

reality check

text by Dr Kostas Prapoglou, curator

imagination is the only weapon in the war against reality

---- Lewis Carroll, through the mouth of Cheshire Cat, *Alice in Wonderland*, 1865

The psychiatric hospital of Dafni is situated on the axis of the ancient Sacred Way connecting Athens with the town of Eleusis (where the processional ceremony of the Eleusian Mysteries used to take place in antiquity) and opposite the sanctuary of Dafnios Apollo, above which the byzantine monastery of Dafni was later erected in the 6th century AD.

In an area of high spiritual and mental rebirth since ancient times, the Psychiatric Hospital of Attica in Dafni was built in 1925 as the first State Psychiatric Hospital and has been continuously functioning ever since.

The exhibition takes place in one of the larger –now abandoned– buildings of the hospital grounds. Its focus transcends beyond the objective hypostasis of a psychiatric facility. It gazes further away from ideas of institutional confinement, it overrides mental illness as a medical condition and it surveys the structural constraints and qualities of the mind in relation with space and time.

Spacelessness (having and understanding no borders or limits) is a term that is further investigated in this exhibition. We also explore how consciousness, language and speech stand against gravity and how oftentimes visual landscapes turn into mindscapes and vice versa. Notions of the inside and outside are also being taken into account.

Where is insanity really located? Where do we normally find the real madhouse?

This is not an exhibition about the psychiatric hospital per se; viewers enter the micro-cosmos of an asylum but leave having witnessed what spaceless time and timeless space might mean, filtered through the omnipresence of human consciousness. The hospital is a simple point of embarkation and *reality check* brings to the fore not only the ideological follies of our existence, but also unpacks and unfolds its meaning layer after layer.

The research for this exhibition began several months before covid-19 became a fundamental part of our lives and the world started experiencing severe lockdowns. The paradoxical synchronisation and timing of the current pandemic situation with the conceptual framework of the show, became an additional vital element in the creative praxis of all participating artists because –amongst other things– they all experienced their own personal restraint and experienced what the inside and the outside could possibly mean on an interpersonal, social, and universal level. Perhaps, for the first time, everyone on this planet went through the very same situation at the same time (a kind of a collective isolation), thus registering a new common intercultural reference. The exhibition concept, consequently, reverberates the oddity of life through the manifestations of our real –unpredictable– and mutual everyday life.

time and space are modes by which we think and not conditions in which we live

---- Albert Einstein

Thirty-four artists have been invited to participate with site-specific and context-responsive works embracing the diversity of their visual (or non-visual) vocabulary through installations, video, soundscapes, sculpture, photography and performance. Each artist is allocated a separate room and viewers are free to navigate themselves within the building, explore and discover their works.

Each artist unveils their own perception of reality employing the medium they have been practicing on or started experimenting utilising new materials with which they felt a new connection, and adapted to particular components dictated by the environment of our building.

While the works are deeply esoteric as well as personal, they simultaneously touch upon issues we all deal with or usually feel awkward to share in the open. There is a fine line separating sanity from insanity and this is a paramount parameter that all artists attempt to convey here.

Reality check is a story that features an array of protagonists; time, space and human existence. All three dictate the visual lexicon of the works on view, shaping up convoluted narratives and allowing us to develop our own individual awareness of actuality. These works play a manifold role on a par with our protagonists, merely driven by our impulses, emotions and cognitive attitudinal shifts. There is not a set script and, maybe, this text should not exist at all; everything should really be open to free observation and interpretation by everybody.

time is a measure or an idea, it does not exist.

---Antiphon of Rhamnus (470-410 B.C.), Athenian orator and statesman

All installations on display are robust mindfields and multi-layered constructs.

Eozen Agopian's domain [no. 25 on map] is an amalgamation of materials that have undergone a long course of physical effort incorporating reaping, cracking, tearing and cutting. *Broken into pieces/piece together* (2009-2021) is a visual panorama encapsulating the praxes of connection and disconnection, construction and deconstruction. The vigorous metaphors escaping from every inch of her fabrics and threads are a tribute to the omnipresent negotiations of life and the condition of unabating flux.

