

PRESS RELEASE:

Manolis Daskalakis-Lemos - Feral Remnants/Oinousses

10.01.13 - 16.02.13

"There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town."
(Robert Lee Frost, *Directive*, 1946)

Feral Remnants/Oinousses is Manolis Daskalakis-Lemos' (b. Athens, 1989) first solo show.

The series of works presented here examine cases of change or deterioration of a previous state of prosperity and their traces as recorded in the urban landscape, architecture and public sculpture. The motive for this series of works was an observational documentary entitled *Grey Gardens* (1975) by the Maysles brothers, which follows the routine of the aunt and cousin of Jackie Kennedy Onassis in an old mansion near New York, which had been occupied by plants, while it was internally populated mainly by cats and raccoons.

The show is divided into two main parts, which run in parallel. The first part focuses on pictures of houses and cars captured in the Highland Park and Brush Park areas of Detroit, U.S.A. After the 1967 riots, which emerged as a fight between citizens and the police and were caused mainly by racial differences and after the collapse/relocation of the U.S. auto industry, the city population decreased from almost 2 million to 700 thousand. The retreating population left behind an estimated 33,500 abandoned homes and 91,000 vacant lots. The vines *Toxicodendron Radicans* ("morning glory"), *Ipomoea Tricolor* ("poison ivy") and the tree *Ailanthus Altissima*, also known as the "ghetto palm" or "tree of heaven" are common in the area, mainly because of the local climate humidity and their resilience in snow and low temperature conditions.

As observed by the great German lyric poet Friedrich Hölderlin "What remains is what the poets found"¹ and Daskalakis-Lemos is doing precisely that. Through 12 digital prints and a text the artist exhibits a sample of his collection of photographs from Detroit, thus creating an archive of remains, a database of "Feral Remnants", houses that are no more houses, cars that are no more cars. It is the artist's need to preserve even for a moment what is continuously changing, that which is wearing out. The rather Boltanskian idea to keep a trace of that moment of the life in the city and at the same time his need to prove the authenticity of his finds and precisely situate them.

These are not the pictures of an elusive place. They are existing landscapes or rather manscapes. All that is created here by man is in turn taken back by nature. When *Remembrance* is opposed to *Forgetting*,

¹ "Was bleibt aber, stiften die Dichter", Friedrich Hölderlin, „Andenken“, *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 2, hg. von Friedrich Beißner, Stuttgart 1951, p. 188

photographs become its *Testimony*. Absence, decay, entropy², are all joined in order to preserve romanticism, nostalgia. As Jean Genet puts it "...But what ultimately survives is the evidence, rarely accurate but always stirring, vouchsafed to the future by the victors."³

The second part of the show focuses on examples from Greece: An empty neoclassical building in Plaka and Oinousses, a group of islands northeast of Chios, the birthplace of a large number of shipping families, where in the 50s and 60s there was great prosperity mainly due to wealthy families who returned in their place of origin for the summer. The population of Oinousses today does not exceed 500 residents. The artist uses examples that draw from his experience and that he is comfortable to narrate and guides us through the current state of Oinousses, a strange blend of extravagant private villas and traditional island architecture, where all public works and sculptures derive from private donations with interesting results.

The *Oinousses' Stadium* (digital print on aluminum, 67.5x90cm and vinyl text) is both a football court and an amphitheater, built in 1998 after a donation of the JDL John Diamantis Lemos Foundation. *Mermaid* (drawing with pencil on paper, 114x171,5cm) was originally commissioned by Anthonis Spyrou Lemos and is now awkwardly standing - compared to the famous Little Mermaid of Copenhagen- on the seaside of Oinousses. Finally, the drawing of an imposing house in Plaka, *Untitled, Navarchou Nicodemou and Thoukydidou* (drawing with pencil on paper, 114x171,5cm and video) is a remembrance of the magnificent bourgeois house it used to be. Isolated from its environment and on white background, it is automatically transformed into a symbol -with inevitable repercussions on the current state of Athens.

The artist moves from study and research, to recording and thence symbolization. In what ways what we remember, memorialize, organize and archive is influenced by specific circumstances and random events? The exhibition also includes an audio-interview of Nicholas Spyrou Lemos - who narrates the processes of change over the course of time in the island- and a book which includes a transcript of the interview and a set of photographs of busts, statues, monuments and other public sculptures that adorn the island today. The recording and display of the Oinousses project aims to create a different reading of a historical narrative that is forcefully attempted to be consolidated in a certain way. Finally, *Blue Sculpture with Pedestal* that stands in the center of the gallery is a monumental sculpture-installation that satirizes this series of monuments of Oinousses, which are exclusively commissioned by individuals rather than the state.

Monuments and remnants, public sculptures and house-carcasses occupied by ivies, all signify an *Absence*. They are the remains of where man once lived. By exploring *Presence* in what appears to be *Absence*, a cross-reference occurs among the Detroit "Feral Remnants" and "Oinousses"... Cause what once lived has not an *End* but a *Remnant*.

² Entropy is a concept to measure disorder, whose maximum value reflects the total disarray (homogenization of everything) and is equivalent to the termination of life or of evolution. In such a situation there is no process and no "dormant" (hidden) kind of information which would allow the evolution (or life) if somehow there was energy.

³ Jean Genet, *Prisoners of Love*, 1986