

# Words by Panos Giannikopoulos



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W

*Before all of this. Before I was  
betitted and broken by early onset  
pubescence. Before the piss of millions  
of women hopped up on synthetic  
second-generation hormones started  
changing the sex of the fish. Before all  
reproduction was rendered faulty*

E

A

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E

I

*and false. Before the deal was sealed  
and climatologists and activists threw  
their hands up in despair and walked  
away from the world. Before all that,  
before that which is coming, comes...  
it's important to remember things were  
always fucked up.*

N

↗ We share the same tears,  
Sophia Al-Maria, 2018

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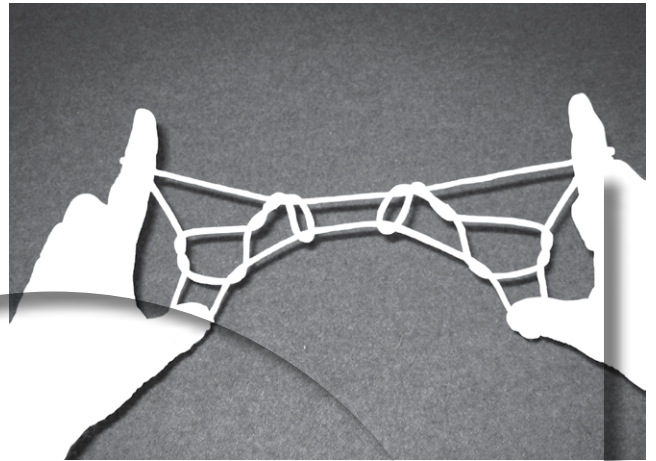
S

TOGETHER

# NOTES ON AFFECT, DESIRE AND CONNECTIVITY



# 01



## new walls are being built

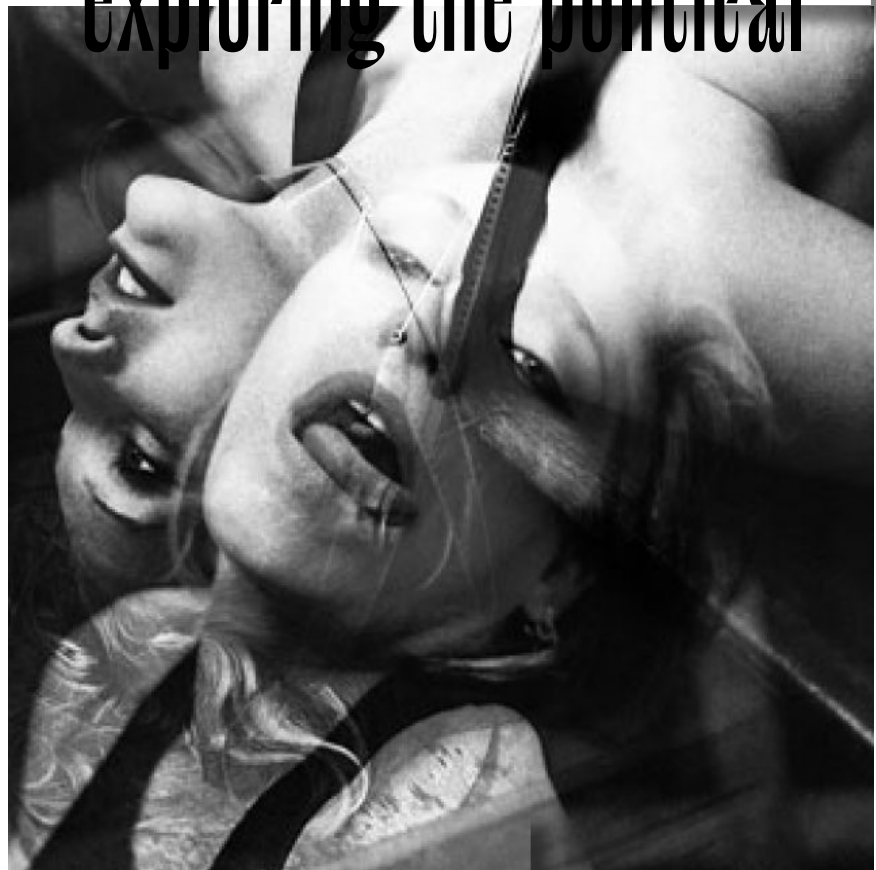
We live in dark times. Alt-right discourses are the new mainstream. New walls are being built and neoliberal practices are making us vulnerable and precarious. And we cannot even look to the past with sweet nostalgia either. So, how does one react? What is the power of the artist, the power of the artwork, the power of the accompanying words, if there is any?

When the problematically constructed binaries of north versus south, west versus east, center versus the periphery seem more concrete than ever, when borders are built "in response" to the need for safe passage, when the small, the marginal and the remote is getting smaller, more marginalised and isolated and then even exploited because of these "qualities", maybe a considerate gesture is to claim these characteristics and think about our liminality, our alienated and disjointed life as feelings we are sharing with others.