The environment of **Lydia Andrioti [32]** brings a different perspective into everything that we know of. *In between the day without yesterday and the day after tomorrow* (2021), concentrates elements of our planet and the universe it belongs to within the restraints of a room. Earth from the countryside, sprouted plant seeds and free moving insects co-exist harmoniously with a curious sculpture in the heart of her space. Blowing up the scale of one of her platonic solids, the artist cognises a powerful unity with a metaphysical realm and primordial intelligence. Facets of spirituality and self-awareness dominate here, in tandem with the higher meaning of reconnection, re-awakening and ubiquitous wisdom. In unremitting dialogue with the universe, Andrioti's work is a conceptual investigation of 'who we are' en masse.

The yard (2021) by **Katerina Apostolidou [28]** echoes through the voices of two individuals, closely related to the former Psychiatric Hospital of Corfu for female patients, bygone conditions of institutionalisation. The scrupulously orchestrated sound material disorientates the viewer and generates an obscure ambiance that is also complimented by the visual components of the two reciprocating video channels. Troubling spatial discontinuities on a par with human utopianism, challenge ideas of normality and abnormality, simultaneously suggesting methods of healing and catharsis that lead towards a state of discharge and deinstitutionalisation.

The Garden of Maladies (2021), is **Zeina Barakeh's [21]** interpretation on aspects of the anthropocene and the tropes we have been experiencing disease and global pandemics. Her animation references covid-19 and all subsequent issues related to biowarfare, biosecurity and the channels through which we come up against trauma and the ways we can finally achieve safety and salvation. Redolent of Hieronymus Bosch's surrealism,

Barakeh's animation was created as an odyssey of contemplation encouraging us to rethink about the reality we live in and reconsider our world, society and environment.

Ward of the Feral Horses (2014-17) by **Orit Ben-Shitrit [27]**, enfolds a meditation on movement and madness, which are deciphered as the conduit of force of passion and the politics of being. Receiving her inspiration from philosopher Noah Parker-Sharpsteen, the artist creates a diverse situation, where surrealism and the occult are basic ingredients unfolding a mental exercise to affirm the borderless traits of sanity and insanity. Shitrit's protagonist is a cyborg undergoing a schizophrenic upheaval. Unable to communicate with his pre-oedipal being, his mind cracks and unleashes an outlandish carnivalesque dance troupe –Jinn– who emerge from his room's furnishings. Aspects of gender, sexuality and race are constantly emerging and, like an ancient Greek play, we become the witness of the emancipation and disenthraling of the human pneuma.

The film *In Absentia* (2000) by **Brothers Quay [10]** is a perpetual journey into the subconscious, propelling our attention towards the multi-faceted planes of consciousness and the fine line between the real and the imaginary. Immersed in a parallel universe, the film's female character echoes a constantly changing totality, fabricating a surreal domain we are all invited to unite with. Tricking the eye with visual discontinuities, the artists indulge us in a trove of nostalgia, loss and an estranging unveiling of the intellect.

In *Juste le temps* (1983) by **Robert Cahen [11]**, an unidentified emotional rhythm permeates timeless space, voiding an endemic sense of undefined anxiety, which unsuspectingly converts into a dreamy realm. Through this film, the artist conjures the quality of the fragility of the moment, which intertwines with the bleak ruins of the self. It recontextualises the viewer's sense of space and size and forming a deep interpersonal connection.

Emerging through its sheer minimalism, *BORDERLINE DO NOT CROSS* (2021) by **Lydia Dambassina [29]**, is both a prayer and a directive; an appeal for regeneration. Bearing dominant auto-biographical references that recall the artist's studies in psychiatric epidemiology, her installation is an interpersonal statement of weight-lifting and liberation. The printed phrase on the floor tape is a reminder to keep away from the right to be, while the blowing curtain of the wide-open balcony door signifies the path towards unrestricted release and freedom. Focusing on our collective unconsciousness, Dambassina proposes a spatial externalisation as a therapeutic method to unchain our mind from all inequalities and disparities.

