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## 1. BROADENING MUSEUM PEDAGOGY

*An art intervention at the Archaeological Museum of Cyprus by  
Angelos Makrides and Phanos Kyriacou*

### INTRODUCTION

Artists have been increasingly interested in looking at and investigating the museum, influenced by the museum's changing role as well as the diverse and alternative directions that art has taken over the last century (McShine, 1999; Rice, 2003; Gibbons, 2007). Artists, often "wrestling with the issue of their dependence on the museum to endorse their place in art history" (McShine, 1999, p. 11), are also more attuned to the power of the institution to define art, to influence their future career, and to make artworks accessible to wider audiences. Over the past few decades, artists have shown a certain degree of critical awareness regarding the authoritative power of the museum to form, but also to sustain and promote very specific and often stereotypical and limited understandings of world situations.

This tendency developed as the result of a more general and increasing mistrust of 'official History' and a critique against an 'accurate' and singular account of the past. It was also a reaction influenced by many poststructuralist claims that the museum was formed as a technology serving the colonial western gaze that defined the viewed 'other' object in relation to the viewing 'dominant' subject. These theories proposed that history be rephrased so that it includes the multiple and diverse accounts of the past and takes into consideration of the essentialised notions inscribed in western displays (Phillips, 2007). They also proposed that the classificatory systems used in museums be viewed in a more critical manner as problematic forms of categorisation defined by the colonial gaze. Due to this manifest awareness and eagerness to challenge issues otherwise concealed by museum orthodoxy, artists were in many cases called by museum curators to the task; they were invited to define, redefine, challenge, and criticise museum stories, and the ways in which museums choose to tell them.

This chapter is interested in the ways in which artists have criticised the museum's authoritative voice and the technology of the gaze, as these are structured and directed through the display of museum objects. In particular, it examines the ways in which artists have intervened in museums in order to shed light on the 'untold' or the 'hidden' stories of museum exhibits, making particular reference to a case study from Cyprus: an intervention at the Cyprus (Archaeological) Museum of Nicosia by artists Angelos Makrides and Phanos Kyriacou. The specific museum is quite unique in that, although it displays archaeological remnants from Cyprus, it remains a museum formed by the British

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during colonial times. Thus, beyond the conventional effect of framing the ways in which visitors' interact with museum objects and the ways in which the museum as an institution has traditionally defined aesthetic beauty, the Cyprus Museum is a case study, which stands as an example of Imperialist agendas.

The chapter will particularly examine the ways in which Angelos Makrides' and Phanos Kryiacou's intervention challenges the museum and its functions, while making reference to a wider museological framework developed in Central Europe and the US concerning objects and their interpretation, as well as to theories of Institutional Critique. Attempting to locate contemporary art interventions from Cyprus within the international art scene is a difficult, if not impossible task, since a consistent and coherent theoretical framework of art historiography is currently missing, especially one that deals with modern and contemporary art practices emerging on the island. As a result, art practices from Cyprus remain under theorised due to the lack of a clear trajectory of the socio-political, and other, conditions that have influenced their production. There is currently no substantial research to locate art practices from Cyprus in a wider context of art history, or to draw connections between the island's art practices and the particular developments that have come out of international movements in the West and the East. As art historian, Antonis Danos writes,

Artistic creation from 1980 onwards, demonstrates a hitherto unknown degree of heterogeneity and pluralism. The term 'contemporary Cypriot art' lacks true substance, and it merely refers to the work of contemporary Cypriot artists, without the capability of defining some common traits of various 'generations', not even of groups. (2011a, p. 30)

Thus, attempting to locate an art practice as the one by Angelos Makrides and Phanos Kryiacou within a wider art historical framework is of great significance for beginning to develop a stronger and clearer understanding of the art produced on the island, as much as for the conditions that have influenced it historically, and which continue to do so. At the same time, the specific intervention can shed light on the ways artists have engaged with the narratives of museums.

Although the narratives produced by different museums vary, there are certain types of museums such as, ethnographic, archaeological or history museums, that have traditionally functioned as bastions of culture in the ways in which they often promote and sustain cultural heritage and provide a sense of collectivity among groups of people. Artists' interventions in these museums are viewed here not simply as 'events' that interfere with the nature and function of the museum, but also as political forces, which aim to bring about change. Furthermore, these events are potentially educational and have important implications for museum visitation, possibly also after informing the reader of the conditions of artistic production in many other areas of the Mediterranean basin.

## THE “MEDITERRANEAN” CONDITION

Fernand Braudel in his seminal work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, argues:

The Mediterranean as a unit, with its creative space, the amazing freedom of its sea-routes ... with its many regions, so different yet so alike, its cities born on movement, its complementary populations, its congenial enmities, is the unceasing work of human hands. (Cited in Horden & Purcell, 2006, p. 724)

Although Braudel’s claim is a reference to the actual formation of the region through struggles, fights with the land itself and other obstacles, as much as to the possibility of this land (or sea) to never actually have unchanging borders—its mass to be endlessly re-shaped—it is nonetheless useful for the present discussion. The notion that the Mediterranean is the work of human hands (and minds alike) is very relevant, beyond any claims made by Braudel, as it also allows one to understand the Mediterranean as a construction, and as such, it should not remain unquestioned.

It is within this understanding that the task of discussing an art practice as Mediterranean seems rather paradoxical: assuming a preexisting type of aesthetic that *is* Mediterranean and which thus has its own specific characteristics, as much as relying on the descriptive adjective ‘Mediterranean’ for an aesthetic, are equally problematic. But, perhaps these problematic aspects are relevant to the historical construction of the Mediterranean imaginary and to the local-specificity of such an aesthetic—if any at all—in art practices being shaped, and shaping, various areas of the Mediterranean basin, including the one discussed in this paper.

