

“In the Course of Ten Years - 18 Artists”
Co-curation – texts: Nikos Vatopoulos, Manolis Charos
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ALMA Gallery, Trikala

By Nikos Vatopoulos

ALMA Gallery’s tenth anniversary is an opportunity to reflect. Nothing today is reminiscent of the art scene of 2010, and clearly there is no evidence upon which to base any predictions for future developments. However, there are certain constants, or at least we can opt to focus on those creative forces that insist, admittedly with great difficulty, on offering to the public the opportunity to connect and communicate with contemporary art.

ALMA Gallery first captured my attention many years ago, somewhat by chance, through multiple complimentary mentions in the arts and culture section of the press. It stood out to me for two reasons. Firstly, because it was based in Trikala instead of Kolonaki or Metaxourgio or some other Athenian district. Secondly, and most importantly, because the exhibitions it presented were carefully selected and curated, inviting exemplary contemporary artists to showcase their work to a different –more demanding– audience.

We should never underestimate the educational function of an art space, and there is no doubt that ALMA has, since its inception, cultivated thousands of people’s taste in art. Who could have imagined that one after another, the greatest contemporary artists would showcase their work in a newly established gallery in the heart of mainland Greece?

What gave life and meaning to this endeavour was the personality of its tireless founder, Maria Almpani. Little by little, while the idea was taking shape, and the gallery’s objectives were becoming clearer, it became evident that ALMA was to maintain an upward trajectory, and the space in Trikala would continue to welcome new collaborations. A few years later, on Ypsilantou Street, in Kolonaki, the Athenian branch of ALMA was born, in a space that has since been identified with high standard exhibitions and has become a meeting point for art lovers, collectors and artists alike. What Maria Almpani has achieved in this small space is nothing short of a miracle. By utilizing every available square meter, she has presented a series of remarkable exhibitions, often including large-scale works as well. At ALMA I have seen a number of incredibly significant exhibitions by renowned artists, but I’ve also had the unique opportunity to become acquainted with young, emerging artists, and that is very important. This alone justifies the role of a gallery and certifies its educational function.

With respect and joy I have observed ALMA’s numerous participations in international art fairs, its successful collaboration with Art Fair Budapest, the tireless efforts made by Maria Almpani to introduce Greek contemporary artists to audiences abroad and simultaneously to present international art to Greek audiences. The negative impact of the pandemic has momentarily paused all future plans, but once it has cleared and we return to normality, ALMA will be ready to continue its journey.

ALMA is the realisation of a Greek dream, of how with tenacity and vision, and with Trikala as its starting point, a gallery can -slowly but steadily- secure a permanent space on the artistic map of Athens and build a personal history. I am especially moved by the Trikala art

space. Trikala is a historic town with an important past and an auspicious future, dynamically located in the heart of mainland Greece, not far from Athens or Thessaloniki and surrounded by major urban centres such as Volos, Larissa and Ioannina. In Trikala, Maria Almpani, with a centrally located gallery as her base, quickly won the respect and appreciation of the public through her carefully curated choices. Cultivating the artistic taste of the public is a significant affair, one that requires dedication and hard work as well as perseverance, in order to overcome the many obstacles and setbacks on the way. However, the experiment, which began a little over a decade ago, has been successful and ALMA continues to gain in popularity as it has developed a network of outstanding collaborators. It is important to occasionally take a step back and appreciate the hard work of all those who strive to keep the art scene alive in these difficult times. We must not forget that ALMA, like so many other art spaces, was born in the midst of the economic crisis and is now faced with the upheaval brought on by the pandemic.

However, things must keep moving forward. In Trikala, against the negativity of our time, we honour the ten year course of this gallery. This important group exhibition postulates a social ideology and takes a stand regarding the function of art in times of crisis. And this message is broadcast nationwide through this private initiative, which honours both the city and its inhabitants, and welcomes exemplary artists to showcase their work under the careful curation of Manolis Charos. Among the artists exhibiting is Dimosthenis Kokkinidis, who was a close and trusted collaborator and a dear friend of ALMA. His absence adds value to this osmosis among multiple generations of artists.

The artists exhibiting in this anniversary exhibition all have an organic and emotional relationship with ALMA. This exhibition is a unique opportunity to see, in Trikala, a curated sample of the Greek contemporary art scene and to honour both the artists and Maria Almpani who continue, with passion, to encourage us all.

Nikos Vatopoulos, December 2020

By Manolis Charos

Inaugurating an art space is the equivalent to opening a new portal to adventure. Opening this - door, or art space - in a town in the suburbs, however, is a commitment to an expedition into uncharted waters. These last 10 years have been, for all of us, an unending adventure into unmapped lands. With new elements being continually added, the trip is always becoming more treacherous, more valiant, excitingly interesting, unyielding and, finally, very decisive. In some ways life has come to resemble a video game where new levels are being added, leading into the unknown. But, isn't this what exploring Art is all about? An adventurous, intrepid, unpredictable and very exotic journey.

