

PARATOXIC

An exhibition organized by
Polyeco Contemporary Art Initiative (PCAI)
in collaboration with the Benaki Museum

23.03—21.05.2017
Opening: 22.03.2017
Benaki Museum*

Is man's relationship to the environment the most controversial, recalcitrant and unfinished project of humanity?

A long history of ideas, philosophies, sciences, arts, politics and global events seems to confirm this tumultuous relationship and its pending matters, as it becomes increasingly evident that treating the political in terms of a relationship limited only among humans is insufficient, and that all the world's species, things and beings must be represented in a sustainable symbiosis.

The exhibition Paratoxic Paradoxes presents new works of moving image (film, video, animation, digital imaging, etc.) that explore this critical question through the contemporary viewpoint of political ecology and eco-criticism, as the latter is currently shaped at the point of intersection among arts, politics, socioeconomic demands, pedagogy and activism, beyond naive classifications, univocal readings and outdated strategies.

The exhibition is the first public presentation of a capsule of eleven original artworks created through commissions to artists around the world by the cultural non-profit platform Polyeco Contemporary Art Initiative (PCAI) and curator Nadja Argyropoulou. The project, which began two years ago and is now presented through this exhibition, should be viewed, to a certain extent, as part of the global response and mobilization of artists, theorists, curators, scientists, activists, creative practitioners and social media initiatives in the face of climate-change tipping points and their connection to every aspect of contemporary life.

Being the first of a series of such experimental ventures pursued by the PCAI platform (in the context of its collection formed on the basis of hazardous waste management), this capsule begins with a study of the physical parameters and effects, the symbolic, psychological and socioeconomic implications of two – seemingly simple yet quite vague and ambiguous – terms and the multifaceted reality they reflect: 'toxic' and 'waste'.

It explores the parallel readings of the redundant and the rejected, of that which is manageable yet elusive, of the amorphous and the anarchic, the abundant and the dwindling, the repulsive and the repressed, the excessive and the grotesque, the viral and the virulent, the processed and the possessed.

Selected so as to make up an open set of significantly different approaches and practices over and beyond a common environmental agenda, the artists faced the unusual challenge of a minimal curatorial precept (2 words: toxic, waste) and maximum liberty in their chosen geographical, ideological or material approach.

This approach could take the form of analysis, dissolution, exploration, reversal, transmutation, rejection or study in the light of conflicting discourses, appendage to existing approaches and international financial data, or conjunction with indigenous cosmologies, capitalist nightmares, scientific findings, artistic sub-genres and 'soft' or 'hard' theories of interaction between the human and the non-human. It could be extended into thinking-through-the-senses, the dispute of forms and contemporary policies of identification and representation, the anatomy of the ways of neo-colonial fiction and violence,

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over-urbanisation, consumerism, racism and inequality. It could devise ways of distorting, influencing, mixing and combining so as to demonstrate the paradox of the very notion of (de)contamination beyond the obvious.

The common medium is the moving image (film, video, animation, digital and analogue applications). Thanks to its new composite varieties, its fluid, unstable nature and its capacity to connect with time, evolve through transformations, be readily available and transmitted quickly, the moving image can express our relationship with the continuum of the world in effective and novel ways. Strangely enough, at the same time, it threatens this same relationship with a contamination through image and data, which is equally novel – abstract, elusive, inescapable, terrible – and violently changes the way we perceive matter and its ontology.

Paratoxic Paradoxes recognises as urgent and essential the demand of thinking people, activists, artists, scientists, grass roots movements and productive forces to 'stay with the trouble' of the world in symbiotic terms (as Donna Haraway puts it); to adopt a new 'natural contract' by redefining our relationship with materials, non-human forms of life and environments and removing the waste of appropriation and exploitation until the advent of what Michel Serres calls 'Mundus res nullius' (world object of none); to put a stop to colonialist manipulation and the objectification of nature; and to activate new praxis of ethical-political commitment to the world (as per the approaches of Paulo Tavares, T.J. Demos, Vandana Shiva, the poetic philosophy of Édouard Glissant et al.).