Moreover, it is worth being reminded that the Mediterranean as a constructed notion has been defined mostly by geopolitics and founded on difference rather than on a romanticised sense of a unified understanding and/or a shared habit or attitude. According to Claudio Focu, quite often a sense of *Mediterranean-ness* points to “the geographical consistency of the connection between sun, Mediterranean sea, and white-walls architecture”, and is linked to “the diachronic consistency of climate and natural landscape across the Mediterranean area” (2008, p. 26). But as he continues, one needs to question whether *Mediterranean-ness* (*mediterraneità*) can be seen as anything other than a political strategy, convenient for creating a space of artistic practice that wishes to remain distinguishable from other political trends (in the case of his argument, the avant-garde Futurists used ‘the Mediterranean’ as a way to separate from Fascism) yet, continuing to feed locality (in the case of the Futurists, it was a sense of *Italianness*).

Other theorists studying the Mediterranean—arguably, more reflexively than Braudel—cannot but understand the Mediterranean as a concept born out of imperialism, “deployed in the service of politically undesirable master narratives” (Horden & Purcell, 2006, p. 725) characterised by *exceptionalism* and *exclusivism*: the fact that the Mediterranean served as the centre of Europe during the Renaissance is an example of such *exceptionalism*, whereas the assumed shared personality traits among individuals from the Mediterranean is an example of

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*exclusivism*<sup>i</sup> (since it disregards those who do not share these traits). So, bearing this context in mind, asking whether *Mediterranean-ness* exists, and if so, in which ways, is probably more appropriate than attempts to take it for granted in discussions about art practices. Such questions apply to the analysis of the art intervention discussed in this paper, which seems more relevant to art practices developed in Central Europe and the US during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rather than to a distinguishable Mediterranean character, conventionally defined by the “sun, Mediterranean sea, and white-walls architecture” (Focu, 2008). At the same time, this art intervention is characteristically Cypriot, referring to the artists’ own locality and responding to the unique nature of the museum in which it took place.

Again, what needs to be stated at the outset of this paper is that the Mediterranean is viewed as a contested term—as much as its aesthetics is—referring to a constructed space rather than a specific location. The Mediterranean is characterised and influenced by exchanges and various encounters with the other; a landscape of diverse cultures, of what Chambers in, *Mediterranean Crossings*, claims to be a “mixed heritage” and a “complex inheritance” (2008, p. 45). I would like to argue, here, that the case of Cyprus is an example of such crossings. However, it is useful to adopt Focu’s (2008) definition of the Mediterranean as a *medi-terra*—literally ‘in between lands’—not simply as a reference to the sea, but to the fluidity of the impact of the socio-political and economic exchanges which take place here, and as a reminder that the Mediterranean should not be seen as a contained space with clear borders, but as a shifting space, frequently in the process of being defined.

Contemporary art practices or art history in Cyprus, are specific to the island’s social and political history, its geographical location in the Mediterranean sea, and, indicative of the discontinuities witnessed historically in the production of a strong sense of identity due to the island’s turbulent history and parallel existence in the margins of both the East and the West.<sup>ii</sup> Thus, the art intervention discussed here will not be viewed only as a result of the artists’ influences from the West, especially because of the ways in which it intervenes in the stories produced by the Cyprus Museums, but it will also take into consideration the immediate mirroring of the artists’ locale. At the same time, its relevance to things Mediterranean has to do with the notion of the *in-between* and how this is subverted or affirmed by the artists’ critique.

#### PAST NARRATIVES: THE CASE OF THE CYPRUS MUSEUM

In January 2009, the sculptures of Angelos Makrides and Phanos Kyriacou were exhibited for a month alongside the artefacts of the Cyprus Museum in an event entitled *Synergy*. The title of this event indicated the intention of the curator of the exhibition, Yiannis Toumazis, to position these two artists in a dialogue. The artists did not work together physically for the preparation of their respective sculptures, as one might have expected. Instead, they worked independently in their studios to produce the work and later met at the museum where their work, curated by Yiannis Toumazis, was positioned in a dialogue, both with the artefacts on display

and in relation to each other. This interference was a venture to work within the museum architecture and space in order to challenge the stories promoted by the museum.

The Cyprus Museum was first established in 1882 by a group of British and Greek-Cypriot elite intellectuals during British rule in Cyprus (Bounia & Stylianou-Lambert, 2012). Finding its roots in similar occasions in Europe, most of which grew out of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Princely Collections that aimed to display the splendour and legitimacy of the prince's rule (Duncan, 1991) and to “symbolically [magnify] it in the public domain” (Bennett, 1995, p. 33), the specific museum could in similar ways be seen as an attempt by the British to endorse and safeguard their legitimacy on the island. Although the origins of the specific museum do not lie in a royal collection, one could still argue that the objective of the British to collect art during colonial times, or the interest of Royal Archaeology in excavating the past, and the Empire's eagerness to showcase the objects of its collections was in alignment with the aspiration of any imperial power to look powerful, progressive, and interested in providing for the common good.<sup>iii</sup>

Furthermore, the British believed that the Greek past was the cornerstone of Western civilisation. Thus, any connection with this past in the form of museum collections in the Cyprus Museum could further serve as a form of validation of European Imperialism (Bounia & Stylianou-Lambert, 2011, 2012). This validation was further achieved through the museum architecture. The exterior façade of the main entrance of the museum, originally built in 1908,<sup>iv</sup> is reminiscent of the Parthenon in its four columns of Ionic order supporting an entablature attached to the main building. As Carol Duncan suggests, the museum architecture's reference to

a pre-Christian world of highly evolved civic institutions, [and] classical-looking buildings could well suggest secular, Enlightenment principles and purposes. But monumental classical forms also brought with them the space of rituals—corridors scaled for processions and interior sanctuaries designed for awesome and potent effigies. (1991, p. 91)

