

URBANOGRAPHY



NATIONAL GALLERY
ALEXANDROS SOUTSOS MUSEUM

—
THE LIFE
OF THE CITY
IN THE
1950s–1970s

21.06
2023

—
03.03
2024

Curator
Syrago Tsiara



The exhibition *Urbanography* explores representations of the urban experience in Greek art from the 1950s to the 1970s through the eyes of visual artists and filmmakers. On view are paintings, sculptures, prints, installations, photographs and film footage. The visual arts engage in dialogue with popular Greek cinema, critical realism and alternative narratives.

The show conceives the city in terms of lived experience, tracing urbanisation, reconstruction and migration in the context of the dramatic societal changes in post-war Greece. The featured artists interpret the city, not merely as the built environment that contains them but also as everyday experience – a domain they encounter either in recognition, safety and acceptance or in investigation, negotiation and conflict.

The city is changing and so are people. The metropolis becomes the ground where internal and external migrants construct new identities – an embrace and a refuge, a meeting place and a realm of desire, as well as a mechanism of alienation, rejection, mass culture and marginalisation.

During the early post-war decades, there was a remarkable flourishing of popular genre cinema. This medium swiftly gained popularity, emerging as an affordable and widespread form of entertainment that

permeated both urban and rural areas, becoming an essential part of the modern lifestyle. While it faced criticism for its stereotypical naivety, preoccupation with private matters, and dearth of critical analysis, the Greek cinema of the 1950s and 1960s played a pivotal role in propelling modernisation due to its extensive acceptance and influence. It introduced and disseminated fresh perspectives on gender relations, family dynamics, and societal norms, and had a profound impact on consumer habits and collective as well as individual behaviours. Furthermore, it set out the terms of coexistence within city centres, neighbourhoods, and blocks of flats.

The perspective offered by popular or commercial cinema regarding the urban experience was disrupted by filmmakers who ventured into the realm of critical realism. These filmmakers explored less popular and easily digestible narratives, presenting an alternative gaze that delved into the intricate stories of the city.

A constant shift from the large scale to the small scale, from panoramic to close-up, is attempted in the narrative structure of the show. The city, the square, the street, the alley, the building, the apartment, the veranda, the shop window, public and private life, all reflect aspects of urban coexistence, the vibrations and transformations that characterise life in the city.

1

Urban Scenery

Artists interpret the changes taking place in the urban landscape, human geography, and the interconnection of human and physical environments, of past and present. Nostalgia, the stereotypical or idealistic narratives of a distinct urban identity, mutating along with the neoclassical houses swallowed up by new constructions, initially prevails. Art now attempts to preserve the vanishing city. As artistic representations of urban transformation capture a virtual palimpsest of experiences and emotions in an imaginary coexistence of different eras, the work of art takes on a staged quality. The city is invented as a backdrop; artists select their point of view and compose the frame, drawing references from reality, memory, and desire.

Aghinor Asteriadis (1898-1977)
Maroussi, 1973
 Egg tempera on wood panel
 Donated by the artist
 EPMAS Collection



Spyros Vassiliou (1902 or 1903-1985)
The Microcosm of Webster Street, 1975
 Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas
 Donated by the artist
 EPMAS Collection

2

Nostalgia

Certain artists focus on nostalgia for the vanishing city, an idealised recollection of the longed-for city. Others turn their gaze towards the inviting, bustling metropolis. Lower-class neighbourhoods, refugee settlements, improvised constructions, reconstruction, and urbanisation expand the frame. The emergence of urban culture and rising living standards give birth to the society of spectacle, entertainment, and mass consumption.

3

Construction Site

The construction site epitomises the sweeping changes in the city. The increasing building height alters the landscape, scale, and the relationship between the inhabitants and passers-by with the built environment. Simultaneously, the practice of granting land in exchange for flats in blocks constructed by developers marks the history of urban development. As blocks of flats begin to appear, artists discover new visual spaces for the study of composition and the depiction of space and the human figure. The lens shifts from the bigger picture to the everyday stories of construction workers, creating new narratives about the encounters of bodies in space and time.

Panayiotis Tetsis (1925-2016)
Construction Site, 1964
 Copper engraving and aquatint on paper
 EPMAS Collection



Giorgos Paralis (1908-1975)
Barbara's Sink, 1971-1975
 Oil on canvas
 EPMAS Collection



4

Close-Up

The microcosm of everyday life, the organisation of private space, and the inside-outside relationship are privileged areas of focus that reflect a changing city. The pace of personal life is influenced by the movement towards the urban centre, as well as the demands of city life. Both those who migrate to other countries and those who immigrate from the countryside to urban centres contribute, in their own way, to the experience of the city.

