

# EMΣΤ OPENS PART I OF THE EXHIBITION CYCLE, *WHAT IF WOMEN RULED THE WORLD?*



Marina Gioti, *As To Posterity*, 2014. Single channel video, colour, sound, 12'. Edition 3+ 2 AP. Collection of EMΣΤ | National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens. Purchased in 2022

From December 2023 until the end of October 2024, the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (EMΣΤ) presents a three-part cycle of exhibitions exclusively dedicated to the work of women artists or artists who identify as female, under the umbrella title ***What if Women Ruled the World?***

With the re-hang of one entire floor of the museum's permanent collection and a series of twelve solo exhibitions of Greek and international artists of different generations, over the course of the next seven months the entire museum will gradually be taken over by women artists.

Despite recent advances, as women artists and cultural practitioners are still underrepresented in most aspects of the art world, this project, initiated by the museum's artistic director, **Katerina Gregos**, aims to radically reimagine what a museum would look like if, instead of a few token pieces, works by women artists were the majority.

She notes: *"Especially in a country like Greece, where there was never a prominent organised feminist movement in the visual arts and women artists were systematically marginalised over decades, this is both an important statement and a redressing of a major imbalance. At a time when we are witnessing a resurgence of attacks on women's rights, the question of female empowerment and gender equality, across the board, is more urgent than ever."*

The exhibition cycle posits an oft-repeated hypothetical question: would the world be a better place if women did indeed rule the world? Would it mean the end of political and armed conflict and deadlock? Would human rights be better respected? Would economic policy be more socially equitable and considerate of the

environment and our non-human companions? Would there be more discussion and compromise? And, ultimately, would the world be a more caring and compassionate place? Or would we bear witness to the same human flaws, corruption and abuses of power engaged in by those in critical decision-making positions. At a time when we are seeing the rise of male-driven authoritarian rule in Europe and beyond, leading to social and political polarisation and heightened geopolitical tensions, it seems a timely moment for reflection.

**Part I** of *What If Women Ruled the World?* opens **14 December 2023** with the rehang of the museum's permanent collection. The exhibition, entitled, *WOMEN, together*, includes the **first comprehensive presentation** of a number of works from the **D.Daskalopoulos Collection Gift to EMΣT**; *Chryssa Romanos: The Search for Happiness for as Many as Possible*; *DANAI ANESIADOU: D POSSESSIONS*; and *Time in my hands. Leda Papaconstantinou. A Retrospective*; as well as a series of performances by **Alexis Blake**.

From 20 January 2024, visitors to the museum will be confronted by the question, *What if Women Ruled the World?* by way of **Yael Bartana's** iconic neon work of the same title. The two installations, one in Greek and the other in English, each 10 metres in height, will be presented on the north and south exterior façades of the museum, interrogating passers-by along one of Athens' main thoroughfares, Syngrou Avenue.

**Part II** of *What If Women Ruled the World?* opens on **9 March 2024** with solo exhibitions of work by **Lola Flash, Bouchra Khalili, Tala Madani, and Malvina Panagiotidi**, as well as special projects by **Yael Bartana, Claudia Comte, and Hadassah Emmerich**, while **Part III** will inaugurate three further solo exhibitions of work by **Bertille Bak, Penny Siopis, and Eva Stefani** on **11 May 2024**.

**EMΣT | National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens is funded by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture & Sports.**



