

Thessaloniki eyes new encounters

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As Greece is struggling with the economic crisis, but the third Thessaloniki Biennale is continuing at full speed. It is curated by Paolo Colombo, Marina Fokidis and Mahita El Bacha Urieta



The biennale focuses on the Mediterranean region and is framed by a main and a parallel program of artistic events, such as exhibitions by the 5M, the International Workshop of Young Artists "Domino," the Performance Festival, and a symposium. Photos courtesy of organisation

collaboration with Arab Image Foundation), Thomas Dworzak, Andreas Embirikos, Mounir Fatmi and also Turkish artists, Ali Kazma and Tayfun Serttaş.

The biennale this year differs from previous ones, not only in the area of interest and its realization time, but with its collaborating institutions as well. The State Museum of Contemporary Art is the leader of the team, which is comprised by museum members of the "Thessaloniki – 5 Museums Movement" (5M): Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Museum of Byzantine Culture, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, State Museum of Contemporary Art, Teloglion Foundation of Art AUTH.

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The biennale is also part of the "Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads" program of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, focusing this year on the Middle East, and running under the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Department of Culture, Education and Tourism, the ninth Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities and other cultural and educational partners jointly.

Capturing sense of fragility

Curators wrote in the press release: "It captures the sense of fragility and jeopardy that looms over the wider politics of the Mediterranean and the psychology of the individual. The title refers to the expression "Being caught between a rock and a hard place" which indicates psychological, social, and political dilemmas that often present painful alternatives. The saying originates in Greek mythology, in "The Odyssey." In his efforts to return home, Odysseus must pass between Scylla and Charybdis."

Scylla was a horrible man-eating monster that struck from above the cliffs – the "rock" – while Charybdis was a treacherous whirlpool – the "hard place."

"A Rock and a Hard Place" will take place in historical buildings around the city, including Alataz Imaret, Bazaar Hamam, Bey Hamam, Casa Bianca, Yeni Djami, the Old Pumping station at the port, as well as in five museums: the State Museum of Contemporary Art, the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, the Teloglion Foundation of Art, the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki and the Museum of Byzantine Culture, which are part of the consortium that organizes the biennial. The biennale will relate to the city of Thessaloniki as a metaphor for its vigorous multicultural character of the past. Each of the buildings that will house biennale exhibitions will form single episodes of the main program's overall narrative.

A CRITIC FROM BIENNALE

According to art critic Firat Arapoğlu, the choice of artists featured in the biennale was democratic in terms of age, group and gender. Marwan Sahmarani's work, which is also in harmony with the general theme of the exhibition, Moataz Nasr's three-channel video installation and Turkish artist Tayfun Serttaş's work titled "Studio Osep" from 2009 reveal the identity, culture and philosophy of diversity in the approach to the exhibition. Some of Velonis' works in the exhibition were also in his solo exhibition, which took place at the Athens National Contemporary Art Museum last year. Those works can be read from the Soviet avant-garde era. Mounir Fatima's work also draws attention, Arapoğlu said.