



# Marianne Strapatsakis at the National Archaeological Museum [17.05 - 31.08 2012]

in the context of events organized to celebrate International Museum Day

EXHIBITION CURATOR: ANDREAS IOANNIDIS

**S**olid columns and flowing water. Stable foundations and the course of the world. The primal water smelts everything, the primal light reflects memory. These two basic elements of Life are encapsulated in the column, the axis of the world. This is the way Marianne Strapatsakis has conceived the eternal development of birth-death-rebirth. The title of her work *The Phantasms of the Mediterranean or The Reflections of the Past* invites us to recall the civilizations of the Mediterranean, pillars of the modern

Western world. The choice of the ancient temple of Aphaia leads us further, to focus on ancient Greek civilization, which lauds the ideal Man. Past and present in continuous connection. Ancient and modern art in harmonious convergence. This gripping creation invites a response to the proposed dialogue, passing from static to powered, from the past to the present and the future. In a period of crisis, like the one we are experiencing, the work of Marianne Strapatsakis shakes us in a disagreeable way, with its restless waters

and ruins, but at the same time it heals with light, strengthening our teleological rebirth in the incontrovertible World. Through these symbolisms Marianne Strapatsakis' work is harmonized in the Museum, amid its ancient sculptures. Its presence supports the diachronic value of Greek antiquity, which focuses on Man; further more, it adds to the purposes set by the National Archaeological Museum, to be a cultural core in the heart of Athens.

NIKOLAOS KALTSAS  
Director of the National Archaeological Museum



## The Phantasms of the Mediterranean or the Reflections of the Past

In a passage of Hesiod's cosmogony, the world is created through a series of successive births. These births, however, are not the result of the act of love, of a union, but rather a result of separation: Gaia bears Uranus and Pontus; the Earth bears the Sky and the Sea. We shall again come across a similar motif in the Christian myth of creation: earth will emerge from the waters. Successive instances of separation will result in a world divided in three parts: the Sky, the Earth and the Underworld, or Hades. But the human being cannot bear this condition of separation and seeks union instead: the presence of love. Thus is created the cosmic axis that connects all things opposite; the *axis mundi*, running deep into the centre of the earth, the navel of the world, a firm point of reference.

And it is the *column*, the column built by Mediterranean cultures – the Mesopotamian, the Egyptian, the Ancient Greek – that will become the *axis mundi* of the western world. This cosmic axis allows us to trace the most solid ground in all Creation; a guardian of the world's form in the face of the formless flux preceding its birth; the concrete in the face of the abstract. It is this condition of flux that water comes to represent. And yet, this aquatic flux is at the same time the source of all creation, it is a cleansing baptismal font, and it remains inscribed as such in the collective unconscious of the Mediterranean peoples. It guarantees the myth of eternal recurrence; it is the beginning and the end, a place wherefrom all things emerge and into which all things vanish only to emerge yet again. It is that which shapes, that which takes shape away and that which casts it anew: from within it, history is born and reborn. The Mediterranean is to its peoples a basin that truly affords the possibility of catharsis. In discussing the water's symbolic power, Mircea Eliade will note that the waters are in fact "the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence; they precede every form and support every creation [...] immersion in water signifies regression to the preformal, reincorporation into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence. Emerson repeats the cosmogonic act of formal manifestation; immersion is equivalent to a dissolution of forms. This is why the symbolism of the waters implies both death and rebirth."

If one among the many roles of art is to remove pieces from the accumulated meaning of this world, or add new notions to it, then an essay inspired by a particular work of art should operate in a similar manner. Hence, in attempting to interpret this "installation" I was aided by a reference to mythical man and the archetypal act of creation. For, in the end, doesn't every artist strive to create their own world? A reference, then, to Creation, at the heart of which one finds the image of the waters, which "precede every form and support every creation"; of the waters as "the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence". And when the waters are troubled, they signify a return to the abstract, formless, pre-creation condition: a suspension of History. Conversely, when the waters are calm, they imply a return to the solid form, to History reinstated. This process is repeated ad infinitum in the work of Marianna Strapatsakis: in the element of the water itself; as much as in the video image and the reflections peopling her sheets of stainless steel. The only difference being that this "stainless" quality of the steel foils prompts me to veer slightly "off course" and to read into it a resilience to decay, a resistance in the face of time. The stainless steel surfaces are a mirror for the images of both troubled and calm waters: images of an unbreakable chain of birth, death and rebirth. The work is ultimately a space containing at one and the same time the past, the present and the promise of the future. For isn't this the space of the unconscious, whether individual or collective? Isn't it the space of the *axis mundi*, bringing together all that is different and opposing, in unity, through space as well as time?

