



**GREEK**  
HORIZONS

CONTEMPORARY ART FROM GREECE

With essays by Efi Strousa and Roger Wollen  
Edited by Roger Wollen

These images were made even more interesting by the use of ground porcelain to create a controlled area of cracking in the paint surface by applying the powder to the canvas and using a water spray and hair-drier to control the results.

In reviewing Siagreece's 1991 exhibition in *Arti*, Elizabeth Koscielak asked "What will be the art of the new era, which is still without an aesthetic identity? This identity will be created by ... Siagreece's generation. Perhaps it will be created on canvas; perhaps somewhere else." Siagreece is now painting on objet trouvé. Many of the new works use a small amount of rich blue paint on a rust-enhanced metal found support, for example a ship's porthole, a pressure vessel, or a bird-cage. In other cases he is fashioning minute papier-mâché and ceramic figures and painting them blue (which he tells me can signify hope in Greece.)

The resulting work provides a comment on life today and the state of society by manipulating and enhancing the connotations and references supplied by the found object, so the painted area and the created interpretation(s) do not run counter to the original object but enhance it and extend it. The result is a magical construct with an absorbing power to worry and intrigue the viewer. Our response to the works is guided by Siagreece's titles, which pun and play with the objects and the concern which the artist attaches to them. "How a table takes off" is directly related to one of the large cracked surface paintings and similarly adopts a low viewpoint underneath the table. (Catalogue No 55 and illustration 7) A more searching humour is apparent in works entitled "The way rusty minds are made", "Cultural heritage is our hat" and "Prison for blue men".

Siagreece (the only artist in this exhibition to do so) studied Byzantine painting at art school, as well as fine art and spends some of his time painting frescoes and icons for the Orthodox Church. I doubt whether any of the works exhibited relate directly to his religious work (as some of his earlier paintings do) but one can perhaps suggest that his ability to work with

a limited set of components (found objects, blue paint, ceramics and papier-mâché) on a small scale, to produce powerful contemporary symbols of our society does have something in common. A world not in a grain of sand but in some piece of rubbish jettisoned by our throw-away world.

## MARIANNA STRAPATSAKIS

Lavrion, on the coast of Attica, has been an important mining centre for three thousand years. The silver that paid for ancient Athen's political and economic hegemony was mined there and in more recent times lead, manganese and cadmium have been the principal ores extracted. Today the mines are abandoned and the industrial buildings are derelict. Strapatsakis' video installation, with its enclosed metal housing and two small vertically-angled video screens is redolent of that history, with the abstract video images, sparkling and glittering in many colours, like metallic ore and mineral crystals, atmospheric of past tradition and the beauty that was based upon it.

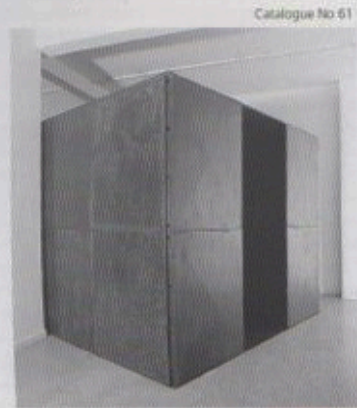


Illustration 13



The metal structure we enter to view the videos (Catalogue No 61) recreates the underground passageways peopled by generations of miners. The screens glitter, as we imagine metallic ores would do, with images shot on video in the mines and then montaged at the editing desk with further images of minerals shot at the Museum in Lavrion and combined with images painted in pastels on stainless steel. The resulting footage, with an atmospheric musical score by Haris Xanthoudakis, combines a wealth of historical, mythological and socio-political ideas with the aesthetic simplicity of a kaleidoscopic presentation of colour.

Strapatsakis' work as a video artist and as a painter has explored the histories and cultures that border the Mediterranean, reworking the archaeological, cultural and architectural monuments into electronically processed images for today (illustrations 8 and 13). This metamorphosis of past culture and history is filtered through and intertwined with the interaction of the underworld, the earth and the skies (or heavens) and their respective manifestations and representations, as in Hesiod's telling of the creation story. This interplay of the three 'worlds' is also mirrored by the range of settings in which Strapatsakis' installations are created, from underground basements and artificial structures (as in "Lavrion") to light, airy and exterior sites.

