

PRESS RELEASE

Toxic

TITA BONATSOU, ANTHI BOUKOUVALA, LILA CAMBANIS, EFFIE FOURIKI, KATERINA GAKA, YORGOS GYPARAKIS, MARIA KONTI, JAMES LANE, ANA MATHIOU, YIANNIS MELANITIS, KATERINA MERTZANI, EVA MICHALAKI, ALEXANDER PFAFF, FANI SOFOLOGI, COLOR SOUND: DIAMANTIS TASSIS – MICHALIS HADJIMOISSIS, YIANNIS THEODOROPOULOS, EMILIA TSEKOURA, DIMITRIS TSOUBLEKAS, PANAYOTA TZAMOURANI, DIMITRA VANTZOU, PANOS VARDOPOULOS, APOSTOLOS ZERDEVAS

4 – 29 October 2001

Organised by: The Deste Foundation, CCA – WWF Greece

Toxic was organised by the Deste Foundation to coincide with the exhibition *Images Beyond the Naked Eye*, a project organised by WWF Germany which has toured in many countries and will be hosted at the Deste Foundation's Centre for Contemporary Art. *Toxic* was conceived in order to give the opportunity to Greek artists to examine one of the world's most critical problems: the greenhouse effect, global warming and the gradual destruction of the natural environment.

Both exhibitions will be shown in the Centre's two exhibition spaces, and reflect the Foundation's unwavering interest in those manifestations of contemporary art which approach crucial issues of contemporary life, recording its complexity and directly communicating its concerns to the general public.

Most of the exhibited works – photographs and videos – were made specifically for the show.

Dimitra Vantzou is concerned with the idea of transformation – a reality which, although an integral part of the process of survival, often acquires an apocalyptic aspect as a result of the adverse changes we have brought about in our natural environment. The creature she has visualised, a woman with butterfly wings or a butterfly with a woman's body hovers between two dimensions, transmuting in an effort to survive.

Panos Vardopoulos's film *The Dream of Euridice* attempts to explore the psychological parameters that are a result of the realisation of man's new place within the ecosystem, his awareness of the greenhouse effect, and therefore his anxiety about the future; an anxiety expressed in emotional as well as rational terms. The condition the work examines is none other than the state of confusion generated within the human mind because of the changed relation between man and nature as well as the fact that nature is now a competitor rather than an ally.

Katerina Gaka's video *Blue* calls upon the viewer to retreat to that primordial dimension where one's senses are not yet saturated through constant friction with the world as we know it. Her immersive imagery triggers an immediate perception of reality and awakens pure and genuine emotions. Gaka focuses on the image of water thus alluding to the beginning of all life. She reminds the viewers of the sense of security nature used to give, in contrast to the threat we now feel as a result of the destruction of the natural world.

Yorgos Gyparakis isolates aspects of everyday reality, extracting them to create a series of microcosms in order to arrive at a total, universal concept and to embrace the macrocosm of human experience. A piece of trash evokes the state of the whole planet, while a sink invites us to realise our dependence on water which is in increasingly short supply.

The text-based photographs of Apostolos Zerdevas constitute an attempt to explore the way in which words and images interact. The incorporation of short texts in his photographs enables viewers to "read" the image, without however dictating interpretation or trapping them within a single logic. The text suggests, whether directly or indirectly, a state of invisible threat and generates a sense of the dangers inherent in the phenomenon of global warming. The photographs of **Yiannis Theodoropoulos** deal with the idea of restricting nature within an artificial environment, in this case, a greenhouse. Although seemingly neutral, his image transcends mere depiction. This completely controlled environment inevitably poses questions

about the ideological as well as the aesthetic transformation of nature. From unprocessed raw material through to its complete exploitation as a product, nature increasingly appears to resemble the 'protected', 'productive' space of the greenhouse.

Lila Cambanis focuses her camera on what she calls "true reality", referring to the conditions around us that have a devastating effect on both humans and their surroundings. Her images are emotionally charged and resonate with a feeling of malaise and disquiet. Cambanis uses photography to awaken consciences and raise questions about crucial issues pertaining to the quality of human life and the future of the planet.

