

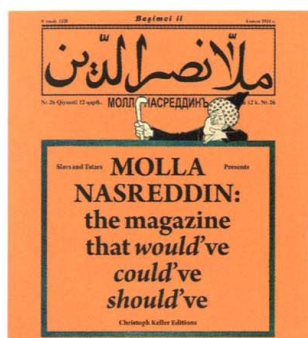
Flash Art

NEWS

GREECE

ATTENTION TO DETAIL: THESSALONIKI BIENNALE 2011

Giancarlo Politi



SLAVS AND TARTARS, Molla Nasreddin (COVER), 2011. Offset print, 24 x 28 cm.

GIANCARLO POLITI: *What kind of setting, in relation to the production and showcase of contemporary art, does Thessaloniki represent?*

Katerina Koskina: Thessaloniki is an important city due to its history and geographical position. It is a city that bears the mark of the various cultural eras from antiquity to today, and with an open horizon to the sea and very close ties to the Balkans, the nearby East and the Mediterranean countries. At the same time it is a city with a multitude of significant museums and institutions, in addition to private and public cultural spaces and initiatives. The city has two museums of contemporary art: the State Museum, holder of the remarkable Costakis Collection of Russian Avant-garde art that has already

organized in the past two Biennales various exhibitions; and the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, with a quite eminent collection of mainly Greek contemporary art dated from the '50s up until today and a smaller section of the Alexander Iolas Collection. Thessaloniki is a vibrant cultural city with a vivid and energetic audience that includes the vast student community of the two universities.

GP: *What is the concept behind this edition of the biennale?*

KK: This edition differs from the previous due to its area of interest, this time focused mainly on the Mediterranean region. Its aim is to reveal different fields of social and artistic discourse in relation to geopolitical classifications taking place in that part of the world, even though the main focus of the biennale won't concentrate on the political situation but rather on the creation of a multicultural platform open to new expression derived mainly from the mid Mediterranean. Greece has always been, since the ancient times, part of and in close encounter with this area; hence we consider that the biennale holds every reason to make the Mediterranean its area of research. We submitted a proposal to the European Regional Development Fund, and managed to retain three additional editions of Biennales

titled Old Intersections - Make it New, last summer before the turmoil started. This emerging artistic society full of similarities as well as diversities, with its very intimate relationship with tradition and history drew our attention as it started to present a new field of experimentation in contemporary art. In the third edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale, the State Museum of Contemporary Art is the leader of the Thessaloniki 5 Museums Movement (5M) that comprises the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, the Museum of Byzantine Culture, the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art and the Teloglion Foundation of Art. Each one of us according to our field of research will present an exhibition that will address associations with the Mediterranean. The main programme, titled A Rock and a Hard Place, has been developed by three curators: Paolo Colombo, Mahita El Bacha Urieta and Marina Fokidis, appointed by an international Advisory Committee. In addition, there is a parallel programme including the Workshop of Young Artists, the Performance Festival, events and a symposium.

GP: *Is the biennale going to engage with the city and its community with site specific projects and artworks?*

KK: Certainly yes! The Biennale will be spread throughout the entire city, indoors and outdoors, engag-

ing many institutions and private and public venues, such as the five museums and various historical sites strongly associated to the city's past. Hopefully the curators of the main program, which will concentrate on this particular engagement with the city and its community, will have the opportunity to give you more information. The Performance Festival of the parallel program that takes place for the second time, will also occur at various sites through the city. Our primary intention is to host an international Biennale in a form of an artistic celebration, where notions of critical thinking will arise and issues in discourse will be examined. This can be implemented throughout the participation of the citizens and especially the younger generations. With the opening of this Biennale we are enhancing the city's extensive program that consists of various cultural initiatives and by doing so we are also exposing the city's multicultural "face". We have been collaborating, with the Municipality of Thessaloniki and other city authorities as well as with foreign institutions such as the Goethe Institut, the British Council, the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, the Institut de Francais, etc. At the same time we are examining possibilities of collaboration and we aim in developing partnerships with other Biennales taking place at the same time, such as the one in Istanbul and Lyon.