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In the Greek Crisis, It Is Immoral for Art to Fall Back on Pseudo-Political Cliches

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Marina Fokidis, one of the curators of the Thessaloniki Biennale 2011



Courtesy of Thessaloniki Biennale

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For everybody in Greece, one of the first issues should be preventing the current crisis from being branded in the wrong way. The Greek crisis confronts us as a harsh reality, a reality that is here to stay, a difficult episode of an unknown duration — certainly, it will last longer than we once imagined — during which we all have to learn to survive as best as possible. We must learn to find our balance in this new environment.

The mass media has been quick to make a brand out of something called the "Greek crisis," with the paradoxical goal of triggering consumerism. Only a few advertisements in Greece do not refer to the economic crisis or ask people to buy more products for cheaper prices, etc. And then, of course, the crisis appears all the time as a subject in contemporary theater, music, and visual production. "Crisis" is an easy tag for everything as long as there is no need for serious thinking.

This is immoral.

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Our biggest responsibility during these turbulent and uncertain times is to think with deepest precision, to think of causes and possibilities, to analyze facts, to open up a constructive environment for knowledge, even amid the difficult context which results from the real restrictions produced by the crisis.

Because the theme of crisis is so present, almost a cliché, we actually believed that avoiding using the Greek or the European crisis as an easy way to catch the attention of visitors was one of the key tasks of the Thessaloniki Biennial. In the initial discussions between curators on the state of the world, the phrase "between a rock and a hard place" came up. We decided to use the phrase as a name for part of the show, but to leave out the "between," mainly because we were interested in investigating the terms of the question rather than placing the art or our curatorial practice in a defeatist position.

At the same time, we wanted to avoid pseudo political gestures, false or incomplete documentation, and pseudo activism — trends we see a lot in the art world of late (for some years now, actually). Such things have their place on TV or in the mass media — not here. We focused more on works which speak of current conditions, but through the properties of art itself, using color, form, conceptual abstraction, or elusive storytelling — to name just a few of the strategies — rather than including works which resemble manifestos.

Art is connected to illusion, after all. This may be where its main political power lays, so this is where we focused. The works we have included in our biennale reflect the human condition and its fragile nature, in many different senses and via many different pathways and stories. And in this way, we can open up ways to think not just about the crisis, but beyond the crisis.

Another important strategy for us as curators was to involve the city of Thessaloniki in a very clear

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