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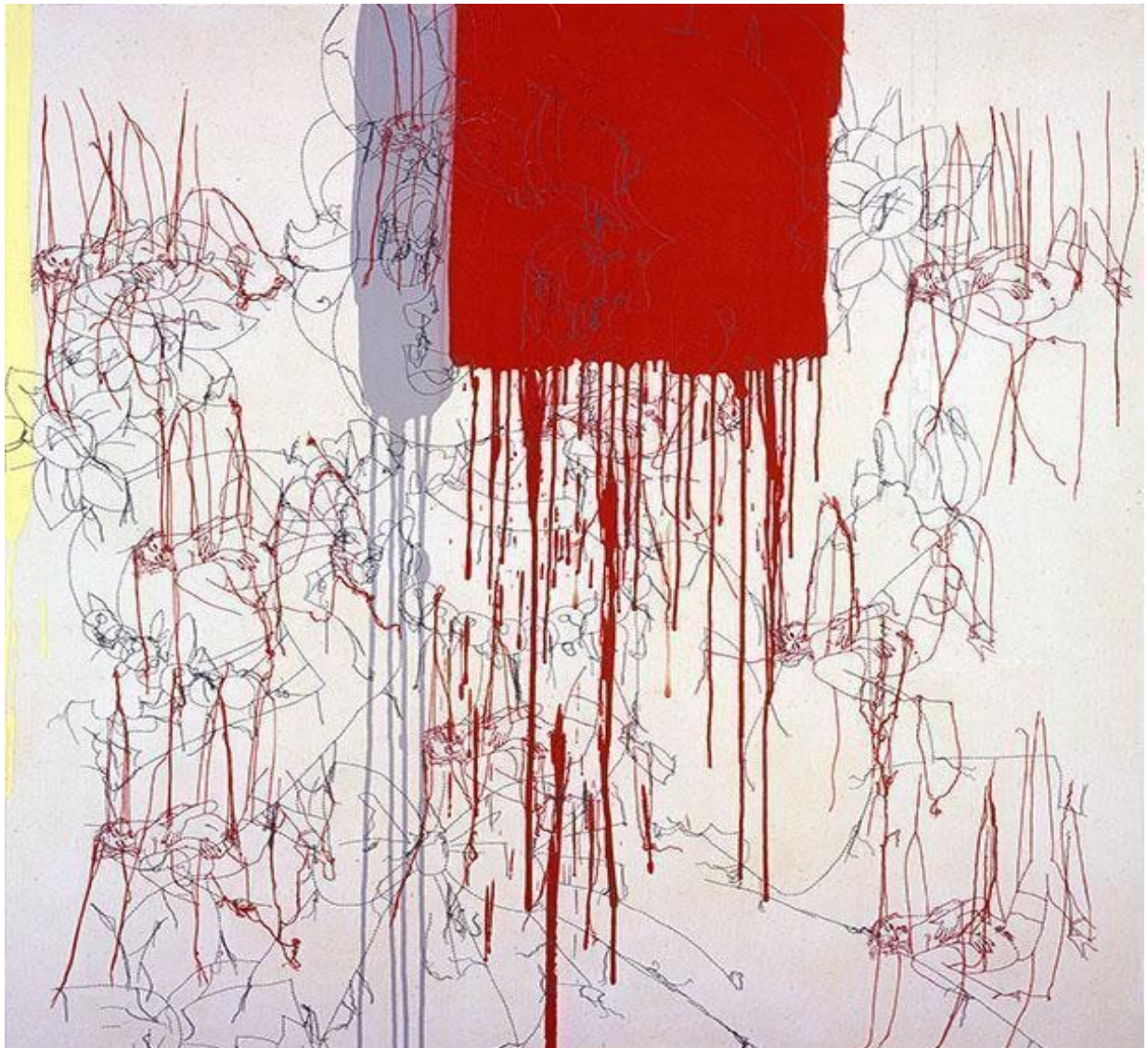
## **PART I: WHAT IF WOMEN RULED THE WORLD?**

### ***WOMEN, together***

New collection presentation

**Curators:** Katerina Gregos and Eleni Koukou

Level 3



Ghada Amer, *The Little Girl*, 2001, Part of the D.Daskalopoulos Collection Gift. Collection of EMΣT | the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens

The entirety of a museum collection can never be permanently on show, as its size invariably exceeds the available exhibition space. Changing the presentation of the collection is necessary to renew the works, to showcase those that have not been seen before, and to demonstrate that a museum, as well as its collection, are lively entities, and not moribund apothecaries of the past. Moreover, as history is neither fixed, nor singular, the acquisitions policy of a museum of contemporary art should reflect this.

