

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



POPAGANDA

**Davide Balula, is there anything essentially Greek that inspires you?
- The Greek dance and the Greek tsipouro.**

Nominated for the 2015 Prix Marcel Duchamp, famous artist Davide Balula shows his new work at Gagosian Athens for the first time in Greece and talks to Ioanna Kleftogianni.

Ioanna Kleftogianni



He has worked in all sorts of art forms: drawing, sculpture, architecture, installation, performance, photography. He has also worked with all sorts of materials: solid, liquid, gas, even with fire. He has even set somebody's mouth on fire for a project at MoMa (*Speaking in Flames*). He has topped one of his installations at Art Basel with ice cream with the help of New York based chef Daniel Burns (*Ice Cream*). He has submerged several of his canvases in rivers and creeks (*River Paintings*) as well as placed paintings in climate chambers and subjected them to humidity and extreme temperatures (*Artificially Aged Paintings*). He has even created his own anti-demonstration performance with a crowd of people who were carrying banners with colors rather than slogans (*Demonstration of Colours*).

The Portuguese born artist, now a French citizen, is also nominated for the prestigious 2015 Prix Marcel Duchamp. For his first exhibition in Athens, Davide Balula utilizes the herringbone-patterned hardwood parquet floor at Gagosian Gallery by removing some of the planks and replacing them with identical sections of white drywall. He also uses fragments of marble from mount Parnon to recreate motifs springing from the Greek tradition and identity. When he visited our country to set up the exhibition, he literally found himself in the eye of the storm: "I arrived on the day of the referendum and left on the day of the elections," he tells us now that he is back in New York.

Which are the Greek “ingredients”, the Greek ideas that stimulate and inspire you?

The Greek dances and tsipouro. They “trigger” the highest art.

What does Greece stand for in your mind? What did you know about the country? And above all, did you change your mind after visiting the country recently?

Greece stands for a lot of things; in fact, more than just “things”. I had no expectations whatsoever when traveling to Athens for the first time, but I left the city ever so much happier. I arrived on the day of the referendum and left on the day of the elections.

Was it in some ways obvious to you that the country is going through a crisis?

The situation is actually difficult as well as complex. It is ever so interesting to see that people still have hope, and fight for it; and it is really dreadful to witness people who, under the pressure of fear, are tempted to take horrible decisions.

Your in-situ installation at Gagosian Athens is a form of discourse with Classical Age as well as with architect Pikionis. Do you consider the Ideal as an end in itself to be one of your goals? Was the Greek crisis something that you wanted to exclude?

I do not believe in the Ideal. , I believe in uniqueness and in change before anything else.

As an artist you harness all forms of natural matter. Which one do you prefer? Which one is the most challenging?

The media I prefer is always different from the one I’m using! In other words, it is not about the elements per se or the way they can be categorized. The important issue is the state of the matter in the specific moment you of its observation.

When and how do you decide that an inspiration will become a performance?

Live performances are an essential part of my work and I am working to keep it that way.

What are the boundaries of contemporary art? It looks like you have shattered all kinds of boundaries.

They are the boundaries of the person looking at it.

What are the sources of your inspiration?

Anything can inspire me, as long as it can stay up till midnight.

Can you spot any similarities between the situation in Greece and in Portugal?

I am not a specialist on the issue and I suppose I will oversimplify things. But I do sense similarities, especially when it comes to people approving or disapproving their government leaders due to their past and, even more so, when alternatives seem limited.

Are you optimistic about the future of our world?

Yes. The world... The future... Maybe not with us still in it though!