that it will be as much a source of reflection and discussion for the readers [...] but also with the secret hope that, even though some may not be moved by contemporary art, this book will entice them to further explore and engage with it.*”

The idea for this book began with a conversation regarding the works of the Collection. Conversations dating back three years, gathered in notes, transcriptions, and recordings, have resulted in a structured text divided into thematic chapters.

The book is prefaced by art historian and curator Sir Nicholas Serota, Director of the Tate (1988–2017) and Chairman of Arts Council England. He writes “*This is an unusual book, about an unusual person and his distinctive approach to making a collection of art. It records with rare honesty a personal quest for enlightenment and his decision, without precedent amongst collectors, to give his collection to four museums in New York, Chicago, London, and Athens, while also founding and endowing a new organisation, NEON.*”

Madeleine Grynsztejn, Pritzker Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, also writes in the preface, saying that “*This book is unusual, and in some ways uncategorizable, in that it is a biography of a sort, surfaced by way of dialogue, as seen through the lens of art and love, yet the text does not come across as narcissistic.*”

BOOK STRUCTURE

The **first part** of the book focuses on the collector and the creation of a collection. The two interlocutors discuss topics such as the definition of art, value and money, the selection of artworks and the trajectory a collection follows, according to the guidance of the collector.

As the author herself states, “*The progress of the collection is as interesting as the journey of the collector, since they are completely intertwined. The collector himself is philosophical and deeply contemplative. The collection is one of reflections and contemplations, ‘peripatetic’ in both the ordinary and philosophical sense. It is a collection that is instinctive and visceral, which embodies the creative output of the last few decades. It expands and deepens, both dropping anchors and flying to pioneering horizons, all the while retaining the fundamental rationale of its founder.*”

With respect to his reasoning the collector himself says “*By putting different works of art in dialogue, I try to create an imagery that expresses this constant tension between life and death, between futility and immortality, an image of the human struggle and its propensity towards optimism and endeavor instead of nihilism and abandon.*”

While he further underlines “*I have a love of art, based on the deeper belief that art is a basic human good, a basic human need. I felt it early on. Art has meaning only when it is a sort of interaction, in communication with the receiver, with the human being. Otherwise, a work of art in itself does not exist, if it is not seen, if it does not interact with a viewer to generate reflection and emotion.*”

With regards to the choice of the artworks that make up the Collection, Dimitris Daskalopoulos relied on his instincts. *“I never chose artists as such—I chose the work first. I know that I always chose the works with my feeling, that is, with the soul and not the mind. What I was consistently looking for was an artwork that is powerful, that evokes emotion. And the powerful work contains within it the artist, its creator. I always chose art that I thought suited what my collection wanted to express.”*

The Collection is an asset, Dimitris Daskalopoulos, however, does not aim at profit, but sees art as a common good. When asked whether a collection ever ends, he notes that *“I fall more into the latter category of collectors—those who believe they have a duty to ensure the future of a collection, with the same level of care and attention that they invested in its creation. Apart from fulfilling a duty of care for the works and the artists, it is also a joy, equal to that of building the collection.”*

As the author notes, *“The relationship of a collector with their collection is deep; this is why its completion and, even more so, the decision about its future, are very personal, subjective, almost existential...”* For Dimitris Daskalopoulos – who has a deeply rooted belief that art should be accessible to everyone – the future of the Collection cannot be but the preservation and exhibition of the artworks for the wider public, through the initiatives undertaken by of large institutions. *“An artwork belongs to the artist, because they conceived and made it; an artwork belongs to the public that has seen or will see it. This is an important foundational value of my thinking.”*

Irini Pari highlights this reasoning, *“This is exactly what moves me about Dimitris Daskalopoulos. He wants to share and transmit what he has experienced through art, so that it can be felt by fellow citizens, by children, the new generation, so that they have the opportunity to reflect on it, thus opening new horizons. This is why he has always had an open-loan policy for the collection; why he donates works to major museums around the world; and why he created the non-profit NEON.”*

The **second part** of the book is a contemplative walk through the Collection. It is structured around the themes of Universe, Man and Society and delves into subjects such as human existence, creativity, trauma and pain, life and death, beauty, great achievements, strength and sensitivity, Greekness, as depicted in the Collection’s artworks.