## PANOS VARDPOULOS

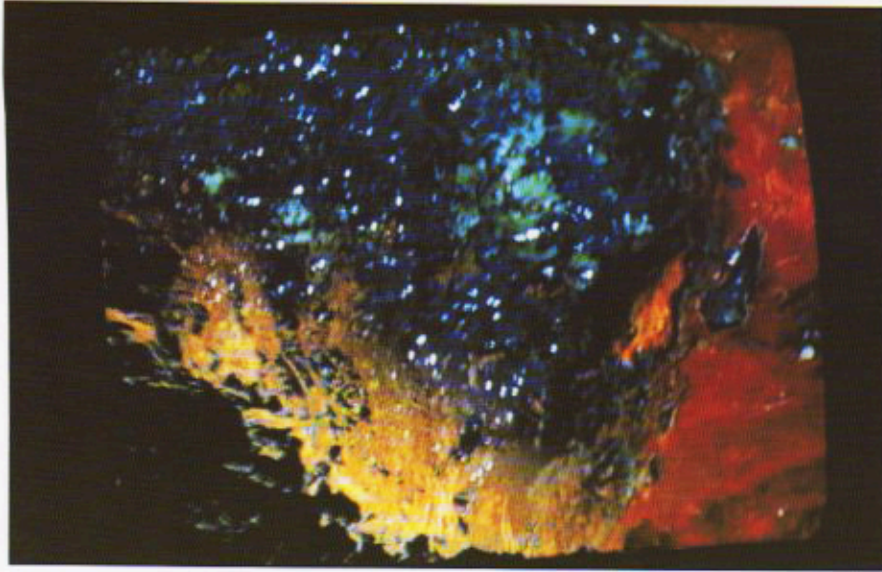
"Thalassa" is Vardopoulos' first video work and developed from "Thalassa I and II" (1992/3) which included a sequence of photographs of bathers in, on and beneath the sea, in which he used an underwater camera for the first time. (Illustration 14) "Thalassa" is also a development of his earlier photographic projects, "Driving" (1986) and "In the Underground" (1988). These projects combine ravishing and atmospheric colour and tonal presentation with an elegiac, plaintive feel and a sense of movement, self-evident in "Driving" (described in the catalogue for "Image and Icon" as "a fantastic journey through the Athenian night, a night torn by the headlights of cars against a background of neo-classical statuary and luridly illuminated skies") and "The Underground" and less obviously in "My Toys" (1989) - isn't childhood the most frenetically active period of most people's lives? The video, which exists in versions for both a single monitor (shown here) and five monitors, retains these characteristics. It not only makes the movement a reality (albeit largely in slow motion) but adds a mesmerising instrumental sound-track which is ideally matched with the images, which dissolve from reality (sea-bathing) into dreamlike, mysterious abstraction.

In Vardopoulos' work, as in Lizzie Calligas' photographs, the commonplace idea of swimming in the sea (Greece's *nostrum mare*) is reworked into a universal parable about the evolution of man (as a species and individually), his place on earth and his limitations.

Illustration 14



Catalogue No 61 (detail from the video)



Catalogue No 61 (detail from the video)



Illustration 21



**BORN:** 1947, Athens

**STUDIED:** Athens TEI 1967; Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, Paris 1969-74; Ecole du Louvre 1972; Sorbonne, Paris 1979

**SELECTED EXHIBITIONS:**

**SOLO** (paintings) - Maison des Beaux-Arts, Paris 1975; French Institute, Thessaloniki 1981; Medusa Gallery, Athens 1984, 1990 and 1997

**SOLO** (video and video installations) - Goethe Institute, Athens 1985; 10th International Video Festival, Montpellier, France 1989; Guebwiller, France 1989; French Institutes, Athens and Thessaloniki 1990; Rhodes Municipal Art Gallery, 1990; Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Nice, 1990; Auberge de France, Rhodes 1993; "Byzantium", Venetian Fortifications, Corfu 1994 and Museum of Modern Art, San Diego, Chile 1995; Medusa Gallery, Athens 1997

**GROUP** (paintings) - Salon des artistes Français, Paris 1971; Ninth Grand Prix de Peinture de la Côte d'Azur (honorary distinction) 1973; "Feminine Dialogue", UNESCO, Paris 1979; Athens Municipal Art Gallery and Medusa Gallery, Athens 1988; Ileana Tounta Art Centre, Athens 1989

**GROUP** (video and video installations) - Thessaloniki Film and Video Festival 1987; European Media Art Festival, Osnabrück 1988; 2nd Istanbul Biennale 1990; "Metamorphoses of the Modern - The Greek Experience", National Gallery, Athens 1992; Panorama Europeo del video arte, Madrid 1993; Roma Europa, Rome 1994; Medusa Gallery, Athens 1996; Contemporary Art Centre, Rethymnon, Crete 1997

**VIDEO PUBLICATION:** Included in *Eikona* Video Magazine No 1, 1997.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** *Arti - Art Today* No 31, Athens, 1996.

