PRESS RELEASE

Monday 31 October 2022

New Director Syrago Tsiara gives the start signal towards a National Gallery for Everyone

The new Director of the National Gallery – Alexandros Soutsos Museum, Syrago Tsiara, presented the principles, artistic propositions and overall vision of her tenure at the Press Conference held today, Monday 31 October 2022, at the National Gallery’s Onassis Foundation Auditorium. In the presence of the Minister of Culture and Sports, Lina Mendoni, and the Deputy Minister of Culture and Sports, Nicholas Yatromanolakis, Mrs Tsiara outlined the cultural and social impact that the organisation will strive for going forward, in an environment in which ‘interpretation of cultural heritage, communication with the community in both the analogue and digital realm, and the promotion of critical thinking coupled with the sharing of knowledge and the cultivation of empathy sustain and expand the role of the National Gallery.’

The Minister of Culture took the floor first to deliver a greeting, stating: ‘The National Gallery has the full support of the Ministry of Culture and Sports. We are all fully aware that the Gallery today is very different to the Gallery that closed some twelve years ago for the restoration project to begin.

The current facilities have increased needs, increased demands. Which means more money, more support – and that is certainly going to be provided. On the other hand, not only the National Gallery’s facilities, but the collections and personnel under Syrago’s guidance can produce events to contribute, in turn, not only to the Gallery’s promotion and extroversion but also to augmenting the resources required.

Many people, including many of our colleagues, used to believe that culture does not require a lot of money. This turned out to be completely misguided. Culture needs resources; all kinds of resources – financial, human ones. It is important for these resources to be reciprocally rewarding to culture itself. The National Gallery by all means has the right, as well as the ability, to claim the funds provided by the national resources of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, the co-financed programmes available to us, the new NSRF 2021–2027 to be launched in the coming months.’

The Deputy Minister of Culture and Sports, responsible for Contemporary Culture, welcomed Syrago Tsiara to her new role, underlining the common goals of the Ministry of Culture and the National Gallery, to jointly ensure the organisation’s historical continuity, adopting a holistic and integrated approach. This, he explained, requires care and interventions for the National Gallery’s ‘somewhat forgotten,’ as he said, Annexes and the Glyptotheque at Goudi, as far as the educational programme is concerned, to which he attached great importance, as well as for the facilities, including the cafe, restaurant and shop, which together determine the overall experience expected from a museum by today’s visitors. Acknowledging that the National Gallery is the ‘custodian of the country’s art history,’ Mr Yatromanolakis also committed for the Ministry to supply the National Gallery with the tools required to equip the new Director to apply herself to the great artistic demands arising from a high-standard museum, such as the National Gallery today.

After a video recapping the milestones in the National Gallery’s history was screened, Mrs Tsiara committed herself to inclusion, sustainability, social permeability, public accountability, discernment, synergy and pluralism in the organisation’s operation. On the basis of these principles and recognising that the National Gallery under the late Marina Lambraki Plaka’s direction managed, albeit understaffed, to be popular and now has the infrastructure to respond to contemporary challenges and demands, she outlined the future course, stating: ‘It is time to become more environmentally aware, diverse, open and inclusive, to bring the collections and history into a fruitful dialogue with the needs of today’s society and contemporary intellectual currents.’

To achieve this goal, the new National Gallery Director explained, each exhibition will now be accompanied by a programme of public events, as well as educational programmes for different audiences. An emphasis will be placed on an interdisciplinary approach to a variety of topics through a multiplicity of genres and media, as well as on strengthening the National Gallery’s interconnectedness with the international artistic and academic community.

Reflecting these principles, as part of the temporary exhibitions programming for the years 2023–2024, the exhibition ‘Konstantinos Parthenis. Painting an Ideal Greece’ will be extended through early March 2023. The exhibition will be accompanied by an academic conference and a theatrical performance. An exhibition on ‘Urban Experience’ in visual arts and cinema in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s will be inaugurated in collaboration with the Greek Film Archive in the spring, open through the end of 2023.

Moreover, to mark the 50th anniversary of the restoration of democracy in Greece at a moment when authoritarian forces emerge menacingly in Europe, the National Gallery is launching from spring through the end of 2024 a major international exhibition focusing on ‘Democracy and Art in Greece, Spain and Portugal.’ The exhibition, for whose preparation cooperation is already underway with museums and research institutes in Spain and Portugal, traces – for the first time internationally – common and unique historical developments in the countries of the European South. The exhibition will be accompanied by a conference, workshops, book presentations, screenings of documentaries and fiction films, public talks and other events.

Regarding the permanent collection, Syrago Tsiara spoke about gradually introducing a mentality of diversity and inclusion, while promoting the historical and experiential perception of art through specific programs. She announced that the National Gallery’s Glyptotheque in the Army Park (Alsos Stratou), the Library and the Archive are being reopened, while the Western European Art Room is also inaugurated, where a total of 47 works will be on display. After going through a conservation process which will be open to the public in a specially designed space, the French painter Charles-Louis-Lucien Muller’s ‘30 March 1814’ will also go on public view in the Western European Art Room in 2023. In addition, two new programmes will be implemented by the new Directorate, ‘The Collection as Studio’ and ‘Intermediate Space,’ introducing a variety of artworks and new interpretative approaches to attract returning visitors while at the same time giving space to contemporary art in a conversation with the historical collections.

At the same time, serving the goal of transforming the National Gallery into a multifaceted, living organisation and encouraging a meaningful interaction among its members, Syrago Tsiara presented the planning for special events at all National Gallery Annexes. From the Coumantaros Art Gallery in Sparta and the Kapralos Museum in Aegina to the Nafplion Annexe, the Corfu Annexe and the Contemporary Greek Art Institute (ISET), the National Gallery brings art into everyday life by organising exhibitions, workshops, guided tours and educational programmes that appeal to all.

To reflect this and realise the motto ‘A National Gallery for Everyone,’ education is central, introducing, alongside tried and tested practices such as guided tours and educational programmes, programmes suitable for children from 18 months old, themed guided tours on two Saturdays every month, as well as guided tours in English. Importantly, the National Gallery will collaborate with the Council for Refugees – Pyxida Intercultural Centre to contribute to the process of the integration of children and their families into their new social environment.

Emphasis has also been placed on public communication, with new possibilities afforded by the National Gallery’s refreshed official website ([nationalgallery.gr](nationalgallery.gr/en)) and other tools, on the assumption that the future of museums depends on adaptability, resourcefulness and the development of new models of communication and operation, not only in the analogue, but also in the digital realm. Syrago Tsiara emphasised that, ‘From the immediate environment, the neighbourhood, the city, the country through to the international public, which we can reach today by the means offered by modern digital technology, the possibilities are endless.’

Setting a culture of synergy as a key requirement towards sustainability and resilience, the new National Gallery Director also spoke about the goal of strengthening the institution’s cooperation with cultural and educational organisations in Greece and other countries, outlining her vision: ‘The National Gallery holds a leading position in Greece’s cultural life. In the future, it can, and must, increase its impact by undertaking international initiatives for artistic events and synergies on broader social, institutional and cultural issues, as well as by contributing to the improvement of the quality of everyday life.’

At the end of the Press Conference, the journalists were guided by Syrago Tsiara and National Gallery curators to the Western European Art Room, which is now open to the public. The event concluded in the new National Gallery Cafe – a spot with a spectacular view that aspires to become a meeting point in the city.

#OurNationalGallery

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**National Gallery – Alexandros Soutsos Museum**

Vasileos Konstantinou 50, Athens

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