

Hommage to NIKOS ALEXIOU

group exhibition

Participating Artists:

Nikos Alexiou, Lefteris Alexiou, Maria Ikonomopoulou,
Lefteris Tapas, Dimitris Tataris, Stratis Tavlaridis

Show Duration: 16.09.16 - 15.10.16

Nikos Alexiou was born in Rethymnon in 1960. He died in 2011 at the early age of 51 leaving behind an important body of work. After some brief studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in 1984 he returned to Greece where he enrolled at the Athens School of Fine Arts. A year later he held his first solo show in the historic art gallery DESMOS. Already from that early period he focused working with humble materials such as stone, wood, mud, reeds and water. A pioneer in Greece, in 1987 he became the first artist to create "Prisms", a series of immaterial works-installations that analyze the spectrum of white light in space, on rain, water etc. That was followed by "Solar Houses", a series of simple architectural constructions made of reeds that resembled immaterial structures of buildings. Most of all, however, he became known with his characteristic lace-like cut out patterned paper works, his paper "curtains", his "skeleton" plexuses made of reed and with his obsession with handicraft, never wasting anything, always transforming every little piece of material left out into something new. In 1995 he found himself for the first time on Mount Athos and since then he began to visit regularly at various different moments throughout his life. In Athos he discovered spirituality, ecstasy and mystery, asceticism and the notion of metaphysics that would profoundly affect his work from that point onwards. In 2003 he was nominated for the Deste Prize, in 2005 he represented Greece along Lizzie Calligas at the Alexandria Biennial and in 2007 he represented Greece in the largest and most important contemporary art event in the world, the Venice Biennale with a monumental work-installation entitled "The End" modeled around the floor mosaic of the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos.

The large installation of Nikos Alexiou in the centre of CAN gallery aims to convey everything that the artist worked at

throughout his career, from the early 80s till the end, presenting a "re-staging" of his work as he envisioned and presented it at various major exhibitions and events such as the Venice Biennale, the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki, the Alexandria Biennale, the Benaki Museum etc. At the same time, the exhibition aims to present a panorama of his oeuvre and his studio practice as a whole by exposing some of his signature works, such as the reed structures, his table installations, the "thorax" pieces, the nets, the paper curtains, etc. All the major references and turning points in his work, along with the dominant characteristics of his practice such as order, repetition, handicraft, the obsessive process of saving and re-using everything, along with the feeling of self-reflection and psychedelia are presented here in order to form a symbolic and carefully structured system of works and memory traces that perfectly convey the sensory materiality and multiplicity of his artistic practice. This tribute exhibition could not of course be realized without Lefteris Alexiou, Nikos' father, a self-taught amateur artist who was profoundly influenced by his son's work and who was the first to pay him a tribute by mimicking his DIY "thorax" structures made of wood, yarn and reed.

Maria Ikonomopoulou was born in 1961 in Kalamata. She studied at the Free Academy of Fine Arts in The Hague and in the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. Since 1985 she lives and works permanently in the Netherlands. Her work blends photography and handwritten text with a range of techniques related to Folk Art, like embroidery and paper cut outs. In the current show-hommage to Alexiou Maria Ikonomopoulou presents *Black Plegma* (= *Black Net*) which is a hand cut text that creates the impression of a paper lace. The text consists of various associations of the words *You and Me* combined with different adverbs. *You in front of Me You round Me You with Me You on Me You all over Me you close to Me You after me You in place of Me*, etc. The phrases have been written without any gaps between them and the words have been joined vertically with lines. Then the text has been printed on paper and the artist has manually removed the spaces between the letters with a surgical blade. The process of repetition with the exclusive use of words without any linguistic pause creates a kind of looping self-reference that gives the impression of a rhythm. While words are selected carefully and with a sense of economy, they later form an archipelago of associations and thoughts that cast a poetic-philosophical glance at our daily life. The gaps between the letters create the impression of an organic geometry, while the text is at times visible and at other times completely concealed balancing speech with the sense of a visual motif. Ikonomopoulou is interested in investigating here the complexity

of human relationships. [Com-plex-ity / plex -plegma (=net)] Friction between people may be natural and inevitable, it can however also be a difficult balancing act, often complicated and painful. The lace reference -an allusion to something beautiful and decorative- is completely conscious and beauty is here purposely projected to compensate us, as a much needed solace against the difficulties of human relationships.