Regarding the narrative thread of the collection, Dimitris Daskalopoulos says, *“Regarding the works in the collection, the sensitivity and reasoning may stem from me, my own psyche and worldview, and the feeling they create in me, however, the reason I choose them is because they say something much larger than me, that I think concerns human existence in its primordial, generative, and enduring dimension.”*

In this, the author aptly adds that *“Putting the human being and his existential truth at the center of the D. Daskalopoulos Collection renders it profoundly Greek”* and further notes *“How beautiful that a collection of purely contemporary art should be so deeply connected with the Greek roots of its collector, even without a conscious or active intent on his own part. And how moving it is that this book is being published by Cahiers d’Art, whose founder, the Greek Christian Zervos, profoundly believed that ‘contemporariness’ does not exclude the past—on the contrary, it includes both the ancient and the archaic.”*

Further dissemination of Greek artistic creativity abroad is an additional aspect of the D.Daskalopoulos Collection Gift. Dimitris Daskalopoulos notes that *“I want to emphasize that I did not include works by Greek artists in the collection merely for their Greekness but for their content, because they reinforced the messages of the collection. They were selected using the same criteria as all the other works: the meaning of the work itself, the power of the emotions it emits and the degree of thought it can provoke. After all, in the world we now live in, we are all, or should be, citizens of the world and open to global ideas and developments.”*

Dimitris Daskalopoulos chose to use the human body as the core component of his Collection because *“I see the human body not as flesh, but as the vehicle that condenses and expresses the entirety of human existence, the place from which it originates and in which the human entity is completed. I see the human body not as a body, but as the point of reference for existential, ideological, and social reflection.”*

Irini Pari adds that *“Strength and fragility are dominant elements of the universe, nature, and the human being. We often fear fragility and try to hide it. It takes strength to look straight at it and yet within it, it has sensitivity, that tenderness, which is a source of love and beauty. It is a source of fear and sadness, and yet it contains the driving force for life, dreams, evolution... If we accept it, we can feel light, ready to overcome so many obstacles. If we try to embrace it, it can help bring balance and harmony within us. It is a concept that could not but sensitize artists, a subject that could not but move the collector.”*

The book refers to about 100 artworks of the D.Daskalopoulos Collection by artists such as Marina Abramović, Terry Adkins, Kutluğ Ataman, Phyllida Barlow, Matthew Barney, Hans Bellmer, Lynda Benglis, Joseph Beuys, John Bock, Mark Bradford, Louise Bourgeois, Christophe Buchel, Vlassis Caniaris, Paul Chan, Marcel Duchamp, Fischli & Weiss, Tom Friedman, Kendell Geers, Gilbert & George, Robert Gober, Antony Gormley, David Hammons, Mona Hatoum, Thomas Hirschhorn, Damien Hirst, Jim Hodges, Jenny Holzer, Mike Kelley, Martin Kippenberger, Barbara Kruger, Jannis Kounellis, Nikos Kessanlis, Stathis Logothetis, Sarah Lucas, Paul McCarthy, Cildo Meireles, Annette Messager, Robert Morris, Wangechi Mutu, Bruce Nauman, Cornelia Parker, Paul Pfeiffer, Dieter Roth, Doris Salcedo, Kiki Smith, Paul Thek, Keith Tyson, Adrián Villar Rojas, and Bill Viola, among others are featured in the book.

The publication is available at the National Museum of Contemporary art Athens (EMST), the Benaki Museum, the Museum of Cycladic Art and Amazon.

NOTE TO EDITORS

Irini Yvonne Pari has dedicated her professional life to promoting the ideal of the European Union, advocating for entrepreneurship, and building consensus.

She was a member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) from 1998 to 2020. She was vice-president of the EESC (2008–10), vice-president of its Employers' Group (2006–08), vice-president of its social section (2004–08), and president of its Immigration and Integration working group (2013–15), as well as president of the European Citizens' Initiative sub-committee and member of the Bureau of the European Migration Forum.

From 1995 to 2017 she has been the permanent delegate of SEV-Hellenic Federation of Enterprises in Brussels, a member of the Committee of Permanent Delegates of Business Europe–Confederation of European Business, and a member of the European Social Dialogue Committee.

She has worked as an advisor to the Secretariat-General of the European Commission and the Directorate-General for Competition on State Aid (1988–94). She has also been a member of the Board of S&B Mining (2014–15).

