

1. GREEK ARTISTS ARE HEROES (13 05 16)

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INTERVIEW



Greek Artists are Heroes...

National Museum of Contemporary Art director Katerina Koskina talks exclusively to Stella Sevastopoulos about the well-documented struggles facing **EMST** - and that media furore over Jan Fabre.

The National Museum of Contemporary Art (also known as **EMST**) has been in the making since 2000, when the museum's site was allocated at the former Fix beer factory on Syngrou Avenue. By assuming the position of director in December 2014, Katerina Koskina was also taking on a many-headed Hydra in terms of problems, which have kept the museum's doors closed. Yet despite the many obstacles in her path, she is devoted to her goal: to finally see the museum open in 2016.

Koskina is also one of the few Greeks that controversial artist Jan Fabre had announced a collaboration with, before he resigned from the post of creative director of the Athens and Epidaurus Festival.

Do you think that Fabre was a good choice for the position of creative director of the Greek Festival?

I think yes. He's a multidimensional artist with plenty of Festival experience. Fabre is a world-famous personality, whether we like it or not. He has a very radical creative oeuvre, which you either love or loath. What annoyed me however, was the way some of the Greek artists reacted after the press conference. I believe the press conference was not well prepared, but the reaction from some people was very aggressive.

Fabre's works were also criticized, such as Mount Olympus, the performance comprising nude Syrtaki and Zembekiko dances.

This work was performed in Thessaloniki at the Megaron Mousikis and

elsewhere and no fuss was created about it. So why now? Suddenly it was offensive. I would say that a big part of Fabre's work has been inspired by ancient Greece and Greek mythology, and that he could have offered a lot to the festival. After all, his work is meant to be provocative. But how can we Greeks be so shocked by it? Have we forgotten our own mythology? Are we really so puritan?

Maybe we are not as contemporary as we would like to think we are?

Maybe, however, I think the problem was how Fabre handled the situation at the press conference. Furthermore, if the Greek Festival and Culture Ministry had taken more time to better organize the press conference, maybe things would have been different. Yet I also feel that some people were just waiting to react. I like Fabre very much, and consider him a great artist and friend. I was involved in a project that had been announced (between Antwerp's MUHKA museum and Greece's **EMST**, among other projects we had discussed). But that doesn't mean that there wouldn't have been other collaborations with Greeks. I know that he was working on that.

You have been involved in the Greek cultural scene and art world for around 28 years. What opinion have you formed?

I have never regretted deciding to work in Greece, although I had studied and worked in Paris too. No doubt working in Paris as a curator or museum

director would have been less tiring, more organized and I wouldn't have had to orchestrate so many other things which at the end of the day obstruct me from my curatorial goal. But I have noticed that in the last few years, a lot has changed in the Greek art world, and despite my great tiredness, I am glad that I am here and that I have witnessed these changes. Because things happen painstakingly slowly in Greece, when you achieve something, you feel extra happy about it. And it's worthwhile supporting the artists of this country.

How do Greek artists compare to others?

There are great artists here. If they were living somewhere else, in a country that supports and promotes them, they would have played a different role on the international art scene. So many generations of Greek artists have been lost. Greek artists are heroes, because they have managed to establish themselves all on their own. That's why it is so important for **EMST** to open its doors to the public, and to provide Greek art with the international platform that it sorely needs.

What have been the main obstacles you have encountered since you took on the position of the museum's director?

Apart from the legal, technical, administrative and financial problems, there was also a psychological factor: The previous director of 14 years, Anna Kafetsi had offered a lot, so people were initially wary of me. Then, a little after I arrived at the museum, the political situation changed in Greece. For months problems came from the side of the Culture Ministry. Yet I'm a non-political person. I feel like I am a European citizen, although recently I have started to question what it means to be a European today.

What is your vision for the museum?

It's a truly magical space of 20,000 m², a historical building with great potential. However it needs the support of the Greek and international art world. We need to finally see it in a positive light. The museum's non-completion might reflect our shortcomings as a nation, but now, even during the crisis, it is important that this work is realized; it can offer so much to Greece's cultural scene.