

IRIS TOULIATOU

OVERNIGHT

June 14-July 14, 2019

"In the dead of night here, to whom can one write?"

Transcript from *Destroy, She Said* by Marguerite Duras.

The works in this exhibition needed to be made overnight, for luminosity to be measured, for grief to be observed, for electricity to be needed, for news to be printed, for fruits to ripen, for a thought to soften, for the tide to reach its lowest point, for the sea to be unable to be seen, for silence to be sculpture, for a flower to give its scent, for a decision to change, for a prediction to be made, for discovering oneself alive the next day.

—Iris Touliatou, May 2019

Midnight is not at everyone's reach

A conversation between Iris Touliatou and Helena Papadopoulos

Helena Papadopoulos: In a note you sent me the other day from Singapore you wrote "...very inspiring experience and a time travel to the future. Like 10-20 years ahead. In ecological terms also—closer to the end of the world, etc."

Iris Touliatou: It is already several hours ahead, it is already Monday and that's maybe enough to condition my thoughts. Things seem to age faster here, from being exposed to tropical atmospheres and the lack of seasons.

Flowers bloom throughout the year, sea walls and amphibious architectures are protecting Singapore's coastline from the rising sea. A kind of experience where ordinary things take on an edge, but the strangeness of a place drives one into life.

HP: In your work you seem to be interested in what evaporates, what intoxicates—scents, vapours, alcohol—in temperatures and climates. A

materialist approach that takes into account the environment, the body, affects, the plasticity of nature.

IT: I think of energies and of rhythms, of tempos and durations which flow through bodies, landscapes, and materials in a temporal topography. Much of this temporality that I'm drawn to, is in scales and forms we cannot sense or predict. The short-lived, occasional, unconstrained, unrepeatable overlaps with the planetary, the ceaseless, the cyclical—like the turning seasons, day and night, the tides.

These energies, intensities and magnitudes are bodies in fragile counter movements. Their fleeting substances and otherness, do not only materialize in a place, a landscape, but also in time or occasion, and it is always a matter of a shift ; to a less dominant position, to a less obvious point of view and the abolition of control and authorship.

HP: And yet you also introduce ideas such as seriality, modularity and repetition in your fluorescent light sculptural installations. At first glance these evoke minimalist and post-minimalist strategies however, where Dan Flavin for example extracts the aesthetic potential of ordinary hardware by inserting light tubes in the rarified context of fine art creating environments of everlasting luminosity, the lights you use are cast-offs. Slowly dying, — are they mostly from the 1970s found in disused office buildings?— their syncopated effervescence is a sign of time running out. Also, the objects you select are repeatable *and* manifold, serial *and* sundry.

IT: I find the fluorescents, highly resistant, thriving in neglect in their original habitats. I take them apart and reassemble them without any further modifications. I like the banality of their shapes, how they carry this habitual worn-out-feeling of something near to the heart, and how they gradually turn into this natural phenomenon or crackling wildlife sound.

I always remind myself that Dan Flavin was a trained meteorologist- when I am trading minimalism for a sentimentalist romantic genre and its recurring themes of love, loss, existence, death. Post a sudden shock, I find that these themes continue to grow within a certain familiarity or with the need for a pattern embedded in them.

Repetitions invite you to think of the repetitions to come in the future. The lights are default choices, their availability, their modularity, their standard, manufactured size; appearing in various iterations, they are both consistent and elusive. Accumulation becomes an affective process along with an

underlying obsession, that keeps coming in high bursts like their voltage before expiration. Our relationship keeps changing, until it's time to let go.

HP: To quote French poet René Char: “Eternity is not much longer than life”.

IT: The absolute could be enclosed within the last moments, the least amounts, the minimum values, short-lived affairs, between night and day, between public and private, between personal and social, between the fear of loss and the gift of loving, between reasonable thinking and passionate action.

HP: When I visited your studio last fall I noticed this alluring portrait of Charlotte Posenenske from 1967 — she is standing coat in hand, wearing slacks that get slimmer at the bottom, a dark coloured turtleneck and she sports a pixie cut. I curated an exhibition in 2012 pairing her work with that of contemporary artist Liz Deschenes and I can see the elective affinities in your attitudes towards objects. How do you connect to figures like Posenenske, also Ana Mendieta; there is a series of drawings in which you replicate her signature that becomes almost a motif on the surface of the paper.

IT: I love this photograph. Posenenske is half smiling, I imagine that she's just arrived there or that she is about to leave. In the first case, she is not intending to stay long, she is in fact already somewhere else, her steel ducts changed to a blurry shape in the background. I feel close with this idea she had of her objects, more than objects, witnesses of relationships. “What else they are or can mean (art and stuff like that), will not be discussed here,” she wrote. “The main thing is that you can change things.” At the end, she added: “Have fun!”

HP: There is a long tradition of self-portraiture, particularly in painting and photography. What drives your current series of self-portraits in commercial photography studios that you walk-in on any given day, an act which is deliberate but also a little unplanned, depending on where your everyday tasks take you. Is the ‘I’ which is portrayed provisional? Fictive? Is it a way to unthread subjectivity, is it a mask?

IT: The photographs stand somewhere between self and commissioned portraiture, both anticipated and unprepared, as I stand between first and third person, monologue and dialogue, fiction and autobiography. They started as confrontations with slippery entities—myself, time, the medium of photography itself, a certain history of female portraiture. The way these

portraits are conducted, their pattern semi thought over, becomes very soothing like stepping on the fresh sand of a shore in the morning.

They are maybe attempting to solve riddles through this unexplained presence within spaces and buildings and explorations of the notion of the 'wild' or 'wilderness' again, composed by the borrowed landscapes. I'm intrigued by what makes her ephemeral background... lights, heat, downtown, bags, frames, whites, blues, mirrors, clocks, screens. The content of this background, like weather, suspended and welded into me.

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Iris Touliatou (b. 1981, Greece) is currently artist-in-residence at the NTU CCA Singapore. Recent solo exhibitions include *Woman Spinning* at Palermo, Stuttgart, Germany (2019) and *Some Seine*, HYLE, Athens, Greece (2017). Selected group exhibitions include *The Same River Twice: Contemporary Art in Athens*, curated by Margot Norton and Natalie Bell, Deste Foundation at the Benaki Museum, Athens, Greece (upcoming); *Bright File (June)*, curated by Maya Tounta, Haus N Athen, Athens, Greece (2018); *May the bridges I burn light the way*, 5x5x5: Selected Projects, Manifesta 12, Palermo, Italy (2018); and *Expanded Ecologies*, curated by Daphne Vitali, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, Greece (2009).

Opening hours are Wednesday 4-8pm, Saturday 1-5pm and by appointment.

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