

# freymond- guth Ltd. fine ARTS

Depuis 1788

Freymond-Guth Fine Arts  
Limmatstrasse 270  
CH 8005 Zürich

T +41 (0)44 240 0481  
office@freymondguth.com  
www.freymondguth.com

Tue - Fri 11 - 18h  
Saturday 11 - 17h

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## *The Sculptor's Dance* YORGOS SAPOUNTZIS

By Christiane Rekade

Since its acquisition in 1949 it has been standing at the façade of Kunsthaus Zurich: in fact La porte de l'enfer The Gates of Hell is to be recognized as the lifework of Auguste Rodin. Until shortly before his death the French sculptor worked on the monument with which he, inspired by Dante Alighieri's "Divine Comedy", created a portrayal of the damned creatures engaged in the existential battle against hopelessness and ultimateness of death. However the first cast-bronze of the seven meters high and eight tons heavy sculpture had been executed only posthumously (1926). Today eight copies of the masterpiece exist around the world. Of which one is to be found in Zurich. In January of this year Greek sculptor Yorgos Sapountzis will pay a visit to the Gates of hell. It is not the first monument that Sapountzis visits.

In his video Gold (Thessaloniki), 2005 the artist is seen wandering about the nightly Thessaloniki under one of those gold foils that are sold as rescue blankets. He looks like a glittering mountain that rambles around the streets, leaning against the city's monuments and statues here and there or simply places himself next to them. The video is a poetic, sensual walk through the night that leads and changes the view on the figures in the public space. This bizarre, veiled body describes a path through the city that connects the monuments among each other and puts them into a relation- to the body of the artist, to public space, to the audience. The view on sculpture and the appearance of the body in space are sources of the videos, performances and sculptures of Yorgos Sapountzis.

### Order and Chaos

Sapountzis' interest in experimenting with sculpture and their impact and significance in the public space perhaps roots also in the richness of antique monuments in his native city of Athens. The constant confrontation with his cultural heritage also shows in his video- installation that he created for his nomination of the 2009 DESTA Prize at the Athens Museum of Cycladic Arts. For the video The Heritage of its Architecture (2009) Yorgos Sapountzis had himself filmed inside the museum by surveillance cameras at night constructing a new installation of colored cloths and aluminum tubes between the vitrines with pre-historic sculptures. Sapountzis mixed the video of the surveillance cameras with his own recordings: quickly altering perspectives blend with the reflections of cycladic vases and figures in the glass of the vitrines and the color plains of the cloths. Hard electro sound amplifies the confusions of the view.

For the presentation of the film Sapountzis built a tent-like construction of colorful cloths and projected the video onto two walls of fabric. Doing so, the nightly performance, the video and the installation aggregate to a single complex system in which forms repeat and reformat, pre-historic objects meet the formal vocabulary of modernism. This might appear chaotic at first glance. But through almost choreographed movements Sapountzis creates new combinations and motion sequences: "I create chaos to create order."

In fact, Sapountzis' diverse bodies of works are interconnected, condition one another and evolve: the installations are formed through their function as displays for the video projection or remain as a relict of a performance. The videos again are recordings of the performances. Also, the colorful, handmade posters made of painted newspapers that he embroiders with letters serve as announcements of a performance or an exhibition.

### Techné

In the process handcraft is a distinctive factor of all works. Sapountzis applies material that he can work, install and transport himself. The originally Greek term of techné - the ability, artifice, craft- does not distinguish between today's categories of art and technique. In Sapountzis' works the technique/ the medium often is constitutive of the form: eg in the use of surveillance or web cameras for the recording of his performances at night, in the construction of projection screens for the videos, in electronic music that he accompanies his films (and performances) with. Yorgos Sapountzis also develops

a group of aluminum- paper sculptures from the form of bicycle frames. For all his works he repeatedly uses the same materials: colored cloths, aluminum or elastic plastic tubes, adhesive tape, string, newspaper. All these materials share certain qualities: they are light, flexible, ductile, their volumes can be reduced, they are easily transportable. Materials that can be moved with the human body- fabrics and ribbons- used for example by gymnastics for their exercise.

### Eternity and Lightness

Thus the materials in a certain way are also determinant of the structure of the performances:

“ When I effect a performance, there are always several elements- eg the materials- that are clearly defined from the beginning. Between those I try to react, make contact with the audience and use the creativity of the moment.” The performances of Yorgos Sapountzis have something of a dance, a procession and a poem: dance because the movements are subject to rhythm, repeat, constitute a form, steps, luffing, nodding, going back and forth. Procession because the viewers are included: newspaper hats, colored gowns or aluminum tubes are distributed, as in the performance *The Distances Between Teeth and Street* that Isabella Bortolozzi Gallery in Berlin presented 2010. For *Field Trip*, 2010, an exhibition in the form of a promenade through the Humboldt University Berlin, Sapountzis handed out branches and limbs of trees so that the procession moved through the halls, aisles and corridors of the university like wandering forest. Of a poem the performances remind with their immense concentration, the condensation and the tension that arises in the voidage.

In the spontaneous appropriations and occupancy of public space and the undermining of existing structures and authorities of Sapountzis' performances, parallels to certain forms of streetart may be seen: be it the way skateboarders, breakdancers or traceurs illegally use public space (and it's monuments) for their jumps, turns and parkours. Sapountzis achieves to create a tension, a connection between viewer and performer and the public space. With his performances he opens a new perspective on common spaces and environments. Everyday movements and noises suddenly are noticed more delicately, spaces are redefined: “In my performances I'm always concerned with building something, constructing something. It is like the dance of the sculptor around his work of art.”

Also Auguste Rodin struggled for his work: it took him almost 37 years to the conclusion of his *Gates of Hell*. The visit of Yorgos Sapountzis to the eight tons heavy monument on the other hand will be more fugitive. It's the contrasts that Sapountzis is interested in: “For me *The Gates of Hell* is one of Rodin's best pieces- what I'm interested in is the fact that Rodin knew how to attribute a certain “holiness” to the portrayal and yet the *The Gates of Hell* are not a religious illustration.” says Sapountzis. “My performances too often have something of a procession, but they are not religious.”

And so Sapountzis will once again will encounter a cast-bronze for eternity with the lightness of his ephemeral sculptures and fugacious acts.

Christiane Rekade is curator and lives in Berlin. [chrekade@yahoo.de](mailto:chrekade@yahoo.de)