

# A HEART TO HEART ON ART



MARINA VRANOPOULOU, the founder of the Dio Horia art gallery, shares her vision of a new scene merging tradition with modernism, inspiring communities to connect more with art.

Text: Alexandra Koroxenidis

IN 2015, DIO HORIA, a non-commercial art platform at the centre of the tourist hub of Mykonos, made a distinctive impression. "At that time, there was no official business plan," recalls Marina Vranopoulou. "The project took off totally out of chance, as we have roots on the island. We absolutely loved it there; collectors were just so happy, free to spend their spare time marveling at our shows." By 2018, the Platform became an Art Gallery and timidly started participating in International Art Fairs following one strict premise: to present previously unknown artists, coming from small peripheral countries, historically connected to Greece, Greek history and culture. Last year Dio Horia Gallery inaugurated an institutional space in the centre of Athens. "It is a short distance from the Acropolis Museum, in the place of a 4th c. AD villa urbana of the Late Antiquity referring back to the everlasting fountain of creativity," Marina continues. The name *Dio Horia* originates from a famous treatise by the late architect Aris Konstantinidis, *Dio Horia* from Mykonos, referencing several dualities, such as the Athens Gallery and Residency program, the Greek roots and the International program, the dual audiences of the educated Art World member and the curious flâneur. In this pleasant and welcoming sun-lit gallery, focus is on post digital art, queer art, female empowerment, new technological media, 'do it yourself' training and all that is current and relevant.

Marina, who initially studied political science at London University College, subsequently entered the world of art, first through



Marina Vranopoulou, Founder of Dio Horia.

OPPOSITE PAGE  
Stay with me, and don't look back, Maja Djordjevic, oil and enamel on canvas.

Christie's Education, and lately as a PhD candidate at Goldsmiths College in London. She is interested in inspiring communities by making art more accessible, as she did when she undertook the newly at the time Hydra project of the Deste Foundation in 2008, where she invited artists who had not yet exhibited in Greece, all coming from her own generation.

Dio Horia has introduced many international artists to Greece, including Hulda Guzman. The 2003 programme includes Maja Djordjevi and Rhys Lee, artists 'reinventing painting' through a contemporary lens, Iliodora Margellos and Desire Moheb-Zandi who accentuate the tactile feeling of craftsmanship in their work.

**Interni:** Would you agree that Dio Horia Athens has benefited from your experience in Mykonos, where current programmes are on pause this year? For example, Dio Horia Athens is still very active in residency programmes.

**Marina Vranopoulou:** Indeed, we can't help but draw from our heritage on Mykonos; the mesmerising summer light, Delos' mystical spots and overall Cycladic warm ambience inspire us to keep moving forward. No matter the current, more-urban-focused business model, we cherish our initial vision. Though our residency program currently revolves around the new space at the Acropolis, we plan on complementing it with our Mykonos residency, once the artists start feeling more familiar with the new location and rather wish to explore the endless possibilities of the Cycladic heritage.

**I.:** In the midst of multiple arts spaces, many of them non-profit and offering opportunities for young artists, what makes Dio Horia distinctive?



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**M.V.:** We like to think that our distinctive character comes from maintaining the same free-spirited attitude and artist-community standards that got us started. We run an international exhibitions program for established and emerging artists that have not yet exhibited in Greece. We are active participants in prominent international art fairs in all continents, to showcase the work of Greek, Cypriot and Balkan artists. We choose, e.g., respectively, to promote Greek Elias Kafouros, Cypriot Chris Akordalitis and Serbian Maja Djordjevic's work, as it seems to be a specific response to troubling times. Our programme focuses on creating a unique vibe, setting up a vibrant atmosphere that, despite it all, is positive and constructive. Human

energy is contagious.  
**I.:** What challenges do you face as art spaces are becoming more resilient, artists are not always represented by a single gallery and much art is happening in public spaces or within communities?

**M.V.:** In order to remain competitive in this environment, we are investing in shipping to a greater extent, to fully expand to and accommodate collectors around the world in the best possible way. The truth is that the art world has significantly transformed, prices keep rising, and artists are becoming more independent. However, as long as audiences are also growing and each gallery caters to separate types, this is incredibly inspiring, introducing a new way of experiencing and/

or running any type of art-related organisation. Following documenta 14, and with DESTE Foundation, Onassis Stegi and NEON paving the way, new galleries and art spaces have emerged, gradually leading artists to feel more supported and, all of us together arguably manifesting ourselves as the new sensation within the global art world.  
**I.:** Many of the artists represented by the gallery belong to your generation (artists now in their late thirties and forties). Today, do you see the need for more visual pleasure and for works more accessible through their pop-like character?

**M.V.:** We definitely have a soft spot for artists belonging to our generation. Regardless, visual

## THIS PAGE

Saint Queeneth, Aleksandar Todorovic, egg tempera and acrylic on wooden board.

## OPPOSITE PAGE

After Hope, a group exhibition at Dio Horia.



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pleasure is a relative term, depending on various circumstances and perspectives. For example, many viewers may not be particularly fond of the emphasis on strikingly bold colours or even be disturbed by a seemingly excessive number of nudes. First and foremost, the gallery is purposefully putting forward the expression and practices of under-represented artists, such as minority and female artists, so as to amplify these voices that we believe they deserve to be systematically supported. Drawing from my experience as General Coordinator at DESTE Foundation in Hydra and Contemporary Art Curator, I started Dio Horia as a non-commercial Art Platform to attract Mykonos visitors and art lovers in a very distinct way.

While the platform followed the structure of DESTE Foundation's Hydra projects, where artists were invited to study the *Topos* (place) and create in-situ, it soon became quite clear to me that art today is first looking back, in order to move forward to the future. For example, Serbian artist Aleksandar Todorovic and artist Desire Moheb-Zandi from Adana in Turkey, are currently part of our artist roster. Both are inspired by tradition, but incorporate new perspectives on contemporary culture. Todorovic engages with the concept of evil, making use of Byzantine iconography while Moheb-Zandi is writing code in woven form on a loom, just as her grandmother taught her.

**I.:** What are some of your aspirations

and goals for Dio Horia? Whom would you like to work with in the future?

**M.V.:** My absolute favourite artist is Tracey Emin. There are no boundaries between her work and life. I am awed by how she daringly transmits her traumas, passions and desires through her work. As for plans, we have dreams and are working to realise them: a growing number of museum shows and an exhibition programme involving a series of gripping works by brilliant artists in different milieus. I am very excited about what the future holds for Dio Horia. For the time being, we are still enjoying our new space in Athens. A space that is so open and feels at home in this historic-urban, international environment.

WE CAN'T HELP BUT DRAW FROM OUR HERITAGE ON MYKONOS; THE MESMERISING LIGHT, DELOS' MYSTICAL SPOTS AND CYCLADIC WARM AMBIENCE INSPIRE US TO KEEP MOVING FORWARD



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