

INTERVIEW: Despina Zefkili in conversation with Katerina Komianou, published in Athinorama, 5/4/2024.

Despina Zevkili: How did your interest in the "old" aesthetics that some of your photos and films exude begin? How have 80s and 90s photos and videos from concerts influenced you?

Katerina Komianou: Music has always guided my thinking. The club *Rebound*, *The Rock Diaries* of Giorgos Turkovasilis, *The Generation of Chaos*. This idea of emerging from pitch black darkness into bright light is incredibly fascinating to me.

I imagine my reaction is somewhat like H el ene Cixous' when confronted with the effects of the past, she is not denying that they are still with us, but refuses to reinforce them by repeating them, to betray the irrevocable, the equivalent of fate, to confuse the biological with the cultural, because it is no longer possible for the future to be determined by the past.

Why do you insist on analog?

The texture of film lends a sculptural quality and a poetic narrative to the time when what we watch was filmed. I have no access to the image for a long time, this anticipation brings changes both in the subject matter itself, which is usually in public space, and in my thinking.

The aesthetic problem of form is essentially also a moral problem. Nothing can explain the devotion of the giants of human history to art, as Maya Deren states, except the understanding that the form of a work of art is the physical manifestation of its moral and political structure.

It's like I know exactly what to shoot when and how, and once it's shot, the material is somehow final. Even the editing is done in real time, the film remains uncut and organically becomes part of this narrative.

Nothing is first or last, nothing looks like the past and nothing looks like the future.

How has Hito Stegerl's thinking on the destruction of the image and the digital influenced you?

Obviously, a high-resolution image looks more shiny and impressive, but I wouldn't say it's more real and magical, more frightening or seductive than a poor quality one.

In *Defense of the Poor Image*, Stegerl quotes the lyrics of the Stranglers and tells us "no more heroes anymore."

The poor image approaches abstract structures and is used as a symbol against the impositions of the modern capitalist condition.

Documenting the city that is changing, from the statue with the cupids at Exarchia square, to the Archaeological Museum and the Polytechnic, do you feel you are practicing a form of resistance? Tell us about it.

Recording is always a deliberate act that includes and excludes, focuses and blurs, selects and cuts. The intersection of amateur film culture, political resistance, feminism, and the body in public space presents a rich ground for research.

With the feminist theories of Judith Butler and Henri Lefebvre, we can understand the act of filming as a form of resistance, deeply entangled with issues of bodily presence and visibility in public space.

Recording the imprint in the space and on the objects of these moments of protest—results of performances and acts of transformation and mutation of memory—the amateur black and white shots, as in Gogou's poem 'The film in the movies is colored. In life black and white', in turn challenge dominant narratives and disrupt normative understandings of gender, power and space.

With this practice, of using a cheap amateur super 8 camera, documenting these historically charged spaces, I look for new forms to emerge against the prevailing structures.

What did you choose to show in your first solo show on Radio Athènes and why?

In my first solo show at Radio Athènes curated by Helena Papadopoulos I show a new body of work that consists exclusively of super 8 film. My research started photographically and evolved into moving images, entitled *Heirlooms*.

Specifically in relation to the cupids at Exarchia which you obsessively recorded for years, why did you focus on them and what works came out of this process?

The project includes more than 500 analogue photographs of the sculpture with the three little Cupids standing next to each other. Photos of the square, close-ups of their bodies. Passing by the square every day, I began to notice how the sculpture functioned as an active work of art in public space. I tried to record it. To record this continuous change. With an eye on the collective memory that is captured in public sculptures and public spaces. Places which have been for years battlefields for the politics of memory.

The sculpture was removed from Exarchia Square for the metro station works.

How and what do you read?

I usually read many things at once. I like to open different books in front of me and make imaginary connections between them.

From Vakalopoulos and Gogou to Delacroix and Maya Deren, what are your references?

When I photograph or shoot with film, there is no going back, cutting, or editing. Everything happens for that moment and in that moment. Sometimes I catch myself walking down these same streets and telling stories on my mini tape recorder; and between the recordings, daily life

around me is documented like an audio diary, because the films have their own sound. I adore Vakalopoulos' love of the rooftops of the Athenian apartment buildings, especially when he compares them to the ruins and provincial towns in Angelopoulos' films. He is looking for some kind of truth there. In the streets, in the places and people he describes and films.

Gogou writes: "I receive underground phone calls in the booths of Omonoia...Patision Street." It's like I'm looking for their tracks. The slogans on the walls. That's where my need to record begins.

Maya Deren had her body pounded by the waves, and this image haunts the moments I've filmed broken Venuses and Amazons in the archaeological museum. Everything aims at an identification. Like Delacroix who identified with his tigers.

In what way have your studies at ASKT (Athens School of Fine Art) or the master's degree you are now pursuing influenced you?

I was a student of Giorgos Lappas and Nikos Navridis.

At ASKT I used the darkroom for the first time to develop film and spent countless hours in the library. I continued my studies in Design - Culture because I felt I needed to live within the Polytechnic.

How does sculpture enter your work? How are you interested in materials?

Sculpture enters in the way I perceive my works. Even films or photographs often make part of sculptural installations. Materials go through a series of transformations. From something culled from nature, such as a leaf, to wax, fire and metal. Indestructible.

Materials matter more as ideas for me. I borrowed the bronze from the cupids at Exarcheia square when I wanted to transform leaves I collected from all over Athens into bronze wings.

In the exhibition *Plasmata* you started from Kyra Frosini to make a Medusa that created her own ecosystem in the lake. How does feminism concern you in your work?

The work in *Plasmata* was about the femicide of Kyra Frosini, its normalization and how such an event passes down in history as a myth. A jellyfish washed up by the waves on the shores of the lake was organically transformed when its tentacles became a shelter for aquatic organisms, thus constructing a symbiotic relationship with the lake. This twisting of our imaginations so that matter can have different meanings is what I hope this aquatic body can perform, as an idea. Feminism is part of my thinking and is always present in my narratives as an irrevocable part of me.

At the *Exo Frenon Apo Efharistisi* exhibition we saw two different videos of yours with ready-made material. How did they come about?

I was thinking about something I had read by Jacques Derrida: "Does the animal I am speak? What is this animal, what would it be, what would it like or could it be, is it perhaps what I am? "

When I saw these videos of the leopards I asked myself: Can it smell my fear?

The poor image - such as it was - is the result of recording videos found on the internet, through the use of several different cameras, which I recorded from the screen.

The leopard became a subject I could personally identify with, a visible transformation of the virtual, a renewal of a myth.

The romantic imagination seeks beauty in the form of an animal.

What film do you use in your wanderings around town and how do you come to terms with the fact that you often don't control your material and the end result has an element of randomness?

The idea that you defy all commercial production conventions and start making films, filming with only ordinary amateur equipment.

The poetics of the medium, is not an element of randomness, it is a process of systematic research and persistence before I find myself at the moment of shooting, when all systematic obsession moves into poetic abstraction.

Is wandering itself part of your work?

The idea of wandering does not exist in my work. The places I choose to film are always specific.

What do you film at the Polytechnic and the Museum?

Sculptures, especially those spread in the center—the archaeological museum and the central squares of Athens—are my main subjects. These material representations of collective memory and social identity become symbols of conflict and change in our society. The national archaeological museum, the Polytechnic, just before they will change.