

Press release

19/04 – 26/05/2018

*«A woman's coiffure and shoes reveal her character. They should always be in impeccable condition... And a basic requirement, is no frowning... A man in order to be charming, firstly, should be clean and secondly, should have a crisp and elegant appearance».*

Art meets fashion. Catalyst for this encounter of contemporary Greek artists, fashion designers and "craftsmen of fashion" has been the Notebook (dated 1958) of a seamstress, who studied at the Couture House of Tsopaneli.

The finding has been retrieved by Marika Handji's grandson, the architect George Kalivis and the sewing lessons of Tsopaneli to his students provide us with an alternative reading of modernity. From the knowledge of savoir vivre, the learning of pattern cutting for women's clothes to the set of instructions for technical use of sewing machines, those notes not only are the source of interpretation of an era but also the phenomenon in the year 1958 of Greek fashion itself. Besides it was an epoch when modernization is spread over all social layers and diffused throughout new lifestyles, new labor conditions and leisure time, such as entertainment, excursions, parties, and holidays.

Fashion, gauge of men and women's behavior, at the end of 1950s, breaks the limits of «decency» and «beauty» of bodies becoming the ultimate example that highlights modernity. A series of radical changes manifest through fashion (new styling applications, new behaviors, spreading out of mini skirt and other accessories, new body representations, etc.). Hence, fashion interweaves with gender social phenomena and institutions and therefore contributes to the democratization of the new and especially to the democratization of the desires. Garments concern every relationship of human beings with their body, alike the relationships of human body with the society.

It is the encounter of artistic creation with design practice. Artists and fashion designers show through their artworks their personal reading of this finding. It is their way to examine and recompose the narration of modernity's diffusion. While they ask themselves questions about the way Greek reality assimilates, processes and appropriates the phenomenon of fashion or even devalues its production.

The exhibition re-examines the Notebook of Marika Handji as starting point for the 18 invited artists and fashion designers, because it has the characteristic of "written fashion", namely of fashion that is translated into language and design, with identifiable elements of new behavior (at savoir faire) and decorative abolition (at the patterns).

It is a valuable token by an unknown apprentice seamstress, who reveals the traces of a profession that was eliminated from the historic and artistic research and narration. The minor aesthetic practice of dressmaking that represents this woman may have sunk into oblivion the years that followed, however its worth of revisiting and rescuing it from the silence and "the aftermath of the later ones" – as the British historian E. P. Thompson notes – with a series of other craft activities,

such as weaving, cutting fabrics, even the “utopic” craftsman and all those female figures of household economy that developed during the pre-industrial era. And this not because of nostalgic contemplation. But because today they acquire crucial importance and perspective to all versions of post-industrial economy and new cultural developing practices. The Notebook of the apprentice seamstress gives new meaning not just to the subjective “archive fever” but also to a series of neglected aesthetic methods of modernity that are connected to the craftsmanship and during the last three decades many despised them.

“How far could you go?” This is the question that every generation asks itself, looking for the modern it receives multiple answers through the artworks of the participant artists. The Notebook of the seamstress is transformed into a tool of recording and reviewing. As “Diary” it becomes the background of change in social behaviors that influence not just women, sex matters or ethics but also demanding the re-distribution of social power. Besides, even nowadays the question wording simply changes – “how far can ideas go?” – emphasizes the changes of fashion and clothing. That reinforces the battlefield between the old guard (the couture houses trapped in the role of the *épater le bourgeois* of the dominant social classes) and the “new barbarians” that feel that have the right to demand whatever could float in the atmosphere of contemporary air.

Participating:

*«A Whale's Architects», Bespoke Athens (Vassilis Bourtzalas), ΦΙΡΜΑ GYPSY GLOBALES, Angelos Frentzos, Elias Kafouros, Demi Kaia, George Kalivis, Irimi Karayannopoulou, Sophia Kokosalaki, Maria Mastori, Olga Miliarisi – Foka, Leda Papakonstantinou, Eva Papamargariti, Alexandros Psychoulis, Nana Sachini, Serapis Maritime Corporation, Stefania Strouza, Kostis Velonis, Zeus & Dione and the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation (from the archive with clothes by Tsopanelis' House)*