5

Spectacle

Social gathering places, such as football grounds, become significant not only for the culture of leisure but also for the sense of belonging. Forms of entertainment, performances, and consumer habits are enriched and diversified. Representations of scenes of work, holidays, and fun enable us to observe the social aspects of the subject matter chosen by each artist, as well as the choreography of human movement in public space. The attractions of the city bring about changes in societal models and affect body image.

Giorgos Vakirtzis (1923-1988)
Giant Poster for the Film
"The Great Gatsby"
Fish glue, pigments on paper
mounted on canvas
Donated by Babette Papastamou
EPMAS Collection



Chryssa (Romanos) (1931-2006)
Reportage, 1965
Collage on canvas
Irene Panagopoulos Collection



6

Dreams and Conflicts

During the 1960s emerges a realistic intention of certain artists aiming to highlight the issues and contradictions of everyday life in the big city with a critical eye. Of exceptional artistic interest are the different depictions of intermediate spaces between the public and the private realms, such as the terrace, doorstep, rear views of buildings, staircase, view from the window, and shop window. These spaces reveal how people and groups of different genders and social backgrounds experience the city, blurring the line between inside and outside.

7

Materialities

In the 1970s, materiality takes on new significance in the works of artists who engage with the conceptual aspects of urban living. Expectations, frustrations, conflicts, and demands have a tangible weight; they leave their imprint not only on the street but also on the canvas surface. They are captured by the lens, carved on wood, drawn or printed on paper, and unfold in space, feeding our dreams, desires, and fantasies.

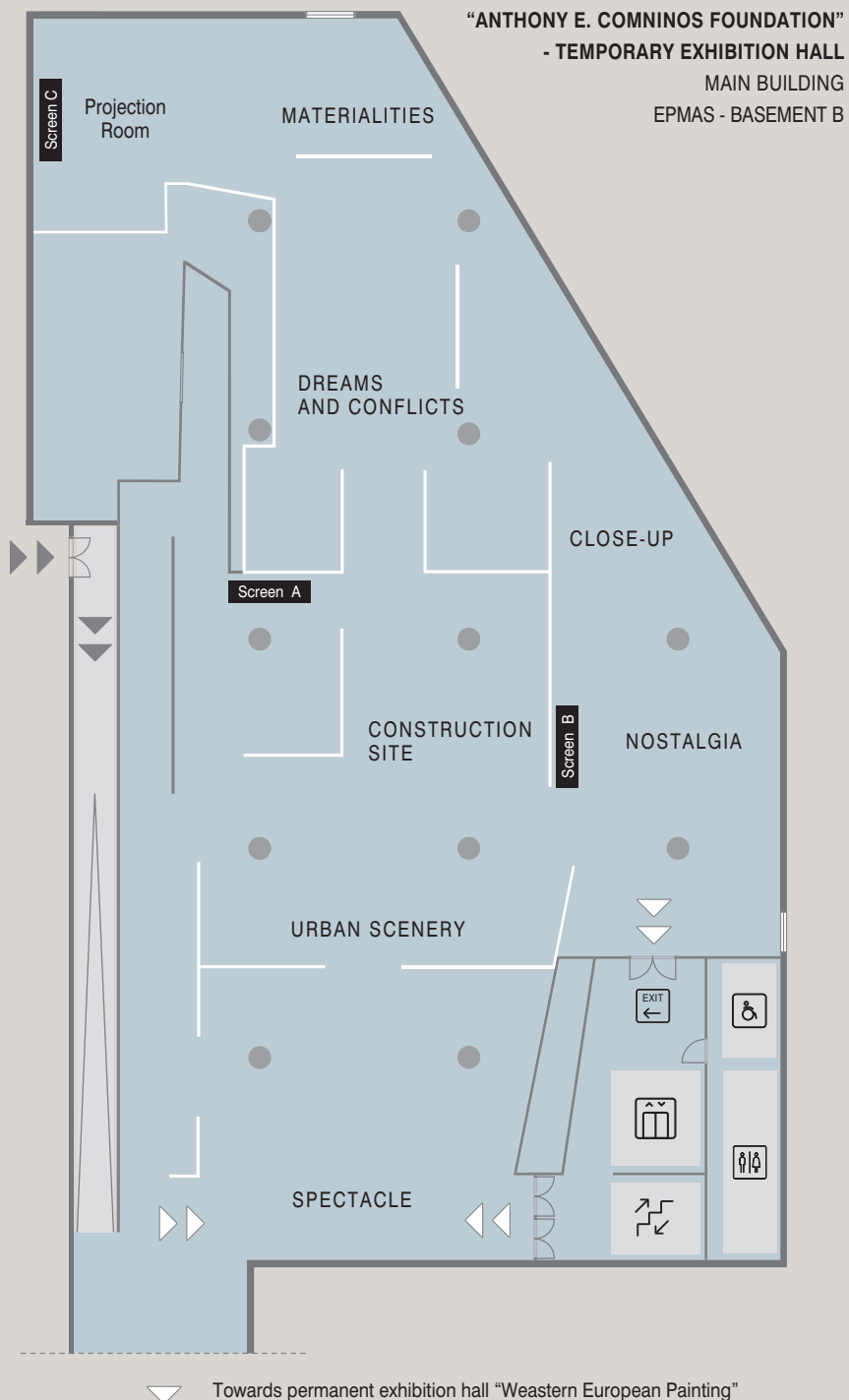
Rena Papaspyrou (1938)
Episodes in Matter, 1980-1981
 Detached wall surface,
 anodised aluminium sheet,
 pencil intervention
 On long-term loan from the artist
 to the EPMAS Collection



