

Octopus 10





*How We Know That
The Dead Return*





The Living

Well, and is there not an opposite of life, as sleep is an opposite of waking?

True, he said.

And what is it?

Death, he answered...

Is not death opposed to life?

Yes.

And they are generated one from the other?

Yes.

What is generated from the living?

The dead.

And what from the dead?

I can only say in answer — the living.

Then the living, whether things or persons...are generated from the dead?

That is clear, he replied.¹

How We Know That The Dead Return is an exhibition that seeks to explore the way ghosts, spectres and resonances of the past return to occupy and transform the present. The curatorial framework draws on Socrates' characterisation of the immaterial recounted in Plato's final dialogue. For Socrates, a cycling of life to death and death to life exists; to hope one's soul will continue to exist after death, one must believe in the possibility of the 'birth of the dead into the world of the living';² Like the soul of the dead that must be somewhere such that it can return, *How We Know That The Dead Return* considers strategies in contemporary practice that suggest an inevitable return of the dead and reveal symbolic manifestations of pasts that haunt us in the present.

The exhibition includes film, video and installation works by Harutyun Khachatryan, Els Opsomer, Christodoulos Panayiotou, Nikos Pantazopoulos, Debra Porch and Eugenia Raskopoulos that refer to the neighbouring territories of Greece, Cyprus, Turkey and Armenia. While each project gestures toward specific geopolitical histories and genealogies throughout this region, collectively the group of artists engage in a conversation about the difficulty of decoding the region's histories that are riddled with conflict over territory and identity. Porch explains how this difficulty can be the result of familial experiences where access to tangible discourse is often discouraged: 'My family spoke in whispers, and as a child, we were never told or exposed to the tragedies that were experienced before we were born. Life was precious and speaking of the past would soil the present.'³

The exhibition title draws its name from *How I Know that the Dead Return* (1909), British spiritualist William Thomas Stead's literary account of mediumistic communication. While the investigation of parapsychology in spiritualist literature provides anchors for exploring visual phenomena associated with the afterlife, the exhibition concentrates on formal and performative strategies used by contemporary artists to reflect on the role of the dead in the lives of the living. The exhibition harnesses aspects of appropriation and the archive; relational modes of practice that deploy

mimetic technologies to document enactments; and the threads of reverie in art that foreground the way objects and images have the capacity to evoke past (or otherwise absent) experiences and events.

The works in *How We Know That The Dead Return* also reflect on a presence that is difficult to decode, whether in recalling events from second-hand memory, revealing gaps in social memory or utilising archival material to generate new ways of thinking about historical experience. The artists' choice of recording media (film, video, sound and photography) accentuate these relationships between past event and its document, suggesting that documentation can function as not simply a record, but also as a replacement for these experiences. Throughout the exhibition, events remembered in collective memories shift into fictional accounts based on artistic representations. The artists remain conscious that art cannot objectively or sufficiently reflect the truths of the past. Instead they harness the possibilities of mnemonic strategies or counter-memories in making the reification of social, political and aesthetic experiences difficult and not open to simple identification.

This intergenerational group of artists represents those living and working in the region and in the diasporas. While individual works highlight a sense of estrangement from these histories and pasts, the artists all remain compelled by what the histories of this region mean in the present as well as the political imperative of recalling history without sentimentality. In this way the curatorial framework was encouraged by Nicholas Tsoutas's remarks on the 11th International Istanbul Biennale (2009), which highlight the responsibility for contemporary art to reinvest in a dialogue with history and politics. As Tsoutas states of the curatorial collective WHW [What, How & for Whom] and their rationale distilled through the Brechtian question of *What Keeps Mankind Alive?*:

[the exhibition] requires political solutions, and for that art, artists and curators find solutions that reconsider the past in order to re-imagine the future, through a direct



and active engagement with the cultural processes that frame and produce art. In this sense the curators reflect optimistically what it means to *stay alive*, necessitating an activist responsibility to art.⁴