Beyond any imperial agendas though, the visitor in the Cyprus Museum is facilitated into accessing the island's past: a greatly distant and often uninteresting past that has been excavated and left unattended for many years. The permanent collection of the Cyprus museum consists mainly of archaeological remains, displayed and often crowded in glass cases, while the dusty interiors of the museum carry a feeling of nostalgia for all things past, reflecting an insistence to safeguard this particular past as unquestionable, unproblematic and sacred, similar to the first cabinets of curiosities (*Wunderkammern*). These cabinets of curiosities aimed to promote a picture of a world through an almost encyclopedic ordering of objects (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Bennett, 1995; Garoian, 2001), which often also aimed to facilitate memory, *private* and *public*. As Hein points out, museums first developed “parallel with the advent of the nation-state”, demonstrating mainly the power and wealth of the state (1998, p. 3). Although the Cyprus Museum was not

originally formed parallel with the island's existence as an independent state—on the contrary, it was mostly aligned with the aspirations of an empire—it still remained a space that the natives viewed positively since it potentially functioned as a site of identity formation.

More specifically, many Cypriots supported the development of the Cyprus museum with great enthusiasm, albeit for reasons entirely different to the ones driving the British. They invested in the museum's making, their hopes of liberation from both the British rule and, before that, Ottoman rule. They viewed the museum as a way of affirming the island's connection to a Greek past, thus supporting and justifying continuous efforts of unification with “motherland” Greece. One could argue that this kind of leaning is reflective of the more general aspirations of the late nineteenth century “philological-lexicographic revolution and the rise of intra European nationalist movements, themselves the products, not only of capitalism, but of the elephantiasis of the dynastic states” (Anderson, 2003, p. 83). As Benedict Anderson discusses in *Imagined Communities*, the nationalist ideal was increasingly gaining prestige during this time throughout Europe and “there was a discernible tendency among the Euro-Mediterranean monarchies to sidle towards a beckoning national identification” (2003, p. 85). As Anderson predicted in the same book, this tendency would not rest only on “sheer antiquity” but would instead pose dangers in Europe. Indeed, the rise of Greek nationalism in Cyprus would define later political events, such as the EOKA resistance to the British in the mid 1950s,<sup>v</sup> the conflicts between Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots in the 1960s, and the attempts of a militant coup to overthrow the president Archbishop Makarios of the then newly formed Republic, which would ultimately lead to the Turkish invasion in 1974.

Interestingly enough, although this museum held within it both the aspirations of the British Empire to legitimise its power and the hopes of Greek-Cypriots to safeguard their Greek origins, it never quite fulfilled its potential as a means to public education despite best efforts. Instead, the museum remained closed to the public for the first nine years of its life (Bounia & Stylianou-Lambert, 2012), while today typical visitors of the museum still tend to be tourists, professionals, or scholars interested in the museum as an exciting case study. In a way, the Cyprus museum never managed to escape the origins of the museum as a temple of authority, existing, therefore, only for a few experts and remaining a site of academic interest rather than a democratic and open space for public interaction. Although the museum's audiences are, ironically, different from—if not irrelevant to—the ones for which the museum initially seemed to favour, there has not been any substantial change of the aims, scopes or vision of the museum, at least not in practice, since in principle, currently, there are plans to renovate the museum space.

It is within this framework that a contemporary art intervention in the existing displays of the Cyprus Museum seems like a ground breaking event with much political and educational potential. Especially, when one accepts the proposition that most, if not all, artistic interventions of this kind are a form of interference and a way of reframing a museum's traditional authority. Thus, the museum's

authorisation for such an intervention might be indicative of the museum being on the verge of change, seeking to find alternative ways to revise its existence and have an impact on the island, following international attempts to radicalise museums and the museum experience. In addition, this intervention might be an indication that the Cyprus Museum is in fact aware of the contemporary art scene and other cases of institutional critique, and is willing to open its doors while acknowledging the displacing effect of such artistic interventions.

Both the artists involved in this intervention, Angelos Makrides and Phanos Kryiacou, work with sensitivity toward history, archaeology and tradition, even when they criticise it, and this is revealing of the degree to which the Cyprus Museum has demonstrated a turn towards a radical direction that will potentially have a great impact on museum education in Cyprus and could possibly inform other Mediterranean countries. At the same time, the curator's intelligent choice of involving two artists who represent distinct art historical periods on the island, and who demonstrate the different philosophies of their time, has worked creatively in opening the space for various forms of dialogue: namely, between the artists and the museum, between the two artists, between the artists and various audiences, and between the museum and its visitors.

#### *SYNERGY, PART I: ANGELOS MAKRIDES*

Angelos Makrides represents a period of modernity and post-war art in Cyprus and his work can be considered as connecting the archaeology of the island to contemporary practices. His work emerged in a period during which art—as everything else on the island—was struggling to resurface right after the island's independence in the early 1960s, during the immediate and turbulent years, between the 1960s and the early 1970s, and after the Turkish invasion in 1974. Continuous conflicts between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, economic deprivation after the war, destruction of the land, the loss of people and their land, and, the wave of refugees from one side of the island to the other, were all influential conditions for the future growth of the island. The once prosperous island had to struggle once again in a period of regeneration and the arts and culture were certainly the last thing on the new agenda. Instead, emphasis was placed on other disciplines that would potentially improve the living conditions on the island.