When contemplating where art stands amidst this landscape, I feel the urge to turn to practices from the Athenian art scene that respond to this need for alliances and connections; practices that hope to cause a bit of trouble, to disrupt and rethink the frame they take place in; works that use desire and pleasure as political manifestations and are prone to self-sarcasm and irony, but distance themselves from superficially lachrymose humanitarian manifestations, where the gloom-addicted psyche pairs with a cynical relief, something far from the desideratum here.

I am more interested in tracing the political wherever it is overlooked. In subtle practices, gestures which even if they are not categorized as 'political art' – oh the melancholy – it is their politics we need.

## exploring the political



02

1. Dokatzis, D. (2011). In Limbo. Athens: The Apartment Gallery.

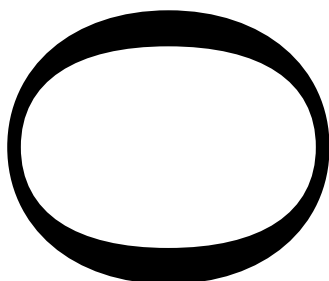
Works that are in limbo – to quote the name of the titular exhibition<sup>1</sup> by Dimitris Dokatzis. His work features the exact direction of form and draws upon the politics of desire which I am thinking of. The existential narratives of "the other", conditions beyond predetermined codes of conduct, where personal desire impinges upon the real. In Limbo with the thought of the works of Dimitris and his aptly critical comments, which expanded the idea of sculpture in the Greek art history (even if he is unacceptably missing from the canon), we bear in mind the social condition of exclusion, control and surveillance but also the possibilities for rupture and shift of direction.



Exploring *the political* in pieces bearing multiple connections to the common elements between different expressions of desire; a ground of desire and creative expression

as opposed to structured forms of struggle with hierarchical political means; in the fragments of personal stories, in silences and pauses instead of big declarations, in the moments of bodily and intellectual pleasure, wandering over and with the various works, re-contextualising them, tracing affinities.

works that use desire  
and pleasure as political  
manifestations





"Let's make an ephemeral monument with simple materials, our bodies and our voices" state Nova Melancholia in their new work *Imagine a heroic landscape / Fantásou éna topío iroikó* (2019). Nova Melancholia blend Time-Based Art with its origins in dance and theatre. It is a visual language that refuses to be categorised, where a more traditional classification does not apply. Using camp and queer aesthetics, Nova Melancholia aim at destabilizing stereotypes and prejudices.

In their latest work they present the Letters sent to Sophie Liebknecht by Rosa Luxemburg while she was imprisoned. These letters are deeply moving due to the sensitivity they exhibit to even the smallest form of life: birds, insects, plants, questioning the definitions of the heroic, the idea of humanity and socialism strongly reacting to any kind of inequality. In the play, we see heroism in the battle of an upturned beetle with the ants attacking it, or a



destabilizing  
stereotypes and prejudices



bird's lyrical outburst.  
The collective state  
the relevance of these  
struggles with an  
unforced sensuality. It  
is the pangender naked  
body that becomes  
connected with other  
— not only human —



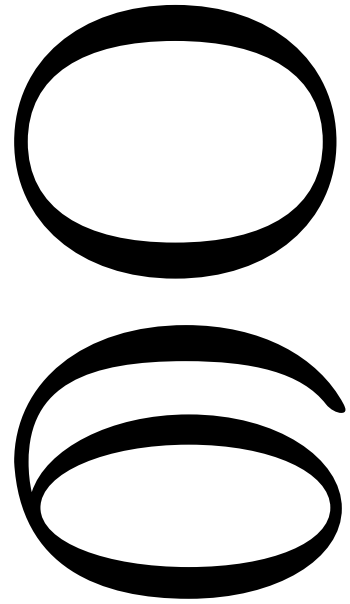
bodies. The performers  
carefully touch leaves  
and small branches,  
little rocks and flowers,  
and organise them as if  
it is exactly this — the