The exhibition ***WOMEN, together*** is the first rehang of the collection since the initial presentation of the museum's collection in 2019 in its permanent home, the former FIX brewery.

To address a major issue confronting all museums today: the under-representation of women and the urgency regarding gender equality – one of the main shared concerns underlying all ‘waves’ of feminism over the years, no matter how different – EMΣT has decided to make a bold statement with this exhibition and highlight exclusively the work of women artists in its collection.

Curated by **Katerina Gregos** and **Eleni Koukou**, **WOMEN, together** features works from EMΣT’s collection, including the first presentation of a number of works from the D.Daskalopoulos Collection Gift to EMΣT, the most important and generous donation in the museum’s history.

There are a total of 49 works by 25 artists of different generations, ten of which are Greek. Twelve artists and 24 works are from the **D.Daskalopoulos Collection Gift**, while twelve artists and 25 works are from the existing collection of EMΣT. The exhibition also includes seven new acquisitions, as well as a new long-term loan of a major work by **Etel Adnan** (Lebanon), courtesy of the **Saradar Collection** (Paris/Beirut).

While there is no single thematic narrative, as that would be restrictive within the framework of a collection exhibition, there are many common points of reference and dialogue as well as conceptual and aesthetic affinities between works. The artists are preoccupied with a variety of issues, both related to gender and identity, as well as to social and political issues, and the entanglements between them, although what they mostly share is an interest in materiality and the handcrafted, existential or humanistic issues, and the ephemeral nature of all things.

There are several works that incorporate and re-signify objects and materials extracted from the domestic/everyday environment and transform them through meticulous manual sculptural processes, and fragile gestures. The complexity of human existence and the quest around perennial questions of life and death are evident in several works, as is a preoccupation with entropy, breakdown, decay, and fragility, reflecting the current state of uncertainty. There are enquiries into the body as a site of contestation and the multiple renderings of its meaning in relation to domesticity, work, sexuality, and self-representation. While the majority of works are not focused on the female condition *per se*, there is an underlying preoccupation with questions of equity or oppression and difference.

Finally, there are artists who probe issues regarding history, memory and collective/cultural identities centering around the critical geopolitical position of Greece and its immediate geographic surrounds in South East Europe and the former Levant. These are the territories of the former Ottoman Empire, and with them come a multitude of suppressed or marginalised histories that lay dormant in the wake of new nation building.

Artists featured in **WOMEN, together** include: **Etel Adnan** (1925, Beirut, Lebanon), **Diana Al-Hadid** (1981, Aleppo, Syria), **Ghada Amer** (1963, Cairo, Egypt), **Helene Appel** (1976, Karlsruhe, Germany), **Bertille Bak** (1983, Arras, France), **Karla Black** (1972, Alexandria, UK), **Hera Büyüктаşçıyan** (1984, Istanbul, Turkey), **Christina Dimitriadis** (1967, Thessaloniki, Greece), **Marina Gioti** (1972, Athens, Greece), **Eleni Kamma** (1973, Athens, Greece), **Maria Loizidou** (1958, Limassol, Cyprus), **Tala Madani** (1981, Tehran, Iran), **Despina Meimaroglou** (1944, Alexandria, Egypt), **Annette Messager** (1943, Berck-Sur-Mer, France), **Tracey Moffatt** (1960, Brisbane, Australia), **Eleni Mylonas** (1944, Athens, Greece), **Rivane Neuenschwander** (1967, Belo Horizonte, Brazil), **Cornelia Parker** (1956, Cheshire, UK), **Agnieszka Polska** (1985, Lublin, Poland), **Christiana Soulou** (1961, Athens, Greece), **Aspa Stassinopoulou** (1935–2017, Athens, Greece), **Maria Tsagkari** (1981, Piraeus, Greece), **Paky Vlassopoulou** (1985, Athens, Greece), **Aleksandra Waliszewska** (1976, Warsaw, Poland), and **Gillian Wearing** (1963, Birmingham, UK).



