

Interview between curator Roxana Marcoci and artist Haris Epaminonda (October 23, 2011)

Projects 96: Haris Epaminonda

RM: Haris, you grew up in Cyprus and then studied at Chelsea College of Art and Design and Kingston University before completing a Master of Arts in 2003 at the Royal College of Art, London. What was the artistic climate then and who would you say was instrumental on your thinking and practice at the time?

HE: I left Cyprus in 1997, right after finishing high school. I was seventeen at the time and my knowledge of contemporary art was incipient. After I moved to London, I became attracted to the city's museums and film culture. I recall spending hours in the British Museum, The National Gallery, or places like the British Library and the British Film Institute Southbank. I vividly recall an exhibition that we visited at the Royal Academy with Jonathan Miles, a tutor in Critical and Historical Studies at the Royal College of Art, who has played a critical role in my thinking and artistic development. The exhibition was titled *The Return of the Buddha*. These early Chinese sculptures, discovered in a small town in eastern China, had a beautiful stillness and tranquility and their aura stayed with me ever since.

Can you speak about the project *The Infinite Library* that you conceived in collaboration with German artist Daniel Gustav Cramer? I am interested in the ideas of archives, cartographies, and atlases at the root of this project, as well as the montage technique involved in splicing books together into new volumes, and in the title, which I believe makes reference to Jorge Luis Borges.

Daniel and I began working on *The Infinite Library* project in late 2007. We decided to disassemble a few books

and reshuffle their individual pages. Once the pages from these various books had been reordered—with glossy and matte surfaces, images of mixed origins and sheets of different sizes—we began experimenting, collecting books and thinking of them as fragments of new volumes. Each page, taken out of its context and placed next to another, formed new associations. The order, rhythm, and logic of the original book was disrupted and reconfigured. The title, *The Infinite Library*, is indeed inspired by Borges's short story "The Library of Babel," in which librarians enter a vast library to search for meaning amongst books that they believe carry all the answers, only to find volumes filled with random content, in every possible variation and sequence.

This disrupting cut-and-paste process recurs not just in *The Infinite Library* project but also in your series of short videos titled *Tarahi*, which similarly consist of fragments edited from found videos and films. What does *tarahi* mean, and what is the underlying narrative, if there is one?

In Greek, *tarahi* means "turmoil"—specifically, a moment of calm followed by something intense happening. It's also a state of mind. When I began the *Tarahi* series in 2007, I was looking at popular Greek movies from the 1960s—romances, thrillers, dramas, comedies—that I had watched earlier, as a child in Cyprus. I realized what an impact they had had on me and decided to rework them. Instead of recreating the original narratives, I would put together short sequences, isolating a small movement or the appearance of a shadow. In this way, I could build up a collage of fragments, selected according to my own emotional responses and arranged according to color or imagery rather than in any sequential story line. As with the sound composition, the films developed rhythmically, based on changes of mood and atmosphere, building to peaks, creating tension.

The footage that you use in the three-video installation at MoMA, *Chronicles* (2010), is actually not appropriated but

rather shot by yourself over the course of several years. Chronicles eschews narrative in favor of fragmented images that probe the nature of time and assert the permeability of memory. Could you talk about the conception of these works?

Chronicles is an ongoing work that first began to take shape last year in an exhibition at Site Gallery in the UK. It's a collection of moving images shot with a Super 8 film camera during my research travels. As the title suggests, Chronicles is an ongoing process of documenting and capturing scenes or moments that mark the continuity of time and the layers of history present in places and things. By collecting and juxtaposing these instances and encounters, I'm in some ways trying to build up abstract connections between things as well as observe the passing of time. I study the changes that occur between one event and the next. I see these works semantically, close to how one would form sentences, and attempt to go beyond the concept of mere documents.

Who are the filmmakers that you are drawn to, who inform your practice? And, what is the acoustic link that unites Chronicles in the MoMA installation?

Sergei Paradjanov, Robert Bresson, Yasujiro Ozu, amongst others. The sound is created by Part Wild Horses Mane On Both Sides, an experimental music duo based in Manchester. Their music is mainly based on improvisation, which creates suggestive narratives.

The spatial composition that you conceived at MoMA is titled VOL. VII. How does the video installation interrelate with the sculptural elements—ancient sculptures, earthenware vessels, various plinths, images of archeological finds, and scenes from tourist destinations culled from older books—in the exhibition?

For me the essence lies equally in the distinctive constellations as well as in the formation of one whole visual narra-

tive. The individual films that form Chronicles function as elements, like a vase displayed in a niche, or a thin piece of wood positioned vertically in the centre of the gallery, cutting through space. The conjunction of the films, found images, and objects and their specific locations within the exhibition opens up the possibility of multiple readings, readings that are determined in part by the physical and emotional perspective of the viewer. Perhaps it's also a question of visual shift, or drift, in the perception of things. Certain motifs are repeated, like an accumulation of gestures that happen to be objects, or things that exist around us in different states of disappearance. For me, these depictions and objects have in the simplicity of their forms a potentially post-apocalyptic impression.

If this installation evokes one emotion, or one level of memory, what would you say it is?

Emotions and memories are always personal. I don't like to think of the work as generating one emotional state.