05

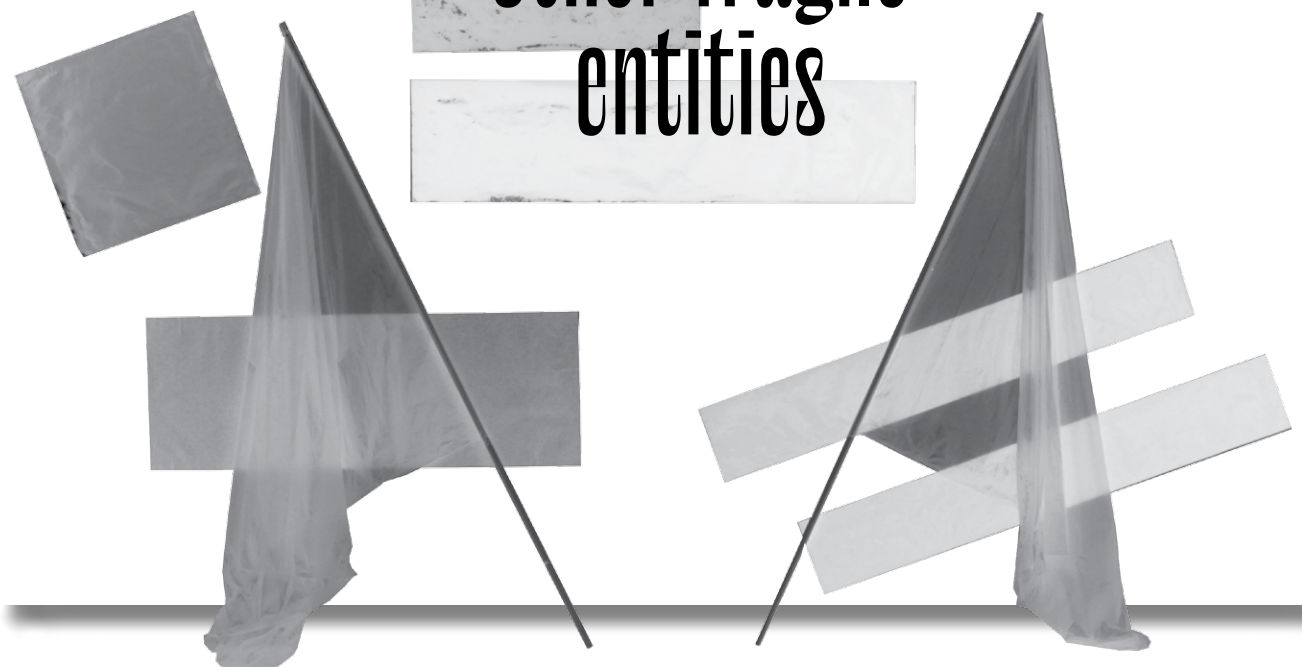
nonentity — that needs to be displayed in a museum.  
The paper pieces worn during their performance  
remind me of Rebecca Horn's fabric, wood and metal  
body-sculptures, with a material twist; the medium  
is taken in its simplest and most modest form. Horn  
was working with fibreglass unprotected, during  
the 60s, and the material poisoned her lungs. It was  
the time of her recuperation in a sanatorium that  
lead her to the wearable objects which connect the  
body to its surrounding environment — its immediate  
reachable surroundings. So, I kept projecting Horn's  
Body fan, the finger gloves, her masks and feathers  
and cone structures, watching the performance  
that was based on the writings by the imprisoned  
Luxemburg, addressing the vulnerable, constrained  
body, the need to reach out of its predetermined  
limits and also the importance of connection with  
other fragile entities.


wood and metal body-sculptures

Other multiple unexpected references of agitprop and Hugo Ball's dada performances, Carolee Schneemann's sexual expression and Malevich's Suprematism with the focus on basic geometric forms (imagined or not) trigger the political significance of being with other bodies or, putting it in Butler's terms, "beyond differences, sometimes in proximity situations we do not choose." (2015: page 27). Nova Melancholia embrace their media and thematic complexity and resist categorisation articulating the capacity to blur aesthetic boundaries, unsettling the neoliberal forms of separation and categorization and showing the ability to forge connections.



connection with  
other fragile  
entities





9

imagine  
another  
kind  
of history

Lito Kattou similarly focuses in entities that are small or marginal and neglected, entrapped or lead to extinction. Insects and animals create an alliance with extra-terrestrial organisms and monsters. Kattou observes forms of community between human & non-human actors. She proposes trans-species, cyborgs as forms of multi-becoming that blur categorical distinctions of human and machine, nature and culture, male and female, born and made. As glimpses of Haraway's myths, Deleuze and Guattari's processes of becoming and Rosi Braidotti's thoughts on Embodiment and Difference and materialist becomings, her works invite us to imagine another kind of history and



think of a futurity where these binaries have been dissolved. Her installations and sculptures reexplore the historical material conditions, the material reality of the relations of production and knowledge, and merge them with sci-fi references and imagery, creating myths from and for the future and rendering history as a science fiction blueprint that can shape our vision. In her work *Soft Incalculable Souls* she introduces Ido, Kaha and Emlet, three open and flexible, soft, warm, sharp and edgy entities, abstract and graspable at the same time, linking the digital with the aptly mechanic, the human with the animal and the other-worldly, the earthly with the celestial. In her solo show, *Days of San* she presents a liquid, ungendered being with the same name, a cyborg and goddess that lives in an almost digital world. San lives in a visual simulation of the Red Lake, the remnant of an ancient copper mine close to Nicosia, Cyprus.