All of the above serve to reassure me that one cannot be wrong in choosing to place a contemporary artwork that carries this kind of content in an Archaeological Museum, let alone the National Archaeological Museum with its panorama of Greek antiquity, an era known for its vision of mankind, for contemplating, imagining, fantasizing about the ideal man: a process as valuable as it is necessary for this day and age that is so poor in collective visions.

ANDREAS IOANNIDIS

Associate Professor Athens School of Fine Arts Athens, April 2012

**“Truly remarkable...! It is like the fluid recollection of a fading past, coming back to mind, perhaps for the last time... the space of dream, of fantasy... all is in flux, especially time.”**

Andrei Math, Montpellier, 1989



**“Very impressive, a work that transcends the boundaries of time – this is a submerged world, it is a snapshot of a world existing before the image, of a world that was no more than a wayward thought, or one that will still exist after we are gone, without us – it is a vision as inhumane as it is fresh, like eternal light.”**

Jean-Paul Faugier, Montpellier, May 1989

### A Video for Marianne Strapatsakis

Both a descriptive work and a generator of impressions, the video projection in Marianne Strapatsakis' installation comes to complement and enrich the notion of memory. As if reaching out to us from their place in Antiquity, tranquil images of an ancient temple flow by in slow motion, its columns being "the living pillars", while the camera attempts a description of their particular space.

This dream-like approach allows viewers to dream alike of this once inhabited space: the repetition of images allows us to think of this space as a passage, in terms both of knowledge and of history. These images convey a sense of time (the seasons, the passage of time) as well as motion (a coming-and-going, a back-and-forth between the exterior and the interior of the temple, alternating views of earth and sky). In the video's second part, the images seem to vibrate (by means of special effects), to come

alive at a chaotic pace: viewers experience a sense of precarious hovering; a vertigo-like feeling that forces them into a daydream of portentous moments in history. It is then that time dissolves, which leaves room for details of the images to come into play, drawings the artist has created on metal sheets, her core subject treated further, filtered through a blend of visions originating in reality as much as in the realm of painting: column fragments, broken steps leading up to temple, cracks in the stone. The image's subject takes on a painterly quality.

Editing choices and the rhythm these create offer viewers a sense of experiencing different times in the monument's life: a time of darkness for example, when the temple was a nightmarish relic submerged in troubled waters. This is no more than an image of the temple reflected in the surface of the steel foil, an uncanny visual effect meant to remind us that this space was a meeting point for men and gods – metal age, when the stone itself begins to speak.

ROBERT CAHEN  
Videoartist, April 1989

In *The Phantasms of the Mediterranean or The Reflections of the Past*, a work by Marianne Strapatsakis, the interplay of reflected images is not employed in a metaphorical or symbolic fashion, but rather as one of the installation's organic, structural elements. The functionality implied in the use of refracted light through video monitors, which record a series of attempts at deconstructing the image of ancient ruins (the temple of Athena Aphaia in Aegina) only to re-construct it anew, is telling of an unusual approach, not only of the technological media employed, but also of a number of archetypal questions.

In my view, the very use of means and materials (screens submerged in water, attached to four double-wall columns made of plexiglas and stainless steel foil) makes reference to a poetics that is no more "modern" than it is part of a rational and thus split awareness of cultural products and historical memory.

[...] Besides, it is precisely in this sense of the unattainable, in this reflection of the deceptions to which consciousness yields, that the true appeal of Strapatsakis' complex, polyvalent construction lies.