The site-specific installation of **Diohandi [14]** brings a transformative experience to the viewer. Expanding on themes involving visual limitations, *DAFNI 2021* (2021) is an elegy to the navigational uncertainties of the subconscious. After having studied thoroughly the architecture and the acoustics of the building and its integral spatial elements, the artist devises a psychogenic quest towards the depths of the unknown. Following a route through the long corridor, we are distracted by the abstract soundscape that exceeds us. And although it is unclear whether these are the voices of the past, present or future, the emerging transcendental sphere leads us towards a ghostly pathway that channels the desire to endure and carry on being. Diohand's work is a conceptual mapping of the soul, a ceremonial unravelling of purification and cleansing.

Anaktoron (2021) by **Angie Drakopoulos [12]** epitomises the ceaseless human need to exist, especially in times of hardship. The visual references of the video and prints on show confine a locus of an inner sanctum. Evocative of Carl Jung's interpretation of the serpent as the ancestral symbol of healing and hidden libido, the artist creates an environment where nature has its own adjuvant purpose. The interconnectedness of inner architectural spaces with the outer natural world effectuates our utmost covet to repair and reclaim our life.

Whirling into light – an homage to Vico Nahmias (2021) by **Efi Fouriki and Lambros Taklis [13]** conveys an attempt to reevaluate the limits of our existence. The employment of sound, motion, water, light and darkness signifies our understanding of timelessness and atemporality emerging through an immersive situation. This is where the present inevitably turns into a subjective value in connection with neural mechanisms of time perception. Inspired by the meditational practices, mindfulness techniques and inward dimension of Sufism, the two artists unlock the condition of self-captivity and create a new substitutional reality of a placeless place.

The photographic installation *Exercises in Speaking Out, vol. 3 (Flowers)* (2021) by **Aikaterini Gegisian [23]**, is a journey through the artist's vast archive of 90s Greek magazines aiming at questioning the aesthetisation of experience as a form of a conscious or subconscious narrative. Unbound by instructions and directives, the viewer dives into a visual adventure, where colours and their chemical reactions dictate the ways we see them and therefore the way we comprehend and reimagine reality through emotion, cognition and logic.

A fragmented glacier in my room observing a still life – 'homage to climate change' (2021) by **Yorgos Giotsas [7]** registers the phenomenon of climate change as a point of embarkation reacting to esoteric crisis and transition. Escaping from the subjective meaning of time and space, the artist generates a new domain, where iceberg fragments are seen as a simulation of a natural event strangely taking place within a controlled environment. Also containing pieces of still life, his habitat implies the diverse states of mind, where paranoia and sanity usually co-exist. This is the artist's refuge, an examination chamber where certain 'weather' conditions are being scrutinised and parallelised with our perplexing cosmos, uttering textures of pseudo humanism and entropy.

The title of **Irini Gonou's** installation **[17]** borrows a verse from *The Tawasin*, a poem by Mansur Al-Hallaj, a 10th century Persian poet, mystic and teacher of Sufism. *Illusion with you has no illusion* (2021) explores the timeless metamorphosis of the self, the annihilation of the ego and the dialectics of spiritual freedom. Imbued with an abundant lyricism as well as unfeigned romanticism, the artist's works pronounce the intensified inwardness and the ethereal hypostasis of the human energy and aura.

In full bloom (2021), a video by **Zoe Hatziyannaki [20]** reacts to those remnants on the building's wall surfaces that once used to bring to the previous inhabitants an artificial sense of outside inside. Stickers of flowers, birds and insects come back to life and become part of a new reality blurring the boundaries between fact and the imaginary, the real and virtual. Incorporating a dash of impossibility in her narrative, the artist denotes the healing effects of nature on the human psyche and the potency to recalibrate from self-conflict to self-healing.

Reciprocal Synchrony (2021) by **Daniel Hill [2]** is the perfect device to reveal the ability of natural world to reset itself, involving in this process every single part of it, including humans. Through a soundscape of cicadas, which entails fluctuations of specific oscillations and rhythmic patterns that are, bizarrely, within the range of the human heartbeat as well as our brainwaves, the artist engenders a remarkable sonic experience. The sporadic synchronisation of all cicadas is employed as a metaphor for symbiosis pointing at the wider picture of alignment, unification and agreement between the natural and the human worlds.