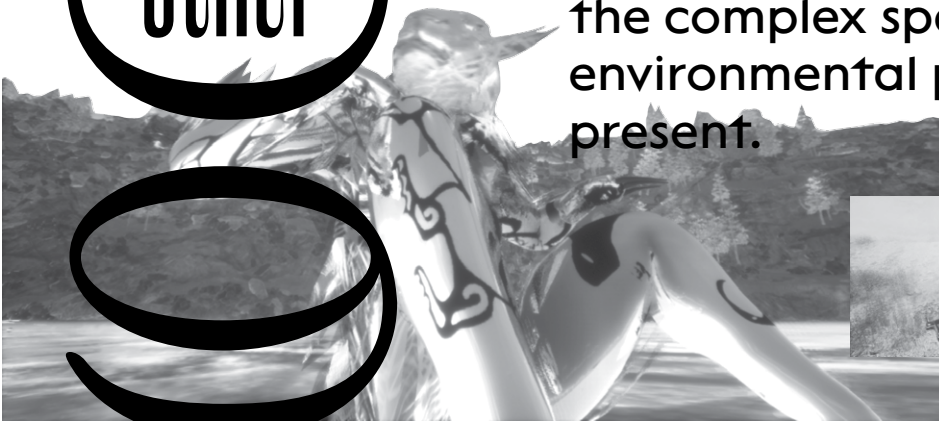
rendering history as  
a science fiction



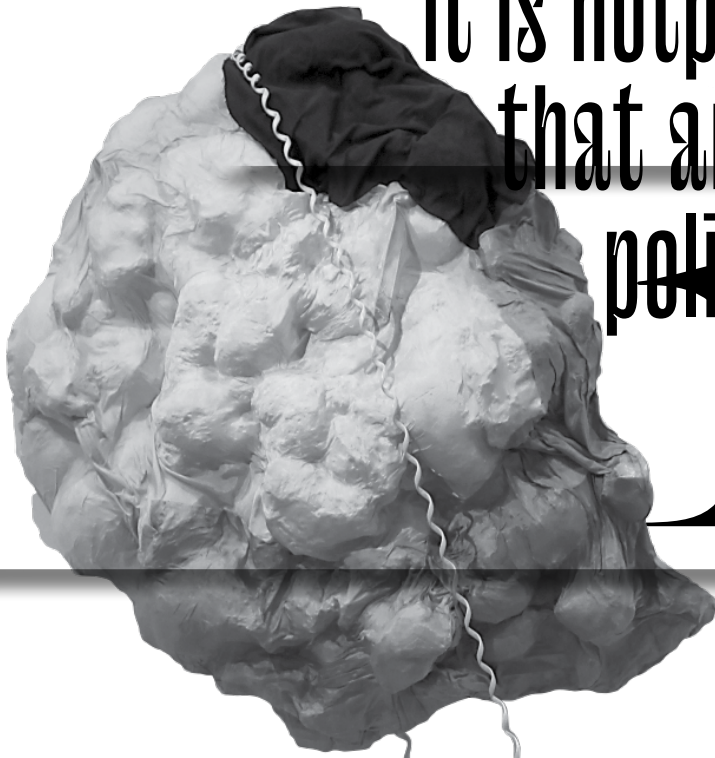


providing  
space  
to  
the  
unknown  
possibilities  
of  
the  
“other”

The digital world receives real time information from the physical world and San as an AI creation which is able to learn turns this info into knowledge, embodies and performs it. Questions of agency arise, and the definitions of subject and object are challenged. The artist is providing space to the unknown possibilities of the “other”, which in turn claims its own actions. It is her own undoing and creating of something happily out of her control. At the same time, she is thinking about the digital body in material terms. Skins and feathers from the being's epidermis take sculptural forms and inhabit the Benaki Museum space in Athens and the Point Centre of Contemporary Art in Cyprus in different geographical and time allotments. The digital element leads to an interesting fermentation of time and geography and brings forward the complex spatial and environmental politics of the present.



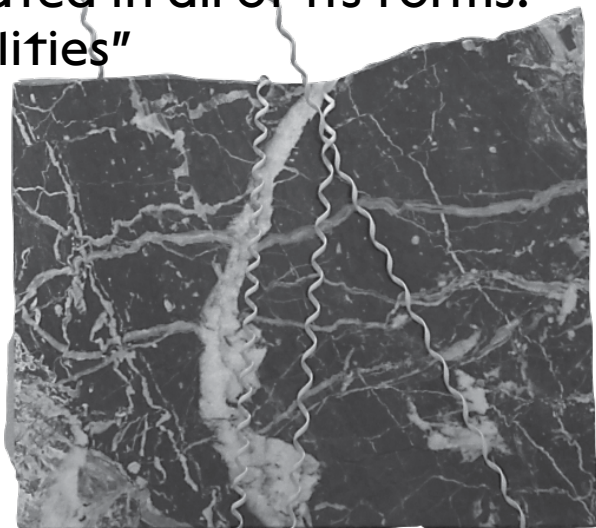
it is not physical "qualities"  
that are recognised as  
politically useful