The event comes as yet another unexpected hub of transmission from a 'Greece in crisis', convinced that such an act is useful precisely because it seems paradoxical, overstated, superfluous; a luxury, or even 'pollutant', wasteful. And it is topical not despite the crisis but because of it.

It is held in recognition of the fact that art is always about life and its enjoyment, that nature is an ingredient of our perception of what this life is made of, and that it must be constituted by a radically democratic and inclusive 'us'. It responds to the need to form the broadest alliances possible if we are to devise new, post-anthropocentric paradigms, promote economies of symbiotic and sustainable collective actions, and fight against the toxicity of socio-ecological disasters, neoliberal dictums, historic distortions, aesthetic levelling, populist ideological constructs and poisonous fundamentalism.

It confirms the conviction that art can be a setting for radical involvement, free thought and justice as long as it continues to devise new languages about our relation to the world.

The participating artists are: Loukia Alavanou, Sophia Al Maria, Korakrit Arunonondchai, Vasilis P. Karouk, Anja Kirschner, Eva Kotatkova, Saskia Olde Wolbers, Eva Papamargariti, Agnieszka Polska, Mika Rottenberg, Wu Tsang. Their works were created over the last two years in various places around the known world (China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Greece, Thailand, USA) and referencing many others.

The exhibition is designed by architect Malvina Panagiotidi and complemented by a series of talks by international speakers (program to be announced), educational activities and print materials.

The Paratoxic Paradoxes project has a *virtual dumpsite*, designed by Eva Papamargariti and Vassiliki Maria Plavou as an online parasitic body living in the PCAI site. (www.pcai.gr).

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People are invited to read it as Michel Serres's "Stercorian Atlas", where "growing appropriation has piled up hundreds of networks of marks, stains and signposts".

The project-related team (artists, curator, organizers, designers, various interlocutors) will be throwing in materials that communicate with the exhibition by challenging (or contaminating) its theories, content and form.

Links, images, texts, references, indecipherable symbols, apparitions, unclear contradictions, quasi objects, things that are repulsive and attractive, *perittā*, will be piling up, anarchically, asymmetrically, subject to contingency and circumstance.

Guests can dig in and decide what to salvage, reuse, criticize, bury deeper or ignore; to test how disposal can become dis-appropriation, liberation, of at least one site.

For more information please contact:

Loraini Alimantiri

+30 210 40 60014, +30 6948500531

l.alimantiri@pcai.gr

www.pcai.gr

The Polyeco Contemporary Art Initiative is a non-profit organization aimed at raising the public's environmental awareness through an original artistic programme that creatively confronts the key issue of waste management.

'All our perceptions show us the real through a network of presuppositions that constructs it... This real that we perhaps know nothing about, and will never know anything about: we cover it not only with garbage, signs and marks but also with finer structures through which we do not see, feel or understand the real but rather appropriate it under the name of science, technique, thought; hundreds of other maps.'

— Michel Serres, Malfeasance: Appropriation Through Pollution?, Stanford University Press, California, USA, 2011 (1st ed.: Le Pommier, Paris, 2008)

'The party celebrating the end of the old necessity – a party that was admittedly legitimate, but often repugnant, with an orgy of riches, intoxication with diverse drugs, with ongoing trumped-up spectacles – is now followed by the dawn of a new settling of accounts, in which necessity returns, through a private entrance, behind us, inside the concept of "us".'

— Michel Serres with Bruno Latour: Conversations on Science, Culture and Time, The University of Michigan Press, USA, 1995 (original in French, 1990, Editions François Bourin)

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Exhibition Hashtag: #ParatoxicParadoxesBM

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Tuesday to Sunday: 11:00 a.m.—9:00 p.m.

Thursday: 11:00 a.m.—11:00 p.m.

Monday: closed

Full admission: € 8 — Reduced admission: €4

(more information at <http://www.benaki.gr/admission>)

Unified ticket: 20% discount on the total admission cost of the exhibitions on the day of the visit

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