

Curated by Matthew Higgs, Lucas Samaras will present the multi-installation "PARAXENA" in the Greek Pavilion in the Giardini della Biennale at the 53rd International Art Exhibition in Venice.

Venice Biennale Vernissage: 4th, 5th, 6th June Inauguration of the Greek Pavilion: 4th June, 14.00

Matthew Higgs explains:

"PARAXENA" brings together three recent series of photographic and video works produced between 2005 and 2009, juxtaposed with a discrete group of sculptural works from the mid 1960s. 'PARAXENA' sets up a conversation across four decades of Lucas Samaras' practice, establishing a historical context for the recent departures in his work.

Upon entering the pavilion the viewer will be confronted by an image of themselves, reflected in the mirrored sculpture 'Doorway' (1966-2007): a scenario that initiates a narrative that runs throughout 'PARAXENA', where the act of being observed and the activity of observing are central concerns. Samaras will debut new photographic works from the 'Nexus' series alongside images from the recent 'Chairs' series (2008) and the 'iMovie' video works (2005.) The 'Chairs' and 'Nexus' series originate in digital images taken during the artist's walks through New York City. Seen together the images suggest a kind-of hallucinatory urbanism. The 'iMovie' films take this sense of 'strangeness' into the artist's domestic space, recording Samaras' everyday habits and routines. These recent works will be shown alongside the video installation 'Ecdysiast and Viewers' (2006), in which Samaras filmed the reactions of twenty four friends and colleagues (including artists Chuck Close and Jasper Johns) whilst they watched a video self-portrait in which Samaras lays himself bare for the camera. The frank self-portrayal in 'Ecdysiast' is echoed in a group of sculptures from the 'Jewels' series of the mid 1960s: fragile jewel-encrusted aluminum foil sculptures which represent three extremities of the artist's body: the head, the groin, and the feet, creating a form of 'incomplete' self-portraiture".

About Lucas Samaras

Lucas Samaras (b. 1936, Kastoria, Macedonia, Greece) is widely known for creating a diverse body of work including sculpture, drawings, paintings, film and environments, many of which explore his own image as subject matter. He has innovatively combined materials such as beads, chicken wire, clay, Cor-ten steel, fabric, pastel, pencil, pins, plaster, and oil, and developed and/or experimented with new techniques and mediums, such as the Polaroid, which have had profound impact on younger artists.

In the late 1950s, early 1960s Samaras participated in a series of Happenings, working with Allan Kaprow, Robert Whitman, Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg, among others. During this time, he created his first numbered box sculpture, combining elements of sculpture, architecture and painting. By 1989, he had produced 135 boxes in this series.

Lucas Samaras is also widely acclaimed for his pioneering work in photography-the series of images referred to as "AutoPolaroids" and "Photo-Transformations" in which his kitchen chair was used as a prop. Samaras began shooting with the Polaroid 360 in the early '70s. Alone in his studio, using a medium removed from formal tradition and technical skill, the Polaroid allowed the artist unlimited creative freedom. Samaras has manipulated and transformed his photographs using many different techniques, including hand-applied ink, and altering the picture surface with his hand or a stylus to move the dye emulsions under the top, clear layer of Mylar.

Between 1978 and 1981 Samaras conducted the Sittings, his project which focused on subjects invited into his studio. Samaras, a veteran of the Happenings, created a performance-like atmosphere by warning the participants that they would be required to undress in his West 71st Street studio and pose nude for 8 x 10 as well as large-format Polaroids while he sat to their right.

Twenty-five years after completing the Sittings, Samaras turned the camera on himself once again. At the age of 65, Samaras began experimenting with computer manipulated photography and short films, blurring the boundaries between art and life, and creating altered realities in the process.

Lucas Samaras' 2006 work *Ecdysiast and Viewers* is a two-part installation consisting of a 5-1/2 minute iMovie shown synchronically with 24 films of individuals recorded as they watched and responded to the artist undressing in his West 56th Street studio. With the help of new technology, called an iMovie Bump Distortion filter, Samaras is able to achieve a number of poses that would not be humanly possible otherwise. The 24 subjects are equal amounts viewer and participant, and their reactions range from intense concentration to hearty laughter. A list of art world participants included Douglas Baxter, Peter Boris, Chuck Close, Susan Dunne, Ken Fernandez, Arne Glimcher, Marc Glimcher, Tim Griffin, Jasper Johns, Katerina Koskina, Daniel Kunitz, Peter MacGill, Elizabeth Murray, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Pincus-Witten, Marla Prather, Andre Ribuoli, Bernice Rose, Ingrid Sischy, Philip Tsiras, Coosje van Bruggen, Diane Vanderlip, Robert Whitman, and David Wildenstein. *Ecdysiast and Viewers* is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Lucas Samaras' previous foray into film included *Self*, a 16mm color film in which he acts and directs done in collaboration with the writer Kim Levin. *Self* premiered at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1969 and was recently on view in the Whitney Museum of American Art's survey exhibition *Unrepentant Ego: The Self-Portraits of Lucas Samaras* (2003-2004).

In addition to *Unrepentant Ego*, Samaras has been the subject of seven retrospectives. These include *Lucas Samaras: A Retrospective*, National Gallery of Greece, Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens (2005); *Lucas Samaras-Self: 1961-1991*, organized by the Yokohama Museum of Art, Japan (1991-92); *Lucas Samaras: Objects and Subjects 1969-1986*, organized by the Denver Art Museum, which later traveled to five museums including the High Museum, Atlanta and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1988-89); a retrospective of his Polaroid photographs from 1969-1983 that traveled to museum venues in twelve European and American cities (1983-84); *Samaras Pastels*, a drawing survey organized by the Denver Art Museum that traveled to six additional venues (1981-83); his first Whitney retrospective (1972-73); and *Lucas Samaras: Boxes*, an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1971).

Other important group shows include *Documenta 4* (1968), *Documenta 5* (1972) and *Documenta 6* (1977), Kassel, West Germany and the 28th Biennial Exhibition at The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (1963).

Lucas Samaras joined PaceWildenstein in 1965 and has been the subject of 32 solo exhibitions at the gallery. His work can be found in over 40 public institutions worldwide.

About Matthew Higgs

Matthew Higgs (b.1964. Wakefield, England) is a curator, writer and artist currently living and working in New York. Since the early 1990s he has sought to develop a practice that considers the intersections and overlaps between these disciplines. Over the past fifteen years he has organized more than two hundred exhibitions and projects in Europe and North America. A former Director of Exhibitions at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, and Curator at San Francisco's CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, Higgs is currently the Director and Chief Curator of White Columns, New York's oldest alternative space. Higgs' writings have appeared in more than fifty books, catalogs and periodicals, including *Artforum*, *Frieze*, and *Interview*. Recent publications include catalogues and books for artists including Elizabeth Peyton, John Baldessari, John McCracken, Christian Marclay, Oliver Payne & Nick Relph, Ken Price, Marilyn Minter, and Kay Rosen, amongst others. Since his arrival at White Columns in the fall of 2004 he has organized more

than one hundred and fifty individual exhibitions and projects there, showing the work of more than 500 international artists of all generations. Higgs has taught extensively over the past ten years and was previously a lecturer at Goldsmiths' College, London and the Royal College of Art, London.

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