# CHRYSSA ROMANOS

## THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS FOR AS MANY AS POSSIBLE

Curators: Eleni Koukou and Dimitris Tsoumplekas

Level 4



Chryssa Romanos, Serigraphy from the folio *Some Pages from a Diary*, 1973

**Chryssa Romanos** (1931–2006) was one of the most significant Greek artists to emerge in the 1960s. She belongs to that group of Greek expat intellectuals who lived and worked in the artistic centres of the West and, for the very first time in the history of Greek art, actively participated in formulating international artistic movements of their era. The twenty years that Romanos spent in France (1961–1981) proved decisive for moulding her artistic identity. She was part of the circle of the influential critic Pierre Restany and the *Nouveau Réalistes* and was one of the important female figures in the Paris art scene of the 1960s.

Open-ended narrative structures, mechanical reproduction, randomness, transparency, and the notion of play characterise her body of work. From her very first works, the motif of the labyrinth, the critique of consumerism, the political interest in social inequalities and injustice, the democratisation of art, the osmosis of art and everyday life, and the interest in travel recur as main thematic axes, and evolve as the artist herself matures and her social and political environment transforms.

The exhibition ***The Search for Happiness for as Many as Possible*** includes works from almost all periods of her oeuvre, highlighting their correlation and relationship. At the same time, it situated the works in their historical, political, and social context. The exhibition *parcours* begins with *Myths*, the paintings originating from the period when she left for Paris. It continues with the historical collages of 1965; the grand *Meccano* sculptural constructions, inspired kit toys of the same name typically intended for boys; silkscreen prints from the famed Mec Art Graphic atelier in Paris; and culminates into her most mature works, the *Maps-Labyrinths*, with their notable *décollage* technique on Plexiglas. Finally, it concludes with a video work based on the rich photographic archive of Chryssa Romanos and her husband, the equally influential artist and Athens School of Fine Arts professor Nikos Kessanlis, emphasising the indissoluble and reciprocal relationship between art and life.

The exhibition title is derived from a text by the eminent French theorist Pierre Restany found in a catalogue devoted to Chryssa Romanos and brings to the surface both the emotional and political dimensions of her work.



# DANAI ANESIADOU

## ***D POSSESSIONS***

Curator: Ioli Tzanetaki

Level 4



Danai Anesiadou, Installation view (L to R): *Pumpkin Seeds for Left Shell*, 2023; *Papaya Seeds for Right Shell*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: we document art

EMΣT is pleased to host the first solo exhibition in Greece of the Belgo-Greek artist Danai Anesiadou. Born in Germany to parents of Greek origin and based in Brussels since her early years, Anesiadou has developed a range of metaphysical and personal concerns into a seductive and mercurial body of work over the last fifteen years, which references cinema, occult sciences, Greek antiquity, surrealism, and contemporary affairs. Described as a “21st-century European poster girl for crisis”, her work is highly attuned to both the political and the invisible fabric of reality. Armed with a keen interest in historiography and politics, she questions what we consider to be true, pointing to the double standards and false dichotomies of the dominant discourse.

***D POSSESSIONS*** invites visitors into an allegorical scenography consisting of sculptures, collages, props, crystals, and iron objects, among others, referencing the rise of political, social, and spiritual crises. In an attempt to permanently get rid of all her personal belongings, she cast them into epoxy. She then added metal shavings and quartz crystals to the mix, transforming them into orgonites, devices which some believe attract Orgone (life-force energy) that extracts negative energy and transmutes it into positive. The orgonite-sculptures carry multiple forms and shapes, created from moulds of architectural elements from set design in which she embeds her possessions. Like a modern-day exorcist, Anesiadou attempts to purge and transform not only her material possessions but also the energies they carry.