Artist Unknown
Zavoritis Patisserie in Syntagma Square (now demolished),
 Athens, early 1960s
 Reproduction of 12 x 17 cm
 gelatin silver print
 EPMAS Collection /
 Photographic Archives

Maria Chroussaki (1899-1972)
Christmas 1951, Athens
 From 6 x 6 cm negative
 EPMAS Collection /
 Maria Chroussaki
 Photographic Archive





URBANOGRAPHY

Concept - Curator - Texts

Syrago Tsiara

Research Assistants

Efi Agathonikou, Elpiniki Meintani,
Katerina Tavantzi, Marina Tomazani,
Artemis Zervou, Maria Komninou,
Ioulia Mermigka

Administrative Support

Konstantina Plaka, Sofia Eliza Bouratsi,
Marina Tomazani

Architectural and Lighting Design

Maria Maneta

Coordination

Eirini Sapka

Communication

Maria Ioannou

Photography

Stavros Psiroukis
Thaleia Kymbari

Copy-Editing / Proofreading

Konstantina Panagiotopoulou

English Translation

Dimitris Saltabassis

Visual Identity / Graphic Design

Vasso Avramopoulou / A4_Design

www.nationalgallery.gr

#OurNationalGallery

National Gallery - Alexandros Soutsos Museum
Main Building (50, Vasileos Konstantinou
Avenue, Athens)

"Anthony E. Comninou Foundation" –
Temporary Exhibition Hall

21 June 2023 – 3 March 2024

© National Gallery - Alexandros Soutsos Museum

The National Gallery –
Alexandros Soutsos Museum
is sponsored by the Hellenic
Ministry of Culture and Sports.



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
Ministry of Culture
and Sports

JOINTLY ORGANISED WITH



WITH THE SUPPORT OF



URBANOGRAPHY – THE LIFE OF THE CITY IN THE 1950s–1970s

Featured artists: Theodoros Adamopoulos / Alekos Alexandrakis / Theo Angelopoulos / Achilleas Aperghis / Michael Arfaras / Minos Argyrakis / Aghinor Asteriadis / Joannis Avramidis / Chronis Botsoglou / Eva Boulgoura / Michalis Cacoyannis / Vlassis Caniaris / Christos Capralos / Maria Chroussaki / Daniel (Panagopoulos) / Diamantis Diamantopoulos / Dinos Dimopoulos / Cleopatra Dinga / Nicos Engonopoulos / Alekos Fassianos / Costas Ferris / Yannis Gaitis / Daniel Gounaridis / Grigoris Grigoriou / Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika / Dimitris Harissiadis / Giorgos Ioannou / Lefteris Kanakakis / Niki Karagatsi / Stelios Kassimatis / Takis Katsoulidis / Nikos Kessanlis / Dimosthenis Kokkinidis / Klearchos Konitsiotis / Alekos Kontopoulos / Alexandros Korogiannakis / Nikos Koundouros / Panos Koutrouboussis / Aristeia Kritsotaki / Yulika Lakeridou / Giorgos Lazongas / Konstantinos Malamos / Georgios Manoussakis / Roviros Manthoulis / Tonia Marketaki / Fotis Mastichiadis / Dimitris Megalidis / Yannis Michas / Yannis Migadis / Yannis Moralis / Dimitris Mytaras / Nikos Nikolaidis / Ira Oikonomidou / Cleanthes Pantias / Rena Papaspyrou / Giorgos Paralís / Maria Plyta / Jannis Psychopedis / Chryssa Romanos / Alekos Sakellarios / George Skalenakis / Dimos (Dimosthenis) Skoulakis / Vassilis Sperantzas / Yannis Spyropoulos / Aspa Stasinopoulou / Dimitris Stavrakas / Pavlos Tassios / Tassos (Anastasios Alevizos) / Panayiotis Tetsis / Georges Touyas / Yannis Tsarouchis / Giorgos Tzavellas / Giorgos Vakirtzis / Spyros Vassiliou / Giorgos Velissaridis / Loukas Venetoulis / Nikolaos Ventouras / Pandelis Voulgaris / Andreas Vourloumis



NATIONAL GALLERY
ALEXANDROS SOUTSOS MUSEUM