**COLLECTIONS:** National Gallery, Athens; Ministry of Culture, Athens; Goulandris Museum of Modern Art, Andros; Rhodes Municipal Art Gallery; Contemporary Art Centre, Rethymnon

## MARIANNA STRAPATSAKIS

### "SECRET PASSAGES - LAVRION"

Lavrion: ancient Lavrion, the mining area near the Temple of Poseidon at Sunium. Silver was extracted from lead sulphide. The first Athenian silver coins in the 5th BC were minted from Lavrion silver. Mining continued until this century.

"Secret Passages - Lavrion" is the second part of a trilogy on the process of creation. The first part (The phantasms of the Mediterranean, or The Reflections of the Past) concerned the element, water and linked the act of creation to the Mediterranean Sea and civilization through the temple of Athena Aphaea on Aegina. In Strapatsakis' work the history and image of the ancient temple were rebaptised in the water of which the wider physical and cultural landscape consisted, thus generating a new narrative about the unity of nature and art.

"Secret Passages - Lavrion" is concerned with the element, earth. The tunnels at Lavrion were dug out of the earth, the pits still gape in the surface and the subterranean life which, chthonic but marvellous, evolved in hiding beneath our feet and under the sun, make up the field over which Strapatsakis' restless gaze has wandered. She is still gazing at, and exploring, this bipolar unity: Nature and art. In this mineral world guarded within the womb of the earth, the movement of water is reconstructed in a stabilised form. It is through this solid space that, centuries ago, man began to build the structures of the industrial era, leading to the wasteful exploitation of the material wealth bestowed upon him by the earth. At that point history, nature and technology parted company.

In this buried history, Strapatsakis, led on by a curiosity most closely resembling that of the explorer, walks once more between the elements of nature and the remains of a mortified life. After observing water and fluidity, which as a natural state is inherent in the body and is reflected in human mental functions, the artist's eye has turned to the solid walls of earth. This brought her hard up against the solidified structure of things - of thought, of the form of the word. The artist, bringing their gaze to a standstill and focusing their attention on a single specific aspect of the cosmos, seeks to crystallise that aspect in a text of some kind, in an unambiguous structure and technique which - apart from their power of expression - will also convey a concept of the world correlated against a given historical point of view. For Marianna Strapatsakis, the work of art talks of the process of observation as if it were the act of mining a wealth of concepts and images lying somewhere in the depths, beneath all flat and linear forms of information. With spontaneous almost erotic passion, she penetrates into

the elements of nature, into the sea, into the structures of civilisation, into the images of art, helping us to "retrieve our sense" as Susan Sontag put it, in reference to the language of art and its reading in the culture of the present day.

That is why, before proclaiming the superiority of a "new" viewpoint on the world, of a "new" reading of art, we should examine whether we are able "to see more, to hear more, to feel more" (Susan Sontag: *Against Interpretation*, 1964). The course taken by Marianna Strapatsakis stimulates our sensibility in the direction of such a quest.

*Efi Strouza (Excerpts from the Catalogue to "Secret Passages - Lavrion", Medusa Gallery, Athens 1997)*



## PANOS VARDOPOULOS

### THALASSA

Suspension in the sea! A flight as in a dream. The impetus for this video are the serene feelings of the flight of dreams. Man is able to fly naturally in the water, an element with a gentle and cooling density. An anguish surfaces from the different medium, which is beyond human nature, but slowly it dies out. As in a dream, the consciousness of the circle of creation emerges in the individual's mind. The water cleanses and dilutes, embodies: it is the wellspring of life. The sea is the vast perpetual womb. In these sea flights, serenity and inner-gazing predominate. Thus a journey to a strange and yet harmonious space begins.

All these happen in a place, Greece, where the sea, as much as the land, is "La Patrie", the homeland.

**BORN:** 1956

**STUDIED:** University of Athens (Economy) 1983; Fotokinisi School, Athens 1984/5

**TEACHES:** Athens TEI

### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS:

**SOLO** - Athens Photography Centre 1992; Photo Synkyria, Thessaloniki 1993

**GROUP** - Biennale of Young Mediterranean Artists, Barcelona 1987; Athens Photography Month 1987; "Tendencias", Bari, Italy 1988; Fotogallery, Cardiff and tour 1988; Athens Photography Month 1989; Torino Fotografia, Turin, Italy 1989; Athens Photography Centre 1992-1994; Greek Video Art, Villa Medici, Rome 1994; "Landscapes of the Familiar", Milan Architectural Triennial, Italy 1996; Image and Icon, Thessaloniki, Bratislava and RPS, Bath 1997/8; "Aegean - Trajectories in Light and Time", Skopelos Photography Centre, Skopelos 1997

**VIDEO PUBLICATION:** Included in Eikona Video Magazine No 1, 1997