

The speech of the Director of National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (EMST) Mrs. Katerina Koscina at the a press conference held at the Fridericianum in Kassel, where the collaboration of documenta 14 and EMST was announced.

Dear Mrs Anette Kulenkampff, President of the Documenta Foundation,
Dear Adam, Artistic Director of documenta 14,
Dear curators, Dear colleagues
Dear media representatives,

If documenta 14 is the one that will in the future be considered historical for being held both in Athens and Kassel, this is also a historical moment for the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Greece in Athens, EMST, since with this collaboration we are taking another decisive step ahead.

We are enthusiastic about Adam Szymczyk's decision to realize documenta 14 both in Athens and Kassel. We believe that documenta 14 comes to Athens just in the right time. Despite the crisis and its impact in our day life, there is a vivid reaction expressed through a great interest for creation and culture, especially from the younger generations. Parallel to that, some lost values and principles, like solidarity, kindness, conscience raised and gave to the greek people a reason to feel better and proud. Practically, unions, associations and synergies in all aspects little by little are transforming, together with the crisis devastating results, the Greek society, in a gentle but deep way. This is for sure a turning point and it is in that time that documenta14 is happening in Athens.

But before I start naming the reasons of our collaboration with documenta 14, I would like to briefly tell you the story of EMST and name some of its activities. The Museum was founded by Law (2557) in 1997. It is a Legal Body of Private Law, of non - profit character, supervised and financed by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports. Its basic aims are: the collection of works of contemporary art, Greek and international, the promotion and presentation of advanced and experimental artistic tendencies, the enhancement of the aesthetic and artistic education and the research on subjects of contemporary art history and theory.

The National Museum of Contemporary Art began its operation in 2000 at the former Fix brewery on Syngrou Avenue.

The first exhibition hosted in the Fix building and before the Museum started its operation and program, was that of **Yiannis Tsarouchis**, one of the most prominent painters of the 20th century, in 2000.

The second exhibition in the same building and the first realized by EMST was **Synopsis 1- Communications**. Many exhibitions followed, organized by the founding director Mrs Anna Kafetsi. Let me mention a few: **George Hatzimichalis, Artworks from 1985- 2000, Costas Tsoclis, Retrospective**, the solo exhibition of **Chen –Zhen: Metaphors of the Body, Synopsis 2: Theologies**.

In 2003 the Museum was temporarily relocated to the Athens Concert Hall until 2008 starting its nomadic journey, in order for the reconstruction of the FIX building to begin. I will mention some important exhibitions of the Museum: **Synopsis 3 - Testimonies: between fiction and reality** was the first one, **Transcultures** In 2004 during the Olympic Games. Most of the artworks shown are now in the permanent collection of the Museum. In 2004 EMST also presented a solo exhibition of **Jannis Kounellis**, which was hailed as a major art event during the Olympic Games. The work **“Untitled” (2004)**, characterized by the artist himself as an “in situ” installation, made of iron, wood, charcoal and sackcloths, is one of the most emblematic works of the EMST collection. It was displayed in a 600 sq.m space.

Talking about Jannis Kounellis and given this opportunity I would like to announce for the first time something **very important for us**: the Administrative Board of the Museum approved my proposal to name the main hall of the Museum permanent collection spaces, where this work will be presented, after his name and to organize in the coming 2 years a major retrospective.

Let’s go back to the story of the Museum. In 2005, the exhibition **The Years of Defiance: The art of the 70’s in Greece** was organized showcasing this important generation of Greek artists, that didn’t have the chance to exhibit, due to dictatorship and many other factors, many of whom have donated their important works to the EMST collection. In the summer of 2006 EMST organized the international exhibition **The Grand Promenade** along and around the "Grand Promenade" of the Athenian Unification of the Archaeological Sites, the huge urban intervention around the Acropolis.

From 2008 until March 2015 EMST moved again and was hosted that time in sections of the building of the Athens Conservatory. Many exhibitions were organized there, I mention just a few: **Ulrich Ruckriem: Shadows of the stone**, **David Claerbout**, **Shirin Neshat: Women Without Men**, the **Afresh** exhibition focusing on the emerging art scene, as well as exhibitions with works from the EMST collection. The last exhibition in the Athens Conservatory was entitled **Every End is A Beginning** and it was a solo exhibition by Andreas Angelidakis.

