

Works from the 1960s up to the present in an exhibition on the merging of life and art

Video and photo-documentation of performances, actions and process art in Salonica exhibit

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In one of Yves Klein's most famous series from the early 1960s, women, whose nude bodies were covered with blue paint, lay and moved haphazardly on top of a paper-covered floor, leaving their physical marks on its surface. Klein had used the human figure and its movement as paint brushes, thus defying all conventional art practice. "Anthropometries," as the works are known, began as visual art performances and ended with a finished painting. They were largely about the process of making art but were also related to the innovative quest to merge life and art that the '60s introduced with great vigor.

Most artists in the 1960s were bound together in a quest to push the limits of the visual arts beyond the conventional modes of painting or sculpture. In essence, they questioned the nature of art and, in consequence, turned to the very process of art making and made it either a subject or a vital part of their work.

Process art, happenings, visual art performances and, later on, land or environmental art were all part of a broadened range of artistic expression that centered upon "process" and art itself as an experience. It also involved live action and the participation of the artist or the public.

It is this tradition of making art that "The Gesture," an exhibition currently on display at the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki, traces, beginning from the 1960s through to the present.

The exhibition is jointly curated by Marina Fokidis, Sergio Risaliti and Daphne Vitali and is a



collaboration between the Fondazione Fabbrica Europe in Florence and Oxymoron in Athens. It is also part of Culture 2000, a European Union-funded project.

"The Gesture" has taken for its title a term associated with the action painting of abstract expressionism to suggest how artists in the '60s inverted that notion and produced a whole range of new, "alternative" art out of it. Befittingly, the exhibition includes pioneering works of visual art performance from the 1960s and '70s.

Examples include the video documentation of "Shoot," one of the most famous performances by Chris Burden in which the artist has a friend shoot him in the arm (the artist said that "it was an inquiry into what it feels like to be shot") or "Following Piece" by

Vito Acconci, "Body Tracks" by Ana Mendieta or "Leap into the Void" by Yves Klein.

However, "The Gesture" is not an exhibition about the past. It does not follow any chronological arrangement but places all works (most of which are video documentations of performances, happenings or live action but there are also some photographs and other documentary material) in a single installation made by television monitors placed on differently colored pedestals of varying sizes.

Intended as a "Visual Library in Progress," the works in the exhibition are arranged in a way that blends the past and the present and highlights the notion of art as an experience, always open to new possibilities and, just as in real life, too varied to fit into es-



An image from the documentation of 'The Utopia of Hugging for Twenty Minutes' (above), a live performance by the Gao Brothers (copyright: Gao Brothers), and (left) one of the images from a slide show of the work by photographer Christina Dimitriadis (artist's copyright).

established categories. Several works are by Greek artists. A video work that pays homage to Godard by pioneer Greek performance artist Leda Papaconstantinou goes back to the beginnings of performance art in Greece.

Maria Papadimitriou is one of the most prominent contemporary artists whose work revolves around entire, long-term projects that involve interaction and also influence social reality. Her ongoing project based on a community of Gypsies in Greece is an example.

Experimenting with gender roles is a subject for many of Lina Theodorou's video-documented actions. In "Wonderpark," for instance, the artist wanders through Athens's National Gardens in the role of a male voyeur to test her own reactions as well as the response of the people she encounters. In "Translocal," one of her recent projects, New York-based Greek artist Jenny Markertou camped out in different cities. Her work is both the documentation of her experiences and a means of testing art's capacity for

interacting with real life.

Another example of bringing art and life together is provided by the photographs that Manolis Babousis took during his visits to mental asylums and his interaction with the patients. Nikos Charalambides, Alexandros Georgiou, Christina Dimitriadis, Giorgos Sapountzis and Makis Faros are the exhibition's other Greek artists. The Stalker group, Sophie Calle, Uri Tzai and Piotr Uklanski, are some of the other artists participating in the exhibition.

Their works are gathered together in an exhibition that highlights freedom and the broad scope of artistic expression but also inquires into the capacity of art for live intervention and, finally, makes the viewer wonder what art will look like in the future.

"The Gesture" is on at the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art (154 Egnatias, 2310.240.002) through September 18. At Quarter, the New Center of Contemporary Art in Florence, in early October. The National Bank of Greece is the main Greek sponsor.