NIKI LOIZIDI

To Vima, 15 August 1999

*Both a descriptive work and a generator of impressions, the video projection in Marianne Strapatsakis' installation comes to complement and enrich the notion of memory.*

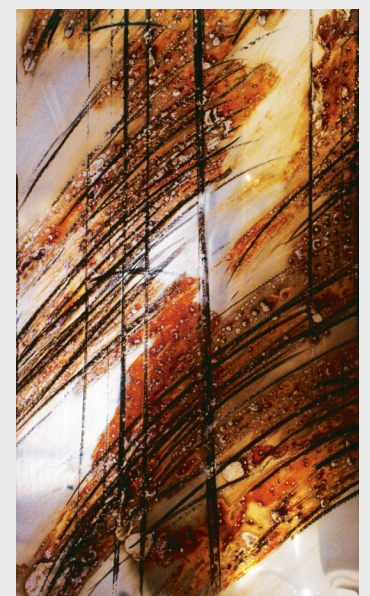






photo: Nikos Kasseris

**M**arianne Strapatsakis' new work, presented in two spaces – Medusa Art Gallery and the French Institute of Athens – explores ways in which contemporary visual investigations may revive and indeed reinforce the significance of an ancient ruin.

At the French Institute, on Sina St., Strapatsakis presents a video installation that includes painting and combines elements as diverse as plexiglas and water, while at the spaces of Medusa Art Gallery, the artist presents work in painting, which is one of the media she has used in creating the installation. The latter is a work that makes reference to the interplay of light and sea and of the ancient ruin mentioned above, the temple of Athena Aphaia on the island of Aegina, through a practice of painting upon steel foil that has been given the shape of a column. As far as the installation at the French Institute is concerned, the painted foil has been encased in a plexiglas column, in the hollow of whose interior runs water, while a monitor has been placed at the base, projecting images of the temple as a whole, or partial, fragmentary views of it, always in relation with light (the sky) and sea. The module of the column, complete with painting, water and video screen, is repeated four times throughout the exhibition space, presenting different aspects of the same subject.

[...] Now, what can be so special about this particular work by Marianne Strapatsakis, especially at a time when installation, video art, a whole range of media extraneous to conventional painting practice seems to have shed its erstwhile quality as a staple of the avant-garde, and has become instead part of a banal visual reality? The answer is that her work is sensitive, poetic and yet real; it is a work which the viewer would not feel the need to place under the category described above (though we must admit that no such category exists for works created by true artists and not mere “assemblers”) and therefore consider it within the limits of this particular moment in

