

This month the world of art will once again meet at the Helexpo building for the 10th Art Athina



Art Athina

The classical beauty of the Caryatids on the Acropolis will once again, for the tenth consecutive year, overlook video art and installations at the contemporary art fair, *Art Athina*. *Katerina Gregos* explains the effects of this dialogue at the very place where classical art reached its peak.

Art Athina, Athens' Fair of Contemporary Art, will take place for the tenth year from March 28-31. The event has gone from strength to strength since being established by the Hellenic Art Galleries Association in 1993. From a small, predominantly local affair, *Art Athina* has developed into an international exhibition due in large part to the efforts of all those involved in its organisation to broaden its scope and impact. The Organizing Committee is comprised of Greek and international gallery owners and is organized by Maria Panayides, a recognized and experienced professional in such matters.

Things have changed considerably from the early days when the event was held at the rather drab Athens Exhibition Center. Since 2001 *Art Athina* has moved to the state-of-

the-art and more spacious (5,500m²) premises of Helexpo in the commercial and business district of Maroussi just north of the center.

Although the primary aim of the fair is the promotion of Greek as well as international contemporary art, it has ultimately also functioned as a kind of barometer of developments in contemporary art in this country. In addition, it has also provided an important platform for the introduction of internationally renowned artists, thanks to an increasing participation of galleries from Europe and the United States. This year, out of the 63 galleries taking part in the fair, a record 30 are from abroad. Visitors will have the chance to see a wide variety of artists represented by a number of well-known galleries such as Denise Rene, Georges-

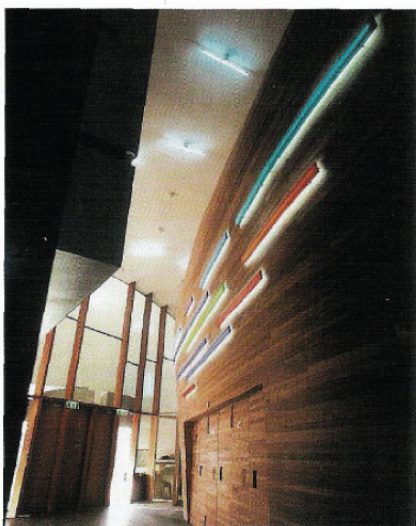
Philippe Vallois and Art: Concept from Paris, Anthony Reynolds, Modern Art and Asprey Jacques from London, Christian Nagel and Michael Janssen from Cologne, Neu and Klosterfelde from Berlin, Giorgio Persano and Rafaella Cortese from Turin and Milan respectively, and Spencer Brownstone from New York. As one would expect, *Art Athina* offers a representative panorama of the Greek gallery scene. This year 32 galleries - predominantly from Athens and Thessaloniki - will be showing work by established and up-coming Greek and international artists.

Apart from the fair itself, the Organizing Committee of *Art Athina* has placed particular emphasis on the organization of a number of parallel events such as symposia and round-table discussions and other exhibitions.

One of the fair's most important contributions has been the annual exhibition of contemporary art from each of the invited European countries, where established curators from each country are invited to present thematic exhibitions that showcase contemporary art from their countries. Past exhibitions worth mentioning have included: *Spanish Art at the End of the 20th Century*, curated by art critic Alicia Murria (1995); *Private Face - Urban Space: A New Generation of Artists from Britain*, curated by Henry Meyric Hughes, former director of the Hayward Gallery, London, and this author (1997); *Italian Art Today*, curated by art critic Franco Fanelli and Katerina Koskina, curator of the J.F. Costopoulos Foundation (1998); *The School of Athens*, curated by Veit Loers, director of the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg Monchengladbach, Germany (1999); *Tongue in Cheek: 6 French Artists*, curated by Daniel Abadie, director of the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris (2000), and *Make Me Feel - Eight Statements from the New North*, curated by the Swedish publisher and editor of NU: The Nordic Art Review, John Peter Nilsson.

All these exhibitions have been important events in the annual Athenian contemporary arts calendar as they have presented a cross-section of internationally renowned artists who had not previously shown their work in Greece. Although these shows traditionally took place in the exhibition hall of the Athens Gasworks (Gazi) - with the exception of the French show that took place at the Deste Foundation - since 2001 they are all held in the exhibition halls of Helexpo, thus being integrated into the fair.

This year the guest country at *Art Athina* is Belgium (with a particular emphasis on Belgian galleries and art), and six galleries from Belgium - Annette de Keyser, In Situ, Kusseneers, Mulier Mulier, Annie Gentils and PlusGalleries - will have booths at the fair. The exhibition planned to coincide with the fair is entitled *The Ambiguity of the Image: Belgian Art Now* and will be curated by Florent Bex, former director of MUKHA, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp. Among the participating artists are a number of internationally established



The Ambiguity of the Image: Belgian Art Now. Above. Left: Neon light installation by David Neirings, RFA, 2002, In Situ Gallery, Aalst Right: Belgian artist Eddy de Vos paints *De Sade* (Kusseneers Gallery, Lier) Below: Art Athina's organizer Maria Panayides (left) with the art fair's President, gallery owner, Ileana Tounta. Right: Inside a previous Art Athina exhibition.



Belgian artists such as Luc Tuymans, David Claerbout and Wim Delvoye. For most artists it will be their first Athens show.

Art Athina's emphasis on an international angle creates a medium for cultural exchange and a network for communication between Greece and other countries. To this end the fair set up an International Collector's Program three years ago, whereby a selected number of significant collectors of contemporary art are invited to Athens to attend the fair to acquaint themselves with the Greek art scene through a program of parallel events and visits. Apart from the galleries, inside the fair itself one can find an International Review Section, featuring a selection of international contemporary periodicals and journals, a section with Greek art publications, as well as an art shop and bookshop.

Apart from raising awareness about contemporary art, promoting the work of a younger generation of artists and expanding the local audience, *Art Athina* is the only organized commercial event of its size for contemporary art and also plays the important role of providing the Greek art

market - which tends to be fragmented - with a much-needed structure built according to professional guidelines.

Art Athina deserves credit for contributing to the growing interest in contemporary art in Greece and for extending its activities beyond the commercial domain. Last year the fair attracted more than 18,000 visitors and this year, the biggest and most international *Art Athina* to date, the number is expected to be even higher. Not bad for a fair that started out with just 18 local galleries. □

INFO

Art Athina 2003 Contemporary Art Fair

March 28 - 31, noon-9pm
Helexpo Exhibition Center
39 Kifissias Avenue, Maroussi
Levels B, C, D.

Admission: €7

Artists - Students: €4

High school students and children: Free

For more information contact:

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www.artathina.gr

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