

Exercises of the Gaze

It is always interesting for an art historian to be in touch with what is happening in the art scene today, so the invitation to write an essay for the exhibition *Exercises of the Gaze* was not only an honor, but also a challenge for me.

I decided to see the works of the participating artists both individually and as a whole, in the hope of detecting common patterns and connections, which actually happened. This shows not only the education the participants receive at the Department of Audiovisual Arts of the Ionian University and the excellent work done there, but also that the artists keep up with the international trends in art and share the same concerns about important issues regarding our time, one's self or even the whole community.

Going through the works of the participants, I started thinking of ways in which one could navigate through the works. First of all, I detected some interesting dipoles that dominate the space and create an unconscious collective canvas on which the affinities of the works are hatched. It is all about the truth and the lie or the deformation, the conventional and the digital, the personal and the collective.

Apart from these, one can also notice some key-words in the artists' texts that can also guide us in how to view the works. Some of these words are: truth, silence, identity, self, memory, experience, imagination, work and viewer.

Finally, I think the title of the exhibition itself, *Exercises of the Gaze*, proposes another way to navigate through the works. The word *exercise* means insistence, patience, orderliness, critical thinking, solution. The *gaze* on the other hand means sensation, tension, observation, admiration, surprise and much more. What possibly attracts the viewer's gaze and leads him/her to exercise it through the exhibition is the materials of which the works are made. And apart from the gaze and sight, materials mean texture. They can even mean smell and touch. Therefore, one approach to the works could be multi-sensory.

We shouldn't forget that senses are the primary means by which one perceives the world. It might be safe to say that sight, because of its immediacy, dominates among the senses as it contributes to the primary formation and conception of reality. However, it is not always self-evident that the visual experience is the same for everyone, meaning it is not sure that it will cause the same stimuli to all, as the way one interprets each experience is strongly connected to his/her personal experiences, education and culture.

It could be stated that sight is the sense most connected with the concept of truth. When it comes to art, everything has to do with the sight. But does a work of art give the chance to discuss about authenticity, truth, falsehood, deformation? Typical examples are **Omer Hadjiserif's** works, who claims that through the exploration of ways to compose forms, shapes and colors, he aims to create a virtual world. With the relationship between the visual arts

and technology to be his guideline, boundaries are expanded, possibilities are multiplied, the snapshot that has been removed from a continuous flow of situations is isolated, deformed and fragmented, blurring the lines between the real and the imaginary. The instantaneous, the accidental, the fiction and the reality coexist all on the same "canvas", either it is conventional or digital.

On the same page, **Andriana Rodakou** thinks the creation of any object stems from an idea and this idea stems from a truth. A truth that when you turn your gaze to the object of creation, it comes back to you in a straight line as if you were looking in a mirror. It doesn't really matter if this truth is yours, the creator's or just the reality. What matters the most is that in each work one sees a truth.

Christos Mavrodis, an audiovisual artist born in Greece, lives and works in the Netherlands and is interested in the complexity of contemporary life where the lines between reality and fantasy are often blurred out. Through media such as ink drawings, videos and installations, he explores concepts such as happiness, memory and mortality. His aim is to search for a meaning in an uncertain world.

In the series of works by visual artist **Vivi Perysinaki** under the attractive title *Emergence from Silence*, the role of a concept related to the sense of hearing, that of silence, is discussed. Being the opposite of noise, silence creates space, sometimes even more "noise", expectation and sensation. In any case, it is clear that noise and silence need each other. Perysinaki uses textile techniques to create sculptures and installations. Masses emerge in the space and invite the viewer to a game with his/her senses, while the white color suggests silence. White is in fact both the obvious absence of all colors and the presence of all colors together. I would also say that to me it is also both the absence of all noises and the presence of all noises together.

From several of the artists' texts, I remember words like identity, self, memory, everyday life, decaying. I recall the narrative theory which claims that people combine and change through their ongoing narratives of the stories available in the context in which they live. The narrative is produced through interactions that take place in a particular social and historical context, and therefore it must be studied in relation to it. Thus, the personal is in a constant relationship with the collective, a relationship of negotiation and formation based on memory, experience and identity. Typical of this is the work of Jerome Bruner¹, who believes that through narrative we recreate ourselves, which is also a product of narrative. Without this ability there would be no "self".

Works that could be approached in this regard are those of **Dimitris Spanos**, who describes his work as a reflection of his experiences, as a visual diary of his growth and his development as an individual. Through the observation of his environment and its visual representation in expressive terms, he aims to explore his personal identity. It is natural that his subject is the human figure

¹ Bruner, J. (2002). *Making stories: Law, literature, life*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

which he instinctively works through lines. He tries to capture the essence and energy of the subject, giving emphasis on the expressiveness and the spontaneity. His figures, the protagonists of his narrative, are formed, renegotiated and structured within a fluid social spectrum, reflecting the reality of the artist's life.