Seeking to understand and critically reflect on the present, Anesiadou looks to trace connections between things that on the surface seem utterly unrelated – from fake news and conspiracy theories, to Hollywood and the Pentagon’s Entertainment Industrial Complex, to reality TV and the fashion industry, incorporating references to ancient Greek sculpture, surrealism and B-movies. What impact may these have on the state of our world and our minds today? Trying to resist binary thinking, she questions what is truth and what is fiction claiming a right to interrogate everything.

The different elements that make up this kaleidoscopic exhibition create an immersive and alluring environment which, at the same time, suggests a sense of the uncanny, the surreal and the uneasy. Playing with rumour, fantasy and the mystical, Anesiadou's work acts as an acute socio-political commentary on the multiple and multi-layered crises we face, the invisible, repressed or darker sides of reality, and the extreme polarisation we currently witness on a daily basis.

The exhibition is a co-production with WIELS, Brussels.



# ***TIME IN MY HANDS***

## **LEDA PAPACONSTANTINOY. A RETROSPECTIVE**

**Curator:** Tina Pandi

Level -1



Leda Papaconstantinou, Photograph from the performance, solo exhibition, *The Box*, 1981 (11-16 May, Gallery 3, Athens). Performers: Leda Papaconstantinou, Lesley Walton (alias Sally Smith), Photo: Erricos Karrer

Time in my hands represents the first ever major retrospective exhibition for Leda Papaconstantinou (b. 1945), one of the most important artists in the history of contemporary art in Greece. For over almost five decades, Papaconstantinou developed a diverse body of work that took on a range of forms – performance, sculpture, video, site-specific installations, painting, etc. – in order to explore issues of gender, sexuality, collective and personal memory, history, politics and ecology, centred always on the body. As a trailblazing feminist artist and one of the most important artists of her generation, Papaconstantinou's work is a seminal reference point for the Greek art scene and serves as an inspiration for subsequent generations of artists.

From the 1960s onwards, at a time of social and cultural radicalism, Papaconstantinou was one of the first artists to experiment with the then-emerging medium of performance art. Her first iconoclastic performances, carried out during her studies in England, investigate the construction of gender, identity and the female subject, through

a feminist perspective that challenges patriarchal structures and other hierarchical relationships of power. The exhibition includes her films and performances from the 1968–1971 period, her first installations in Greece in the 1970s and 1980s, the 1975–1979 community theatre group “Spetses Players”, and her large-scale video installations of recent years. It aims to showcase and reframe pertinent issues within her art practice concerning gender, identity, the social dimension of the artwork, memory, and the relationship between discourse and corporality.

The exhibition is an appraisal of her entire oeuvre, bringing together for the first time a large number of installations, paintings, sculptures, audio-visual and audio works, as well as rare and unpublished photographic and textual archival documents and traces of her performances, highlighting the importance and timely character of her practice, in its own time but also today. The title *Time in my Hands* derives from the site-specific installation of the same name, created by the artist in 2010 for the Monastiraki Metro station, which was based on a photograph of the video entitled *The Arrows are of Eros*, and projected onto a wall of the Ottoman baths of Bey Hamam in Thessaloniki.

# ALEXIS BLAKE

## ***ALLEGORY OF THE PAINTED WOMAN***

**Curator:** Anna Mykoniati

Performances (duration 30 minutes)

- Tuesday 12 December at 12 pm
- Friday 15 December at 4 pm
- Saturday 16 December at 2 pm
- Sunday 17 December at 2 pm



Image: Alexis Blake, *Allegory of the Painted Woman*, 2012–2015. Rijksmuseum, 2015. Photography: Ran Biran

For the opening days of the exhibition cycle ***What If Women Ruled the World?*** EMΣT is pleased to present a series of performances by 2021 *Prix de Rome* winner **Alexis Blake** (Netherlands/USA), which marks the artist's first presentation of her work in Greece.

Blake's multi-disciplinary practice coalesces visual art, performance and dance. She investigates the way in which the body is represented and treated as an archive, which she then critically examines, disrupts, and re-negotiates. Her work directly engages with the representation and subjectification of women's bodies, while also activating them as sites and agents for socio-political change. In doing so, she created languages of resistance and spaces to expose and elude systems of power.