Angelos Makrides, originally born in the now Turkish occupied Yialousa, studied in Athens and lived in Paris in the 1960s. He decided to leave Cyprus in 1974 and to live in Athens for the next decade before returning back to Cyprus. Although it does not explicitly represent the island's political struggles, as most of the artworks produced during this period in Cyprus, Makrides' work is inherently influenced by his childhood memories and his later travels and studies. His works are very modern echoing the assemblage pieces of Jean Dubuffet, Picasso, and Rauschenberg; this is a term coined by Dubuffet, and given public currency at the exhibition, *The Art of Assemblage* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in



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1961 (Cooper, 2009), and of which Makrides, living in Paris at the time, would certainly have been aware.

Makrides' sculptures, nonetheless, maintain a deep connection to the island of Cyprus through the use of materials which he adopts in ways that remind one of the unique landscape of the island: wood, bronze, stone from the island, iron, fabric, the gold leaves used in Byzantine iconography, as well as found readymade objects, are all incorporated in his practice. In a personal conversation with Makrides sometime last year, the artist remembered the time when as a young boy he used to punt a small stone from home to school, hiding it in a safe place as something precious, only to punt it back home after school. In this way, Makrides was not only marking his own path, but he was already developing a strong connection to the details of his land. These same stones he would later carve again and again in his art.

The similarity between the formal elements of Makrides' work and the artifacts on display at the museum can explain the reason that the museum allowed him—and only in the case of Makrides' sculptures—him to intervene in the museum's glass cases, by displaying some of the artist's small stone sculptures alongside the rest of the historical remnants (Figure 1). This illustrates a series of claims made by the specific museum, namely, that the glass case is sacred for all that it safeguards; that what is displayed in the glass case should remain at a distance from the viewer, both physically and conceptually; and, that Makrides' work is already part of this historical discourse of the island, which despite its critical character it has already been consumed and assimilated in the art historical narrative of Cyprus.



*Figure 1. Angelos Makrides, installation view of Gathering (1996), as part of Synergy exhibition at the Archaeological Museum of Cyprus, 2009 (dimensions variable).  
Courtesy of the artist and Yiannis Toumazis.*



In the specific art piece, entitled *Gathering* (1996), Makrides uses iron, bronze and stone to create five small figurine-like sculptures, which were then positioned around an archeological object already on display at the Cyprus Museum. The central piece can stand here as a symbol of the island and its history, heavily influenced but also controlled by external powers. In this particular display, the artist's specific understanding of the island's fate to always be under external rule is apparent in the way in which the five figures—made out of the same material as the piece they enclose—suffocate and control it, allowing little space for movement or independence. One of the figures is painted in the blue, red and white stars of the American flag; another has a swastika-like shape attached to it, the edges of which end up in little hands; and a third has the Jewish star pouring out of its eyes. These might refer to various details from the island's history. The American flag possibly refers to America's involvement in the Turkish invasion in 1974 and Turkey's subsequent occupation of a third of the island, when it allowed Turkey as a country of NATO to intervene in the internal conflicts between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots. The swastika symbol as a reference to extreme nationalism might refer to the wave of Greek nationalism during the 1950s and the 1960s that led to the conflicts between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots. Finally, the Jewish star might refer to Israel's geographical proximity to the island, while also functioning as a sign of a feeling of persecution felt by Cypriots (like Jews) since various powers have historically sought after controlling the island due to its strategic location between three continents.

This particular reading, of course, might have little to do with the artist's original intentions when creating the five figures, since they were selected and placed in this particular order and positioned by the curator of the exhibition rather than the artist himself. This in itself is telling of the curator's power to create and support certain stories in the museum as well as of its authoritative voice, but also of the artist's own contradictory rejection of this power by way of refusing to take part in the process of curating. More specifically, in many casual conversations with Makrides, he tends to be sceptical of the idea of both exhibiting at galleries and museums and of participating in the process of curating, reminding one of many artists—especially those working during the 1950s and the 1960s in Europe—who questioned “whether their work should be in a museum at all, feeling that to be included is to succumb to the establishment” (McShine, 1999, p. 11). As such, Makrides' work could be viewed within the wider artistic and theoretical tendency of the period when artists began to lose faith in the museum and in other social institutions (McShine, 1999) and began negotiating its authority.<sup>vi</sup> These artists' main concern was to question the highly codified space of the museum, as much as its neutralizing and/or acculturating force when presenting and displaying artworks. What was later named “Institutional Critique” was at the time a systematic form of inquiry by artists, aiming to expose the “ideological underpinnings” of the museum (McClellan, 2003, pp. 31-32). More specifically, they aimed at discussing the ways in which the museum often becomes a *dead* space, fixed in its own pre-conceptions (and misconceptions) about authenticity and authority, definitions of aesthetic superiority and artistic intentionality, or even

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about the historical legitimacy of artworks. As Joan Gibbons affirms, these artists' reflections upon museums and galleries also echo a "preoccupation with the ways in which art is framed by the ideologies and agendas of institutions but also with the institutionalisation of knowledge itself" (2007, p.121).<sup>vii</sup>

Clearly, there is a lot up for debate in terms of these first attempts against the institutionalisation of art. For instance, when Marcel Broodthaers reversed the roles of the curator and the artist in his creation of the fictitious, *Museum of Modern Art: Department of Eagles*, he attempted to reveal how the frame (indicating the actual space of the physical architecture and also signifying the process of the work's presentation) *acculturates* heterogeneous objects and transcends them to the status of art. But this attempt in itself is also located, defined and shaped by that exact frame under question. As Hal Foster (1986) suggests, the institutional frame determines the production of that practice and because of that it is a de-limited one. Foster also argues that such practices, as Broodthaers' practice, posed within or against the institutional frame, adopt the same language and the same categories used by the museum and gallery for the definition of art, and regardless of the original purpose and form of the critique, these museum categories are "sustained even as they are demonstrated to be logically arbitrary, ideologically laden and/or historically obsolete" (Foster, 1986).

