# NATIONAL GALLERY – ALEXANDROS SOUTSOS MUSEUM

**Press Conference  
31 October 2022**

**Director’s Statement**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to our press conference. I would like to thank you for accepting the invitation of the National Gallery – Alexandros Soutsos Museum.

The short video we just watched celebrates milestones in the history of the organisation: the visions, projects, adventures, adversities, the institutionalisation, growth, successes and challenges, through the eyes and deeds of the protagonists – directors, members of the Board, politicians, benefactors, artists, donors – the outstanding figures that survive in archival documents over the centuries.

The truth is that it was the love and support of many people that made the National Gallery what it is today. Of course, its history is more than the sum of the stories of the protagonists, collections, laws and buildings – it goes beyond what is documented in the archives to also embrace the everyday stories of the people who worked with dedication across all levels of the organisational hierarchy. People working in security, accounting and administrative services, artistic planning, conservation, maintenance; the shop, reception and café; education, online presence and communication.

For the past four months since I was appointed director of the National Gallery, I have spoken many times with most of my colleagues and associates to understand what the National Gallery means to each one individually, to process the different experiences and shape my outlook. Today I am pleased to present to you all our objectives and planning for the next two years – decisions on which I have received the unanimous approval of our Board of Directors.

**OBJECTIVES**

The main management areas involve the overall planning of exhibitions and other artistic programming and of educational activities for the public; the safekeeping, documentation, conservation, management, study, display and developing of the collection; the promotion of research; strengthening the National Gallery’s connections with the artistic and academic communities, attracting new audiences, ensuring smooth daily operation and facilitating the improvements required in internal organisation, in the relationship with the annexes, as well as driving future growth.

What nourishes and expands the role of the National Gallery in today’s world is interpreting cultural heritage, communicating with the community in both the analogue and digital realms, and promoting critical thinking, coupled with sharing knowledge and fostering empathy.

**Our guiding principles are:**

Inclusion, sustainability, social permeability, public accountability, discernment, synergy and pluralism.

In terms of artistic planning, group survey exhibitions will be encouraged and promoted, which constitute a critical narrative that speaks to the broader cultural context of artwork production and reception, in dialogue with contemporary intellectual currents; also, an interdisciplinary approach through a variety of artistic genres and media.

**2023–2024 Programme**

**I) TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS**

1. **Extension of the exhibition ‘Konstantinos Parthenis. Painting an Ideal Greece’ through early March 2023, accompanied by a new public event programme**

Each exhibition will henceforth be accompanied and enriched by a public event programme specifically designed for each exhibition, featuring visual arts events, talks and more at the ‘Onassis Foundation’ Auditorium, as well as a series of educational activities catering to different audiences and social groups.

The public programme for the Parthenis exhibition will feature:

* A conference on the influence of Theosophism on the visual arts *– 13 January 2023.*
* A theatrical performance, based on a historical text, on the controversy surrounding Konstantinos Parthenis’ stance as an artist, a riveting psychological and social study *– February 2023.*
* A three-minute bilingual video presentation of the exhibition has been produced – a practice to be adopted for all major productions.   
  Please find it included in the press kit.

2. Spring – Late 2023

**Exhibition on ‘Urban Experience’ in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in visual arts and cinema**

The new exhibition programme for next year at the Temporary Exhibitions Space will launch with a historical survey featuring Greek artists. The exhibition reflects on the experience of the city, examining urbanisation, reconstruction and migration – both internal and external – in the context of the sweeping social changes that have taken place in post-war Greece. The artists explore the city not only in terms of the built environment in which they live, but also in terms of everyday experience – a framework they confront in terms of either recognition, safety and acceptance or investigation, negotiation and opposition. They observe, capture and interpret the changes in the urban landscape in a realistic, documentary fashion or by idealising the urban landscape into a Greek-centric ideogram of idyllic urbanism.

Introducing an interdisciplinary approach, the exhibition traces the manifestations of the urban experience in visual arts, popular Greek films, and critical realist cinema. Cooperation with the **Greek Film Archive** is already underway for producing the exhibition.

3. Spring – Late 2024

**International exhibition on Democracy, to mark the 50th anniversary of the restoration of democracy in Greece**

The year 2024 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the restoration of democracy in Greece in 1974. Half a century of unbroken parliamentary democracy after the overthrow of the seven-year military dictatorship – a historic milestone that defines the beginning of the *Metapolitefsi* era in Greece. In the same year, the Carnation Revolution in Portugal restored democracy after almost half a century of António de Oliveira Salazar’s dictatorship; the following year it was Spain’s turn to transition to democracy, after the death of dictator Francisco Franco, who had held authoritarian power since 1939.

Although there have been surveys of the relationship between the arts and democracy in Greece and elsewhere, the topic has never been addressed in a major museum exhibition in the countries of the European South. The experience of coexistence is pending, to evaluate and document the convergences and divergences of historical memory and its representations in art in Greece, Spain and Portugal, the relationship between the discourse of social movements and revolutionary awareness, on the one hand, and on the other the new forms of art that emerged under conditions of suppression of freedoms and political demands.