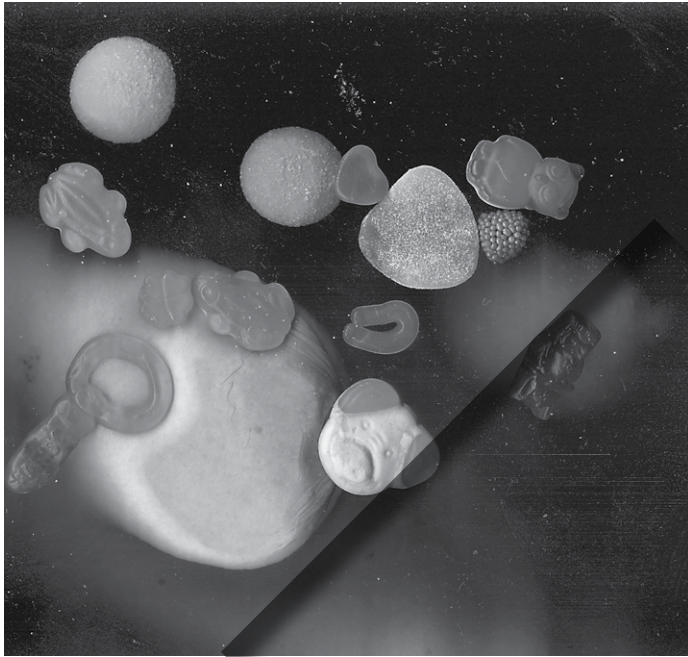


This intersection between the material and the liminal body is prominent in Nana Sachinis's work as well. Nana is working with sculpture in the broader sense. Installation, drawing, photography and performance are all considered part of an extended sculpting process. The marginal and neglected bodies, materials and objects are brought to the fore as entities in alliance. They are all stretched to their limits; almost detached from their centre of gravity, dangling, ready to fall apart but still there, claiming their position. It is the female body, echoing throughout all of the structures, that is constantly re-discovered and celebrated in all of its forms.

It is not the physical "qualities"

that are recognised as politically useful, but the non-hegemonic position, the idea of becoming-woman.





# N

Nana embraces the concept of mistake and failure. The experiment has its potential failure attached to it and she is not afraid to navigate through errors and mistakes, tracing possibilities of resistance in them. She is negotiating the construct of knowledge, surveillance, power and control, causing trouble along the way. The aesthetic is the point of departure: we construct images and images construct us. With this in mind she is giving us fluid, volatile and uncertain forms. The result is playful, full of irony, fragile and precarious. Passion, love, care and affect but also pain and agony are present in the process of work making and being. Mannequins in *The coolest girl around* (2018), *I wanna be loved by you* (2018), *Miss Sparkle: Serket's waking* (2017) are deconstructed and re-assembled in unforeseeable body positions, breaking their former posture and refusing their usability as display items. They claim a character of their own.

the aesthetic is the point of departure



In Gravity and Grace: the geometry of her organs (2017), Sachini is inspired by the the book Gravity and Grace by Simone Weil – the “alien philosopher” or “the martian”, as she has been nicknamed. She creates an active setting mobilizing the thoughts of the philosopher, bearing in mind the playful re-readings of her work by Chris Kraus. It is full of layered, witty references which you don't need to follow in order to be seduced by the complex and immersive installation. Objects that are dispersed and fractured are cross-referencing into a single system. Her conceptual vocabulary includes the ideas of void and its acceptance, the desire without a specific object, detachment, the body as a battlefield, the female pain as an impersonal symbolism and de-creation as a strategy of resistance. It is also the idea of wondering about and waiting for something