Yet the most important, perhaps, limitation which these first attempts helped reveal in regards to the underlying power structures of the museum as institutional frame, was the risk they all run of being relegated from attacking the institution to becoming part of its processes and yet another expert voice that defines the form of the frame. Makrides, by means of his decision to be absent from the process of the intervention at the museum, already makes a political statement relevant to his choice, namely, that he acknowledges the power of the museum to define the stories told by their displays and how problematic that is. By separating himself from the process of authentication and sacralisation of the object on display, he directly criticises this exact process, even if, in the end, his work is indeed exhibited as part of the exhibition at the museum in a much more integrated manner than that of Phanos Kyriacou's work—and inside the glass case—confirming once again the power of the museum to conventionalise the most radical works.

#### SYNERGY, PART II: PHANOS KYRIACOU

Phanos Kyriacou is a young artist who belongs to a generation of Cypriot artists who have studied either in the UK or the US (if not in other European art institutions) and who currently live and work in various international locations, in residencies, and participating in exhibitions elsewhere. This is a generation still concerned with its origins, yet often forcefully neglecting and criticising these origins as suffocating and conservative. His work, as others of his generation, although drawing from his experiences in Cyprus, rarely has any aimed or obvious connection to the island and its history. In this way, his work offers a rather fresh image of a country that is in search of its own identity, for the most part undefined,

and full of discontinuities and contradictions, fulfilling its heritage as a Mediterranean country ‘in-between’. Such interventions do not only indicate the problematic nature of this imaginary, but possibly also the urge to review it.

Similar to other artistic practices taking place elsewhere, Angelos Makrides and Phanos Kyriacou create and practice within a wider context, not limited to their place of origin, influenced instead by undertakings relevant to more general social, political and artistic changes. The 1960s, when Makrides was still a young man working in Paris and in Athens, were a period of increased globalisation in the art world, but also a period of general distrust toward society (McShine, 1999). But like then, the first decade of this century is a period of an intense internationalisation of the art world and a revival period of serious critiques of social and political issues around the world, some of which involve America’s neo-imperialist war interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan with the support of the British government, the economic crisis that currently threatens the whole of Europe and its union, as well as the intense marketability of art practices and the end of post-modernity, as we know it.

Kyriacou particularly deals with some of the issues raised above, especially the ones most relevant to both the museum and art. For *Synergy*, the sculptures he exhibited were replicas of classical sculptures, most of them cast from much smaller replicas that the artist found in souvenir shops in the old city of Nicosia. Upon closer inspection though, Kyriacou’s replicas differ from their original reference. He breaks the cast sculptures into pieces and he then reassembles them in awkward yet humorous juxtapositions, creating a series of new narratives and stories relevant to art history, the power of the museum, and to the subjectivity of interpretation. In a set of three, two of these sculptures are missing their head whereas the other’s head is covered (Figure 2). The choice of holding one’s head, presenting it as a trophy almost, and suspended toward the viewer, becomes an act of projecting at once the ideal of classical beauty and the notion that this ideal is a construction that can be (re-)moved, eliminated, or changed at any time. At the same time, Kyriacou is making a case about the subjectivity of interpretation, of the historical definitions of beauty, and of the process of framing such archaeological objects after they have been unearthed.

Tony Bennett (1995) discusses in a similar manner the problematic nature of the meanings established by history museums. He claims that museum objects are never that which they were originally made for, but only signs or facsimiles of themselves “by virtue of the frame [...] which encloses it [the object] and separates it off from the present” (Bennett, 1995, p. 129). Continuing, he argues that these objects “announce a distance between what they are and what they were through their very function, once placed in a museum, of representing their own pastness and, thereby, a set of past social relations” (Bennett, 1995, p. 129). In the case of the Cyprus Museum, the archaeological remains are all signs of a particular past, yet none of them stand for what they used to be. Many objects for instance, used to be everyday, functional objects or objects of worship, but when put on a museum pedestal and are unavoidably detached from their original historical



Figure 2. Phanos Kyriacou, installation view of *Statues in Crisis* (2009), as part of Synergy exhibition at the Archaeological Museum of Cyprus, 2009. Courtesy of the artist.  
Phanos Kyriacou, *Statues in Crisis* (detail), 2009, as part of Synergy exhibition at the Archaeological Museum of Cyprus, 2009 (165x38x38cm). Photo copyright: Andreas Koutas

moment, they then are susceptible to represent narratives imposed upon them by the museum, the curator and the visitors. Kyriacou seems attuned to this process of framing archaeology. In a phone conversation in May 2010 he mentioned how he is particularly interested in precisely this type of museum presentation of objects and in the ways in which the museum display creates a meta-narrative about the object, its purpose, function and aesthetic potential. This is what Kyriacou described as a process of *forthcoming*, similar to the way in which his sculpture's head is offered to the viewer.