The National Gallery – Alexandros Soutsos Museum takes a lead in this direction by organising a major international exhibition on Democracy and Art in Greece, Spain and Portugal, on the significance, purport and visual expressions of the struggles to overthrow authoritarian regimes in the countries of the European South, the claim of civil liberties and the anti-colonial struggle. At a time when authoritarian powers are threatening to recover in Europe and democratic achievements are being disrupted, an exhibition on how artists have been inspired by struggles against authoritarian regimes is especially poignant.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a conference, workshops, book presentations, screenings of documentaries and fiction films, public debates and other activities to explore the multifaceted affinities and singularities of artistic endeavours. Collaboration with museums and research institutions in Spain and Portugal in producing this exhibition has already been initiated.

**II) PERMANENT COLLECTION**

An approach that encourages diversity and inclusion, and promotes the historical and experiential perception of art in a chronological and thematic presentation will gradually be introduced through specific programmes. The projects planned by the previous management will be completed and delivered to the public:

* **Relaunching of the Glyptotheque in the Army Park, Goudi**

After two years that it was closed to the public for necessary maintenance and upgrading of the exhibition venue lighting, the permanent exhibition of Modern Greek Sculpture reopens under the supervision of my colleague, Tonia Giannoudaki. In 12 sections, it traces the history and evolution of sculpture from the pre-War of Independence years through the 21st century. Opening hours: Daily except Tuesday, 09.00–14.00.

* **Reopening of the National Gallery Library and Archive**

The National Gallery has a specialised library for the visual arts, established and developed in parallel with the Museum, with the main purpose to provide academic support to the organisation and serve researchers. The Archive holds documents, photographs, posters, brochures, exhibition invitations and other documents from the history of the Museum and the history of modern Greek art. It is open to the public 10.00–14.00, Monday to Friday.

* **Opening of the Western European Art Room**

The National Gallery collections include about 1,250 paintings of various periods from international schools, mainly Western European art. Most of them come from donations, mainly from wealthy Greeks of the diaspora, some have been acquired by the Gallery – mainly works of great artistic value – and others have been donated by artists. They span from the 14th century to the present time. However, available space now permits only a small sample of 47 works, from the 14th to the second half of the 20th century, curated by my colleague, Efi Agathonikou. The oldest work is *Holy Trinity* (ca. 1389), attributed to Marco Veneziano, and the newest one is *Moonscape* (ca. 1966) by Lucio Fontana; also on view will be five works from the donation made by French artists.

In 2023, one more, large-scale work will go on display, after being conserved in a specially designed space at Goudi; the conservation process will be open to the public. It is the French painter Charles Louis Lucien Müller’s *30 March 1814,* oil on canvas, 445 × 845 cm, a historical painting of a scene on the eve of the fall of Paris to the forces of Prussia, Austria and Russia. The conservation of this painting, using innovative methods and practices, will be carried out within the framework of the Proteas Programme by National Gallery conservators in collaboration with the Foundation for Research and Technology – Hellas (FORTH), the Demokritos National Centre for Scientific Research and two private companies, Printec Hellas S.M.S.A. and Up2Metric P.C. The project is funded by the Horizon Europe Research and innovation programme.

In addition, two new programmes have been designed by the new management:

* **The Collection as Studio**

We are working towards presenting to the public in the third quarter of 2023 the project *The Collection as Studio,* to go on display on the third floor of the permanent collection. The permanent collection display will be reconfigured with a focus on **the history of emotions, ideas, experiences and attitudes**. The permanent collection display on the third floor will rotate every two years to attract repeat visitors to the National Gallery to explore new works and interpretive approaches. *The Collection as Studio* will also be accompanied by a public event programme, in which museum directors, theorists, art historians and curators will be invited to present innovative and exciting practices for managing museum collections and updating their relevance for the public.

* **Intermediate Space**

To foster a spirit of **inclusion and pluralism**, we will work towards launching a series of exhibitions and projects on the Mezzanine and other areas (both indoor and outdoor), titled *Intermediate Space*, where National Gallery curators at first, and independent curators later, will be invited to develop their own curatorial proposals in frequently alternating shows. Taking as a starting point a work from, or story inspired by, the National Gallery collection and archives, the *Intermediate Space* curatorial projects will initiate a dialogue between contemporary art and the permanent collection.

**III) ANNEXES**

Our policy aims to highlight and promote the distinct character of each annexe and to substantially strengthen the relationships between people and their professional activity, so that the sum of the parts evolves into a living, multifaceted organisation whose members are in ongoing communication and interaction. Specific projects (exhibitions and educational programmes) are planned to be held at each annexe. Examples include:

* **Coumantaros Art Gallery, Sparta – National Gallery Annexe**

The first branch of the National Gallery outside Athens celebrates forty years in operation in the city of Sparta. With the support of the Coumantaros family, an extensive renovation of the exterior and installation of a new lighting system was completed in the summer. In addition to the regular educational programmes, the **Friends and Neighbours** programme for adults will be organised in the coming months, featuring free-admission, specialised guided tours, aiming to bring the residents of Sparta closer to the Gallery and help them make it a part of their daily lives.

