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ATHENS 09.20.11



Left: ReMap founder Iasson Tsakonakis. Right: Dealer Magnus Edensvard, artist Daniel Silver, and dealer Andreas Melas. (Except where noted, all photos: Kate Sutton)

NOT QUITE A FESTIVAL, not quite a fair, the biannual ReMap event is a temporary occupation of two Athenian neighborhoods, Kerameikos and Metaxourgeio. The former, one of the city's more ancient areas (ancient, as in where we get the the word "ceramic"), has in recent years been abandoned to some of the city's overt vices. But for one month, galleries including Eva Presenhuber, gb agency, Johann König, and Balice Hertling join local standard-bearers like the Breeder, Rebecca Camhi, and Helena Papadopoulos, taking over empty villas on avenues lined with brothels and boarded-up buildings.

Originally conceived as a companion to the First Athens Biennial in 2007, in its current state ReMap skirts dangerously close to slum tourism. Arriving Sunday night, I set out in high spirits toward Andreas Melas Projects's impressive, Stephen Shearer-sheathed space for the opening of Daniel Silver's "Letting Go." Only four blocks past a (nominally) five-star hotel, I passed several clusters of locals crouched on stoops, heating spoons over lighters. "Be glad that's all you saw," I bid's Chelsea Zaharczuk assured me later. "This morning I stepped out from the install and was treated to someone shooting heroin directly into his penis." She took a long sip of her cocktail, then added gravely, "I mean, it was worse than Philly."

While it may not have qualified as Brotherly Love, at least everyone seemed to get along. Indifferent, or just oblivious, the locals barely registered the parade of suits and Ray-Bans and tote bags.

That is, until they threw a party.



Left: Balice Hertling's Giulia Roberti. Right: Dealer Helena Papadopoulos.

Following AMP's opening reception, dealer Andreas Melas converted his multistory town house into what basically amounted to an art-world kegger. In the kitchen, guests-cum-chefs whipped up addictive Greek appetizers involving cucumbers, fresh herbs, and a luscious cheese spread, while around the corner, an ad hoc bartender in a Disney T-shirt guided me through a folding table full of choose-your-own-adventure-style cocktail fixings. The DJ leaned nonchalantly against the railing while the crowd exploded in and out of dance.

As the evening progressed, however, neighbors began to line the surrounding balconies, lobbing curses —among other things. I took refuge with a Glasgow-based crew. "I think we just got egged," artist Niall Macdonald moaned. Another Glaswegian tried to translate some of the choicer curses, before stopping abruptly, blushing.

As for the host, he was confounded. "It's weird because this neighborhood is all full of junkies, and I try to do something nice you know, throw a party, and everyone flips out, calls the cops. Last time I had a party, they threw me in jail for two days afterwards!"

I looked at Melas incredulously: "And yet you still had another party?"

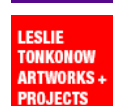
He blinked, then shrugged. "I mean, yeah, why not?"



Left: Dealer Jean-Claude Freymond-Guth. Right: Artist Georgia Sagri.



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The next morning it was late starts all around. No sooner had everyone finished “breakfast” than it was time for ReMap’s official 5 PM opening. There were rumors that Dakis Joannou had made an early run through the program offerings, but it was as hard to envision him popping about the neighborhood as it was to imagine Greeks being “early” to anything (except, perhaps, history).

Kerameikos boasts some jaw-dropping buildings—all balconies, stairwells, and connecting courtyards—but their state of disrepair was almost as shocking as what was going on out on the stoops. ReMap participants did their best to restore the spaces assigned to them, patching up holes and cleaning out flooded basements (adding credence to rumors that this was largely a maneuver to drive up real estate prices in the area). “It’s hard to know exactly what to feel here,” one dealer confessed over ouzo. “On the one hand, it’s great to see the area brought to life, but on the other, where exactly is this money going?”

The decrepit state of the exhibition spaces was as much an inspiration as an obstacle. At the Journal, I needed help tracking down Daniel Turner’s piece: Was it the question mark-shaped arrangement of old screw holes? The contorted electrical fixture? Or maybe the wheelchair poised at the end of the hallway? (As it turns out, that last “work” actually had more to do with dealer Artemis Baltoyanni’s recent knee surgery.) Baltoyanni patiently pointed out Turner’s work, a subtle stain on the wall made with a wire scrub brush. “I suppose being in this kind of building does change the context of his work a bit,” she mused.

One block over, artist Nicolas Party had transformed the Modern Institute’s suite of rooms into a showcase of immense charcoal wall drawings. Party had worked five days straight to cover the rest of the walls with an all-over pattern of red, orange, and blue dashes, which neatly camouflaged existing damage. Upstairs at Conduits, Ann Craven complemented her moon paintings with an installation of items found in the space; this included everything from a poster of Princess Diana to a polyester Saint Nicolas doll, but the real kicker was the actual full moon, insistently visible from the balcony.



Left: Artist Gabriel Vormstein and The Breeder’s Nadia Gerazouni. Right: Dealer Toby Webster, artist Nicolas Party, and dealer Andrew Hamilton.

The moonlight wasn’t the only thing flooding the streets; the citywide taxi strike had offhandedly ensured plenty of space for the gawking masses. We picked our way through to the Indian restaurant Noor, where we promptly mistook a Greek birthday party for a performance. The Breeder’s Nadia Gerazouni met us with a grin, leading us past the kitchen and up the stairs, where we marveled at an over-the-top, seashell-encrusted altarpiece. Gerazouni explained, with obvious fondness, “The artist, Angelos Papadimitriou, is this really famous singer, a real Greek celebrity, but it turns out in his free time he’s been making these seashell sculptures. Like the ones you see at souvenir markets. I find it totally fascinating.” So did we.

Afterward, ReMap’s official kickoff party stormed the rooftop pool bar of the Athens Imperial Hotel, where the space was packed and the shorthanded (shortsighted?) staff were painfully slow with drinks. I was midconversation with dealer Mehdi Chouakri and artist Luca Trevisani when suddenly someone burst into a howl: “Oh my god, this country totally just defaulted!” Sobriety reserves kicked in as smartphones flew out to fact-check. A dealer beside me just shrugged: “Does that mean we don’t have to pay our tab?”

— Kate Sutton



Left: The after-afterparty. Right: Outside AMP.



Left: Artist Ann Craven and curator Gea Politi. (Photo: Kate Sutton) Right: Artist Peter Halley. (Photo: David Velasco)



Left: IBID Projects's Nicole Alexopoulos and Chelsea Zaharczuk. (Photo: Kate Sutton) Right: Artist Gerwald Rockenschaub (right). (Photo: David Velasco)



Left: At the ReMap headquarters. Right: Dealer Mehdi Chouakri.

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