These three particular sculptures by Kyriacou are *Sculptures in Crisis*, as he calls them, indicating that losing their heads or covering them, is not only a metaphor for all the above mentioned associations, but also an act of despair or protest. They are in crisis because of their pre-defined future to be on a pedestal, isolated from their original function and framed by the museum in such a way as to always represent a singular narrative, buried in a function of cultural authentication. This brings to mind Faris, who, when discussing the exhibition, *ART/artifact* that opened in 1988 at the Centre for African Art in New York, stated that objects are often buried in "Our statement of Their function" (1988, p. 778). Certainly, such criticism towards the museum as a western device of mistakenly directing our understanding of 'other' cultures—in this case African—as a unified whole, also points towards the depth to which the museum can also be viewed as a

mechanism serving the colonial western gaze. Thus, artists' institutional critique could further undermine the museum as an institution of such motivations.

Kyriacou consciously chooses to camouflage his sculptures so that they become part of the museum, while indirectly challenging those same narratives that the museum seeks to produce by the display of these objects. His critical works within the institutional structure question more than the mere display of objects. He presents the viewer with the museum's relation to the imperial West bringing about a rupture to the museum's colonial history. His sculptures become an integral part of the museum, its colour and materials, while retaining their uniqueness; this is especially visible in Kyriacou's choice to display them on concrete plinths. The stability, strength and immovability of concrete illustrate another of Kyriacou's decisions to address the irony in museum narratives; and, although they are presented as fixed and unquestionable, they never cease to be fluid, subjective and subject to change, as much as to criticism.

Furthermore, the actual creative process of re-casting these sculptures from replicas found in souvenir shops is also indicative of the process of spectacularisation of classical antiquity to the point of turning it into a commodity: a process for which the museum is one of the institutions responsible. Guy Debord speaks of "the materialization of ideology in the form of the spectacle," (1995, p. 150) which could be considered the result of a successful system of production. Museums are such places in which ideology is materialised in the form of a spectacle on view. Douglas Crimp further claims that such processes have been well secured by the museum since the early nineteenth century; to include "the idealist conception of art, the classificatory systems imposed on it, the construction of a cultural history to contain it" (1993, p. 212). However, one could argue that the museum does that at the same time as it safeguards the past from damage or decay, and makes it widely accessible. Commodifying culture and protecting it from decay, although relevant processes, still have two different, often entirely conflicting effects. More so, they are both equally problematic.

On the one hand, the museum does indeed produce what Benjamin called "the disintegration of culture into commodities" (as cited in Crimp, 1993 p. 212), a thought aligned with Debord's arguments and one reflected in Kyriacou's choice of the kitsch sculptures found in souvenir shops. This is something especially relevant to various Mediterranean countries, including Cyprus, which used to produce such kitsch objects for the Western tourist, the implications of which are far more significant than Debord's observations. More specifically, when Crimp (1993) discusses Marcel Broodthaers' reference to "the transformation of art into merchantise" (p. 212), he points to a more general debate about art as a commodity. He does not refer to art or culture simply as something that one can purchase in the museum or souvenir shop (i.e. reproductions on mugs, calendars or kitsch sculptures), but rather to something even more problematic: to the complete shift of power and authority from the museum to the marketplace.

On the other hand, the museum's emphasis on safeguarding the past places the museum in a position of power, securing a level of authority. This is an issue that has been at the heart of museological debates over the last few decades, one that

has received much scrutiny by artists since the beginning of the twentieth century, and one that still demands reevaluation. The most important issue arising from this is the failure of the museum to be an educational and accessible space. Instead, the authority of the institution encourages the distance between the museum and its audiences, while the objects on display are stripped off any education potential since the emphasis is placed on their aesthetic and ‘auratic’ value. This is a rather widespread, albeit outdated in many countries, museological orthodoxy which insists on promoting aesthetic value over the significance of cultural production, divorcing the two and denying objects the potential to work as both art and artifact, as both the product of artistic intentionality and of cultural production at a very specific historical moment.<sup>viii</sup> At the same time, and to return to Phanos Kyriacou’s sculpture, the fragmented form of museum objects reminds one of the problematic platonic distinction between body and mind, and suggests that we question, if not just dismiss such distinctions, as well as notions of ‘beauty’ and ‘greatness’ that have been historically and culturally constructed.

Responding to the above, Kyriacou created another piece during the intervention. He used a rectangular glass case that was also a mirror. It was only when the viewer approached the work that she was able to look inside (Figure 3). In this way, the viewer’s image was captured by the glass case, transforming it into the object to be looked at, alongside the rest of the archaeological displays that were also reflected on the surface of the mirror-case. This mirrors the artist’s belief that the museum objects should be for and about the viewers’ history and past, and should be presented in such a way that they would eliminate the distance between their past and the present creating what Bennett (1995) calls the *representational effect*. This is relevant to the ways in which artefacts are organised in order to represent a relation and connection to the visitors’ past. Bennett further argues that the organisation of artefacts is significant in shaping visitors’ memory and expectations. To criticise this organisation, he says, does not mean, “calling them to task for their failure to accurately portray the past ‘as it really was’”. This is not to minimise the importance of the curatorial concern to regulate historical displays by ensuring the authenticity of the materials exhibited” (Bennett, 1995, p. 132).

Instead, to challenge the organisation of artefacts is similar to what Kyriacou also achieves here: to question the effects that these displays have on the viewer and to challenge the degree of continuity (or the lack of it) between the past and the present. Although, this might be relevant to other places, such (dis)-continuities are particularly pertinent to the Mediterranean imaginary, as discussed earlier. Especially in this museum, the past is presented as an entirely disconnected discourse from the present. In addition, this work also reminds the visitor that she is the one responsible for the definition and interpretation of this past, by projecting onto it her own ideas and beliefs. Certainly, the degree to which one is able to escape pre-determined ideologies and to reach an interpretation independently from the institution in which this occurs is questionable, and I will return to this later in the chapter.