Irini Pari holds a Bachelors degree in Political Science and International Relations (summa cum laude) from the University of Panteion in Athens and a Master's degree in European Studies (magna cum laude) from the Institut d'Etudes Européennes at ULB in Brussels. She speaks six languages. She loves art, reading, and travelling to encounter different people and their cultures. Born in 1963 in Kinshasa, she is married to Dimitris Daskalopoulos and has two children, Elodie and Iason Kabarakis.

Dimitris Daskalopoulos is the chairman of the financial services and investment company DAMMA Holdings SA and a founding partner of the Diorama private equity fund.

As the principal owner, chairman, and chief executive officer, Dimitris oversaw, from 1983, the transformation of a family dairy business into Vivartia SA, Greece's largest food company, with leading brands in dairy, bakery, frozen foods, and restaurants and 13,000 employees in twenty-nine countries. He sold the business in 2007.

In 2013, he founded NEON, a cultural non-profit organization working to bring contemporary art and culture closer to the Greek public through exhibitions, commissions, grants and scholarships, and educational programs. He is the founder and chairman of diaNEOsis (2015), a research think tank, which commissions studies and makes policy proposals on the major social and economic issues in Greece.

He served as president of the Greek Federation of Food Industries (1999–2006) and as chairman of the SEV-Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (2006–14), Greece's most important entrepreneurial association. He was named honorary president of SEV in 2014. He was a member of the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) from 1998 to 2008 and the vice-president of BusinessEurope, the European Union's top business federation, from 2012 to 2014.

Dimitris Daskalopoulos is a collector of contemporary art. The D.Daskalopoulos Collection is an extensive yet focused collection of contemporary art, comprised of works by leading international and Greek artists, tracing the key aesthetic developments of the last forty years. The collection gives particular prominence to large-scale installations and sculptures, as well as drawing, collage, film, and video.

Dimitris Daskalopoulos is a member of the board of trustees and vice-president of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and a member of the board of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. He is active in the Tate International Council, the Leadership Council of the New Museum, and a founding partner of Whitechapel Gallery's Future Fund.

Thematic exhibitions of his collection have been presented at the Whitechapel Gallery, London (2010–11), the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (2011), and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (2012–13).

In 2022 a major body of 350 important contemporary artworks were donated by the D. Daskalopoulos Collection to four museums (EMST / National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens, Tate, and jointly to the Guggenheim and MCA Chicago).

His contribution to the arts has been recognized on numerous occasions: he is the recipient of the 2014 Leo Award by Independent Curators International; the D. Daskalopoulos Gallery of Whitechapel Gallery was inaugurated in 2022; and he was made an honorary fellow of Goldsmiths University of London in 2023. That year, he was appointed an honorary officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) in recognition of his services to the arts and philanthropy.

Dimitris Daskalopoulos was born in 1957 in Athens, Greece. He holds a B.A. in management studies from the Athens University of Economics and an MBA from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management, Northwestern University. He is fluent in Greek, English, and French. He is married to Irini Pari. He has three daughters (and four grandchildren) from a previous marriage.

Cahiers d'Art is one of the world's most distinguished publishers of the visual arts. Founded in 1926 by Christian Zervos at 14, rue du Dragon in the heart of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Cahiers d'Art encompasses a publishing house, a gallery, and a revue. The Cahiers d'Art Revue was entirely unique when it was introduced, and it still is: a revue of contemporary art defined by its combination of striking typography and layout, abundant photography, and juxtaposition of ancient and modern art.

Between the 1920s and the mid-1970s, Cahiers d'Art published ninety-seven issues of the Revue and more than fifty books on fine art and architecture, as well as the thirty-three volume catalogue raisonné of Pablo Picasso. After its acquisition and relaunch in 2012 by Staffan Ahrenberg, an editorial board comprised of Sam Keller, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Isabela Mora, and Staffan Ahrenberg was created. Cahiers d'Art has since published several new Revues and art books devoted to Ellsworth Kelly, Rosemarie Trockel, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Alexander Calder, Pablo Picasso, Thomas Schütte, Gabriel Orozco, Joan Miró, Lucas Arruda, Ai Weiwei, Arthur Jafa, Frank Gehry, Christo, and others. From the 1920s till today, Cahiers d'Art has maintained a gallery, exhibiting the artists it publishes.

Cahiers d'Art continues to fulfill its mission to be the cultural bridge between the avant-garde of Picasso, Duchamp, and Le Corbusier, and the leading artists and architects of our time.

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