

EMΣΤ Athens opens major outdoor installation by Nairobi-based collective NEST

EMΣΤ Athens is delighted to announce the inauguration of the major outdoor installation *Return to Sender* by the NEST collective

EMΣΤ Extra Muros

Return to Sender

Curated by Katerina Gregos

Official opening: Wednesday 26 April 2023

Press preview: Tuesday 25 April 2023

Exhibition dates: 26 April - 30 September 2023, with free admission for the public

The National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens (EMΣΤ) and Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC) are pleased to present the major outdoor installation *Return to Sender* by the Nairobi-based collective, NEST.

The installation will be on display along SNFCC's Esplanade from 26 April to 30 September 2023, with free admission for the public.



Image: The Nest Collective, *Return to Sender* at SNFCC in Athens. Photo: Nikos Karanikolas.

The NEST Collective presents its major installation *Return to Sender* along the Esplanade at Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center. Specially commissioned for Documenta 15 in Kassel, its installation in Athens marks the first time the work will be exhibited since 2022.

The work consists of a custom-built pavilion made of bales of used clothing—called *mitumba* in Swahili—the majority of which ends up in landfills in Africa, constituting a major environmental problem. The installation in Athens is created from textiles and clothes collected in Greece and intended for recycling or reuse. Over the course of the exhibition, NEST will continue to add local material, all of which will be recycled when it ends.

An inordinate amount of textile waste comes to Africa and up to 40 percent of each bale of imported second-hand clothes is completely unusable and thus taken straight to landfills, often forcing those who trade in recycling waste to risk incurring high overheads for these useless materials.

Alluding to a dystopian waste landscape, the installation offers a reflection on the breadth of uncontrolled consumption in the Global North, and the stringent regulations that overtly force the movement of these materials to the Global South, where they become the business and headache of less industrialised nations.

Return To Sender is accompanied by a video installation, entitled *Return to Sender - Delivery Detail*, which explores the complicated situation of mostly second-hand textile waste in Kenya and Africa, through the viewpoints of different contributors. The mountain of recycled waste and the video installation offer the public a chance to temporarily experience these challenges, which in Kenya and many other African countries, are a permanent reality.

The installation of *Return to Sender* is made possible through a grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF), which will also support a number of educational and creative activities for all ages that will coincide with the project over the course of the exhibition.



Image: The Nest Collective, *Return to Sender* at SNFCC in Athens. Photo: Nikos Karanikolas.

The project in Athens materialised after an invitation from SNFCC to EMΣΤ to submit a proposal for their annual outdoor installation.

EMΣΤ Artistic Director, Katerina Gregos:

"This work was proposed to raise awareness of the negative consequences of high-street or fast fashion – clothes bought, worn for a short while, and discarded quickly – and to raise awareness of the issue specifically in Greece. The environmental footprint of the fashion industry is an issue that needs to be talked about more and consumers need to be made aware that cheap clothes constitute not only an

environmental problem, but also a political one as the wealthy West continues to dump its waste in the Global South and poorer countries. EMΣT is absolutely delighted to have the opportunity to work in the extraordinary public space of the SNFCC that engages so many Athenians, in order to promote art that casts a critical eye on society at large and its political urgencies, examining key issues of our times such as democracy, governance, equity, economics, the environment, the effects of globalisation, while highlighting the importance of public life and dialogue and the challenges facing humanity today. Within this light, the work of the NEST Collective is completely aligned to the museum's mission."

SNFCC Managing Director, Elly Andriopoulou:

"Through our cooperation with EMΣT, Return to Sender, this year's major installation displayed at the public space of SNFCC, brings into focus some of the most critical questions that concern us as an organisation. What is the role of a cultural organisation in the face of the imperative of sustainability? How do we transform, through contemporary art, the public space into a platform for learning, interaction and dialogue about art itself, society and the alternative perspectives we seek for the future of the planet? Aiming to create such a platform, the installation will be accompanied by a wealth of parallel programming, which will include educational and school activities, workshops for children and adults, as well as guided tours, which will be made possible with the support of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation."

SNF Global Programs Director, Alexandros Kambouroglou:

"Public spaces like the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center have a vital role to play in society, offering opportunities for recreation, rest, reflection, and redefinition—for small, refreshing breaths. We are delighted that, through a collaboration between the SNFCC and the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMΣT)—two important Greek cultural institutions—and with our support, this role is being fulfilled and enhanced through the free access SNFCC visitors will enjoy to an internationally renowned outdoor art installation. This work is sure to provoke a multitude of thoughts, reactions, and emotions, and we hope it will leave no one unmoved."

EMΣT realises the presentation of the NEST installation and the collaboration with SNFCC in the framework of the EMΣT Extra Muros programme.

About NEST Collective

Founded in 2012, the NEST Collective has created works in film, music, fashion, visual arts and literature. These projects are designed to engage multiple audiences and important contemporary issues. While their practice refers to African urban, contemporary and post-colonial experiences, as an enquiry into their histories and reflections about possible futures, it often responds to and is aware of, the interconnection of important contemporary issues (such as the climate crisis) at a global scale. Their work usually unfolds across multiple platforms, spaces and audiences, including academia and public space. In 2013, the NEST Collective also founded HEVA—Africa's first creative business fund of its kind—to strengthen the livelihoods of East Africa's creative entrepreneurs.

About EMΣT

Founded in 2000, the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, holds the country's national collection of contemporary art and is located in the former FIX Brewery in the heart of the city. In addition to a series of temporary exhibitions, it also presents a selection of over 170 works from its collection, highlighting the work of artists from Greece and further afield. Its exhibition programme forms part of a renewed mission and a new collection policy for EMΣT, as well as a commitment to fair pay for artists.

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ΕΜΣΤ

National Museum
of Contemporary Art Athens



STAVROS
NIARCHOS
FOUNDATION
CULTURAL
CENTER

ΚΕΝΤΡΟ
ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΥ
ΙΔΡΥΜΑ
ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ
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