

YORGOS SAPOUNTZIS *Die Landschaften Griechenlands*

Exhibition from November 7 to December 13, 2014

The series of monochromic landscapes painted along the arcade on the northern edge of Munich's Hofgarten have a prototypically displaced history. In 1832, foreign powers convened to establish a monarchy in Greece after its liberation from Ottoman rule. A conglomerate of Russia, France and Britain - the so-called 'Great Powers' - appointed Otto, the second son of King Ludwig I of Bavaria, to become the new king of Greece. Following this decision, Ludwig I commissioned one of his favoured landscape artists Carl Rottmann to paint a cycle (Zyklus) of Greek topographies as symbol of the two countries under Bavarian royalty. Rottmann then traveled to 23 locations in Greece's mainland and on its coastline, including its former capital Nauplia, during a twelve-month trip to study the country's scenery. He frequently complained in letters home. Upon his return to Munich the artist worked from his sketches using an encaustic painting technique as the paintings were planned to join the artist's earlier cycle of Italian frescos already installed in the Hofgarten's arcades, which were also commissioned by Ludwig. This decision was later revoked after being outdoors had deteriorated the frescos and the king instead had the Greek cycle displayed in a specially designed hall within the original Neue Pinakothek, which he founded in 1853 and after the artist's death.

Like this building, the arcades around the Hofgarten were similarly rebuilt after their destruction during the Second World War. In 1961 however a newly made series of stylized frescos made by another artist based in Munich appeared in their preconceived place in the Hofgarten; several of which interpreted Rottmann's Greek landscapes. These loosely inspired and altogether flattened revisions are today companioned with excerpts from Greek and German poets stretching the length of the corridor in a format originally intended for the Italian frescos. I walk past these wall paintings nearly everyday on my way to and from the Kunstverein. Quite unintentionally, it didn't take long to become familiar, but then, almost oblivious to ones surroundings when replaced by the daily commute between home and work.

Having spent a prolonged amount of time in Munich earlier in this year, Yorgos Sapountzis on the other hand quickly responded to these landscapes during his stay, which now underpin this exhibition and from which its title is derived from. Interested in how a scenography of a place effects its inhabitants, the artist considers - crucially - how the past is embedded in the present rather than re-reading the history of Rottmann's Greek cycle directly in his work. For example, while Rottmann is frequently invoked, the creator of the wall paintings currently in the arcade, Richard Seewald, is rarely mentioned. Factoring in his own practice as an artist, one could interpret Sapountzis' approach as continuing a lineage of artistic reinterpretation of these landscapes into the now. Furthermore his perseverance in, at least, acknowledging the current rendering of these landscapes is a refreshing antidote to an academic fixation on Rottmann's originals. The artist's want to extrapolate them through his own work distances an emphasis on their former precedence showing a healthy reappraisal; shifting the weight of history to cursory aesthetics.

Essentially, reinterpreting these landscapes provides Sapountzis a backdrop from which to develop new pieces, described as 'closing work'. But in doing so he also, in the sense, ironically revisits his own country (or more precisely, a portrait of his country of birth as seen through someone else's eyes drastically different from the artist's) through materials familiar in his practice; traversing the colorful fabrics, tubular metal rods, and video documentation that often make up his installations.

- Saim Demircan

Yorgos Sapountzis (1976 born in Athens, Greece), lives and works in Berlin. 1998-2002 Set designer and Assistant director for the Diplous Eros Theatre, Athens; 2012 Villa Romana Fellowship, Florence; 2013/2014 kunstzeitraum Residency, Munich. Solo shows (selection): Kunsthaus Glarus, Glarus 2013; Kunsthalle Lingen, Lingen, 2013; Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, 2013; Overgaden, Copenhagen, 2012; Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, 2012; Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Kraichtal, 2012; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, León, Spain, 2010. Group shows (selection): The Kitchen, New York, 2014; Kunsthaus Bregenz (curated by Yilmaz Dziewor), 2013; 12th Triennale Kleinplastik Fellbach, 2013; Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2013; Lismore Castle Arts, Lismore, 2013; Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, 2012; Louisiana Museum, Humlebæk, 2012; Kunstraum Innsbruck, Innsbruck, 2011.