Lefteris Tapas was born in 1974 in Famagusta (Cyprus). He studied Fine Arts in the University of Kent (UK), he currently lives and works in Limassol (Cyprus) and in 2017 he is expected to have his second solo show in CAN gallery. Over the last 15 years Tapas' work often intersects with that of Alexiou, as they both shared a common ground technically, aesthetically and conceptually. The love of patterns that causes vertigo, the intoxicating feeling of repetition, the importance of human touch in the creative process, a technique that exercises patience, discipline and meditation, are all central elements to both. *Angels* is a work that looks like a suspended pencil drawing in space. It is however a pattern made of joined angel (cherubs) wings drawn on paper, cut by hand and painted with graphite that form a transparent net-like curtain. This paper mesh hangs delicately eliminating weight, teasing light and the viewer's gaze like a gate between inner and outer space. The repetition of a pattern that was criticised by some as decoration and was worshiped by others (like the POP artists) is used here to an almost psychedelic extent. The title of the 52nd Venice Biennale "Think with the senses, feel with the mind" curated by Robert Storr, fits Tapas perfectly. Even in the history of philosophy, where repetition has always been regarded as something negative and its derivative qualities only exist in relation to some unique entity, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze is probably among the first that tried to understand and formulate a theory of repetition not as something finite but as a reinvention, an "active force producing difference." Tapas' suspended lace thus defines a new aesthetic sphere open to fantasy that dares to question issues of materiality and space. The power of language, the artist's compliance with a ritual-like process but above all the false pretence of materiality repeatedly returns as a concept to both Tapas' and Alexiou's oeuvre, presenting us with "the perfect excuse to study our inner world and the way this is of course reflected on the outside."

Dimitris Tataris was born in 1975 in Heraklion. He studied painting at the Athens School of Fine Arts and then he continued his studies in London's Middlesex University with a scholarship from the State Scholarship Foundation (IKY). Largely known for his

complex and technically flawless drawings, Tataris presents for the first time and especially for this show a work which can be read on two levels and combines drawing with paper cut -inspired by and dedicated to the work of Nikos Alexiou. In his work Tataris regularly envisions himself captive or confined. Such scenes are usually framed with repetitive motifs or with the use of mirroring (doubling of an image) through which he best reflects the notion of the passing time. In this work, the artist combines images and narratives inspired by Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. On the first level a cut out pattern inspired by Alexiou's grids transforms to a *Mashrabiya* -a functional wooden panel with Islamic motifs which is widely used in the Arab world to cover the windows for privacy as it protects the residents from the prying eyes of the passersby without depriving them from the view outside- and then transforms into a wire mesh -a characteristic motif in Tataris' work and a recurrent symbol of detention and oppression-. On the background and through the openings of this extraordinary *Mashrabiya* one can see the self-portrait of the artist like Kafka's hero -alienated, mentally and physically weak, trapped by his family and work-transforming into a mosquito. This work functions like an open gate to Tataris' surrealist universe, revealing the multifaceted nature of his artistic genre and the ease with which he assimilates and utilizes a variety of techniques, media and sources. The result is a work with a variety of narratives and literary references that captivates the viewer through an encrypted allegory of human existence in the present-day.

Stratis Tavlaridis was born in 1990 in Nea Malgara (Thessaloniki) and is the youngest artist participating in the show. He first studied graphic design and then Fine Arts in the department of Fine and Applied Arts of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. His work draws direct inspiration from Nikos Alexiou's work which he considers a milestone in his interest and development of the paper cut technique. His work directs our attention onto images from everyday life, urging us to essentially re-discover beauty through familiar forms. His long and obsessive process of hand cutting the paper evokes traditional embroidery techniques and betrays the roots and beginnings of his practice in his childhood when he patiently watched his grandmother (who migrated from Eastern Thrace) embroider. Her embroidery was her way to carry with her the customs and traditions of her birthplace. Tavlaridis' works on the other hand bear signs of his own personal narratives and a collective history which has passed from one generation to the other. Last but not least, his paper works can be seen as symbols, both of his memory and of the effort of the people in general to weave their lives back again while looking towards the future ...