* **Kapralos Museum, Aegina**

On display in its indoor and outdoor spaces are Kapralos’ sculptures in wood, limestone and marble, all of them produced in Aegina. ***Tracing Antiquity in Christos Kapralos’ Work***, an educational programme for primary school children is planned, to help them discover how the sculptor transforms the art of the past into the living art of the present.

* **Nafplio Annexe**

The Nafplio Annexe is the foremost ‘narrator’ of the art history of the first century from the birth of Modern Greece, tracing the aesthetic and ideological models of the time. Focusing on **The Greek War of Independence**, the permanent collectionis being redesigned and enriched with new exhibits.

* **Corfu Annexe**

The Corfu Annexe is housed in the Castellino, a historic building in Kato Korakiana. On permanent view is a selection of exhibits from the National Gallery collection, tracing the history and evolution of modern Greek art. It is complemented by seminars, workshops for teachers, guided tours and educational programmes. The immediate priorities include the maintenance and upgrading of the Corfu Annexe building infrastructure.

* **Contemporary Greek Art Institute (ISET)**

An exhibition of archival material and video screenings is scheduled for December; also, the publication of a commemorative book on the history and evolution of Art Athina, in collaboration with the Panhellenic Association of Art Galleries.

**IV) EDUCATION**

A cornerstone of the National Gallery’s mission, education involves all aspects of its activity. Proven educational practices, including guided tours and educational programmes, continue, and new programmes and specialised projects are introduced:

* **Modern Greek Art and Early Childhood Museum Education (ages from 18 months to 5 years):** Based on the principles of active learning, these programmes address the individual personality of each child, focusing on integrating child-centred approaches and creating in-situ paths or islands. They feature exploration games, storytelling, creative expression workshops and interactive activities. They are addressed to kindergartens and families.
* **Themed Guided Tours to the Permanent Collection, exploring portraiture and landscape painting:** These have been on offer since September, on two Saturdays per month. In November they will be expanded to include the Parthenis exhibition.
* **Guided tours in English** to the permanent collection and temporary exhibitions are available upon request.
* The National Gallery will cooperate with the **Council for Refugees – ‘Pyxida’ Intercultural Centre** in creating special educational programmes for refugee groups. These educational programmes will be addressed to children attending the ‘Pyxida’ Intercultural Centre, families and unaccompanied minors. They aim to introduce refugee visitors to modern Greek art and history through educational activities and contribute to these children’s integration process into their new social environment.

**V) COMMUNICATION**

* The official website will be redesigned. A brief tour of [www.nationalgallery.gr](https://www.nationalgallery.gr/en/).
* A three-minute bilingual informational **video** on the Konstantinos Parthenis exhibition has been produced.
* An informational **video** on the National Gallery’s history will be screened on the large screen in the reception area and posted on social media.
* The National Gallery’s communication on **social media** is being redesigned.

**WRAP-UP**

The National Gallery finds itself at a pivotal moment in its journey, having resolved decades-long issues regarding the building infrastructure thanks to the cooperation and dedication of all those who worked for the completion of the new building and the installation of the permanent collection, **led by the late Marina Lambraki Plaka**. Today we stand at a new starting point. The National Gallery has already achieved key objectives: it enjoys broad appeal and has the infrastructure to meet the challenges and demands of our time. Though understaffed, it has excellent staff, associates and management. It has loyal friends and supporters. **It is time to become more environmentally aware, diverse, open and inclusive, to bring its collections and history into a constructive dialogue with the needs of contemporary social and intellectual currents.**

The future, resilience, social and cultural relevance of museums and their relationship with the public in a time of multiple crises all largely depend on **adaptability, resourcefulness and the application of new models of communication and operation, not only in the analogue, but also in the digital realm**. Going forward, our activity must develop equally in both realms. There are multiple avenues for communicating the message of our work – from the immediate environment, the neighbourhood, the city, the country through to the international public, which today can be reached by means of modern digital technology, the possibilities are endless.

**A** **culture of synergy** **is a key ingredient for sustainability and resilience**. Strengthening collaboration with other cultural and educational organisations in Greece and other countries is of the essence, not only concerning our artistic programming, but also research, as well as sharing resources, experience and expertise.

**Enjoying a leading position in Greece’s cultural life, the National Gallery has the potential to increase its impact by taking international initiatives for artistic projects and synergies on broader social, institutional and cultural issues, as well as by contributing to the improvement of the quality of everyday life.**

**Syrago Tsiara  
Art Historian  
Director, National Gallery – Alexandros Soutsos Museum**