Contemporary artists continue to utilise the typologies of both institutional and personal archives as discursive systems for illustrating the past in the present, as well as a formal device for engaging with a return of the past. Okwui Enwezor has provided one of the most moving accounts of the archive as both a form and medium in contemporary art. In discussing the use of archival documents and approaches to film and photographic archives, Enwezor has highlighted the way artists transform archival legacies into aesthetic principals:

the artist serves as the historic agent of memory, while the archive emerges as a place in which concerns with the past are touched by the astringent vapours of death, destruction and degeneration. Yet against the tendency of contemporary forms of amnesia whereby the archive becomes a site of lost origins and memory is dispossessed, it is also within the archive that acts of remembering and regeneration occur, where a suture between the past and present is performed, in the indeterminate zone between event and image, document and monument.⁵

The archival materials presented throughout the exhibition indicate the ways in which artists are rethinking the architecture and archetypes of appropriated material. Panayiotou's investigation of the Municipal Archives of the City of Limassol in Cyprus probes the archives of public information to confirm his observation that there is a prevalence of Disney costuming at the annual Limassol carnival. The accumulation of this visual information is brought together in the cyclical format of a slide projection where appropriated images are ordered according to aesthetic and poetic connections. Els Opsomer's practice is premised on the archive's ethnographic condition: an expanding archive of photographs, films and videos that record ordinary fragments of urban spaces

and phenomena. They reflect the ideological constructions underpinning collective acts of memorialisation in public space as well as what anthropologist Marc Auge's has termed the *non-lieux* — locations no longer defined by history, tradition or community but that continue to function as sites of exchange, transaction and movement.

In describing relationships between the living and the dead, artists have also had to contend with the phantoms inherent in the photographic medium. Roland Barthes famously described the indexical imprint of the photograph as 'that-has-been,' a medium emerges from the presence of something that is no longer present.⁶ Jacques Derrida further suggested that the spectral arrival of the dead inhabits the actual physicality of an image, suggesting the deceased 'leave in us only images.' For Derrida, when we look at something, an inversion of the gaze occurs so that 'the image sees more than it is seen. The image looks at us.'⁷ Like Panayiotou and Opsomer, Porch explores these relationships between the archive and memory by recontextualising aspects of the everyday. Porch uses family photographs and found objects to reveal an afterlife of the dead in us through memories that consist of visible scenes that are no longer anything but images.

The remembering and reliving of events through performative gestures and their documentation has an important function for artists exploring the inner logic of cultural identity. For Panayiotou, revisiting the iconography of the Limassol carnival obscures and redefines Cypriot cultural identity: 'The parade is a kind of revelation of everything we would like to be, of everything we know we cannot be, and of everything we cannot afford to accept that we are.'⁸ In discussing Raskopoulos's work George Alexander has suggested the artist is drawn 'to this horrific divide where she feels the long reverberations of the past. She relives that event in the past so as to come to terms with, have gnosis about, the present.'⁹ Raskopoulos summons memories of her grandmother through a series of performative actions using domestic objects that belonged to her. The artist connects embodied experience to mental space, taking the invisible traces of



memory and making the immaterial visible in the present.

The exhibition expands this platform to consider how strategies of participatory actions in civic space offer possibilities for renegotiating specific political and historical narratives. More broadly, it considers how active interests in monuments and monumentality have the capacity to reorientate the iconography of cultural identity in public life. Pantazopoulos documents the installation of a monument to King Leonidas by a migrant community group in Melbourne alongside a commentary by Nikos Papastergiadis on the seduction of monumentality that is distinct from the totalising notion of monuments. As Papastergiadis observes:

They are somehow seeing in this figure of Leonidas some kind of echo of their own passing through the world and the need to make a claim about where they once stood. And that's what every monument does in some ways. It recognises, it provides a trace of a passage, or some kind of event, of a claim on history. It is a way of implanting your footprint, of imposing your fingerprints into the landscape.¹⁰

Like Panayiotou and Pantazopoulos, Khachatryan foregrounds issues of cultural engagement and involvement in non-gallery based cultural activities. Khachatryan documents the creation and journey of a monument dedicated to Armenian poet and philosopher Ashugh Jivani. Fundamental to this action is the question of whether monumental gestures serve identity rather than history, individual or collective remembrance, or reduce the political complexity of the historical. Khachatryan actively dialogues present and past, matter and memory, by transporting the new monument to Armenians in both rural and urban centres, an unpredictable strategy which foregrounds the importance of social exchange, mobility and experience in and to mnemonic processes.