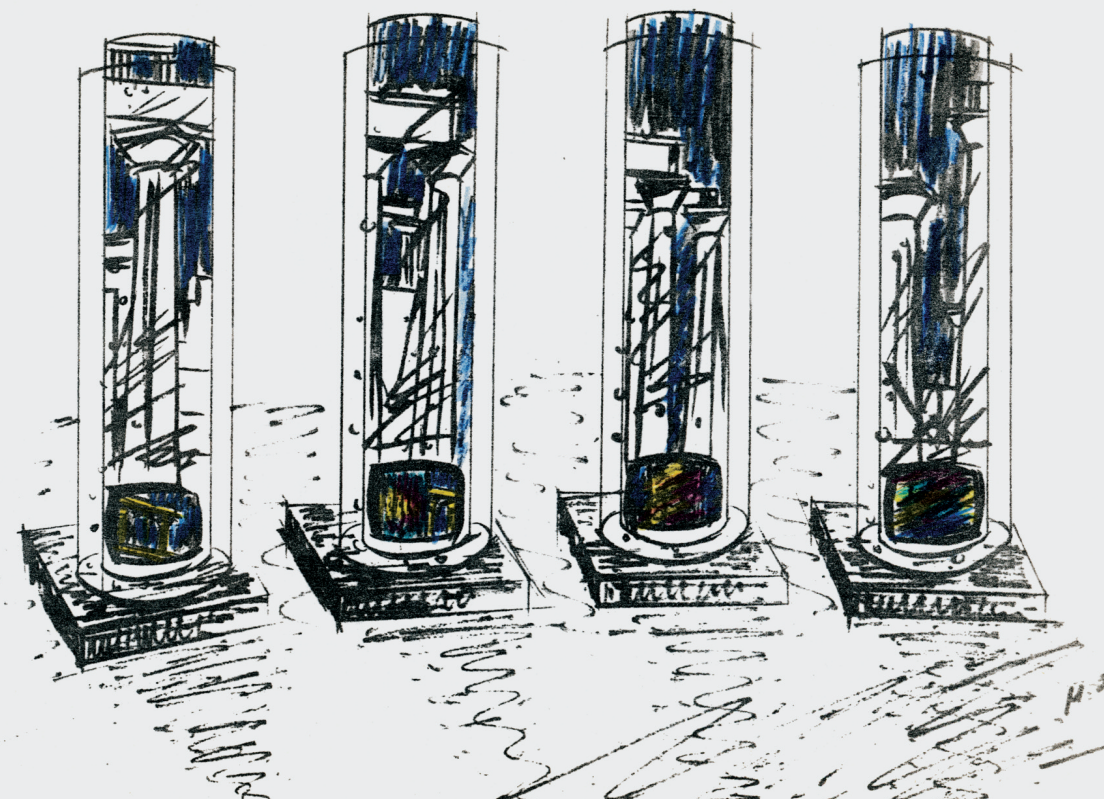
time. In this respect, we should view the work as a contemporary visual statement, not because of the media it employs, but because of the meaning implied in the “image” it proposes. It was not so long ago that the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris presented an exhibition titled *The History of the Museum*, in which another monument was approached by means of the video. The monument was none other than the Parthenon and the work was a video installation by Nam June Paik. It was a raw, aggressive work, which of course bore the stamp of the Korean artist's ingenious outlook on things; a work that did inspire admiration, yet failed to stir our emotion. Why, one may wonder. Perhaps because the monument had been approached as an image for consumption, as a commodity to be reproduced; it was viewed with detachment, it appeared to be disconnected from personal experience. Nevertheless, it was an impressive work, an imposing video installation. On the contrary, the temple of Athena Aphaia in Marianne Strapatsakis' work, its relationship with the sea and the sky is filtered through personal experience and thus allows us to forget the video screen, to escape the reality of technology and to dream instead. Naturally, the preoccupations and work of these two artists are very different. I am only drawing this analogy as I reflect on the reasons that make one video installation immediately assert its character as such and another defy clear definitions, elude even those that would directly follow from the medium itself.

[...] In my view, Marianne Strapatsakis' *The Phantasms of the Mediterranean* is a visual work that draws its power not from the medium it employs – the video and its subsequent editing – but from the artist's sensitive, personal gaze that envelops and infuses the entire “spectacle” of the installation.

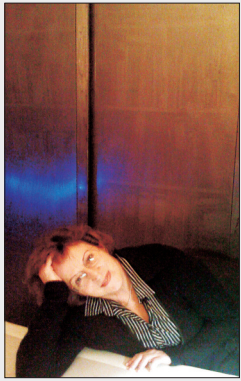
MARIA MARANGOU  
*Eleftherotypia*, 30 January 1990

**“These are images drawn out of the collective unconscious, which fascinate and inspire the individual soul. Upon seeing them, viewers feel as if they were emerging from water, as if they were being singularly reborn in a flash of lightning, as if they had vanished into oblivion. The work is a compelling attempt at representing the vital function that is the creative act. What more can one say when faced with such profound sensitivity and knowledge? Bravo!”**

Serge Hartmann, Guebwiller, August 1989







# Marianne Strapatsakis

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She was born in Athens. She started her studies with a scholarship at the Technological Institute of Athens – A.T.I. Since 1969 till 1974 she continued her studies in Paris, with a scholarship of the Academy of Athens, at the “Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts” in the departments of Painting and Sketch. At the same time she studies History of Art at the “Ecole du Louvre”, and Plastic Arts at the “University of Paris I”, in Sorbonne.

