

Alexandra Athanassiades

Fragments

September 9 – October 18, 2017

Poros

Memory combats decay. Alexandra Athanassiades seeks to introduce the 'Boundaries of Decay', to undo the critical effect of time and oblivion. She combines fragments, conjoins impressions, and evokes, gradually and sometimes imperceptibly, the resulting emotions.

This exhibition presents for the first time new, twodimensional works on paper. These are impressions, 'traces' of earlier sculptures. Through this parallel form Alexandra Athanassiades pursues a continual visual dialogue between the materials of Art and the phases of time.

Alexandra Athanassiades focusses on the fragmentary, the disconnected. Decaying matter provides her material: a piece of broken, decomposed wood, the stray part of an ancient sculpture, warped paper, the chance imprint of an older work. Her artistic creations emerge from these ingredients, which are remains or often fragments, in much the same way that human memory works—that is, disjointedly and selectively. The materials create layers and overlays, like the phases and reminiscences of human life. Artistic creation is often the result of fortuitous events, sometimes even of the accidental. This is why the works of Alexandra Athanassiades serve as the starting points for associations both for the artist and the viewer.

Horses and breastplates—two units—make up the basic theme of the exhibition. This coexistence almost necessarily recalls a

diachronic heroic element. From the depths of antiquity, mythology, and history, from epic poetry to folk song it is possible to trace the role and symbolism of the horse: winged Pegasus, the Trojan Horse, the god-sent horse of Achilles in Homer and Kavafy, the stallion of Digenis Akrites; but also the representations on the Parthenon and the tragic horse of Guernica. Comrade-in-arms, fellow traveller, man's helper and supporter, the horse expresses the harmony of body and spirit. Its role also recalls the limitations of man: it accelerates movement, extends staying power, reinforces energy, allowing man to go beyond the peak of his physical powers—to temper the deterioration of his existence. Alexandra Athanassiades' works record this entire trajectory, common or parallel, the coexistence of man and horse. In this continuous history there is also room for the little wooden horse, the plaything of our childhood years, a favourite companion in our escape and fantasy, and an entrée into the world of heroes, fairy tales, and wonders.

The breastplates are the second element that Alexandra Athanassiades brings in from history. A defining part of the defensive arms of antiquity and the Middle Ages, the breastplate covers and protects the vital organs of the body, chiefly the heart. In these representations on paper or metal emphasis is placed on the inexorable passage of time, deterioration, inevitable closure. This fate—the end—is not limited to the material of construction. It mainly concerns the function and role of the breastplate, for at some critical point this item is bound to fail to secure protection, to ward off fatality. The human body is vulnerable; no 'armour', no external sheathing can protect it for ever. Alexandra Athanassiades is dominated by this melancholy thought, which can be detected in the progressive evolution-transformation of the breastplate: the usual museum display, i.e. the closed, impenetrable breastplate, 'opens up', leaving human life exposed and unprotected.

This in fact is the basic idea behind all the works exhibited. The external covering, the shell, whether a drawing or sculpture, encases a perishable, assailable entity—personal and charged. Alexandra Athanassiades concentrates on this hidden dimension, on the inner element, which as a presence transcends the boundaries of sculpture.