Throughout the exhibition, certain paradigms associated with acts of memorialisation shift around and are de-centralised; some works

move from considering sites of memory to the sight of memory itself. The ideological binds that hold contemporary Turkish culture together are revealed in Opsomer's work, which records aspects of monumentality played out as focal points within a civic context. Robert Morris has conjectured that connections exist in the relationships between space, memory and experience, suggesting actual experience is 'filmic' and our memory of it 'photographic' when we 'shift to [the] recall of the spatial experience: objects and static views flash in the mind's space. A series of stills replace the filmic real-time experience. Objects are obviously experienced in memory as well as in the present.'¹¹ For Porch, the objects and visual devices deployed in her installations have the capacity to recover memories from past experiences and forge connections between the past and present. The material presence of photography and the tools of documentation are replicated in Porch's imprinting of carbon and graphite across the gallery walls to signal the emulsion of a photograph.

We are all haunted by the demands the dead place on the memories of the living. What of the dead we remember, how we remember them, and what we choose not to forget, are all questions that *How We Know That The Dead Return* asks. In connecting a comprehension of haunting, soul and the political via mnemotechnics in contemporary art, the exhibition concerns itself with conjoined perceptual, technical, and philosophical modes of living on, in those who remain or who exist out of the dead. The artists in the exhibition are only too aware that the dead return. What is more important is the 'how' in the exhibition title, the way in which this question of epistemology or proof is taken to suggest the ways in which we *do* know. In this way, the title points to a belief that there is a collective reception or knowingness to the ways memory and mortality inhabit, and are experienced, within contemporary art and the everyday.

José Da Silva, August 2010

1. Plato, 'Phædo', *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol 2, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1892, p.227 (71c–71e).
2. Plato, p.227.
3. Debra Porch, unpublished artist statement, 2010.
 This agency in relation to histories that are both visible and invisible is reflected in two works from contemporary film and literature that were the genesis for this exhibition project. In Christos Tsiolkas's novel *Dead Europe* (2005), a Greek–Australian photographer returns to Europe to discover a malevolent and vastly different continent. While at the Jewish History Museum of Thessaloniki, he photographs a stark archival photograph of Jewish resistance fighters and describes the image's capacity to evoke the haunting legacies of 'blood and land and ghosts.' In Atom Egoyan's film *Avarat* (2002) a young Canadian–Armenian returns to his ancestral land, now controlled by Turkey, to try to comprehend the weight of its history. He comments, 'When I see these places, I realise how much we've lost. Not just the land and the lives, but the loss of any way to remember it. There is nothing here to prove that anything ever happened.'
4. Nicholas Tsoutas, 'Don't Complain: 11th International Istanbul Biennale', *Broadsheet*, No.39.1, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide, 2010, p.63.
5. Okwui Enwezor, 'Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument', *Archive Fever: Uses of the document in contemporary art*, NY Gottingen: International Centre of Photography, Steidl Publishers, New York, 2008, p.46–47.
6. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, New York, 1981, p.96.
7. Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001, p.54.
8. Nikos Charalambidis, 'Never Land: Christodoulos Panayiotou', *Art Papers*, New York, May/June 2008, p.37.
9. George Alexander, 'Re-departing', *Eugenia Raskopoulos*, Artspace Visual Arts Centre, Sydney, 2002, u.p.
10. Nikos Papastergiadis cited in Nikos Pantazopoulos, *The Pallaconian Brotherhood* 2010.
11. Robert Morris cited in Henry M Sayre, 'Open Space: Landscape and the Postmodern Sublime', *The object of performance: the American avant-garde since 1970*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p.242.

Christodoulos Panayiotou

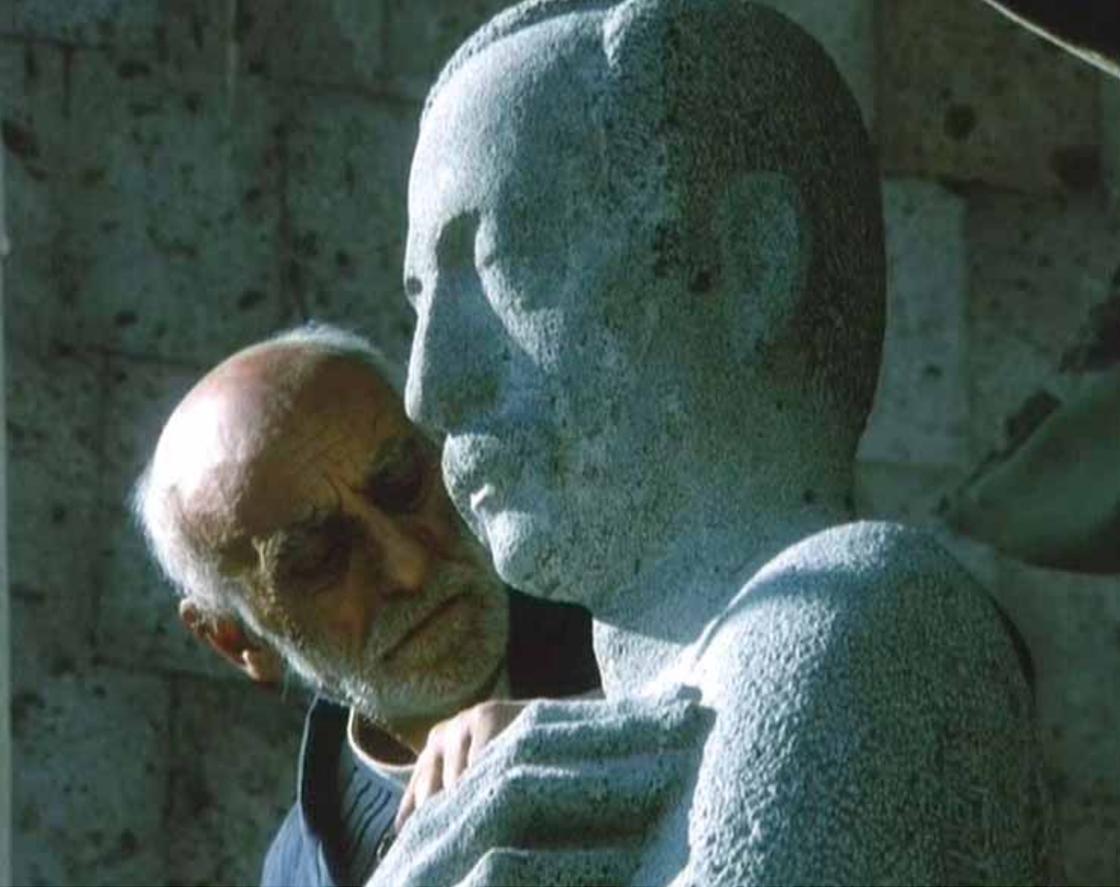
If tomorrow never comes 2007

27 black and white slides, single-channel projection

Realised with the collaboration of Archivio Parisio and Archivio Carbonne, Italy

Courtesy Rodeo, Istanbul







Harutyun Khachatryan
Poeti Veradardze (Return of the Poet) 2006
35mm film transferred to DVD, 88 minutes
Courtesy the artist and the Golden Apricot Fund for
Cinema, Yerevan



Els Opsomer
10th of November | 09:05 2008
16mm film, 14:04 minutes
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Erna Hécey, Brussels

Following page:
Christodoulos Panayiotou
Wonder Land 2008
80 colour slides, single-channel slide projection
Courtesy Rodeo, Istanbul









Nikos Pantazopoulos
The Pallaconian Brotherhood 2010
HD video, two-channel video exhibited on monitors
from DVD, 16:9, colour, stereo, 12 minutes
Courtesy the artist

Debra Porch
Photograph of Abraham Mikalian c.1915
Courtesy the artist







Eugenia Raskopoulos

re-ma(r)king 2010

HD video, two-channel video exhibited on monitors

from hard drive, 16:9, colour, stereo, 5:08 minutes

Courtesy the artist, Arc one Gallery, Melbourne and WW
Artist Projects, Sydney

Harutyun Khachatryan

Born 1955 Akhalkalak, Georgia

Lives and works in Yerevan, Armenia

Poeti Veradardze (Return of the Poet) 2006

35mm film transferred to DVD, 1.85:1, colour, stereo, 88 minutes

Produced in Armenia in Armenian with English subtitles

Director: Harutyun Khachatryan

Script: Harutyun Khachatryan, Mikayel Stamboltsyan

Cinematographers: Vrej Petrosyan, Armen Mirakyan, Ashot Movsesyan, Artyom Melkoumyan

Editor: Harutyun Khachatryan

Music: Avet Terteryan, Ashugh Jivani

Sound: Areg Nazaryan, Mikayel Stamboltsyan

Produced by Hayfilm/Armenfilm Studio with the support of the Hubert Bals

Fund of the International Film Festival, Rotterdam

Courtesy the artist and the Golden Apricot Fund for Cinema, Yerevan

In *Return of the Poet* 2006 Harutyun Khachatryan explores the enduring significance of 19th Century Armenian poet, philosopher and itinerant folk singer Ashugh Jivani (1846–1909). Born in Akhalkalak — a region of Javakhk, Georgia populated by Armenians and Khachatryan's birthplace a century later — Jivani's songs capture expressions of patriotism and protest in the face of poverty and incursions into Armenian sovereignty. Khachatryan's film follows two distinct trajectories of memorialisation by illustrating processes of craftsmanship and social exchange. The film begins with the meticulous construction of a statue of Jivani, first modelled from clay and then painstakingly chiselled from stone. We follow the monument's passage on the back of a lorry through present-day Armenia as it travels from the capital Yerevan to Jivani's birthplace in the village of Kartsakh. The sculptor's journey with the immortalised troubadour provides the basis for a broader reflection on history, nature and the fate of contemporary Armenia. We observe folkloric traditions and practices in scenes of impromptu folk dancing, wrestling sports, communal meals and sites of sacred significance intermixed with the unforgiving realities of life in Armenia after Soviet Union occupation ended in 1991. In Khachatryan's film the *return* of the poet represents not only a physical homecoming, but also a recapitalisation of Jivani's significance, restoring his legacy for new generations of Armenians in urban and rural centres.



Els Opsomer

Born 1968 Gent, Belgium

Lives and works in Brussels, Belgium and Rufisque, Senegal

10th of November | 09:05 2008

16mm film, 1.37, colour, mono, 14:04 minutes

Produced in Belgium/Turkey with no dialogue

Concept: Els Opsomer

Cinematographer: Sebastien Koepfel

Production assistant: Helena Kritis

Local assistant: Nilufer Sasmazer

Sound engineer: Ludo Engels

Music: 'Unfinished Light' by Ludo Engels, Julia Eckhardt and Silvia Platzer;

part of the 'DoUndo/recycling G' project

Dedicated to Gündüz Vasaf

Produced with the support of VAF, Flanders Audiovisual Fund

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Erna Hécey, Brussels

Els Opsomer's evolving archive of photographs and films document the way individuals manoeuvre and engage with socio-political attitudes and behaviours underscoring their surroundings. *10th November / 09:05 2008*, commissioned by Okwui Enwezor for the 7th Gwangju Biennale, observes a collective act of memorialisation in Istanbul marking the precise moment when founder and first president of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881—1938), was pronounced dead. So revered is the figure of Atatürk within the psyche of contemporary Turkey — in particular for his fashioning of a modern secular republic after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1923 — that the anniversary of his death continues to be marked by a complete standstill at 9:05am throughout the country. Opsomer's 16mm film captures this remarkable phenomenon at a busy intersection in Istanbul as vehicles and pedestrians pause to observe two minutes of silence. The looped film presents two versions of this brief moment, the first accompanied by the piercing call of a siren that signals the time and a second version in which the sounds of the city are drowned out by an eerie drone. As life continues again in the city, we glimpse the complicated ideological constructions operating and binding the country together.



Christodoulos Panayiotou

Born 1978 Limassol, Cyprus

Lives and works in Berlin, Germany and Paris, France

Wonder Land 2008

80 colour slides, single-channel slide projection

Produced with the collaboration of the Municipal Archives of the City of Limassol, Cyprus

Courtesy Rodeo, Istanbul

Wonder Land 2008 is the outcome of an intensive research project undertaken at the Municipal Archives of the City of Limassol where Christodoulos Panayiotou investigated documentation of the annual Limassol Carnival. Panayiotou searched the archives for photographs that confirmed his impression that since the 1970s Limassolians have displayed a fascination for Disney characters in their floats, costumes and masks. The customary pageant and festivities that has its historical and mythological roots within the Hellenic tradition remain one of the most popular and unifying events in Cyprus. The social performance of its participants reflects extraordinary expressions of individual and collective identity for a country that since 1974 has been partitioned into about two-thirds of the island's areas governed by Greek Cypriots and one-third occupied and administered by the Turkish government with UN peace keeping forces controlling the zone between them. Within this complex political and social framework, *Wonder Land* positions this fascination for fantastical archetypes as a subversive strategy for renegotiating the historical and political significance of the parade within the transformative modern history of Cyprus. The slide projection, ordered and looped through the artist's instinctive and poetic associations, reflects contradictory aspirations and desires that are borne out of conflict over territory and a melancholic projection of cultural identity. For Panayiotou it represents the gaze of a country that "cannot but turn to the past, however unclear, so that it may manage to look forward again one day".



Nikos Pantazopoulos

Born 1973 Melbourne, Australia

Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia

The Pallaconian Brotherhood 2010

HD video, two-channel video exhibited on monitors from DVD, 16:9, colour, stereo, 12 minutes

Produced in Australia in Greek/English with English subtitles

Cinematographer/Editor: Nikos Pantazopoulos

Featuring: Professor Nikos Papastergiadis, University of Melbourne

Courtesy the artist

The Pallaconian Brotherhood 2010 is a project comprising video, performance and related ephemera and activities. It takes as its foundation the construction of a monument to King Leonidas (c.540—480 BC) by the Pallaconian Brotherhood of Melbourne. The revered King of Sparta, who died during the Battle of Thermopylae defending Greece against Persian forces, Leonidas holds an enduring significance for this group of Laconian men. The two-channel video documents the installation process at Sparta Place in Brunswick, a suburb that during the 1950s had a concentration of migrant communities from southern Europe. In commissioning and installing the bronze bust of Leonidas within the newly gentrified public space, the group replant aspects of cultural resistance and preservation embedded within the Leonidas narrative to a local diasporic context and experience. Professor Nikos Papastergiadis augments this documentary footage in an interview where he reflects on the collective motivations of the men. Central to his interpretation is the question of how individuals reflect their personal histories by shaping civic spaces, and how, by example, the Pallaconian Brotherhood trace their presence as an enduring symbol of their involvement and contribution in this part of the world. The video serves as a point of departure for a car to navigate and weave its way to Gertrude Contemporary in which Pantazopoulos uses a loudspeaker to retell stories. This spoken narrative recalls politics and personal activities, as well as the use of word of mouth in helping to shape histories and knowledge.



Debra Porch

Born 1954 Waukegan, USA

Lives and works in Brisbane, Australia

tracing the erased 2010

Wall drawing with graphite and charcoal; textiles, paper, electroplated and found objects

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

Debra Porch's installation *tracing the erased* 2010 explores how traumas of the past shape individual and collective identities in the present. Based on photographs and memories of her grandparents Abraham Mikalian and Elizabeth Toshigian — survivors of the 1915–18 Armenian genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Turks — the work foreshadows the complexities of reconstructing the effects of a genocide that continues to be the subject of denial and invisibility. Porch focuses specifically on tracing from second-hand memory that which has been erased from the past, searching memory to somehow *fill-in* the gaps that the absence of time has produced. Spatialised within the gallery space, Porch's objects and images communicate the 'tracing' of presence through a range of materials and metonymic gestures: the artist literally traces and erases graphite and charcoal across the gallery walls and arranges everyday objects (vintage cameras, onions, a birdcage and bird) whose material transformations have a defamiliarising effect — concealed by a process of taxidermy or electroplating, they break the division between their psychic and physical significance. While their intended function is rendered mute, these tools of documentation, sustenance and domesticity continue to express the interior quality of absence and presence.

This catalogue features two surviving images of Porch's grandparents from this point in history. Both are dated c.1915–16 with one depicting Elizabeth at the centre of a group of children, presumably in safe refuge outside of Anatolia. The second is a portrait of Abraham either in Marseille, France or on the front where he was stationed as a paid soldier.



Eugenia Raskopoulos

Born 1959 Svitavy, Czech Republic

Lives and works in Sydney, Australia

re-ma(r)king 2010

HD video, two-channel video exhibited on monitors from hard drive, 16:9, colour, stereo, 5:08 minutes

Online editor: Emma Watkins

Courtesy the artist, Arc one Gallery, Melbourne and WW Artist Projects, Sydney

Eugenia Raskopoulos's two-channel video *re-ma(r)king* 2010 features related sequences in which the artist seeks to invoke memories of her grandmother through the actions of making/remaking materials and the marking/remarking of surfaces. The first channel depicts the unravelling of a doily that is in turn spun in the artist's hands to form a ball of yarn, while the second channel sees the artist employ a rolling pin traditionally used for making tiropita (Greek pastries) to roll out a pool of olive oil across a concrete floor. Raskopoulos's slow and meditative gestures oscillate between the oppositional forces of creation and destruction. The oil at once obscures the floor's surface but also becomes a reflective space in which the artist's body is mirrored like a ghostly apparition. By using these objects as tools for creation, Raskopoulos underscores absence and memory within the body, both in the present whilst evoking the past. Raskopoulos is conscious that her memories are not precise and her performative gestures are not intended to be descriptive of her actions. Rather the artist seeks to use objects once used by her grandmother to embody her memory through the physicality of her own body. The static soundtrack, interrupted by the sound of atmospheric electric interference, reflects this haunting of the present by an unknown past.





Nikos Pantazopoulos
The Pallaconian Brotherhood 2010
HD video, two-channel video exhibited on monitors
from DVD, 16:9, colour, stereo, 12 minutes
Courtesy the artist

Octopus 10

How We Know That The Dead Return

Harutyun Khachatryan
Els Opsomer
Christodoulos Panayiotou
Nikos Pantazopoulos
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Eugenia Raskopoulos
Curated by José Da Silva

3 September – 2 October 2010
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Catalogue Design: Yanni Florence

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**GERTRUDE
CONTEMPORARY**

Cover
Christodoulos Panayiotou
Wonder Land 2008
80 colour slides, single-channel slide projection
Courtesy: Rodeo, Istanbul



Nikos Pantazopoulos
Manolis (from 'The Pallaconian Brotherhood') 2010
Digital print
Courtesy the artist



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