*Figure 3. Phanos Kyriacou, Statues in Crisis (2009), as part of Synergy exhibition at the Archaeological Museum of Cyprus, 2009 (205x43x43cm). Courtesy of the artist.*

In the same piece by Kryiacou, when one approaches the mirror-case, one can witness another narrative. Inside the glass case, a sculpture of Aphrodite (Venus) voluntarily leans on the feet of Hephaestus, who is preparing to brutally take her head off with his hatchet (Figure 4). This is an act of sacrifice, violence and irony.

The artist himself is here symbolically transformed into Hephaestus, the god of creativity and art making, who challenges the pre-established definitions of beauty by sacrificing the symbol of beauty, Aphrodite (Venus), with which many Cypriots are familiar. At the same time, sacrificing through taking one's head is a violent way of sacrificing the predominant mythologies about the goddess Aphrodite (Venus). These are relevant to the birth of the island, and thus to its archaeology. Certainly, the sacrifice of Aphrodite can also be seen as a means of freeing the island from its doomed fate to always be dominated, similar to the goddess with which it identifies.<sup>ix</sup> Furthermore, the act of taking the sculpture's head—similar to the three other replicas on the plinths—is full of irony. The head, always pertinent to intelligence, thought, rationality and critique, is in all cases removed, or in the process as such, pointing toward both the ease with which this can occur, and most importantly, toward the visitors' unsuspecting tolerance of all the museum's narratives.

STYLIANOU



*Figure 4. Phanos Kryiacou, Statues in Crisis (detail) (2009), as part of Synergy exhibition at the Archaeological Museum of Cyprus, 2009 (205x43x43cm). Courtesy of the artist.*

In the end, the claims that both Angelos Makrides's and Phanos Kyriacou's works put on the museum demand the viewer to consider challenging historical narratives, the subjective nature of interpretation, the loss of grand narratives, and the multiple nature of interpretation. In other words, this intervention is about putting forward the agency of the visitor and questioning the technology of the gaze, and this holds great educational potential.

#### BROADENING MUSEUM PEDAGOGY

Tracing the history of museum education is not an easy endeavour since each museum has had different approaches to education and to the museum's respective audiences. At the same time, museums' goals and priorities have been historically influenced by other parallel social and political factors specific to the museum's location and context. What is commonly acknowledged though, is that education was a primary function of the museum since its inception (Hooper-Greenhill, 1991; Hein, 1998) and that despite the difference in museums' shifting directions, there are "certain basic and commonly accepted premises that museum educators share since the late nineteenth century" (Blume et al., 2008, p. 84). Such commonly held belief includes the idea that learning in museums is object-oriented—what Bennett calls the "culture of the artifact" (1995, p. 146)—and that this is a process that provides visitors with the opportunity to not only shape ideas and understandings, but also to shape "an aesthetic and cultural sensibility" (Blume et al., 2008, p. 84). Although Blume et al. refer to art museums similar arguments could be made for

historical and archaeological museums, in which learning does involve artefacts, objects of cultural and historical significance, and historical memorabilia.

Charles Garoian, elaborating on the educational implications of artefacts, argues that, “viewers’ agency enables their use of museum culture as a source through which to imagine, create, and perform new cultural myths that are relevant to their personal identities” (2001, p. 235). However, the degree to which this might be possible is questionable. If one assumes that the stories constructed in the museum are indeed the result of a predetermined set of beliefs and ideologies, and that the museum experience is only a process through which these come to existence, then it would hardly be the case that the museum allows visitors to imagine and reflect on their own identities. For as Bennett affirms, “the artefact, once placed in a museum, itself becomes, inherently and irretrievably, a rhetorical object [...] thickly lacquered with layers of interpretation” (1995, p. 146). Bennett (1995) goes on to argue that these interpretations are determined by other media, such as books, magazines, or television, that similarly influence the selection, organisation and display of objects. As Jeffers (2003) similarly argues, the ways in which one understands the museum and constructs knowledge about the museum and its objects is more dependent on social codes and norms, established by that elite minority and its interests, rather than on individual cognitive or psychological development. In other words, knowledge in and about the museum is not the result of personalised experience but an affirmation of an already established set of beliefs.

In the case of the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia, one could argue that a performance of identity could indeed take place, but for Greek-Cypriots this is tied strictly to a particular (Greek) past and its archaeological legitimacy. Similar to other cases, this museum is also structured in such a way as to emphasise the objects’ historical authority and authenticity, thus providing little space for re-imagining, re-creating or performing identities in this space. For instance, the dusty interiors of the museum, especially the glass cases or the vitrines, build a distance between the objects and the viewer establishing the objects’ authenticity, but also their sacredness. The vitrine, both a museum technology and an educational apparatus, was first used by the Orthodox Church to preserve the relics of Saints: “a practice that helped to enhance the powerful presence of the holy and sacred” (Putman, 2009, p. 14). Although the glass case is used mainly to provide protection over museum objects, it also functions in a similar manner to the one first adopted by the Church. Increasing the physical distance between the object on display and the viewer, as well as the preceding distance between present and historical time, seduces the viewer by compelling her to look “at the untouchable and the unattainable” (Putman, 2009, p. 15). This distance is almost necessary in order to accentuate a sense of sacredness in the objects which it imposes upon them, what Walter Benjamin (1969) called the *aura* of the original.

