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# THE ART NEWSPAPER GREECE



*Belle Shafir, Echoes of Transformation (2021), detail of executive action, horse hair, variable d.*




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# Reality Check at the Psychiatric Hospital

01/10/2021

ALEXANDRA KOROXENIDI

Alexandra Koroxenidi visited the group exhibition Reality Check curated by Dr. Costa Prapoglou and the participation of 34 Greek and foreign artists.

The choice of the place of presentation in an abandoned building of the Psychiatric Hospital of Attica in Dafni gives it a special charge and creates in advance a challenge and a responsibility from both the viewer and the organizers in terms of the respect with which they activate a place associated with mental pain, healing and hope for recovery. But also a place located on the axis of the historical route to ancient Eleusis and along which are found memories and traces of different layers of history.



Mental illness and its social stigma is a sensitive subject that the exhibition skilfully overlooks as its subject is not the affinity of creativity with the absurd - a tired idea and a fruit of romanticism or an echo of the influence of psychoanalysis on art - but a modern enlarged look around the blurred boundaries that separate the absurd and the inexplicable from reality in the conventional, commonly accepted, sense. It is a meteoric, strange image of the world in which space is indefinable and time subjective, internal, "silent" and without a specific structure







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between the mentally ill and the socially integrated "functional" person, implying that inclusion is a multidimensional condition and thus uniting the "other" with normalcy, on the other but it seems to be lost in different and indeterminate notions of place and time and to project a, at a distance, relaxed and abstract notion of "inclusion" and irregularity.

It is noteworthy that with the exception of the Quay brothers' film *Absentia* (2000), representative of their refined surrealist writing and inspired by the letters a psychiatric patient wrote to her husband without ever sending them, the ten-minute film *Juste Le Temps* ( ) by Robert Cahen, with the open end and the fleeting, impressionistic landscape images from the train, all the works have been made especially for the specific presentation and after the visit of most of the artists in the specific space. The curator has not constructed an idea to "fit" pre-existing works nor does he give the projects concepts that do not exist but creates a curatorial proposal starting from scratch, collectively and co-creatively.

Recurring concepts are time (eg in the successful work of Marios Voutsinas, but which is unfortunately placed diagonally and more "theatrically", perhaps to signify the exit to the door of the room), memory, nature and the cycle of life , physicality (eg in the work of Belle Shafir or, indirectly, in the installation of Eleni Zouni) and creativity, which have traditionally been associated with issues of mental nature and the subconscious, while manual labor as a creative act is projected as a form of therapeutic mental expression . One also wonders if the majority of women artists are accidental or if it suggests a female artistic appeal to issues of psychological and existential content, a thought that, if true, perpetuates a female stereotype.

The spaces (former patients' bedrooms) have been evenly distributed (with some exceptions in which more space was needed for the needs of the project) with one room corresponding to a project. This distribution and arrangement successfully reproduces the feeling that every human being and every mental state is separate but also that everything coexists and articulates a common, human condition that transcends differences. Isolation and dialogue, separation and union, a sense of loneliness and loneliness, but common, give an experiential element of community that, incidentally, has become commonplace in the last two years of pandemic and inclusion (note the curator planned the report before the pandemic).

Through this condition of confinement emerged "Ground Limitations" by Despina Meimaroglou, one of the most powerful works of the exhibition in which, inspired by





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and vice versa, and projects each of them as a mental, psychic and fluid space. In addition, it confuses the role of the inmate with the one who is watching him, the one who has access and the one whose access is denied.

His relationship with the outside, the confinement and the escape, the inside and the outside - an example is the endoscopic video installation of Marianna Strapatsaki that surrounds the viewer in a natural landscape that moves in different directions - exist as dipoles, which but the report attempts to bring it down. It achieves this through this sense of different, interconnected voices and experiences that, however, have a common origin, begin and end with the same human, primary needs.

Human fragility coexists with the power of life. Debris becomes the ingredients of a new life as in the installation of Dimitra Skandali where withered plants and flowers compose a new landscape. Life is deconstructed and reconstructed with the emphasis on materiality in the work of Eozen Agopian, it acquires different forms, it is reconstructed through the interactive installation of Eleni Panouklia.

The metaphorical but also the literal exit to the light is distinct in many works, while the window that exists in each room provides the artists with a ready-made tool. The DAPHNI 2021 installation of Diochantis, which stretches in three parts, behind the half-closed doors of three rooms, is a sound landscape that hints at the presence of absence and the memory of life and pain and the light as an opening at the end of the installation and at its edge. treadmill comes as redemption. But it lands the otherwise sensitive handling of the issue to a somewhat obvious end.

Some works, while capturing interesting meanings, touch the scenography, while others, such as the installation of Lydia Dambasina, manage to give a sense of exaltation through a few means, while this particular work gives without emotion a dignity and equal position with the rest of the mentally ill. thus depositing a social sensitivity with refinement and originality.

The report has alternations. Some works are more melancholic, others more cerebral, while the sculptural, table installation of Nikos Tranos with the grotesque anthropomorphic, hydrocephalous entities are among the few moments that combine some self-sarcasm with an underground humor and a sympathy for human beings. and the risk of dystopia. This is the unfamiliar that is also familiar.

What ultimately prevails is the search for belonging, a sense of identity for man and relationship with the other, a sense of silence, a numbness but also a vitality. There



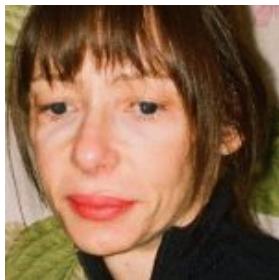
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group exhibitions, and although it leaves the viewer with a sense of "tightness" and anxiety, it strangely motivates them to face the world with acceptance, empathy and imagination. It should be noted that the curator has collaborated with the specialist therapists so that some inmates of the hospital can visit the exhibition.

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## Andres Serrano in Piraeus Artport

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