I first became acquainted with ALMA even before it took flight in the exotic suburb of Trikala, and I have been a close observer of this fascinating journey for the past 10 years, having participated in its inaugurating exhibition. I admire the way my friend Maria Almpani steers the wheel, like a virtuoso captain. I consider it, therefore, a great honour to write about this exhibition, on the occasion of the gallery's tenth birthday, and in such a trying year as well. It isn't easy to write about my colleague's work, but the long friendships that bind me to most of them definitely make the task easier. I somehow feel like the person who arrived first at the birthday party, before everyone else, and therefore I've been

assigned the task of welcoming and introducing everyone to this digital exhibition, in the hope that better days are yet to come, and soon the physical gallery space will welcome everyone back with tsipouro from Tirnavos and traditional treats from Trikala and the surrounding villages.

In the works of Stergios Stamos, bold lines on paper become forms that occupy space; his works an artistic narration of stories, fragments of ruins, that contain light, energy, lives, emotions.

The canvases of Nikos Lagos are filled with colour, the ideal agent to communicate the stories unfolding in the artist's mind, and to guide viewers, through introspection, to their own personal path.

In the works of Michalis Manousakis the artistic act, the course, the transfer of the original image unto his materials all serve a single purpose; the search for a way to become the reflectors onto which the artist, followed by the viewer, will discover their selves.

The nuanced, deconstructed spaces that Kyriakos Mortarakos proposes (just like children who fill-in with colour the rooms they draw) are filled with concealed silences, immovable burdens, perforations and carrying weapons of the reality that surrounds us all.

In her work, Natassa Poulantza deals with knowledge, communication, the function of memory, reality and its digital counterpart. These photos bring together the entire thought process behind her work, in these otherworldly imprints of plants and flowers.

Katerina Giannaka's ceramics are suspended somewhere between the fragility of the material and that of its form. Her works communicate a tenderness in the way they stand in space, as if actively deciding what purpose to serve, whether to be useful objects or sculptures, but in the end they are true, honest works of art.

The spaces of Mandalina Psoma, filled with mystifying energy, describe unfamiliar houses of an eerie world, ultimately describing a world full of what no longer exists.

However, in the portraits of Angelos Antonopoulos, where the metaphysical white (carrier of light) contrasts with the black, the portraits tell stories of people whose three-quarter black and white profiles become the space where their personal stories unfold.

In the images proposed by George Avgeros, the pencil scribbles a black and white, almost whispered, description of events, while his colours compliment, very discreetly and economically, the elements that he has deemed necessary to emphasise in this way.

Similarly, Io Aggeli, pairing a meticulous use of colour with a harmonious palette, explores fluid spaces, which contain elements both threatening and protective, and lures the viewer into this enigma.

Theofilos Katsipanos constructs his own personal universe, with his protagonists watching the spectators, as if in a game of role switching. His models gaze at the viewer intensely, and through a series of visual tricks they invent their own rules in a world proposed by the artist.

Christos Kechagioglou creates his worlds, endless encounters between the earth and the sea, day and night, twilight or dawn, full of elements like houses, trees, open windows, all of which narrate the memories of people from their future.

Tassos Misouras creates carefully directed images while his layered characters, which can only be found in his work, communicate events and emotions to the viewers, who are invited to watch.

It is difficult, almost impossible, to pinpoint the moment of birth of an art work by Manolis Zacharioudakis, since he skillfully integrates his preparation work into the final result. His images, and the medieval-looking figures within them, might originate in contemporary surfaces but in reality are meant to navigate time travellers of the future and past.

In my paintings, I conceal imaginary stories that I like to tell, without always revealing them. Sometimes, I leave clues in the title. This helps me develop my images visually, in the hope that one day this will serve as a vehicle for the viewer's imagination and emotions.

The various different periods which Pavlos Samios explores time and again in his art are all characteristically unique. His famous series of Cafes, however, is the most charming. These spaces echoing with silence of crowds just departed, comprise a glorious period in his artistic career and it is interesting that he likes to return to them from time to time.

Vassilis Karakatsianis describes the world in a very personal visual language; the world surrounding him and the points of reference to which he obsessively returns. His subjects and themes, all of which he serves faithfully and persistently, are freely depicted using different materials and visual languages, but the deciding balance always serves to create his personal vision.

The colour palette and visual language of Dimosthenis Kokkinidis have come to occupy an important place in the history of this country as well as in our collective unconscious. His art, which can be found in museums, will continue to inspire future generations of artists with the magical places he created and the people who occupy them, carriers of moments and memories. He was an invaluable collaborator of ALMA, he often exhibited in these spaces, and if this anniversary exhibition were to open now, in the physical space, he would undoubtedly be the first to raise a glass of tsipouro in honour of ALMA.

Manolis Charos, December 2020

Participating artists:

Io Aggeli, Angelos Antonopoulos, George Avgeros, Manolis Charos, Katerina Giannaka, Vassilis Karakatsianis, Theofilos Katsipanos, Christos Kechagioglou, Dimosthenis Kokkinidis, Nikos Lagos, Michalis Manousakis, Tassos Misouras, Kyriakos Mortarakos, Natassa Poulantza, Mandalina Psoma, Pavlos Samios, Stergios Stamos, Manolis Zacharioudakis