

PRESS RELEASE

Marianna Ignataki | Solo Show

In a deep, dark forest they were braiding the beards of parrots in love

Opening: **Wednesday, May 15**, at 8 pm

Duration: 15.05.19 - 08.06.19

Referencing Chinese philosophy and tradition, bearded ladies and hairmen, the circus and the opera, Marianna Ignataki's exhibition deals with issues of gender, identity, exclusion and otherness, and concepts such as beauty and the grotesque that persistently appear in her work the last few years.

Her figures appear both dominant and dominating, with no signs of vulnerability, hiding or revealing themselves behind masks or hair, at the same time when ideas of the terrible and the absurd are constantly juxtaposed between alternation and coexistence. This is a world where "being different" is not only the subject of urban myths, clichés or carnival disguises, the subject of anthropological curiosity or ridicule but a new reality/regularity.

In the current show as well as in her recent show in the Municipal Art Gallery of Thessaloniki, the artist places issues of racism and race side by side to issues of identity and gender. According to Darwin's theories of sexual choice the beard of a white woman only casts doubt on her gender, while a beard in a black woman even disputes her origin as a human. Similarly, instances where gender identity or gender expression differs from the assigned sex are being treated as exotic birds. Ignataki's work take us exactly there, in the mysterious, deep, dark forest where one can find parrots in love.

Bio.

Marianna Ignataki was born in Thessaloniki in 1977 and she currently lives in Berlin. She begun her studies in architecture at the Technische Universität in Vienna and then she moved to France where she studied Visual Arts at the School of Fine Arts of Saint-Etienne. Between 2010-2017 she lived and worked in Beijing, China. She has had seven solo exhibitions to date, namely "In a deep, dark forest they were braiding the beards of parrots in love" at the Municipal Art Gallery of Thessaloniki in Alaca Imaret (2018), "Josie, the Armor and the Hairman" at CAN Christina Androulidaki gallery, Athens (2017), "The End of Magic" at Outpost Project Space, Amsterdam (2012), the "Sphinx" in Fake Space gallery, Beijing (2011), "This Joke Ain't Funny Anymore" curated by Apostolos Kalfopoulos in Zina Athanasiadou gallery, Thessaloniki (2009), "Coitus Interruptus" (double solo show) in Public Room Project Space, Skopje (2008), and one more show in cooperation with Lola Nikolaou at Fleming gallery, Thessaloniki (2004). She has participated in a number of group shows in Greece, China, Spain, Holland, France, Germany and the US. She is represented by CAN Christina Androulidaki gallery, Athens | www.can-gallery.com

Marianna Ignataki

By D. Fragkos

In Marianna Ignataki's work -as Apostolos Kalfopoulos notes in his penetrating text in the exhibition catalogue of her last solo show in Thessaloniki entitled *"This joke ain't funny anymore"*- we stand against the imperatives of the ideal body, which are summarized in the triadic form of Beauty-Reason-Ethics. In these imperatives, the Grotesque is juxtaposed to the Ugly, the Absurd and the Immoral, Otherness itself. But this Otherness is not entirely unfamiliar. Rosi Braidotti calls it a "familiar strangeness". Julia Kristeva claims that this Otherness contains those unbearable, shameful and insensible zones of social life. The subject is constituted through the power of exclusion of the Otherness. The grotesque body is the body of this blockage.

The curator's note in her recent solo show entitled *"Josie, the Armour and the Hairman"* at CAN Christina Androulidaki Gallery in Athens, refers to the idea of body modification and the use of the "body as a hiding place" and – aptly – brought to view connections with the imaginary baggage of China, where Ignataki has been working before she settled in Berlin, as well as with areas of social theory where the human body shapes and reforms the structure of society, while, at the same time, it also transforms itself through a changing society.