Vessel (2021) by **Marion Inglessi [16]** features a constellation of ambiguous objects, an archive of unknown artefacts. Taking into account the ample ancient past of the hospital area and juxtaposing it against its current status, where the Sacred Way has been turned into a busy avenue with heavy traffic, the artist converts these two moments of time into hybrid specimens of an undefined civilisation. Carriers of memory and untold dreams, her entities are puzzling vessels of displacement; an equivocal interpretation of the erosion of memory and identity.

Elina Ioannou's *Aestivation (Composition with Stone Skins, Swimming Fin and Column)* (2021) **[26]**, is a cabinet of curiosities containing a bricolage of handmade fossilised-looking objects. Resembling organisms in a peculiar state of hibernation and co-existing with remnants of an unidentified moment in time, the installation is an unorthodox scene in limbo. Suspending the meaning of time with her debris that seem to defy gravitational laws, the artist mediates her conception of timeless existence under the lens of an unending search for optimal balance.

Vassilis Karouk [4] with his installation *Tamarack* (2021) expands on themes involving the role and the evolution of consciousness and cognition, and the ways we are programmed to integrate multiple pieces of quotidian data across space and time. Activated by unconscious stimuli, such functions may be initiated automatically whereas at the same time they can all be the result of a controlled socio-political and cultural

infrastructure. Imbued with a caustic approach, the artist reminds us of the boundless and utopian traits of consciousness ruptured by chaotic transfigurations, and prompts us to re-examine and re-discover it afresh.

Renee Magnanti [22] with *Crossroads* (2021) speaks about the intertemporal importance of art throughout the centuries and the multifaceted ways this has been the conduit of expression. Focusing on the role of women as creators utilising multitudinous mediums, the artist addresses emotion and diverse cultural identity as they are both expressed through the idea of opposites and connectivity, enhancing the ever-lasting contribution to society within a context of spaceless time.

Despina Meimaroglou's *Terrestrial limitations* (2021) [9] articulates the artist's self-containment experience within the boundaries of her own home. Inspired by Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés*, Meimaroglou creates a room within a room caging herself and disorientating the viewer while, at the same time, making a sarcastic remark over tourist operators' holiday banners. Allowing visual access onto a single further opening through a hole on a wall, we suddenly see a distorted image of the artist herself at a distance, playing hide and seek with us. With light and its reflections at constant play and in dialogue with layers of shadow and darkness, the installation accentuates our constant battle with time and our unpredictable relationship with it.

When I love you... (2021) by **Vana Ntatsouli [31]**, surfaces as a convoluted construct of the unconscious. The enigmatic and otherworldly beauty of her installation expatriates viewers into a dreamlike territory, which lies on the crossroads of realism and the unnatural, establishing a concealed sub-universe. The illusive water feature –an extravagant fountain of life bursting of colour– stands as a beacon of hope and optimism, evoking a multifactorial emotional fluidity that elucidates the disparate elasticity of time. Viewers are welcome to stay here and engage in an elevating crossing towards new fields of knowledge and consciousness.

A river apart (2021) by **Bill Pangburn [18]** traverses across notions of physical materiality and visual materialisation encompassing a synthesis of dislocated time and space. The characteristics of a disembodied environment are reverberated by emphasising on the noetic flow that pervades the trajectory of heterogeneous and divergent mindscapes and the elusive quality of memory.

Influenced by the works of philosopher Henri Bergson, **Eleni Panouklia [15]** initiates a methodology of archiving mnemonic traces, reflecting the apperception of the space that surrounds us and its impact on the psyche. Departing from snippets of nutriment such as seeds and fruit stone, *Archiving attempts or the first melon I stole* (2021), is an endeavour to explore and absorb the outside world by recording and cataloguing recurring habitual tendencies in order to search further and decode oneself. For the artist, life is a continuous and uninterrupted creative impulse that projects itself into the infinite and the subjective experience of time.

Vivi Perysinaki's *I come anew* (2021) [30] reminisces the allegorical mechanism of rebirth. Her cocoon-like formations resemble stages beyond our mortal desperation and become advanced self-portraits of life. They are incubators of a metamorphosed interiority, narrating a sublime cycle of oneself as an interminable evolving entity. In a world increasingly divorced from our physical landscape, the installation alludes to an alternative stratum of being, where the human body may be controlled as a time-ship and converted into a new upgraded force.

