

“We are not going any faster, we are all hurtling onward
– for fear of falling”

Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.

Featuring the work of three Greek artists whose practices share affinities in their use of found material and splicing techniques, *The Engine Room* examines the schizophrenic condition that forcefully emerges out of the current era of information, liquidity and speculation. It is a mental exhibition that focuses on the inner workings and repressed tensions that overlay and standardize conflicting states of being, allowing for individuals to come to in irreconcilable positions with little or no friction, save the usual shock of negligible value. Given Greece’s recent media attention as the epicenter of the global financial meltdown, the show unavoidably reflects on the kind of personal and societal disconnections and turmoil that accompanies a crisis of such magnitude. It questions the role that contemporary art plays in these psychological and sociological formations, by exploring whether art’s paradoxical nature promotes a new normative way of being in the world, rooted in doubt, by teaching us to embrace ambiguous stances and events, or rather attests to the emancipating possibilities of novel connections beyond already formatted pathways and network exchanges.

The exhibition gathers distinct video, print and collage pieces in a juxtaposition that deliberately mirrors everyday volatile, often violent ideological jump cuts between incongruous attitudes and figures. In this way, it evokes the pressure cooker computation that we unconsciously rely on to process competing biological, synthetic and commercial cycles of (re)production, dissemination and entropy, all the while anxiously tallying up their human, economic and environmental costs. It posits the idea of the crunch beyond financial

terms as a totaling manic arithmetic performed under duress against the looming threat of irrecoverable fragmentation into digital bits –not pieces– otherwise recycled in the set statistical outcomes that shape our awe-inspiring numerical laws of the count, inscribed in the flow charts and index lines flashing across our new (stone) tablets.

Aligned in close proximity, the works effect precipitous leaps and bounds between different referential, metaphorical and allegorical registers. These lead to distressing disjunctions and even more troubling rapprochements within the same field of vision and thought, treading between semantic saturation and a systems-wide communication failure. These vertiginous pictorial and audio compressions suggest two contradictory forces at work: a gravitational pull running subjects to the ground under the weight of a solemn red eye consciousness, and a levitational thrust launching figures into the orbital lightness of being in flight – an exit performed as an exculpatory out-of-body release into the free-flow nebulous swirl of infinite symbolic constellations.

As an image, *The Engine Room* calls to mind an obscure claustrophobic space tucked away in the furthest recesses, where crowded devices amassed together continuously record, calculate, process and redeploy as the whole goes hurtling forward. It is an almost archaic vision of future past, infused with the romantic notion of underlying mechanisms within a complex apparatus regulating conflicting data, movements and impulses in the cavernous tinkers and clicks of grinding cogs and spin cycles. It evokes a nervous center ripe with circuitous loops and connections: a system on death-defying autopilot equally propelled by a creative inner momentum as by a perpetually changing field of endless possibilities, deterministically cast, in mired actions and one time only beliefs.



Detail of *Untitled*, Lena Athanasopoulou, collage, inkjet print on newspaper, variable dimensions, 2010.

Artists Katerina Athanasopoulou, Lena Athanasopoulou, Zoe Giabouldaki
Curator: Stéphanie Bertrand

In a context where Greece is at the heart of major global changes, curator Stéphanie Bertrand gathered the videos, collages and photographs of three artists from the peninsula. The Engine Room refers to a certain mental space and explores the schizophrenia of our contemporary condition, where paradoxical positions can cohabit in a single individual.

Stéphanie Bertrand is a Canadian independent curator based in Thessaloniki, Greece. She has curated a number of exhibitions and projects, including *Marginal corrections* at Studio XX, Montreal, that travelled to l'AECID-Centro de Formación de la Cooperación Española en Cartagena de Indias, Cartagena (2013), *Horizon Sprawl* at Ormston House, Limerick (2012), *Symbiosis?*, as part of the XVe Biennale de la Méditerranée, Thessaloniki (2011), *Acercate más* at Casa Tres Patios, Medellin (2011), *Democracy in the making* at the State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki (2009), *Fire Red Gas Blue Ghost Green Signs* at The Sassoon Gallery, London (2008) and *Radio gA-gA* at Art Athina 08, the Athens Art Fair, Athens (2008). She was the co-founder and co-director of the discursive platform Société Anonyme (www.societeanonyme.gr) from 2008 to 2012 and is an active member of the Montreal-based collective L'Araignée. She regularly contributes texts to accompany international exhibitions, including *Extase à emporter* at Engramme, Quebec (2013), *One Another* at YYZ Artist Outlet, Toronto (2011), *Flexible Aura* at Brain Factory, Seoul (2009), *Calypso* at Sala Rekalde, Bilbao (2008) and *I desired what you were, I need what you are* at Maze Gallery, Turin (2008). She holds an MFA Curating from Goldsmiths College, London and is currently completing a PhD in Museology at Aristotle University, Thessaloniki. She is the recipient of the 2013 Hannah Arendt Prize in Critical Theory and Creative Research.

More about the artists:

Katerina Athanasopoulou: kineticat.co.uk

Lena Athanasopoulou: lenathanasopoulou.gr

Zoe Giabouldaki: giabouldaki.info