

HISTORY PROJECTED

German-Greek Filmic Dialogues on the Past and Future Film screenings program in collaboration with Ethnofest

History and Myth. An Introduction

Before we explain the rationale for selection and say a couple of things about the two films shown tonight, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to a small number of people - without their kind assistance, we would not have been able to see these rare works together: First off, to the family of Lakis Papastathis, and especially Mrs. Yvonne Maltezou; to Feelgood Entertainment, and especially to Soli Beraha, Christina Pelekani, and Katerina Lampadiari; to the Greek Film Archive, and especially Phaedra Papadopoulou, Tasos Adamopoulos and Nektarios Sakkas; and to Neaniko Plano and especially to Marianna Panagiotaki and Katerina Zambeli. The collaboration we had at different stages of this screening's preparation, from locating a copy to securing screening rights and subtitling, reminds us that cinema, similar to the writings of history, remains a collective endeavor- and the art of the many.

When our dialogue with Goethe-Institut Athen set off, geared towards a film program with a "historical" vein, and even before the developments on this side of the planet prompted us to reconsider what it means to experience history in its making (or speculate whether there is such a thing anyway), the contribution and perspective of an "ethnographic" cinema festival could only be deliberately ambiguous. Instead of documentaries that would record a clear view of reality, we thought of proposing mostly fiction films, which borrow elements from reality and translate, appropriate, and transform them creatively, unequivocally arguing that history, after all, is interpretation. Thus, the ethnographic gaze would not be yet another practice, but an experiment and a game: What would happen if we paired samples from two "national," as they call them, "cinemas," from worlds are seemingly incompatible, but getting over our tendency to compare? What if we screened films that manifested their nuts and bolts, the ways in which representations and narratives of the past are manufactured, always in the plural? Many symbols, many faces, many stories. The invitation to research Goethe's archive was not an excavation or a treasure hunt, but rather a stroll in a hall of mirrors, where we would sometimes look for our reflection and other times the exit from a labyrinth of ideas.

And that's how we arrived at the first screening of the "History Projected" series, two days after celebrating a national, quote on quote, holiday, in which fragments and symbols of the distant past return to the present to stimulate our faith in something larger than life- albeit abstract, but setting a clear canon. The two films in the *History and Myth* program, debuts by two versatile artists in the world of fiction, follow a similar strategy, but as a gesture of freedom. The now eighty-year-old filmmaker, photographer, visual artist and ethnographer Ulrike Oettinger shot her first film in Paris between 1972 and 1973, in collaboration with Tabea Blumenschein, a legendary figure of Berlin underground. A few years earlier, in 1969 in her hometown of Konstanz, Ottinger would found her own film club. A few years later, she would move to Germany to align her name with the current of

the New German Cinema. The film's title refers to the iconic Hellenistic sculpture "Laocoon & Sons," but has nothing to do with it, as it is the name of a traveling circus. Ottinger draws her inspiration from Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and invents a country of her own, named after one woman: Laura Malloy; in a "story for all seasons," as the filmmaker liked to call it, the allegory unfolds with the help of masks symbols, like a magic ritual that is difficult to describe, but invites us from the get go to experience history as mythology.

As for *On the Time of Hellenes*, the film may have been shot a decade later, but the idea was also born around 1972, amid the Military Junta in Greece, when Lakis Papastathis first saw *Maria Pentagiotissa*, a 1928 film shot by Achillea Madras: The first Greek blockbuster was supported by the government of Eleftherios Venizelos, the leader of the Greek national liberation movement who entered in diplomatic cooperation with the Great Powers during his tenure and who at the time provided 1,500 soldiers and three cavalry units. Interestingly, because of the films' mistakes and gaffes, the anagram of the director's name gave the Greek word for the "slip of the tongue": Sardam - or at least that's how the legend has it. The story of the abduction of a young bourgeois man by bandits at the turn of the twentieth century may be an allegory for the rise of the Greek, but first and foremost it is Papastathis's interpretation of a Greek history that willingly embraces "historical inaccuracy."

And because every anniversary hides many anniversaries, just as every story hides many stories, we would like to note that a few weeks ago, it was the one-year anniversary of the death of Lakis Papastathis - a filmmaker who has arguably shaped the history of modern Greek documentary more than any of his peers. In lieu of an epilogue or a tribute, we close with his own words. An excerpt from the text "Notes from the shooting", originally published in the *Synchronos Kinematografos* film magazine v. 28/29 in the summer of 1980, so before the release of the film: "I was immersed in the script, as I was trying to choose the shooting locations. After all, the spaces are certainly not a picturesque backdrop, nor a frame of the film's story, but rather an organic part of it that demands its understanding; otherwise, it takes revenge by imposing its presence in the absence of our intentions... The poetics of the film is based on the impossibility of representing the ritual in the present tense. The fact that the space and time of the film is not completely specified, certainly lightens and liberates it. But this is justified only when it is performed in the name of another accuracy. Because poetry is also informed from history, except that it does not aspire to reconstruct the past with completeness."

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