In 2014 the Fix building was completed, as construction. In May 2015, though the circumstances were not conducive. we took the important decision to move our offices to our new –finally- reconstructed building.

Although, there were still bureaucratic and administrative issues and approvals pending from the State, that obstruct the function of the Museum, we took the brave decision to start being alive and having activities in our new building. After having accomplished important steps, like the so call reception of the building, in the dilemma anticipation or partial but regular operation, we preferred the latter.

It has been and still is a very difficult moment, though very creative, and I feel like honoring my colleagues at the Museum for being efficient although they are very few.

Concerning the steps that will follow, of particular importance is the establishment of a strategic divisional operation plan for the Museum.

The decision was not only to open it to the public, but first and foremost to make public our strength to overcome the difficulties. We wanted to exhibit our collection by organizing exhibitions in situ and traveling part of the collection abroad.

In order to be able to open our temporary exhibition spaces, we had first to test our new building and reinstate the Museum's activities. For this purpose we launched the Program **PROLEGOMENA (PROLOGUES)**, which took place in the logic of synergies with Greek and international institutions of related purpose. This was our way to communicate and abandon the introvert character of the Museum since its activities were realized in Greece.

The activities of EMST, began in its new "home" on May 19th, 2016 with the performance *Lagune* by Dennis Savary, in collaboration with the **Flux Laboratory** and **Fluxum Foundation**. **Collaborations** have followed with:

the **Greek National Opera (G.N.O.)** the **Museum of People's Free Thinking (M.E.S.A.)**, **The Onassis Cultural Center** and the **Trisha Brown Dance Company** in the framework of the Festival *Dancing Athens*, the **British Council** for the program *Transforming Future Museums: International Museum Academy (IMA)*. These were the initial events that livened EMST and gave its seal as a space with a wide, transparent and open scope, which believes in synergies with foreign and Greek institutions and aims to work as an open platform.

We managed to overcome many problems, we have tested our building and finally EMST, following its new extroverted policy, opened its temporary exhibitions spaces to the public in November 2016.

A new series of exhibitions was launched, under the title **EMST in the World**. A large number of artworks from the EMST collection started to dialogue with works from other institutions. The first exhibition of this series, titled **Urgent Conversations: Athens - Antwerp**, opened on October 31st, 2016 and ended on February 5th, 2017. It was realized as an urgency to react to the inertia that the crisis causes. It was a cooperation with the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp M HKA, under the form of a theoretical and visual dialogue, materialized with over 80 works from the collections of both Museums. This April, the exhibition will travel to Belgium. The response of the audience was enthusiastic; more than 20.000 people visited the Museum.

The program EMST in the World aims to set the foundations for the rapid development of a dialectic relationship between EMST and other organizations with similar aims and practices, focused on the study and curating of contemporary art around the world. It is exactly within this framework that the cooperation with documenta 14 started.

Just a month after the opening of "Urgent Conversations", EMST participated together with the National Gallery and the State Museum of Contemporary Art with emblematic works from the permanent collection, from November 30th, 2016 until

January 7th, 2017, in the exhibition *Genii loci. Greece art from the 1930 until today*. The exhibition was realized at the **Manege** Museum in St. Petersburg.

Moreover, the Museum in 2016 took over the Commissioner's role of the National Representation at the **57th International Venice Biennale Art Exhibition**, with the narrative installation *Laboratory of Dilemmas* by George Drivas.

And now I would like to talk about the main reason we are all here, our collaboration with documenta 14.

The two institutions, EMST and documenta 14 decided to proceed to a cooperation based on the exchange of practices, knowledge and experiences, materializing the process of “**Learning from Athens**” and extending our new series *EMST in the world*. Little by little curators, artists and other collaborators of documenta started to visit the Fix building. Additionally, the EMST collection became the most significant field of discussion among the curators of the two institutions. The collection that has been built since 2000, when EMST started to operate, had been partially presented in several exhibitions, but never as an institutional proposal. Now, a selection of the collection will become the first presentation of its permanent collection that will be shown within the Museum's premises. While the Museum was organizing its future plans, the dialogue between documenta and EMST became more substantial and led the two institutions to the common decision to proceed to an exchange of practices, knowledge and ideas.