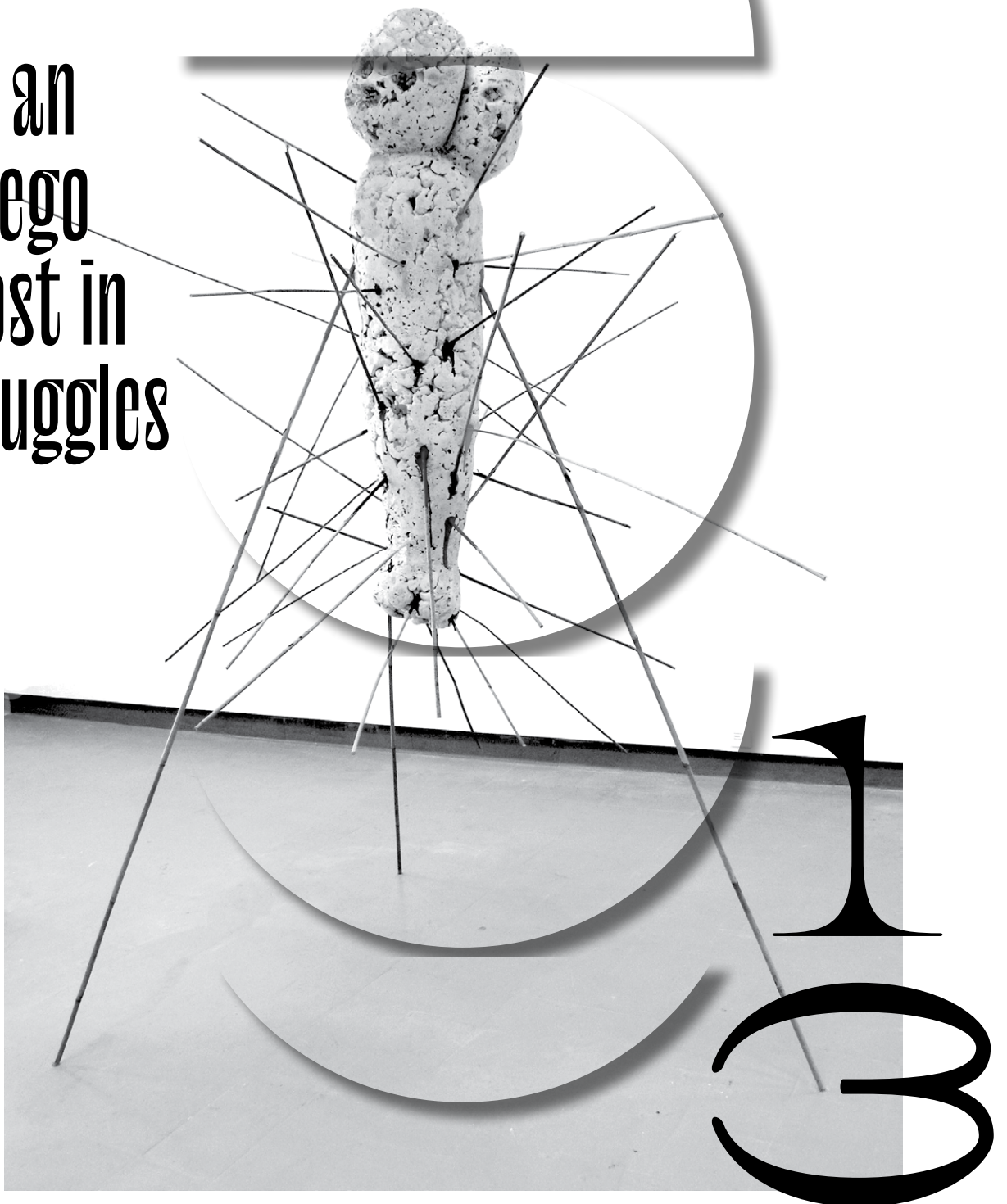
the idea of  
wondering  
about and  
waiting for  
something  
that never  
arrives



1  
2

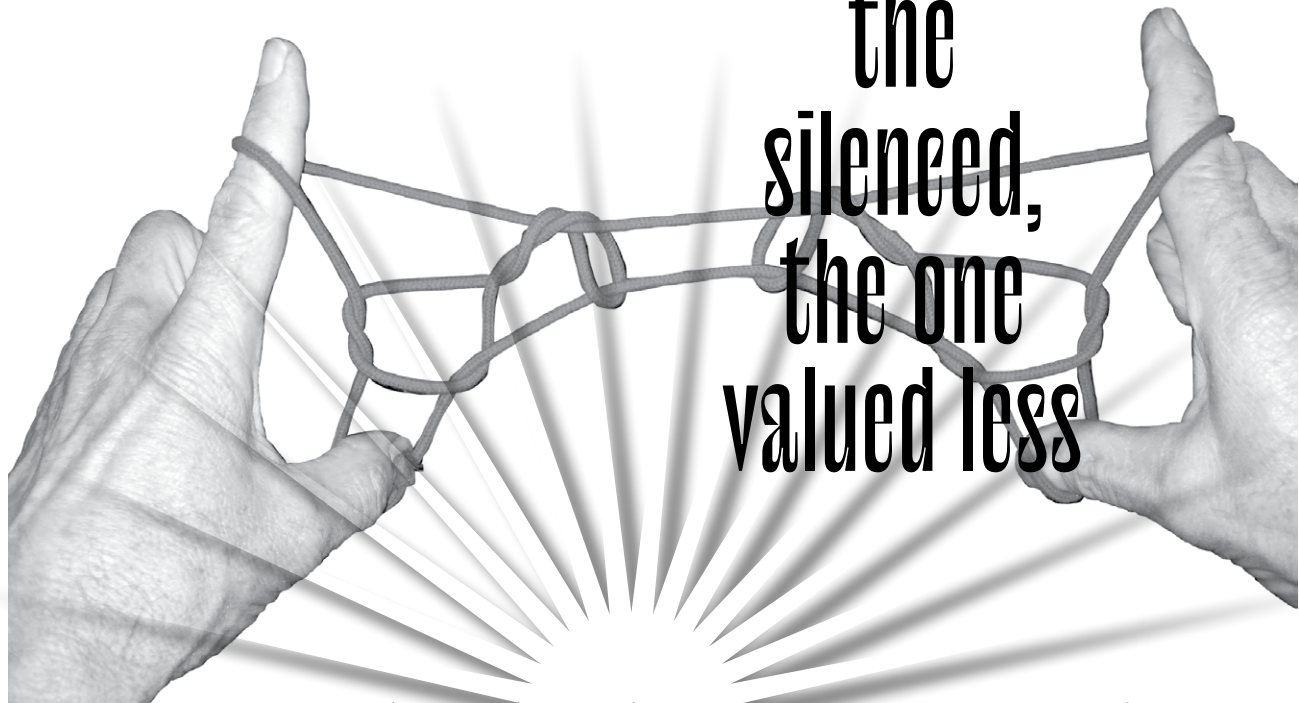
that never arrives — with the feelings of familiarity and alienation that follow — that become central in her work. Her personal narratives run concurrently with universal ones, like an ego lost in struggles that are not only its own. She uses found materials and images and creates surfaces and sculptures that recontextualise their conventional properties, conjuring meditative or reflexive moments. In the end she seems to be thinking of another world, one that is safe for aliens.