The digitally manipulated photographs of **Maria Konti** attempt to depict the sense of unease generated by the random, chaotic character of the Greek urban environment. She photographs the ambitious public works which are in progress in Athens for the 2004 Olympics in an attempt to comment on the rapid pace at which the city is being 'rebuilt', usually at the expense of the natural environment.

The work of **James Lane** transposes the greenhouse effect and its consequences – a concern already assimilated by collective consciousness – into a personal and hence idiosyncratic microcosm. *Warmed and Warned* is an allegorical expression of questions which we are all called upon to answer: Do we still recognise the world that surrounds us? Do we accept it? Can we – should we – put up with it?

Ana Mathiou's photographs depict fragments of nature in an abstract and at the same time poetic manner. Memory, nostalgia, the loss of the world as we know it and the fear, solitude, wilderness and silence of a world we wish never to know are some of the issues she raises. The butterflies in Yiannis Melanitis' video serve as examples of their adaptability to the external conditions they face. The question raised is how long we can keep responding to the ever more frequent need to adapt ourselves to a reality which is increasingly prohibitive for our species?

Katerina Mertzani comments on the excessive projection of human individuality and, consequently, its imposition over a complex, fluid, volatile world which still, however, shows a peculiar kind of balance and cohesion. Her digitally manipulated images hint at the disruption of this equilibrium and the loss of this cohesion as a result of the arbitrary interventions of the human ego.

Natural foods, genetically engineered products and dietary hysteria form the starting point in the work of **Eva Michalaki**. She takes close-up shots of organic forms, obliterating their shape and thus producing ambiguous forms and mutations. At the same time her works constitute a study of the evolution of organic forms as they mutate by default, a 'natural' outcome of scientific progress.

The black vortex at the centre of the photographs by **Tita Bonatsou** keeps growing like a black hole ready to devour our microcosm and the entire universe. Where did it spring from? Could it be our own doing and are we unaware of it?

Anthi Boukouvala expresses her environmental concerns in a direct manner, focusing on people who are mutated and severed from the umbilical cord of Mother Nature. Is malignant growth and teratogenesis the future of mankind? Is this the price one has to pay for hubris?

Alexander Pfaff sees the tangible world as consisting of four diverse but inseparable elements: man, animals, plants and soil. Four different worlds in a cycle with inevitable interactions, whose balance man is now upsetting with dramatic results, causing visible and invisible changes in nature, where the visible is a product of the invisible.

Fani Sofologi has titled her video media offline, from a computer command which warns that some of the original material is lost, or that the experiment has failed. Her work unsparingly demonstrates that Le Corbusier's theory, according to which concrete and steel should be counterbalanced by soil and vegetation in the urban landscape, was not adopted. On the contrary, the density of glass-faced buildings and air-conditioners in a specific area raises the temperature and changes the microclimate. Looking at fragmented images of the city of Athens, the eye is unable to discern shapes and ends up seeing a vast expanse of pixels.

4.1 by Colour Sound – **Diamantis Tassis** and **Michalis Xadjimoissis** – presents the four elements of nature: water, fire, earth and air. It juxtaposes and correlates simplicity and complexity, the unique and the repetitive, motion and immobility in an attempt to redefine the way we perceive the world around us. The work constitutes a virtual tour of our cosmos,

free of topological and subjective references, which aims to trace a more fundamental reality.

Panayota Tzamourani's *Untitled (Sea)* is a video with reworked sounds and images of familiar people and places combined in random stories. Image and sound function in unison in an attempt to provide answers to such fundamental questions as what aspects of the things we perceive are real and what is it that really surrounds us.

Emilia Tsekoura's photographs point a concave mirror to the world, and the resulting reflection proposes a different interpretation of the greenhouse effect. The metaphor attempted by these photographs treats the world as a sphere of accumulated human desire, extravagant and unruly, with despotic and ultimately destructive powers.

Effie Fouriki's video *Whispers and Flows* presents images of nature that emerge gradually through the observation and recording of its motions, pulses and vibrations. The artist concentrates on flowing forms of light and its reflections through a series of different environments and manipulates the images using materials like ink or soot to reproduce the natural environment's structures and activities.

Dimitris Tsoublekas uses photography to create his own independent reality, a reality that draws both on the tangible world and the world of the imagination. The real and the digitally constructed intersect in his work to create startling juxtapositions that completely re-define the ways we look at the environment and the city around us.

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