All this that may cause excitement or suspicion to an anthropologist, or make a psychoanalyst rub his hands, still exists in the work on view at Alaca Imaret. Efi Zoumbouli* would be able to locate the three techniques which the bibliography associates to the grotesque, the presence of invented fused forms or complex creations, the "desecration" and "exaggeration", applied on existing ideas and concepts and the juxtaposition between the ridiculous and the terrible. She could verify her view that *two basic properties appear to emerge as a sensation from the language of the Grotesque: loneliness and risk. One would say that it is both shadowy and shady, frightening and frightened. She talks about her fear and at the same time about yours.*

However, the interpretive system which uses Hieronymus, Artaud, Bataille, Klossowski, Mickey, Manga and Marquis as its coordinates feels somewhat embarrassed. I have a feeling that the risk becomes complicated and at the same time it becomes defined, with almost legal terms by Marianna Ignataki herself: *"Among her subjects, there are portraits with covered faces and 'hairmen', as well as scenes which repeat themselves with some kind of geometry. What interests me in these scenes, is that they stand on the verge of the tragicomic and the ridiculous, that bring to mind words like equilibrium, distortion and ecstasy [...] Or, the title of the exhibition: "In a deep, dark forest they were braiding the beards of parrots in love". [...] I enjoy thinking of this exhibition as a crazy dance of strange, mysterious beings in a dark forest [...] Like the forest that the gate leads you on the mural of the Alaca Imaret. Now, as for the parrot, it came out of a scene I read in Enrique Vila-Matas' book "The Illogic of Kassel", where the owner of a parrot kills him because he could not tell him "I love you" [...] I really like this scene because I think it suits exactly the atmosphere of my work. [...] As for the use of the mask, it is about "An eroticism where the head should not, could not participate".*

The abstraction and the critical reflection we read in the note on her website strengthens the suspicion that Marianna Ignataki's work is not about a univocal mapping of anthropological or psychoanalytical concepts with visual artifacts, but an amalgam, of which the subtle high mercury concentration threatens every semantic wandering of ours: The use of watercolor enables Ignataki to enter into a vague,
#MariannaIgnataki #InADeepDarkForestTheyWereBraidingTheBeardsOfParrotsInLove #CanChristinaAndroulidakigallery

subliminal world, filled with images of her own mythology. Her work ranges from minimalistic scenes and portraits, to exaggerated, kitsch, Rococo-inspired compositions. She works with archival material that references history, art and fashion. The fluidity of her material, imposes a condition of constant redefinition in the images, thus revealing the reason for which they were originally chosen as starting points. As part of a process that develops with a collage-like logic, constructs ambiguous, surrealistic scenes that flirt with the notion of the absurd by combining seemingly heterogeneous elements, which are subtly linked through the organization of the composition. By introducing unexpected details, often with a sense of dark humor, the original meaning of seemingly ordinary scenes is reversed or distorted, resulting to ironic, bizarre and grotesque situations.

The odd rituals in Marianna Ignataki's pictures are another distraction of the Painter-Magician, which diverts the viewer into a process of deciphering the narrative, without warning them that here there is no security of a "programmatic" painting, but the concern of a game without rules. That it is necessary to dive into the ritual of the "fabrication" of the painting, to feel, in his own body, the manner in which this sensual, haptic relationship of the brush with the paper surface develops an unstable relationship with the unfamiliar, almost like the one that Dante Gabriel Rossetti had with the hair of an Aurelia (or a Lilith).

Leaving the Artist-Magician to explore the aspect of the irrational, the equilibrist Marianna Ignataki, marks the human, giving shape to the indefinable that flirts with the real, while, at the same time, is wandering in the territory of violation and desire. The subject-pretence of vintage photographic material from the west (from photographs of long-haired women to yoga practitioners) and from Japanese history creates a multi-readable grid of images, fractured narratives and painting gestures. The images of the free divers of the Japanese photographer, Yoshiyuki Iwase, allow her to dive, without a snorkel, into the reservoir of obsessions and into the obsession of the painting puzzle.

* Efi Zoumbouli, *Grotesque is my middle name, on the occasion of images by Suehiro Maruo and Takato Yamamoto*, Research paper, Department of Architecture, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2013.

Dimitris Fragos
Painter
Professor, Department of Architecture, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki