

Out of space Photo Biennale 2010

Total of 188 artists
from 25 countries
showcased in
Thessaloniki



'Sanalika,' Alexandros Avramidis



'Still Lives,' Leah Tepper Byrne



'NATO Avenue,' Dimitris Michalakos



'A Humble Paradise,' Eugenie Coumantaros

BY HARRY VAN VERSEDAAL

THESSALONIKI – Spending time in Thessaloniki is never a chore, and photo-buffs these days have an excellent reason to pay a visit to this cosmopolitan northern port city.

The Photography Museum of Thessaloniki, the country's only museum dedicated to the craft, is currently organizing the 21st International Photography Meeting, now known as the Photo Biennale, which is scheduled to run through September.

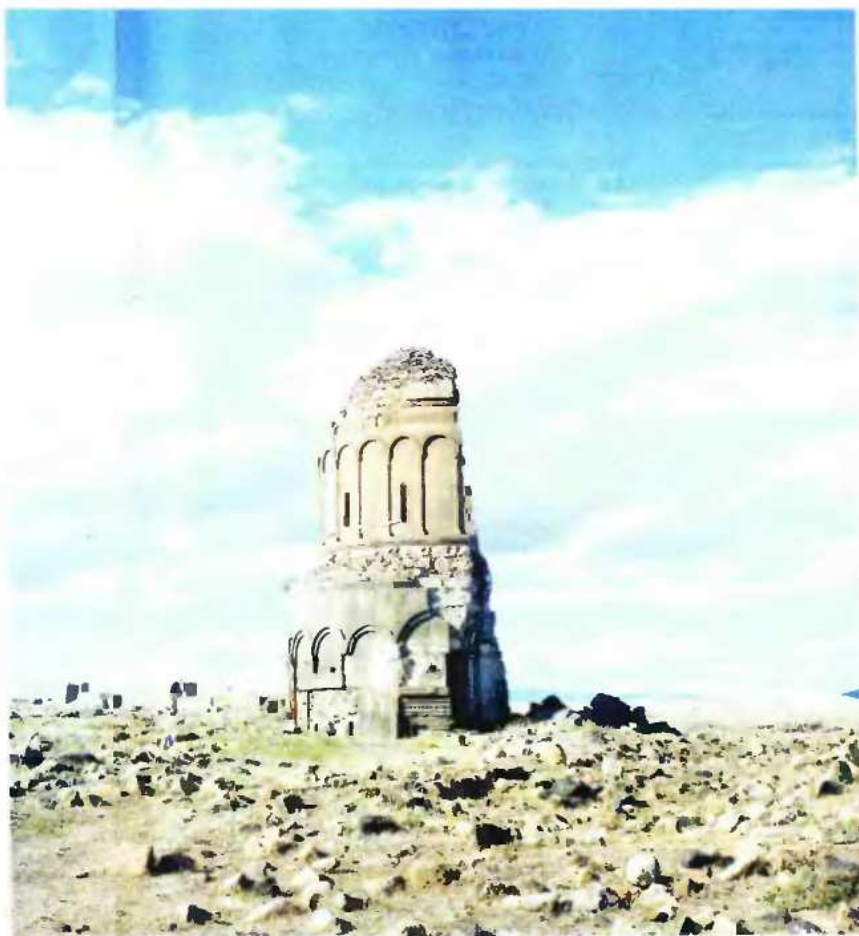
Having grown in size and prestige over the past few years, the Photo Biennale has also become more outward-looking, forging ties with foreign institutions and festivals while introducing a number of welcome initiatives such as master classes and portfolio reviews.

The event, which this year is dedicated to the theme of "place," spans over 58 group and solo exhibitions and slideshow projections by 188 photographers from 25 countries. You can browse through them at some 35 galleries and exhibition centers in Thessaloniki. Organizers plan to showcase some of the work in other Greek towns later in the year.

This year's highlights include Nikos Markou's "Topos: Nuances of Space," a collection of multilayered and often ambiguous pictures of urban and natural landscapes that depict man's impact on nature – only subtly so. Markou's work, which you will find at the museum's beautiful brick-and-steel premises on the waterfront (Warehouse A, Thessaloniki port complex), is complemented by Inge Rambo's "Niemandland." The stunning images of industrial sites turned wastelands shot by the 70-year-old German highlight the devastating effect of humankind on its natural environment.

Both exhibitions run through August 31.

Drive up to the Byzantine Castle and Seven Towers Prison ("Yenti Koule") on the upper side of town to see "Execution Squares" by Damascus-born Hrair Sarkissian. The apparent innocuousness of these empty Syrian squares can be misleading for, as the title suggests, they serve as public execution grounds for criminals sentenced to death.

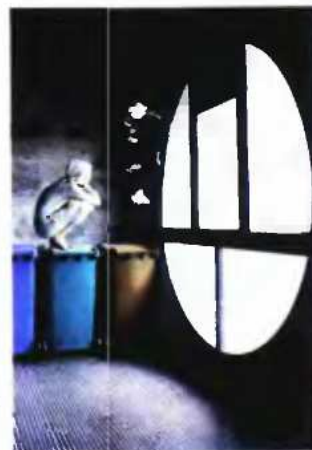


'Homeland,' Serkan Taycan

Shows at the Seven Towers Prison wrap up on June 28.

The launch of the Photo Biennale is an achievement in itself, organizers said, as the museum had to overcome severe budget cuts and organizational snags. The Photography Museum of Thessaloniki, which has come under pressure to merge with the larger but troubled State Museum of Contemporary Art, has turned to the European Union for subsidies.

Fresh funding will be crucial for organizing the follow-up to this event, scheduled for 2012, which is set to complete the time/place/discourse trilogy.



'The Space Between Us,' Sarah van Marcke

Mylos (56 Andreou Georgiou), at the western end of town, is hosting a number of exhibitions this year, including Pavlos Fysakis's melancholy "Land Ends" project. The work, a product of the photographer's extensive travels to the edges of Europe – Norway, Greece, Portugal and Russia – explores quasi-existential questions about the concept of borders and the nature of European identity.

"Homeland" by Turkey's Serkan Taycan is in similar vein, being a semiautobiographical work bringing together images of contemporary Turkey and snapshots from the largely impoverished region of eastern Anatolia, where the photographer grew up.

New York photographer Leah Tepper Byrne documents the Children's Village, a 150-year-old residential treatment center and alternative site to incarceration for more than 200 boys, aged 6 to 21, in upstate New York. Moving, albeit sometimes disturbing, the images in "Still Lives" explore youths caught between isolation and healing.

A more editorial work, Nikos Pinos's "The Invisible Wall Line" revisits Berlin 20 years after the fall of the Wall, while in "Sanalika" (the Turkish word for virtual world) Alexandros Avramidis exposes the plastic but colorful – and often hilariously tacky – aspects of a consumption-driven world. Exhibitions at Mylos will be showcased until July 31.

For more information, visit www.thmphoto.gr.

MORE TO COME

Upcoming exhibitions

worth catching include:

- "From the Bosphorus to the Adriatic Sea: French Photographers Reveal the Balkan Monuments, 1878-1914," at the Rotonda, May 28 - September 12
- Exhibition of photographs from the Second World War, at the Thessaloniki War Museum (4 Grogoriou Lambraki), May 17 - July 30
- "Time Within Us," at the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art (154 Egnatia), May 18 - July 31

Vangelis Ioakimidis

An image of the future

Κυριακή 14 Μαΐου 2010

It has been a tough year for the Thessaloniki Museum of Photography, as severe budget cuts and organizational problems put this year's PhotoBiennale, and the very survival of the institution itself, in jeopardy. Relieved, even proud, about having pulled off the event, museum director Vangelis Ioakimidis spoke to Athens Plus.

“

'I believe the artistic result has been of a high quality; we have managed to preserve our good name'



“

'Anyone can call himself a creative photographer - just as any journalist might think he is a creative writer'

“

'We need things to inspire us. It's not a luxury, it's a necessity'

You've had a hard year, with financial difficulties. What are the biggest compromises you have had to make?

We had to ask almost all the photographers to cover the costs of setting up the exhibitions, we had to use Mylos instead of the larger port sites [used in previous years], and we had to depend on a very small staff.

Are you satisfied with the outcome?

I believe the artistic result has been of a high quality; we have managed to preserve our good name. Our problems are of organizational and financial.

What are the prospects?

In June and July we will know if we will be eligible for EU subsidies; if we are, then this will improve prospects until September. Our application is ready for evaluation. In that case we might be able to apply for funding for the 2012 and 2014 PhotoBiennales. The museum still has problems with operating costs, which although small, are too much for us.

What about the possibility of merging with the State Museum of Contemporary Art?

We don't even want to think about it. It would be a great blow for us.

Is "place," this year's theme, not too loose a concept?

Well, place is everything, just as time [the theme of the 2008 Photo Biennale] is everything. It is everything, but it is also something.

Some of the accompanying texts seem to infuse the images with

meaning that is not there or which was not the photographer's intention. What is your opinion?

Yes, that's so. That's a difficult issue: the connection between the work of art and the words. It calls for caution.

Doesn't that apply to the photograph itself? Has the rise of postmodernism made it hard to distinguish a treasure from rubbish. Has subjectivity been harmful?

We have tried to show different styles, and the dimension of photography, whether narrative, visual and conceptual or completely objective. At the same time, we have tried to show current trends.

Has the digital revolution done more harm than good to photography? Now nearly everyone can be a photographer.

This has always been a problem, that anyone can call himself a creative photographer - just as any journalist might think he is a creative writer. But it is both an advantage and a disadvantage. If the public are able to take their own photographs, they will be more open to photography itself.

Is there a possibility that photography will go the same way as music, where file swapping and data overload have harmed the quality and shelf life of music. People hear far more, pay less attention and move on quickly to the next thing. Some things become very small very quickly.

It was a blow to music because music was a whole industry. Photography, at least the way we approach it, is not. At any rate, photography is not losing its public, it is gaining it. The problem is with the creators; whether they evolve and whether the system around them helps them evolve. I have the impression that they are evolving. And I believe that Greeks too are evolving - albeit slowly.

So to finish more or less where we started, what role can a museum play in a crisis? Should we have other priorities instead of paying to see photographs?

In this world, if we don't have feelings and senses, we can't exist.

Just as we need food, we must have something to make us continue wondering - intellectual food. It isn't a luxury, but one of the three main elements in our existence. Just as we need our health to get around, education to learn how to think and earn a living, so we need things to inspire us. It's not a luxury, it's a necessity.

ΑΠΟΔΕΛΤΙΩΣΗ ΤΥΠΟΥ * ΑΠΟΚΟΜΜΑΤΑ ΕΦΗΜΕΡΙΔΩΝ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΩΝ
ΒΑΚΧΟΥ 30 Τ.Κ 54629 ΤΗΛ: 2310 539371, 538633 e-mail: info@apo.gr

"ενημέρωση"
www.apo.gr



'Topos: Nuances of Space,' Nikos Markou

Nikos Markou

Man vs nature

Nikos Markou, widely considered as the link between the old and the new generations of Greek photographers, spoke to Athens Plus about his 10-year project, "Topos: Nuances of Space," currently on show at the museum's premises in Thessaloniki's port complex.

Apart from the relationship between man and the environment, what else links these photographs?

This exhibition is the result of the most conscious part of my work which has been in the making for about a decade, since I started delving into this place that is Greece.

What I consider "place" is living space, one that you feel you belong to and which, for me, is the place you feel the need to protect.

Just because you were born in Greece doesn't mean that your "place" is necessarily Greece—I don't see it like that. Some people like to travel and feel they belong everywhere. I have a bond with the country.

How do you choose your subjects?

There is no rule. Photography is a part of my life—it is a need and I do nothing more than record situations that interest me and which I want to keep, to record on film.

Your captions give no information about the location; there are only dates. Is that your own choice?

Yes. I don't think the specific location is important. The date is simply a personal diary, although these photographs do not constitute a diary.

There are no close-ups, but mainly small figures in large landscapes. The scale often makes the landscapes seem larger than they actually are.

I'm interested in a general view of the place I decide to photograph, whether urban or natural, although the

latter in the sense of pure nature is not easy to find—there is always some form of human intervention, whether a pylon or a cultivated field, and that's why I rarely choose a purely natural landscape; but what often interests me are the details that we are not used to observing in our everyday lives.

So I am interested in the general, as long as there is something there—it is hard to explain what that something is that makes me lift up my camera—or not—but I also like to look for details.

Now with regard to people—since I started out photographing people in my first two projects, mainly documentary photography, that lasted four years and then stopped suddenly. After that I decided that people as personalities didn't interest me; what interests me is what people create or destroy with in their environment, since that is what remains. It is difficult for me to even notice such images now—I have ruled out that kind of photography.

I think the most important thing for me is the place in which we live, how we act upon it, usually in a negative way unfortunately, and what we are handing down to the next generation

Your photographs look as if they have been taken in the late afternoon, or after rain. Why don't you make use of the bright Mediterranean light?

Generally I don't like blue skies—in photographs, I mean. Of course that affects me more generally. The times I choose to work are usually on cloudy days or in the late afternoon.

“

'It is hard to explain what that something is that makes me lift up my camera—or not'

BIENNAL
TOPOS



(Markou: Nikos Markou)

“

'The most important thing for me is the place in which we live, how we act upon it'

ΑΠΟΔΕΛΤΙΩΣΗ ΤΥΠΟΥ * ΑΠΟΚΟΜΜΑΤΑ ΕΦΗΜΕΡΙΔΩΝ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΩΝ
ΒΑΚΧΟΥ 30 Τ.Κ 54629 ΤΗΛ: 2310 539371, 538633 e-mail: info@apo.gr

"ενημέρωση"
www.apo.gr