

Wednesday April 5, 2006 - Archive




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CURRENT EDITION

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INFORMATION SERVICES

GREEK EDIT

FRONT PAGE

NEWS

COMMENTARIES

S/E EUROPE

FEATURES

BUSINESS & FINANCE

ARTS & LEISURE

SPORTS

WEATHER

CLASSIFIEDS

CARTOONS ARCHIVE

COMPANY PROFILE

HEALTH & EMERGENCY

ARTS & LEISURE



On Stage



Bookmarks



Venues



Gastronotes



On Show

NEWS

WHAT'S ON

CINEMA GUIDE

TV GUIDE

Art project in an unlikely setting

Curators, artists join forces in a group exhibition by the Kappatos gallery in Athens hotel

For her floor installation (right) at the Athens Imperial, Ioli Sifakaki — with Nadia Argiropoulou as a curator — has picked out motifs from different religions.

By Alexandra Koroxenidis - Kathimerini English Edition

Back in 1999, gallery owner Gerasimos Kappatos had the idea of a group exhibition in which young art curators would each present a work by an artist of their choice. Initially held in the four rooms of his gallery, the exhibition has since grown into one of the biggest, liveliest and most successful art events held in Athens.



The 40 artists together with the 30 curators participating in this year's exhibition have mounted a varied show on contemporary art, one of the best up to now. Occupying the entire third floor of the Athens Imperial hotel, "Visions 06" opened Monday evening, drawing in hordes of people from the Greek art world. Just like in the past, the exhibition is expected to draw a mixed audience (an artist participating in last year's event said she was impressed with the diverse crowd that visited), thus fulfilling one of its main objectives, which is to make art more accessible to more people.

"Visions 06" is an indiscriminating project, a "democratic" event open to different propositions, visitors and artists from different backgrounds: visual art artists, choreographers, set designers and actors. Its concept fits the setting, inviting to people from different backgrounds just like a hotel is. It is a "home away from home" exhibition for art, just as a hotel is for its occupants. And, like a hotel room, it creates a thought-provoking play between the private and the public, intimacy and anonymity, one's personal world with a standardized setting, creativity with the banal.

"Visions 06" is a site-specific project. This is why many of the works reference the context of the hotel and explore the experience of living in the metropolitan area. The idea of "home" is often set against the public and the city.

An example is the joint work by the Paris-based artist Maro Avrabou and Dimitris Xenakis (Irina Savani is the curator) in which enlarged, lit metro maps from different cities of the world cover the room's bed and are also presented as hanging like clothing. Resembling human veins and arteries, the lit routes of the city metro become a metaphor for one's personal, urban experience.

Young artist Lydia Andrioti (curator is Lina Tsikouta) uses animation art to reference the surrounding hotel area, particularly the brothels in the old, low-level buildings on the adjacent pedestrian street. The feeling of a lonely, urban existence comes through the paintings of Despoina Stokou (curator is Margarita Kataga).

Spanish artist Laura Fernandez Gibellini (curator is Anna Printezi) explores the idea of domesticity. Her fairy tale-like photographs evoke a childhood innocence and a yearning for a home-like environment, here shown as something elusive and almost unreal.

Chinese artists Zheng Guogu, Liang Shuo and Zhang Yuan (curator is Sofia Karamani) take the play between individual choice and standardization to a cultural level. Their work addresses the exportation of mass artifacts from China and addresses the leveling effect that globalization has on the unique aspects of each culture.

Other artists address the function and role of art. In her performance art piece, artist Lida Patta (curator is Michail Iliou) dances as a stripper and, metaphorically, presents contemporary art as a carefully staged, consumerist product. In his surreal photographs that reverse true scale by showing blown-up objects in miniaturized interiors, artist Petros Chrisostomou (curator is Irini Yeroyianni) makes a witty statement on the pompous, elitist aspect of art.

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In the exhibition one finds humor but also a tendency for introspection. An example of the latter is the installation by Dimitris Xonoglou (curated by Haris Savvopoulos) in which rounded loaves of bread have been symmetrically arranged on top of the hotel room beds. A photograph of a Mount Athos monk baking the bread is positioned like a banner on the wall. The work is a reminder of offering as a spiritual act.

Another work with an existential streak to it is the installation by actress Themis Bazaka. The soothing, whitewashed environment that Bazaka has turned the room into will lull the visitor to a time of lost innocence and childhood memories. The walls are covered by white paper on which visitors are encouraged to write down their dreams (Bazaka performed at the opening by writing her own phrases across the paper) or perhaps answer the question posed by that work's title: Was it a crime? — a crime in the sense of man's original sin or as in crimes against humanity.

A visual metaphor for the lost Eden, the work resonates with nostalgia yet carries a hopeful message as well. It is both a wonderful introduction and an uplifting epilogue to the exhibition — one that joins artists, curators and the public together and creates a lively, creative meeting ground for art.

"Visions 06," at the Athens Imperial hotel (Karaiskaki Square), through April 19. For info: Kappatos gallery (6 Aghias Irinis, 210.321.7931).

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