Ada Petranaki's *Open Line* (2021) [1] transpires as a monumental manifestation of the journey of the soul and the hauntological textures (according to Jacques Derrida) of displacement whether this expands unlimitedly and unconditionally on a corporeal as well as a noetic sphere. The installation proposes an exodus towards the infinite as soon as viewers enter the exhibition world. It transmits an uncanny sense of utopianism and a post-vision of nowness through the confluence of time-dilation and inner crossing.

Echoes of Transformation (2021) by **Belle Shafir [19]** envisions multiple layers of corporeality resounding the labyrinthine course of transformation. Her installation with horsehair (a distant yet sturdy memory from her childhood years) in line with the performative character of her work, survey and illustrate the idea of

transfiguration through a deep process of re-embodiment of the human body. For Shafir, a new life with its spiritual development is always applied as a metaphor of who we really are and what we could potentially become.

Dimitra Skandali's *small dazzled nothings* (2021) [3] (a title borrowed by a verse of Greek poet Tassos Livaditis), is a multi-dimensional field of myriads of dry flowers and plant parts, all painstakingly woven together, creating a new lyrical landscape. Expanding over the vertical and horizontal interior surfaces of the space, the installation enacts as a new organism progressively invading the remnants of a previous life-form. It vocalises the momentary fragility and perishability of our presence on a par with that of nature's as devastated wildfires in Greece and other parts of the planet have recently proven, while it contemporaneously symbolises the eternal and indestructible interconnectivity between natural environment and ourselves.

The video installation by **Marianne Strapatsakis** and **Tania Tsiridou** [6] embraces the innate tendency to seek affiliations with our surrounding living systems and other forms of life. Its title, *Fragile Wondering* (2021) resonates with our urge to reconnect with nature and succeed in re-establishing an equilibrium. Engaging advanced technological methods, the interactive video installation becomes unique with every viewer as it traces, reacts and responds to different movements within the room. Recontextualising the sense of size and space, and spawning a sense of biophilia¹, the work attempts to negate contemporary cacotopias and reset our senses with a polymorphous choreography of nature itself.

Borrowed by a poem of Emily Dickinson, **Nikos Tranos'** installation title *Hope is the thing with feathers That perches in the soul* (2021) [24], comprises an accumulation of human-like figures. Malformed, misshapen, deformed and distorted, the grotesque looking beings are representations of our mortal life. Portraying our vices and our ethical dilemmas, Tranos confesses his fears and anxieties on the future of humanity. Traversing across visions of evolution, sexuality, gender fluidity and the battle of the subconscious, the work poses questions about the world and our relation to it under the prism of post-humanism and the frailty of the void. The artist's poignant figures become a tool for viewing and experiencing futurity casting upon the present we think we live in.

Badtime stories (2021) by **Marios Voutsinas** [8] divulges to the greatest extent our relationship with time, and how oftentimes this can be an utterly subjective situation. Distilled with a dry sense of humour, the installation is a conglomeration of uncountable wrist watches, meticulously woven into the metallic mesh of a bed mattress, all showing a different time. While we are challenged by the profound number of the collected items, we concurrently sense the awkwardness of timelessness, especially when we experience it during our sleep, where time, space and other subsequent impediments are expanded and annulled.

Eleni Zouni's *Inner Source* (2021) [5] is a tide of feelings and ardour, confronting us with countless symbolical and allegorical glyphs and scripture fragments that escape from her suspended limpid surfaces, and bursting onto the walls of her room. Viewers are allowed to step inside and delve into a different world –the artist's own–, where meditation, spirituality, mysticism and mental (dis)orientation collide together. Zouni's work is energised by the pervasive tension between bodily sensibility, spiritual well-being and detox of the mind.

The true value of a human being can be found in the degree to which he has attained liberation from the self.

---- Albert Einstein

¹ *biophilia* is a term coined by Harvard naturalist, biologist and writer Dr Edward O. Wilson suggesting that humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life.