Most of the exhibited works, consciously or unconsciously, seem to have an autobiographical character. These contain important incidents, experiences, personal moments, gaze exercises from and within one's self. Their form and the way the artists express themselves about them in their texts evoke memories that become pictorial associations, while abstract concepts take shape and our eyes translate the artists' gesture leading us to the final result.

Kassandra Thomas' work, in which she studies and seeks various ways of expressing Greek artistic expression, incorporating elements of Greekness, both in the historical sense of the term, and in the contemporary expression of it, is a typical example of that. Through her installations and drawings, she tries to encapsulate childhood memories, dreams and stories, and to negotiate dipoles such as the relationship between the individual and the collective, the explicit and the implicit memory, the conscious and the unconscious.

Art in everyday life and its opposition to decaying and ephemerality are two concepts that concern the artist **Angeliki Dobroyianni**. For Dobroyianni, the victory of life over "death" and decaying is marked through the revival of an old and beloved genre of painting from the 17th century in Europe; still life. As she herself notes, "In still life, flowers and fruit often represent mortality and temporality, the drama of passing time. They are symbolic objects that convey to the viewer the sense of the transience of life and the absolute decaying of human existence. Flowers can represent hope, happiness, beauty and love. They can even represent sadness, the dark part of human existence and the inevitable loss, death."

Through photography she magnifies the flowers she photographs so that they become hope, longing, sadness, in any case, something larger than life. The light and the scale of the depicted objects play an important role in her works, elements that contribute to emphasizing the sense of transience and decaying. Her works are addressed to emotion or rather to feelings and touch the human soul, since euphoria, surprise, joy, fear of decay, anxiety about death and certainty about the greatness of life and nature coexist at the same time.

Yannis Andreou's works also focus on everyday, the random, the humorous, the instantaneous, the idea that is born with a nod, a look, a movement that gives the impetus for a work of art to be born. With his narrative being open to interpretation and personal approach, he enlists friends and loved ones and through an elaborate "staging" transforms them into something else. Spontaneity is the key to creativity, while the energy between himself and his model provides the result the artist desires.

In my opinion, the title of the exhibition ***Exercises of the Gaze*** refers not only to the way we all view the works, but also to a dialogue that is born between the work and the viewer. The viewer watches, sees, observes, exercises his/her gaze through the work of art and, spontaneously, a dialogue begins. It is common, when we are in front of a work of art, to talk with our friends and with ourselves. We are looking for words to explain the things we see, to express the thoughts that are created, to say what the works make us feel and to describe how we see them ourselves.

The theory of perception, in the field of visual arts, studies the participation of the viewer in the work of art, which lead to the viewer acquiring an active role. The audience takes on the role of the interpreter, which is crucial for the survival and transmission of the work, taking the work from the past that gave birth to it to the "today" of each recipient. The work of art will continue its impact as long as posterity continues or renews its reception - as long as there are viewers, writers, readers who will want to re-appropriate it, interpret it, imitate it or reject it. It will continue to exist as long as the viewers continue the dialogue with it.

Regarding this theme, the relationship between the work and the viewer, I would focus on **Theodora Patiti's** work. She creates works that do not exceed the dimensions of an A4 page, which immediately creates an intimacy, a balance in the dialogue between the work and the viewer, establishing a personal relationship. The work is no longer something imposing, distant and inaccessible, but an object that the viewer can hold, flip through, return to and complete the artist's narrative. In these works, the economy of narrative is impressive as Patiti works on a small surface with reasonable constraints.

With intense kinetic lines, references to the body, nature and memory, she forms a peculiar narrative, a Spectacle that happens in present time. In this present time of viewing, the viewer responds, understands and interprets based on his-her experiences.

In every art exhibition including this one, the works may be exhibited according to specific curatorial rules, in order to explain themes of historical currents, stylistic innovations, or to be integrated into a whole based on their iconographic content. However, visitors react to works of art in many ways, as they operate in a personal context of interpretation that depends on their experiences as well as on the content they give to what they see. In every work of art there are things that remain in the dark; they are not said, not shown and not explicitly mentioned as information and descriptions that would exhaust its meaning. Therefore, the viewer is called upon to complete, to "fill in" based on the knowledge, the experiences and the situation he/she acquires or lives in at that specific moment of the viewing.

The immediacy of the visual language used by all the artists in the exhibition is linked to a complexity of meanings and metaphors that goes beyond the first reading of the images. Even if they remain unidentifiable at first, these

images act eventually as a medium to individual, collective, social, mnemonic and multi sensory approaches.

It is conceivable that the visitors of the exhibition, while their navigating through the works, will go beyond the first reading of the images and discover their other, unseen and unspoken side, what happened in front of them, the conscious or unconscious decisions of the artists, the gazes that were exercised during their creation and during their exhibition to the public.

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