Benjamin also asserted that an object’s aura should not be seen as entirely separate from the object’s ritual function. Beyond the objects’ uniqueness and authenticity, Carol Duncan (1995) argues that the museum’s organisation, preservation and display of various representations that are connected to a specific

community, and its highest cultural values, is what transform the museum experience into one of ritual. As mentioned earlier, she maintains that museum visitation is a process similar to the one of rituals because visitors in museums enact some form of performance related to memory or identity. In such cases, the museum aims for what the curator of the Louvre, Germain Bazin, had recognised as “momentary cultural epiphanies” (cited in Duncan, 1995, p. 11). These epiphanies are not, of course, related to an *a priori* truth about the objects on display, nor are the objects inherently able to activate in the viewer such epiphanies at the moment of visitation. Instead, these so-called epiphanies are constructed narratives which museums are so successful in producing. In the case of the Cyprus Museum, these cultural epiphanies relate to an already constructed, well-circulated and established sense of continuity (or discontinuity) from the classical past to the present, defining the island’s identity as a ‘Mediterranean island’, still in the process of ‘finding’ itself. Nonetheless, the museum remains ignorant to the developments of the island and the particular art intervention that occurred on its premises highlighted this urgent need for change.

The contemporary works which were positioned in a direct dialogue with the archaeological artefacts during the exhibition, *Synergy*, opened up a space for questioning what was otherwise impossible or invisible in the museum. While museums have traditionally functioned as spaces for contemplation, reflection and discussion, their educational mission and impact, although desired, remains less clear, especially in the ways in which museums promote inquiry (Jeffers, 2003). Instead, “as educative institutions, museums function largely as repositories of the *already known*. They are places for telling, once and again, the stories of our time, ones which have become *doxa* through their endless repetition” (Bennett, 1995, p. 147). Thus, it is imperative for a museum like the Cyprus Museum to find ways to become more dialectical, to promote probing, and to become more alert and attuned to the needs of the present social life and politics of Cyprus, especially after the financial implementation imposed by the IMF’s austerity measures. More than ever, people’s needs are changing, as much as their living conditions, since the consequences of the economic changes are increasingly becoming evident on the island. Museums as educational institutions are called to play a crucial role in these transformative and unstable times, providing people the space and the platform to connect their past with their present in meaningful and possibly inspiring ways that will allow them to creatively respond to these changes.

The intervention by Angelos Makrides and Phanos Kyriacou (and of Yiannis Toumazis) was an alternative educational tool that reformed the museum for the short time that it lasted. The direct dialogue between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’, the latter being an artistic interpretation of, and, a critique of the former, introduced a critical dimension to the process of looking which escapes mere aesthetics, challenges one’s *doxa*, and destabilises the certainties otherwise fixed in the museum’s space, offering, therefore, the opportunity for multiple readings which have little to do with the historically constructed ‘Greco-Mediterranean’ identity of the island. Surely, one might argue that empowering Cyprus’ presence in Europe and the wider Mediterranean region should be the purpose of such a museum.

Nonetheless, the Cyprus Museum is among the few in the country which could potentially serve as a dynamic and informal educational resource, ultimately refining both the museum experience and one's relation to artefacts and the past. More so, through its openness to host the intervention by Angelos Makrides and Phanos Kyriacou, the Cyprus Museum has proved to be a foundation with great potential for re-defining a sense of collective identity that diverts from orthodox notions of locality and limited understandings of the Mediterranean imaginary.

## NOTES

- <sup>i</sup> Horden and Purcell discuss extensively the notions of *exceptionalism* and *exclusivism* by making reference to the work of Herzfeld.
- <sup>ii</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the notion of identity and the 'homeland' in other contemporary art practices from Cyprus, see Antonis Danos' paper 'The Little Land Fish' (2011b), published by *Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing*.
- <sup>iii</sup> Carol Duncan argues that the creation of public art museums functioned in such fashion in relation to the nation state. They 'made the state look good: progressive, concerned about the spiritual life of its citizens, a preserver of past achievements and a provider for the common good' (1991, p.93). I argue here that these are functions of museums in general, not just of the art museum, particularly museums created during colonial times.
- <sup>iv</sup> The museum was originally housed in governmental offices until a new structure was built in 1908. The building was designed and constructed by architect N. Balanos, and supervised by curator of the museum at the time, George Everett Jeffery (Boumia & Stylianou-Lambert, 2011).
- <sup>v</sup> EOKA stands for *National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters* and it was an organised attempt toward unification with motherland Greece and freedom from British colonial rule. The fights between EOKA and the British started in 1955 and lasted till 1959. A year later Cyprus was declared an independent country after the London-Zurich treaty. Archbishop Makarios III was elected the first president of the Republic of Cyprus.
- <sup>vi</sup> For a theoretical discussion regarding Institutional Critique, see, among others: Frazer Ward's 'The Haunted Museum: Institutional Critique and Publicity' (1995); Benjamin Buchloh's essay 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions' (1999); Andrea Fraser's essay in *Artforum*, 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique' (2005).
- <sup>vii</sup> For a more detailed discussion concerning the ways in which artists have addressed the ordering of knowledge in museums and galleries, see Gibbons (2007) chapter 6, 'The ordering of knowledge: Museum and Archives'. Michel Foucault's seminal text, *The Order of Things*, is also important in better understanding the classification and display system of museums.
- <sup>viii</sup> Similar discussion on aesthetic value versus cultural production can be found in Karp and Lavine (1991).
- <sup>ix</sup> For a more detailed discussion on 'Aphrodite' as a contested entity, metaphor and symbol relevant to the history of the island, see Yiannis Papadakis' paper 'Aphrodite delights' (2006). As he claims in the paper 'The symbolic uses of Aphrodite by British colonialism, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots alike offer revealing insights into the island's politics, as they encompass issues of colonialism, nationalism, historiography, gender and migration. Aphrodite, like Cyprus, is, and has been, a point of tension and contention' (2006, p. 238).

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