an  
ego  
lost in  
struggles

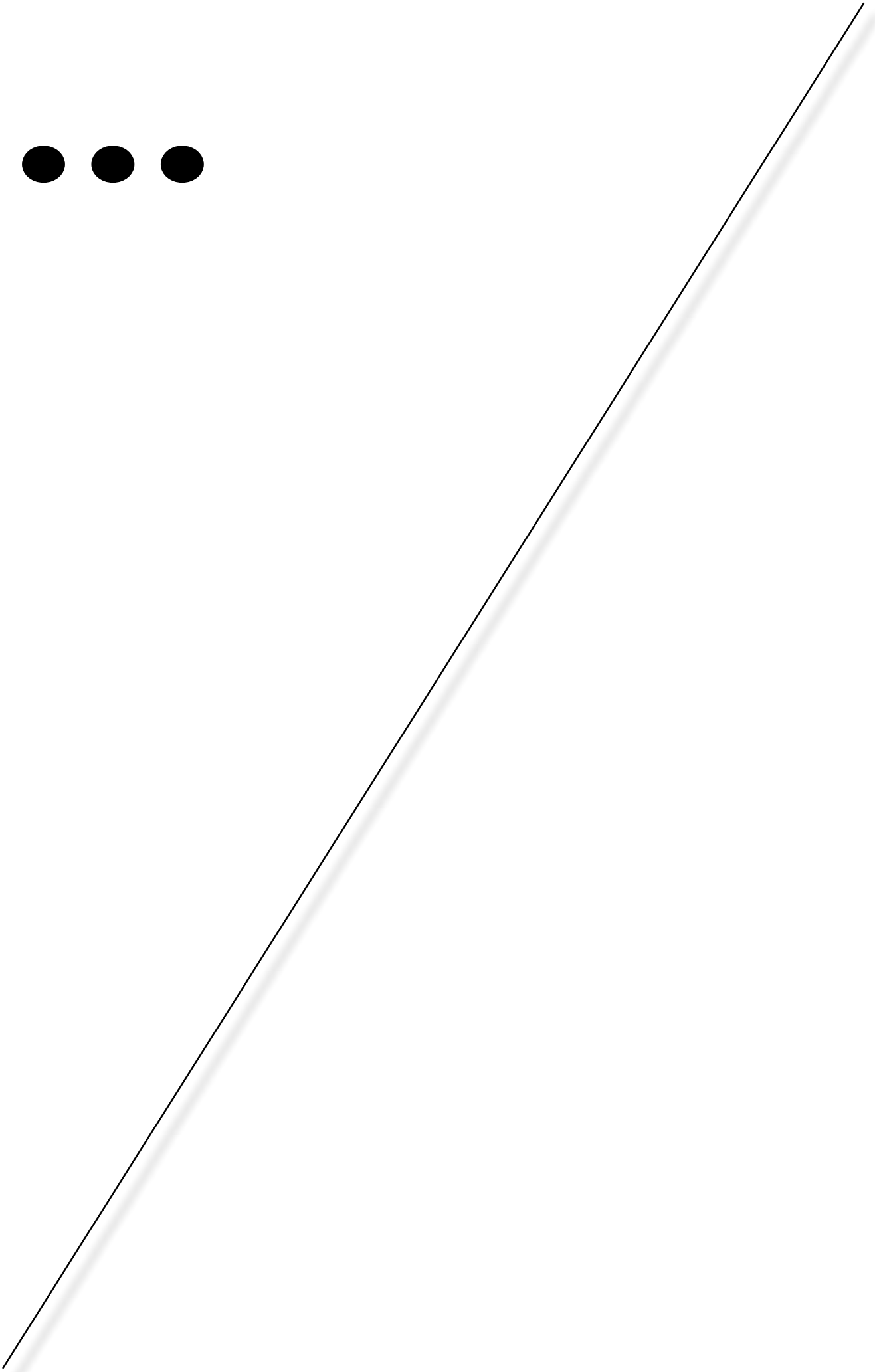


# 14

the "other";  
the muted,  
the  
silenced,  
the one  
valued less



Nova Melancholia's birds, insects and plants, Lito's post-human creatures, Nana's bodies; they are all here to make us take notice of the "other"; the muted, the silenced, the one valued less. They take us out of our world to an in-between state / in limbo (In between bodies: digital, physical, social, between the human, the animal, the plant and the machinic, the AI, the virtual and the tangible). They are exposing the uncertain state we live in and confront it by highlighting the importance of affect, desire, pleasure, empathy and the multiple forms of connections. They embrace togetherness and pose a series of questions: how would it feel if our relations and references were radically different? What are the limits of subjectification and who are we excluding? Can we seek new unnamed territories, making a map for each other to follow? Can we re-write cultural narratives and define their terms from a different perspective?