During the opening week, Blake will present her iconic work, *Allegory of the Painted Woman* for two performers and four musicians, which draws from the endless stock of archetypal, patriarchal portrayals of women throughout the history of art to highlight and subvert this recurring typecasting and objectification of women.

Concept, direction, choreography: Alexis Blake

Dancers: Marika Meoli, Anastasia Galati

Musicians: Anthi Danvouneli, Nicole Peppas, Giorgos Rarakos, Andreas-Roland Theodorou

Music Score: Alexis Blake, Kirsten Gramlich, Robert Visser

Garments: Elisa van Joolen

Production assistance: Helena Julian



# EDITORS' NOTES

## EMΣT

Founded in 2000 and funded by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture & Sports, EMΣT | National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens holds the national collection of contemporary art of Greece and is located in the former FIX Brewery, in the heart of Athens. In addition to a series of temporary exhibitions, it also presents a selection of works from its collection, highlighting the work of artists Greece and further afield. Led by artistic director, Katerina Gregos, the museum is committed to the promotion of artists from Greece and its diaspora and to exploring the rich and often contested histories and the cultural, socio-political entanglements of the geographical region surrounding and including Athens, which includes the Balkans, Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa, where cultures, diasporic currents and religions merge and confront one another, yielding complex and often unknown, forgotten or marginalised narratives

## D.DASKALOPOULOS COLLECTION GIFT

The D.Daskalopoulos Collection Gift represents the largest ever single donation of contemporary artworks to EMΣT | National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens and includes 133 artworks by 83 artists, 35 of which are Greek. The integration of this significant group of works into the museum's collection contributes decisively to the strengthening of its international character. Aligned with the direction of the museum's collection policy, which centres on the critical geopolitical position of Greece, the works speak to the multitude of historical, cultural, and socio-political narratives attached to it. The donation also enriches the anthropocentric, existential, and socio-political orientation of the existing EMΣT collection, addressing relevant gaps in the narrative of the history of contemporary art in Greece.

## ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

### DANAI ANESIADOU

Danai Anesiadou is a Belgian artist of Greek origin based in Brussels, Belgium. Working across performance, installation, collage and sculpture, Anesiadou crafts theatrical settings where 'high' and 'low' culture dip into cinema, deep politics, and metaphysics. Monumental prop-ornaments are pulled back into function as transformative sculpture. Her body of work, developed over the past fifteen years, is an expansive allegory in action. Rumours, mystery, evocations, and the intimacy of secrets are the centrifugal forces from which Anesiadou's entire oeuvre develops. Anesiadou studied at KASK in Ghent, Belgium, and DasArts in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Her work and performances have been presented at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France (2020), Casa Luis Barragan, Mexico City, Mexico (2019), documenta 14, Athens/Kassel, Greece/Germany (2017), Swiss Institute Contemporary Art, New York, US (2016), Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2016), Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria (2013), RCA, London, UK (2012), LUX/ICA Biennial of Moving Image, London, UK (2012), Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (2011), WIELS, Brussels, Belgium (2011), Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam, Netherlands (2011), DRAF, London, UK (2011), KIOSK, Ghent, Belgium (2009), 5th Berlin Biennale, Berlin, Germany (2008) and MuHKA, Antwerp, Belgium (2008). She has been in residence at Fogo Island Arts, Fogo, Canada (2012) and ISCP, New York, US (2011).

