

One of the most successful Greek businessmen and politicians, the current Mayor of Thessaloniki Yannis Boutaris, exhibits a large part of his collection of kitsch souvenirs at the a.antonopoulou.art gallery in Athens.

The show at a.antonopoulou.art reveals the collector's passion in Yannis Boutaris and confirms —especially for those who ignore the existence of this collection— his reputation as an unconventional man who does not hesitate to take risks and try new experiences

Among other things, the collection of Yannis Boutaris comprises a host of animals (porcelain, plastic, wooden or carved in marble); portraits of political figures printed on mugs; figures of Greek mythology; busts of women and half-naked girls in erotic postures; racing cars, dozens of lighters, painted plates, ashtrays, oil lamps, wrist- and pocket watches, matryoshka dolls, inventively decorated bottles, teapots in leopard patterns and a large section of memorabilia from the various places where their owner has travelled in the last thirty years. Many of these souvenirs are readily recognisable landmarks: the Parthenon, the White Tower of Thessaloniki, the Eifel Tower, the Sydney Opera House, London phone booths or Manneken Pis, the famous Brussels monument of the urinating boy.

The ornaments and souvenirs collected by Boutaris belong in the category of melancholic kitsch, functioning as dreamlike images with which we can develop a personal relationship. These objects are more than inanimate possessions: by projecting on them our desires, often in a guilt-ridden way, we invest them with a strong fetishist dimension.

What happens when these kitsch objects go into an art space today? the narratives presented by the gallery owner Angeliki Antonopoulou through the kitsch souvenirs of the collection of Yannis Boutaris point to an installation of contemporary art. In each series arranged by Antonopoulou the objects of the collection tell a new story. The animals, for instance, appear to be "heading for Noah's Ark as the armed forces ensure the orderly progress of the operation". Through images like this, the viewer is called upon to reflect upon the deeper meaning of collecting, the illusion inherent in kitsch and the allegorical power of its poetics.