In this framework, the two institutions developed the idea of a mutual exchange: the EMST building would become the main venue to host documenta 14 in Athens. In turn, the Fridericianum – the traditional home base for documenta in Kassel – would host an exhibition of the permanent EMST collection, based on the approved museological study approved in April 2016.

The study includes approximately a quarter of our collection. The collection numbers today more than 1000 works of Greek and international artists from 1960s onwards, that cover a wide range of artistic media and practices. It explores concepts and practices regarding the cultural pluralism, the intersection of cultures, the relation of politics and art and the cultural nomadism. I would like to mention some of the Greek and foreign artists of our collection, such as Stephen Antonakos, Constantin (Dikos) Byzantios, Vlassis Caniaris, Chryssa, Mona Hatoun, Gary Hill, Emily Jacir, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Nikos Kessanlis, Jannis Kounellis, Shirin Neshat, Lucas Samaras, Costas Tsoclis, Bill Viola, a.o. It is constantly enriched through acquisitions and donations. It is very moving, that since May many works have been donated directly mainly by artists.

This exhibition will not be realized based on the most recognizable artists or on what is usually presented as the collection highlights. There will be a clear selection of the works related to the most relevant artistic practices and to what is happening today in Greece and in the rest of the world.

In the presentation in Fridericianum the collection will be reinterpreted and adjusted to the building requirements , focusing on works of Greek artists, which will cover two thirds of the exhibition. This is our priority and this is what we believe the audience is expecting from us.

The exhibition here at Friedericianum will comprise approximately 200 works from more than 70 artists, including many new acquisitions made in the last two years. The display of the works will reveal the contradictions, dichotomies of parallel realities that the country and the world have experienced during the last decades. It will have three axes:

the first axis will be a distinctly political one with works dealing with recent history or current issues.

Another axis, characterizing the collection, will be the idea of border-crossing

Last but not least will be the axis entitled “mythologies of the intimate”, that includes works that combine mythological metaphors with personal narratives.

Early in the process of adapting the exhibition for the Fridericianum it appeared that a strong alteration of the presentation of the collection, even a re-interpretation would be necessary. Since this was also an honorable occasion, I would like to emphasize on the presentation of Greek artists that had participated in previous exhibitions of Documenta. This emphasis, which does not diminish the international character of the EMST collection, allows us to be faithful to all of our institutional aims.

This is briefly our journey which I believe played a role for our engagement with Documenta 14.

Through fruitful discussions and difficulties, the decision taken to work together, led us to combine the idea of documenta 14 to “learn from Athens” with the *EMST in the world* series, aiming to an honest dialogue and exchange, which In my opinion will help a great deal in the success of our mutual and distinctive goals.

This is a turning point in EMST’s life and both a challenge and an opportunity for the Greek artists. Believe me they deserve it!

THANKS

We look very much forward to this and we want to thank documenta 14 for being our partner and collaborator. Thank you Anette and Adam and dear colleagues.

Adam Szymczyk, artistic director of documenta 14 who with his choice to “learn from Athens” opened the way for a meaningful dialogue, fruitful discussions and interesting practices, with significant common or different views. We are open, we want to learn from each other because this is what dialectic dictates and because it is a

privilege of art, democracy and philosophy. We have made our first big steps and now, more than ever, we count on your moral support to move further.

I want to thank the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports and especially the Minister Mrs. Lydia Koniordou, the former Minister Mr. Aristides Baltas and of course the Museum's Administrative Board for their support. I have also to refer to my predecessor, Mrs. Anna Kafetsi who for many years put forward her efforts and strength to lay the seed of the Museum's vision. At this point, I would like to refer to all the supporters and collaborators of the Museum, the donors, the sponsors, the partners and first and foremost the artists for trusting us to exhibit their works.

And of course all of you who are watching, recording and becoming ambassadors of our effort.