

Georges Salameh

*The Way We Were: A Photo Album from Carlovassia and Beyond*

In collaboration with *Photonisos*

Opening: 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 8 pm

4.08 – 30.09.23

*A friend once told me, that you die twice – you die when you die and you die for a second time when someone picks up your photo and no one knows who you are.*

*But does a smile and a gaze ever die? I wondered. – Georges Salameh*

The Schwarz Foundation is pleased to present the exhibition *The Way We Were: A Photo Album from Carlovassia and Beyond*, its annual summer exhibition at Art Space Pythagorion, the foundation's venue in Samos since 2012. The exhibition, which will open on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, was developed out of a collaboration between visual artist and filmmaker Georges Salameh and *Photonisos*, a Samos-based collective of photographers founded in 2014. The exhibition aims to showcase the rich social history of the island and identify the threads that connect it to its present.

In 2020 *Photonisos* started the digitisation of family albums belonging to residents of Kontakeika village in Samos, and from 2022, the programme was extended to include the archives of residents of Karlovasi town – the second largest town on the island – as well as other neighbouring Samian villages. Karlovasi has a rich cultural and industrial history; in the first half of the twentieth century, it had a reputation for its tanneries and was a tobacco manufacturing centre. This period of prosperity is reflected in the magnificent neoclassical mansions of the period as well as the remains of the large stone-built factories by the seaside. After the Second World War and the collapse of the leather market, the economy shifted to small-scale trade and retail and, locally, ceramics production. Today the city bears prominent traces of its former self – like many places with a significant industrial or commercial past and is seeking to redefine its character, while retaining the charm and distinctive character of island urbanity.

The *Photonisos* archive has been instrumental in preserving the legacy of Karlovassi and its environs. It currently contains over 3,700 digitised photographs and documents which together form a coherent record of the island's social history of the last one hundred years. A selection of images from these family albums will be presented alongside photographs of contemporary Samos taken by Georges Salameh during his residency on the island, in an attempt to create a dialogue between them. The exhibition is a meditation on both continuity but also transformation and change as the island has transitioned from agriculture and small industry to tourism. The selection of archival photographs together with Salameh's images reveal unknown micro-histories, latent or unseen aspects of the island's life and traces connecting threads between the present and the past of Karlovassi and

the surrounding areas. The title of the exhibition is a reference to the town's original name "Carlovassia", according to the Samian historian Epaminondas Stamatiadis, which originates from the Turkish words *Karli-ovasi* meaning snowy valley.

The images included in the exhibition range in tone and theme – from photographs of people working and groups of friends on holidays to outings, local festivals, athletic and other community events. They thread together aspects of the social, cultural, commercial and political history of the island from early twentieth century to the 1980s, before the advent of digital photography. *The Way We Were: A Photo Album from Carlovassia and Beyond* explores photography's role in documenting everyday lives and recording personal but also collective memories. Family photo albums contain emotional, psychological, and affective qualities that reach further than the individual owner, they carry with them stories that are part of a collective memory and that often exist outside mainstream historical narratives. At a time when the whole of the Aegean archipelago is undergoing significant transformations under the pressures of tourism and the pursuit of economic monocultures, the exhibition reminds us of a time when islands were more self-sufficient, communities more close-knit and consumerism had not distorted peoples' understanding of identity. At the same time, it highlights many of the values and practices that carry on today, and could constitute future models of existence and co-existence.

Curators: Katerina Gregos & Ioli Tzanetaki

The Schwarz Foundation and the curators especially wish to thank Apostolis Giannakopoulos, one of the founding members of Photonisos, who single-handedly spearheaded the digitisation of the archives.

## Biographies

### **Georges Salameh**

Georges Salameh is a visual artist and filmmaker. He was born in Beirut in 1973. He has lived in Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece, Greece, France, Sicily and Egypt and for the last six years he has been living and working in Athens. He studied cinema at Paris VIII St. Denis. His artwork and practice deal with the issue of sedimentation, both in a physical and a metaphysical sense, through a creative comparison of reality, languages and narratives. His raw materials comprise files, recordings, images, and his practice deploys peripatetics, gestures, reconstructions, and the act of listening. Since 1998, he has been exhibiting photographic installations and videos, documentaries and experimental films in Greece and abroad. In 2009 he co-founded the production and publishing platform MeMSéA. He has curated and co-curated numerous film and photography exhibitions and has organised various workshops focusing on the study of still and moving images. Examples include the VENTO DEL NORD film festival (2011) in Lampedusa, Italy; the DEPRESSION ERA collective exhibitions at Slought in Philadelphia, USA (2019) and the 5<sup>th</sup> Thessaloniki Biennial (2015) as well as at Art Space Pythagorion, Samos (in the group exhibition *13, 700,000 km<sup>3</sup>* curated by Katerina Gregos, 2019); *PLATEAU 043* (2019) at ZOETROPE, Athens and the exhibition *The Id-RECONSTRUCTING FAMILY*, as part of the Medphoto Festival at EFEK Heraklion. His works are part of various private and public collections.

Filmography: *May First* (Greece, 1999, 8'), *Faces of Electra* (Greece 2002, 43'), *Hold Me* (Greece 2005, 12'), *Mount Falakro* (Italy 2007, 29'), *maesmak* (Italy 2008, 20'), *Ti Vitti* (Italy 2012, 29'), *ΙΠΠΟΔΑΜΕΙΑ* (Greece, 2023, 16'). He also co-directed the documentary film by Marina Gioti, *The Invisible Hands* (Greece/Egypt, 2017, 97') shown at Documenta 14, among numerous international film festivals. Documentaries for TV include *Life Narrative* (Greece 2016, 20') and *The Reception* (Greece 2020, 26')

### **Photonisos**

*Photonisos* is a non-profit photographic society that was founded in the village of Kontakeika in Samos in 2014, the first group of its kind to operate in a village in Greece. The members of *Photonisos* are educators from the area, students of the University of the Aegean and residents from the neighbouring village of Karlovassi,

who all share a passion for photography. In 2019, *Photonisos* merged with *Ideodentro Arts & Culture* and together they form the Non-Profit organisation *Photonisos Arts & Culture*. The organisation's flagship event, *Samos Arts Festival - East End*, was founded in 2020.

In 2020 *Photonisos* started the digitisation of the family archives of the residents of the village of Kontakeika. From 2022, the programme of digitisation of family archives was extended to the archives of residents of Karlovasi and other villages of Samos, currently exceeding 3,700 digitised documents and photographs. Since 2021 *Photonisos* has been running the Vaukis residency programme for artists and art school students. The residents of the Vaukis programme are hosted every year in Samos and produce artistic work, which is then presented in the framework of the East Coast Festival.

In the past nine years, *Photonisos* has organised dozens of cultural events on the island of Samos and has collaborated with numerous organizations, institutions, foundations and groups.