



EX_POSURE

By Eleni Zymaraki Tzortzi



Interviews

FOTINI GOUSETI, INTERVIEW

Fotini Gouseti, *Kalavryta 2012* in *From Generation to Generation : Inherited Memory and Contemporary Art* at Contemporary Jewish Museum.

There are many forms of memory: memories of events we have experienced, memories we have heard as family stories and from popular culture, even memories of an imagined future. The twenty-four artists in *From Generation to Generation: Inherited Memory and Contemporary Art*, currently running at **CJM**, work with memories that are not their own. They remember and recall stories that were never theirs and assemble them in a variety of media to be seen, heard, and experienced by others.

Eventually, through their work, the artists in this exhibition search, question, and reflect on the representation of truths related to ancestral and collective memory—ultimately attempting to deal with their own past.

The main key of the exhibition is the concept of *postmemory*, as coined by **Dr. Marianne Hirsch**; As **Pierre-François Galpin**, one of the two curators of the exhibition, mentioned to **Ex_posure** (read his full interview [here](#)) the exhibition researches the role of *postmemory* in terms of dealing with the past individually and collectively and especially with the traumatic events of the past.

Fotini Gouseti, the Athens born artist who now lives and works in Rotterdam, participates in the exhibition with the work *Kalavryta 2012*, a work that embodies traumatic memories from that region short after the World War II. On 10 December 1943 the German occupying forces ordered the extermination of the male population and the total destruction of the town of Kalavryta... Gouseti collects a postmemory related to this atrocity and brilliantly interweaves it in her work.

Fotini Gouseti talked to Eleni Zymaraki Tzortzi.

E.Z. Your work *Kalavryta 2012* is currently exhibited at CJM's exhibition *From Generation to Generation: Inherited memory and Contemporary Art*. Could you talk to us about this work?

This work is one of the artistic outcomes deriving from an anthropological research on Kalavryta, Greece, which I have been conducting the latest years. Kalavryta is a village of unique charge within Modern Greek history. On December 13, 1943 the Wehrmacht burned down the village, destroyed the food reserves and executed all male inhabitants over the age of 14. After the war the village received supplies from the Red Cross and UNNRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration).

Kalavryta 2012 embodies the memory of a 12-year-old boy living in Kalavryta in the early 50s, as he narrated it to me in 2012. Back then his mother sent him to receive the supplies package for the family. The package was huge and it was quite a struggle for him to bring it home. When they opened it, they realised that it was full of silk ties and nothing more. The mother was disappointed and she ended up using them to make a traditional “kourelou” carpet. Contrariwise, for him loading their hut with this material's colourful luxury was a euphoric circumstance. He recalls the incident laughing: “We were starving and freezing, but walking on silk”. When I asked him about the number of the ties, he estimated it between 2000 and 3000.

I decided to recreate this carpet, together with the volunteers Taxideutes Politismou, using 2000 ties. Out of my experience, I can estimate the number of ties the original carpet was made of being about 500.

E.Z. The exhibition features works by 24 artists from twelve countries; which are your favorite ones and why?

I am thrilled by both *Every World's a Stage (Beggar in the Ruins of Star Wars, 2012)* by Ră di Martino and *Alien Souvenir Stand, 2013* by Ellen Harvey. Martino uses the ground the childhood mega-memory Star Wars creates in order to challenge the security of what is considered as not existent. By presenting the actual ruins of an “unreal” memory in real life, she questions every notion of memories sequence we choose to narrate our lives through. As a result she confronts the viewer with the fragileness of certainty.

Ellen Harvey, makes a powerful comment on the neglected and shameful parts of history through *Alien Souvenir Stand, 2013*. She questions the positive and proud connotations neoclassical architecture is related to as one-sided. She points out that this popular-throughout-time-and-from-different-ideologies architecture style, disregards histories of manipulation and violence.

Harvey attempts to purify neoclassical architecture by creating a hot dog stand (originally made in Washington DC) covered with drawings of neoclassical buildings and numerous pillars. The installation stands for the

Aliens that will visit planet Earth and is placed somewhere in the future, at a hypothetical point when our civilisation does not exist any more. By putting erratically those fragments together, Aliens will possibly offer to our history the opportunity to be narrated and memorised in cruelty- and absurdity-free ways.

I am fond of both works because they make use of intimate elements in order to challenge, in semi-playful ways, individual and social narratives and connotations, formulating such an effective spectrum of distance from what is perceived as elements of proof, value and pride.

E.Z. In what ways can art help us deal with the past personally and collectively and especially with traumatic memories?

It seems that we are running through a historical period in which we are confronted with the fragility of what we used to consider as established “universal” values. While in parallel, there are constant reminders of the fact that each and every moment, at some place around the world heavily traumatic conditions occur. These settings evoke and create the kind of individual and collective memories that perpetuates the qualities resulting to vicious circles of cruelty.

Art is a way to reflect both on the traumas and struggles that bring us to the current sociopolitical conditions. Experiencing (hi)stories and memories through related artworks and art projects is a way to sense the constancy of ourselves and societies as transponders of memories, traumas, fears and ideologies.

Art can formulate the ground to re-assemble and re-evaluate on a personal and collective level the intimate memories we consider as of structural significance for self-determination. De-bordering memories, connecting them and even going beyond them could be an essential step leading humanity away from established mistakes, towards a new imaginary.

E.Z. How would you describe your artistic identity taking into consideration your background, studies, medium, motivations interests, ways of working and ideas?

I was born and raised in Athens. I studied at the faculties of painting and printmaking of the Athens School of Fine Arts. My MFA studies came later and it was an inspiring process which took place in Dutch Art Institute (DAI). My studies were extended due to my parallel involvement in different working environments, which often required moving to different places, getting engaged in different communities, mentalities, social classes and lifestyles. I consider of equal importance both fields of experience, which subsequently orientated my artistic practice towards social-political conditions, while my work methodologies evolved in relation to research and socially-engaged working processes. I aim at results that address a broader, not necessarily specialized audience. The latest years I regard Rotterdam as my home.

E.Z. What are you currently working on?

This period I'm dedicated to my PhD in Anthropology, based on the aforementioned research I have placed in Kalavryta since 2012. The desire to embark on that research sprang from the alarming 2012 national elections results, which revealed that a significant percentage of votes for Golden Dawn fascist party had been cast in the Kalavryta region. My research revolves around the areas of memory, politics of pain, and trauma.

In parallel I expand *The Least Wanted Travel the Most*, a long-term project dedicated to embodying the narrations of people having the need to leave the place of their origin. *TLWTtM* is based on an allegory and uses the ground created by a custom found in areas of former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. There, a dinner set is a very typical wedding present. As a result, newly-married couples end up having many more dinner sets than they need. So they keep as many as they can use, they exchange as many as possible in relevant shops, and

keep the rest in order to offer them as wedding presents in some other weddings. As a result the least wanted dinner sets travel endlessly.

In this project, dinner sets are equated to people that leave their place of origin due to discomfort, in order to search for solutions.

TLWTtM embarked on 2014 in an attempt to map different cases of migration in Europe.

Fotini Gouseti, <http://www.fotinigouseti.com>

CJM, From Generation to Generation, <https://www.thecjm.org/exhibitions/2>

Kalavryta 2012, 2013, 2000 silk ties, 25.4 m x 1.5 m, photo credits: personal archive



<<

<

1 της 3

>

>>



0

CJM

EX_POSURE

FOTINI GOUSETI

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

KALAVRYTA 2012

POSTMEMORY