

George Lappas

Eerie Walk

October 24, 2023 – January 13, 2024

Athens

CITRONNE Gallery presents *Eerie Walk*, a solo exhibition of George Lappas. This fourth solo exhibition held by the gallery on the distinguished late artist, enters the mental realm of George Lappas (1950-2016) in order to track the «invisible» paths of his thought that are transcribed into a body of work that is cohesive and rich in mental and sensorial cues. The exhibition aims at exploring the in-between connections of his works and some of the essential ideas that run through them.

The exhibition's central work is the *Male Figure*, an uncompleted/work in progress sculpture that the artist began in 2015 and has since then been left off as a two-meter high metal frame that renders of the human body. The configuration that stands impressively in the exhibition space as a three-dimensional drawing in space, like a cursive line and painterly gesture, both hard and «fragile», discloses the structure of the work. It is composed of parts that the artist took from other his sculptures and results from the process of dismantling and recomposing new works out of them.

A recurring practice, deconstruction and rearrangement is traced in the modular element in many of the artist's sculptures. What appears as an inner structure/frame is often exposed in certain parts of a work and is often made part of the finished sculpture thus eradicating any distinction between the concepts of the finished and an open-ended work.

Accordingly, some of the parts in *Male Figure*, the exhibition's focal work, formerly belonged to another work that the artist disassembled. The large blue, lighted *Rake* (2012), also in the exhibition is one of those former parts that remains intact. The

placement of *Rake* further away from the *Male Figure* implies distance (also temporal) and matches the fragmented character of the large sculpture of which the head, two shoes and palms are the only «finished», figurative parts. Also, in the exhibition is a group of small sculptures presented exactly as found in the artist's studio. The joint presentation of the small sculptures with the large *Male Figure* also implies the typical of many of the artist's works and often surreal combination of the large and small scale – as in *Couple* (2013) – which disturbed the conventional sense of measure.

George Lappas often referred to this «paradoxica» but in his view natural mixing of the small with the large in relationship to ancient Egyptian art and talked about his childhood memories of the various-sized antiquities displayed next to each other at the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo.

The work of George Lappas constantly expands the boundaries of sculpture, also by integrating light in his works. The CITRONNE gallery exhibition underlines the metaphorical and literal meaning of light and shadow in the work of the artist and to their suggestion of the immaterial, that which is invisible as in the case of a work's hidden structure.

Instead of mass and volume, George Lappas «moulded» space with light which in its opaqueness seems like mass but which appears to liquify mass at the same time. He uses light for the first time in the installation *Parafratellinalia* from the late eighties where it is meant as bright rivers (based on maps) among tent-like constructions.

The works of George Lappas that are often lit both from the inside as well from outside projectors, acquire a pulsating presence that resembles an energized field. The works transmit, communicate, they meet the viewer's gaze, therefore becoming both the object and subject of vision. They transcend a corporeal, tangible element through corporeality and the tangible.

Movement and change, balance and temporal passages, the depiction of different temporalities in one moment and the definition of space in reference to different meeting points (as for example in some of the installations of the Red Burghers series) are characteristics featured in *Eerie Walk. Happy Figure* (2010) that balances in the pose of frozen long stride, is a version of the Balancer or the *Acrobat* (2013), archetypal figures and inner psychological conditions that George Lappas related to the

personality of an artist. His figures are depicted as if in a pending situation caught as they are between movement and stiffness, elevation and fall, stability and instability, an implied vertical and horizontal axis.

They therefore point to an intermediate, awkward situation, a verge, a transition.

Movement, transition and variability are also captured by the *Traveller* (2014) another distinct figure with both autobiographical and intercultural references. A static, inner movement in the sense of a mental alertness as in focused, detailed observation (therefore the use light in the sense of drawing attention to something) is the *Blue reclining figure* (2008), a recurring figure-motif in the work of George Lappas and inspired from the reclining, languid figures of some Egyptians that the artist remembered from his birthplace.

Another figure, the *Gardener* (2011) holds a rod instead of a rake, ending in a round, lighted shape possibly implying cultivation and metaphorically, creativity.

The works presented in *Eerie Walk* share in common the human figure which appears «fleshless» - in an extreme as in the *Male Figure*. However, in the clothed, «finished» works, the foldings of the plastic-made clothing or the light that seems to emanate from within draw attention to what the inside the sculpture might be- as a result the structure and its “skin” are conceptually not set apart.

Eerie Walk is the immaterial, it captures absence, the shadow, the implication of flowing creativity the perception of some indeterminate sentiment, the sense of vertigo that the subversive work of art of George Lappas often generates, it is also this «visceral» throb that the artist believed a true work of art should radiate.

Experiential and evocative but also with the humour of the awkward, the work of George Lappas blends the personal with history and memory, draws from and transforms elements from the History of Art and myths, positions itself in the crossroads of civilization, builds an image of humanity and variously tests the limits of the artistic medium, the perception of an artwork and our sense of space.

A deeply thinking artist, a citizen of the world and broadly travelled, singled out for the enigmatic and at once poetic and intellectual way he spoke about art, George Lappas first studied Clinical Psychology in the United States (at Reed College in Portland, Oregon), studied

Architecture in London (at the Architectural Association School of Architecture) and then Sculpture at the Athens School of Fine Arts (1976-1981) under Yiannis Pappas and Giorgos Nikolaidis. He was a distinct, unendingly innovative artist whose work in the context of contemporary Greek art remains largely unexplored. The exhibition is therefore also thought as invitation/instigation for a further academic study of his work. It hopes to do so by signalling some of the recurring, fundamental concepts in his working method and by opening one more view in a contemporary body of work which indicates that the strongest presence includes absence, or put differently, that which remains hidden.

Unsurprisingly, George Lappas was moreover an inspired and inspiring teacher remembered for his alternative and imaginative teaching method as a Professor at the Athens School of Fine Arts (1992-2016). His complex, intertextual and surprising work was internationally presented in large exhibitions and prominent Art Biennials. Among them were the influential exhibition *Metropolis* at the Martin Gropius Bau in 1991, the Venice Biennial where the artist represented Greece in 1990 (together with Yiannis Bouteas), the Alexandria Biennale (he was recipient of the first prize in 1984) and the Sao Paulo Biennial in 1987. That same year the artist created the installation *Mappemonde*, the Map of the World, a memory field reconstituted by CITRONNE Gallery in the artist's exhibition in 2018.

A catalogue with the curators' essays supplements the exhibition. The exhibition includes a projection of segments from the television series ArtΦιλ by Katerina Zacharopoulou and broadcast by SevenX (1998), that show the night-time mobile exhibition of George Lappas's sculpture *Liver Divination* around the roads of Athens.

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