Since 1973 she began her artistic career. She was granted an honorable mention in 1973, at the group exhibition “9eme Prix de la Côte d’Azur”, and since 1984 she became involved with the Video Art movement, of which she is one of its leading exponents in Greece. In 1989 she is the honored guest of the 10th International Montpellier Video Festival, with her Video-installation “The Phantasms of the Mediterranean or The Reflections of the Past”. In 1990 she is invited to expose the same Video-installation at the Musée d’Art Moderne et d’Art Contemporaine in Nice, France. In 1993 she represents la France in Rhodes, for the celebrations «Rhodes 2400 Years» at the “Auberge de France” a Rhodes. In 1994 her varied artistic project «BYZANTIUM», was presented at Corfu’s Old Castle, for the Presidency of Greece in European Council. The Video-installation “The Phantasms of the Mediterranean or The Reflections of the Past” was exposed also in 1997 at the Greek Cultural Institute of Berlin, in 1998 at the Kiosk of the European Council in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1999 at the 1st Biennale of Electronic Media in Rome, Italy, at the 1st Biennale of Electronic Media in Patras, at the Municipal Gallery of Rhodes, in French Institute of Thessaloniki and in the Biennale of Istanbul. In 2009 in the line of European Artist Exchange, she is invited to present the trilogy «Birth-Life-Death» which composed from three Video-installations, at the European Artists Center «apollonia», in Strasbourg, France. In 2010 she presents the trilogy «Birth-Life-Death» in the Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete, at Rethymon. In 2011 she exposed the three channels Video-installation «Invisible Places-The Vast White»

at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens. She is honored guest of the Municipality of Athens for the exhibition «LADIES ARE SOUTING», at the same year she presented her work at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Rhodes. In 2012 she presents for the International Day of Museums, the Video-installation “The Phantasms of the Mediterranean or The Reflections of the Past”, at the National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

She has accomplished thirty four personal exhibitions in Greece, France, England, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Chile, and she has participated in fifty five group exhibitions in Greece, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, England.

Her work is presented to all the Dictionary of Art, in 140 articles at Newspapers and Journals, at T.V. and Radio emissions, as at Festivals in Greece and Abroad.

She has participated numerous times as a member of the artistic critics community. From 1980 until 2010 she served as the Artistic Manager of the Magazine “Archaeology and Art” of the Journalistic Organization Lambrakis and as partner of the Research Institute Lambraki. In 2005 she was a guest tutor at the Athens School of Fine Arts. From 2004 till today, she is teaching as Associate Professor at the “Department of Audiovisual Arts” of the Ionian University. She participated in numerous Conferences and Seminars of Art.

Works of her art are located in Greece: at the Ministry of Culture, at the National Gallery, at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, at the Museum of Modern Art of Elizas and Vasilis Goulandris, at the Municipal Gallery of Rhodes, at the Center of Modern Art of Rethymno, at the Municipality of Rhodes, at the Macedonian Museum of Modern Art, at the Museum of Byzantium Culture of Thessaloniki, at the Viannou Gallery in Crete, at the Gallery of Syros, at the collection of Harry Antoniou, at the collection of Perikli Sahini, at the collection K.Fix in Austria, at the collection of T. Karavia in New York and at others collections in Greece, France, Germany, Switzerland and the United States.

“In this amazing exhibition, the concept of ‘contemporary art’ seems to find its true expression. The show demonstrates the extent to which new media, when creatively employed, can give voice to contemporary human sensibility. Simply intriguing...”

*Dernières nouvelles d’Alsace, Guebwiller, 13 August 1989*



“You simply must visit the Petrarch art space for a view of Marianne Strapatsakis’ installation *The Phantasms of the Mediterranean or Reflections of the Past*. This is pure visual art. No wonder, of course, since Marianne’s career in art already spans more than fifteen years. Video offers her yet another expressive medium, though one that is decidedly open-ended. It allows her to show “what cannot be seen by the naked eye” and to launch a dialogue between two modes of expression, one static, the other involving motion, as well as between two periods in world culture: Greek antiquity and the twentieth century, the era of technology. It is a dialogue that helps reveal the constant presence of water, the primordial element from which all life emerged.”

*Marie-France Avril, Montpellier REG/ART, May 1989*



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