01, 14

Donna Haraway, Ma'ii Ats'áá' Yílwoí  
(Coyotes Running Opposite Ways)

02, 03

Dimitris Dokatzis, In limbo #1, 1984/2011, *Inkjet on Verona paper, 83 x 117 cm*

Dimitris Dokatzis, Woman on a fence 2, 1982/2011,  
*Inkjet on Verona paper, 50 x 60 cm*

04, 05, 06

Nova Melancholia, Imagine a Heroic Landscape, 2019

07

Lito Kattou, San,  
Point Centre for Contemporary Art, 2018  
*Installation view. Skins & Feathers IX; I; II, 2018; Sun, 2018; Skins & Feathers III; IV; V; X; VII, 2018.*  
*Courtesy Point Centre for Contemporary Art and the artist*  
*Photo: Nikos Alexopoulos*

08

Lito Kattou, Days of San,  
DESTE Foundation at Benaki Museum, 2018  
*Skins and Feathers II Vol.2, 2018, aluminium, steel, uv print, 128 x 199 x 100 cm, detail*  
*Courtesy the artist and Point Centre for Contemporary Art*  
*Photo: Fanis Vlastaras & Rebecca Constantopoulou*

09

Lito Kattou, Red Lake, 2018  
*real time HD video projection, HD sound,  
still from video*  
*Realised in collaboration with 89plus Google  
Residency 2017 and the  
Google Cultural Institute in Paris  
Courtesy the artist and T293, Rome*

10

Nana Sachini, east when it's clear,  
west when it's cloudy, 2014  
*Red marble, satin, velvet, expanding foam, phone  
cable. 168 x 100 x 28 cm*

11

Nana Sachini, Every calculation is naïve  
the oracle said, 2016  
*Digital print, scanned body and objects*

12

Nana Sachini, Untitled ( The coolest girl around), 2018  
*Digital print, scanned body and objects*

13

Nana Sachini, Sebastian, 2007  
*Mixed media. 290 cm*

**Panos  
Giannikopoulos**





Panos Giannikopoulos (b. 1991) is an Athens based curator & interdisciplinary researcher. He holds an MA in Gender, Society and Politics [Panteion University, Greece] following on from studies in History, Archaeology & History of Art [National Kapodistrian University, Greece]. He is currently working for the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Artist Fellowship Program of ARTWORKS, while previous roles include that of the Curator & Researcher at the Contemporary Greek Art Institute [ISET] and the arts section editor for Nomos Magazine. He is a member of the curatorial team of the "School of Waters" Mediterranea 19 Young Artists Biennale that will take place in San Marino (2020). He has collaborated with various art organisations, institutions and galleries. Most recently he curated It Moves and It Shouts, Haus N Athen, Valinia Svoronou "Endymion / Chapter 1: Penumbral Lunar Eclipse", B & M Theocharakis Foundation for the Fine Arts and Music, Songs, Balloons & Broken Tablets at Snehta, Massage the History at the Contemporary Greek Art Institute, Open Archive: Public Art from the Center of Athens at Art Athina, International Contemporary Art Fair. He also co-curated the group shows Still Here Tomorrow at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center SNFCC (Athens), Be Water Again at Korai (Nicosia), (im)material gestures at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo (Turin). He has collaborated as a researcher and curator with the 4th Athens Biennale Agora (2013) and the 5th Athens Biennale Omonoia (2015). He was a curatorial fellow of the Schwarz Foundation (2016).

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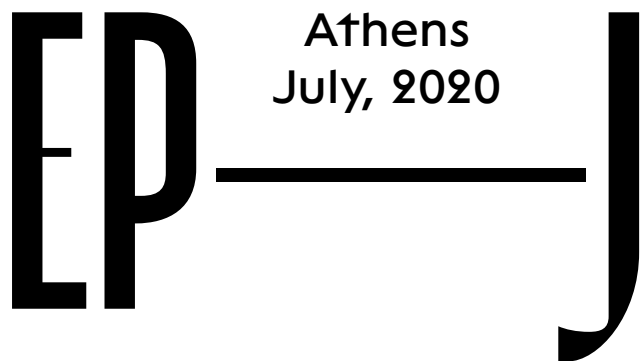


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PROJECTS

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Athens  
July, 2020

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