## **ALEXIS BLAKE**

Alexis Blake is an American artist based in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Her multidisciplinary practice coalesces visual art, performance, and dance. She investigates the way in which the body is represented and treated as an archive, which she then critically examines, disrupts, and re-negotiates. Her work directly engages with the representation and subjectification of women's bodies while activating them as sites and agents for socio-political change. In doing so, she creates languages of resistance and spaces to expose and elude systems of power. The recipient of the Dutch Prix de Rome Visual Arts 2021 award, she received her MA in Fine Art from Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam (2007) and was an artist-in-residence at WIELS, Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels, Belgium (2020–2021), the Delfina Foundation, London, UK (2016), Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, Netherlands (2014–2015), and Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Como, Italy with Yvonne Rainer (2015). She has presented her work in solo and group exhibitions around the world including at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2022), BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium (2019), Performatik19, Brussels, Belgium (2019), IMMA – Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland (2019), TENT, Rotterdam, Netherlands (2019), 1st Riga Biennial, Latvia (2018), La Triennale di Milano XXI, Italy (2016), ExtraCity, Antwerp, Belgium (2016), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2015), and British Museum / Block Universe Performance Festival, London, UK (2015).

## **LEDA PAPACONSTANTINO**

Leda Papaconstantinou (1945, Ambelonas, Larissa) lives and works on the island of Spetses. She created the first performances and installations in Greece and her work is characterised by a consistent investigation into female identity with special focus on the body. Through her multifaceted artistic practice, Papaconstantinou reasserted issues around desire, sexuality, and collective and personal memory, deploying art as a lever for social, political, and ecological thinking. Between 1962–1965, Papaconstantinou studied Graphic Design at the Doxiadis Athens Technological Institute and completed the foundation course at the Athens School of Fine Arts in 1965–1966. She then moved to London to study Fine Arts at the Loughton College of Art (1967–1968) and at the Maidstone College of Art (Kent Institute of Art & Design) 1968–1971. During this time, she also carried out her first performances and film performance works. After returning to Greece in 1971, she had her first solo exhibition at the Ora Cultural Centre in 1974, entitled *An Environment*. In the years between 1975–1979, she instigated a community-based "poor" theatre called "Spetsiotiko Theatro – Spetses Players" on the island of Spetses in the Saronic Gulf. Subsequent participation in solo and group exhibitions includes *The Box*, Gallery 3, Athens (1981); 20th São Paulo Biennale (1989); *Leda Papaconstantinou: Performance, Film, Video 1969–2004*, Bey Hammam, Thessaloniki, organised by the Thessaloniki International Film Festival and the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, *In the Name of* (2006); 1st Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art (2007); *Forever*, Old Oil Mill Factory in Elefsina, Aeschylia Festival (2009); *Yes + No, Bath House of the Winds*, Athens (2011); and *The 3 Papaconstantinou – Theodore, Litsa, Leda, Leda, Fougaro*, The Gallery Nafplion (2016).

## **CHRYSSA ROMANOS**

One of the most important artists of her generation, Chryssa Romanos (1931–2004) was born in Athens and studied at the Athens School of Fine Arts. In 1958, she was awarded at the First Salon of Young Artists at Zygos Gallery. In the next two years, she presented her first solo exhibition at Zygos and participated in group exhibitions at Nees Morfes Art Gallery and the 6th Panhellenic Exhibition in Athens. In 1961, she left Greece to broaden her creative pursuits and settled in Paris for twenty years. This decision proved crucial for her career as, along with Nikos Kessanlis, she became an active member of the artistic avant-garde of the time. She presented her work in a limited number of solo exhibitions in Greece and abroad, but she participated in many group and international art shows, including Young Artists Biennale (Paris, 1961); Engraving Biennale (Ljubljana, 1961); Sao Paulo Biennale (1965, 1994); Venice Biennale (1976 as part of the Progetto Arcevia); and the Istanbul Biennial (1997), as well as various Paris Salons (1967, 1971, 1972, 1974, 1976, 1978, 1980), Europalia (Belgium, 1982); and Transformations of Modern Art (Athens, 1992), amongst many others. In Greece, she had solo exhibitions at "Desmos" Gallery (1981) and the French Institute of Thessaloniki (1986), and participated in the seminal exhibition *Metamorphoses of the Modern: The Greek Experience* at the National Gallery, Athens (1992). In 1994, Exandas Publications published a monograph on her work.