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October 26, 2015

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Fragments of Memory

Daide Balula's latest exhibition opened at the Gagosian Gallery in Athens and appears to be really disorderly.

Amanda Michalopoulou



Installation view of Davide Balula at Gagosian Gallery

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Daide Balula is one of the enfants terribles of contemporary art, dividing his time between Paris and New York. Nominated for the 2015 Prix Marcel Duchamp, he travels around the world to present his performances. In the Gagosian Gallery, housed in an old aristocratic building in the upmarket district of Kolonaki, he worked in situ, using the herringbone-patterned hardwood parquet floor characteristic of classy Athenian apartments. Like a naughty child, Balula removed some of the hardwood planks, replaced them with sections of white drywall and set the planks into the gaps left in the wall. The result is a witty commentary on how we inhabit domestic space as well as a minimalistic sculptural installation that gives viewers a feeling of being slightly out of their element.

Visitors to the vernissage must have felt even more disorientated, since Balula had two men execute an improvisation on a *rebetiko*, without music. The Portuguese artist is fascinated by cultural stereotypes, but does not mock them. Instead, he has breathed new life into the mute *rebetiko* and the ruined parquet floor. The three marble sculptures shown in the gallery are

an homage to architect Dimitri Pikionis, who constructed the pathways around the Acropolis in the 1950s using fragments of marble he found in demolished neoclassical buildings. The natural erosion of the marble slabs by the visitors' footsteps inspired Balula, who saw in the marble the other facet of weight: dust.

In the work Dionysos Marble the marble is smooth but has a jagged edge, as if the piece had been broken at random. The marble-dust reminded me of the old marble workshops in the Athens suburb of Maroussi, the dust turning the workers' overshoes white, the sound of the saw cutting through the stone. And that is what a work of art is supposed to do. Bring back forgotten memories, connect our life to what we see. Gazing at a slab of broken marble you may suddenly come face to face with your past.