



Re-Connecting to Creative Potential



Els Hanappe talks to Stephanie Bailey about the thinking that goes behind Siakos.Hanappe House of Art's latest projects, revealing a few things about herself in the process.

Wandering into the Hilton for an interview with Belgium gallerist, Els Hanappe, one half of Siakos.Hanappe House of Art alongside Lazarus Siakos, I almost pass a sculpture of Ingbert Brunk without noticing it. A sculptor capable of making marble look as light as paper, and as ethereal as a cloud shielding the glowing, summer sun, it almost felt as if the natural character Brunk extracts from his material had been somewhat muted by its urban setting.


This in itself is interesting; it gives the viewer responsibility to discover the soul of the material, and in doing so, perhaps come a little closer to nature and creation. In his own words, Brunk's sculpture is all "about discovering a distinctive language. The material itself has a big power and spirit; there is a spirit in everything and it is nice to make it clearer." His approach to marble is one of the key reasons Hanappe was attracted to his work; "I did this show because I feel like marble is an important material for Greek heritage and so I wanted to know who was using marble and how."

Whether in terms of the natural world, human nature, or the man-made realities of history and the modern city, connecting is one of the core principles behind the Siakos.Hanappe venture. On the latest exhibition at the Glyfada-based gallery space, Hanappe describes the work of British artist, Adam Chodzko as; "very sensitive and very warm in the human sense. He is interested in human beings in a positive way, in that we are all humans together. He tries to find ways related to how can we live together and how can we connect."

In many ways, the Siakos.Hanappe House of Art attempts to re-connect. "I am more interested in what's here, and how you can work with the materials, the traditions, the problems, as well as the crisis. I mean for the future this is far more interesting," she explains, using her gallery's previous show that looked at travellers in Greece during the 18th and 19th centuries and their relation to the modern relationship with the land. "It was about how the traveller changes the perceptions of nature," she says. "We don't have direct contact with nature anymore and therefore we lose how we understand a country."

The concept of the traveller must resonate with Hanappe, as it does for expatriates and immigrants who have made Athens their home, the international Greek Diaspora who return as strangers, or the Greeks who simply want to escape their current reality. On why she has stayed in Greece, Hanappe admits, "I ask myself that question everyday. But in the end, though everyone has criticisms about Greece and everybody complains about Greece, it's not that simple. There are also many positives. I've met wonderful people here and have had many chances to do things."

Moving to Athens from Belgium some 15 years ago, Hanappe started doing shows in an old soap factory in Maroussi. When the property was confiscated by the state, Hanappe started C3A, or the Archive of Contemporary Art in Athens. She later donated the archives to the DESTE Foundation when she decided to open her own gallery space, Els Hanappe Underground, before deciding to leave the city centre for Glyfada, noting that the sea is one of Athens's biggest assets. Yet she is quick to note that it wasn't just the sea that led her to Athens in the first place.

"Athens is a very vivid city," Hanappe concludes. "Of course, before the 2004 Olympics there was a lot of optimism. After the Olympics, everything became much more difficult, and now it is more difficult than ever. The Greeks were very self-destructive in a way because everyone could see this coming and no one cared. But I think they will get out of it; the Greeks are quite inventive when there is an emergency. They have this entrepreneurial spirit." And if Hanappe's example is anything to go by, it's all about finding hidden or existing potential and working with it. 

Adam Chodzko, Taken In; Fall Out at Siakos.Hanappe House of Art until October 30 and Contemporary Marble Sculpture: Ingbert Brunk & Dimitris Skalkotos at the Hilton Hotel, Athens, until October 24. For more information see http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/dealers_galleries/Gallery/SAKOS.HANAPPE+House+of+Art/20137.html.

From left to right: Dimitris Skalotos, Ingbert Brunk