

PARTICIPATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

53rd International Art Exhibition/La Biennale di Venezia

SOCRATIS SOCRATOUS/RUMOURS

CURATOR: SOPHIE DUPLAIX

7 June - 22 November 2009/Opening: Saturday 6 June 19:00



la Biennale di Venezia

53. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte

Partecipazioni nazionali



Seascape with warship and palm tree in the Kyrenia waterfront, Cyprus - Part of documentation for the work Rumours (2008)

Artist: **Socratis Socratous** | Curator: **Sophie Duplaix** | Commissioner: **Louli Michaelidou** | Production & Research Manager: **Andre Zivanari** | Project Coordinator: **Angela Skordi** | Exhibition Production: **Ubis-Design e Comunicazione, Treviso** | Graphic Design: **Artemis Eleftheriadou, Nicosia**

The Cyprus pavilion for this year's Venice Biennale, curated by Sophie Duplaix, presents Socratis Socratous. The artist will stage a series of installations, performances and happenings at the Cyprus pavilion and in other city locations.

The artist writes about his project:

"As is often the case, seemingly 'trivial' incidents lead to an unexpected outcome. Frequently, people are unable to predict their impact as they are caught unprepared. Yet an almost 'magical', poetic, or even eerie feeling may surround these incidents. This can form the starting point for rumours to erupt.

In the recent past, a large number of palm trees were imported to the northern part of Cyprus, as part of an attempt to create a more exotic, eastern feeling to the local environment. Almost as soon as planting began along the northern coast, stories started to spread. Rumour had it that, amongst the roots of these trees, hid the eggs of cobras; what's more, these eggs had started to hatch. As snakes are not bound by political frontiers, the fear grew.

The two ethnic communities of Cyprus, Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot, remain to this day separated by outside forces against their will, seemingly unable to find a way to coexist. Their political leaders are caught up in a perpetual cycle of negotiations, with no obvious end in sight.

The enduring separation and dual existence of these communities, paired with a common tendency to highlight and manipulate events occurring on 'the other side', has systematically resulted, over the years, in an extensive set



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THE CYPRUS PAVILION, PALAZZO MALIPIERO, **SAN MARCO 3198**, I-30124 VENEZIA, **S. SAMUELE- PALAZZO GRASSI**, BOAT STOP - LINE 2
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of stereotypes emerging about one another. A classic example is the characteristic perception of East versus West (the wilder, more exotic 'Turkish-Cypriot north' compared with the 'European' 'Greek-Cypriot south'), with reference both to lifestyle and the natural landscape.

The palm tree, like the cobra which it is about to 'bear', carries along with it a number of religious and mythological symbolisms dating far back in the history of civilisation and which continue to penetrate the collective unconscious. Modern literature is not short of examples either; following a trip to Cyprus in 1953, the Greek Nobel-prize winner Giorgos Seferis, produced a collection of poems, one of which carries political connotations, using the metaphor of the snake as the evil conqueror.

In this year's Venice Biennial, a palm tree wanders the city on a boat, protruding menacingly like the barrel of a cannon. The sight of this majestic plant, uprooted and placed awkwardly in an unfamiliar setting, puzzles the onlooker, creating a desire for it to be replanted again, somewhere suitable.

Snake-charmers roam the city, having travelled from India - a country whose colonial history uncannily resembles that of Cyprus. Allegedly, the snake-charmers alone have the power to lure the serpents from their hiding place.

And so the rumours start; there are snakes in the city”.

Socratis Socratous was born in Paphos, Cyprus, in 1971. He studied in the Athens School of Fine Arts and since 1996 he had a number of solo shows in Cyprus and Greece. He participated in group shows at the Benaki Museum, the Athens Museum of Cycladic Art, the Deste Foundation in Athens, the Old Archaeological Museum (Yeni Djami) in Thessaloniki, the Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre, The Lanitis Foundation in Limassol e.t.c. In 2001 he represented Greece in the Tirana Biennial. In 2008, he appeared in group shows in Paris (in the framework of Paris/Chypre - La Saison Culturelle Européenne), in Arles (Les Rencontres d' Arles, Photographie) and Thessaloniki (Action Field Kodra). Socratous was the official photographer of the preparations for the opening of the 2004 Athens Olympics. He also works as a writer and an art director for theatre, with various collaborations in the framework of the annual Athens Cultural Festival. More recently, he completed a commissioned project with Hemès-Paris. His work can be found in private collections in Cyprus and abroad, as well as the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art and the State Collection of Cypriot Contemporary Art. He lives and works in Greece and Cyprus. www.socratissocratous.com

Born in France, Sophie Duplaix is chief curator of the contemporary collections, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou. In this capacity she has curated several exhibitions, among which Sons & Lumières – Une Histoire du Son dans l'Art du 20e siècle (2004), Gina Pane (2005), Annette Messager (2007), and recently Jacques Villeglé - la Comédie Urbaine (2008). She is currently working on a large exhibition project on Indian contemporary art. In 2000, she co-curated, with Andi Michael, Images Mobiles, a show at the Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre bringing together French, Cypriot and Greek artists working with video.

The participation of the Republic of Cyprus at the Venice Biennial is organised and sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

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