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ReMap2 Redeems Athens

Submitted by [momus](#) on 17 June, 2009 - 10:26

ReMap2 — supposedly a secondary and parallel event — is everything the official Athens art biennial isn't. Whereas the official biennial (whose frustrations I [listed yesterday](#)) battles indifference and motor traffic down at the beach, ReMap2 is positively buzzing with curious people, and is sited in the charismatically crumbling inner city district of Kerameikos / Metaxurgeo.



Kerameikos / Metaxurgeo (often abbreviated to KM) means ceramics and silk, and the district, just to the north of Plaka and the Agora, traditionally housed those professions — as well as a bunch of undertakers. It has a tight streetplan which restricts traffic damage, big immigrant communities (Chinese and North Africans, many of them illegal and paperless), lots of weird post-acid bouzouki ballrooms (trad music has a new lease of life here amongst the young), and a ton of industrial infrastructure, like the gasworks where the first Athens biennial took place in 2007.

Even if the art weren't good in ReMap2 — and it's mostly excellent — the tour of KM that you take to see it, map in hand, would be worth the visit alone. I don't think there's a more



charismatic area in any city I know. Imagine the Lower East Side in the 1980s, with crumbling old Greek buildings instead of tenements. Imagine bits of Tokyo — Daikanyama, say, but much



poorer — and bits of Hong Kong. Imagine the evocative patina of Berlin. KM has all of that.

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Just as in the official biennial, you can borrow bikes at ReMap to see the district. But here the bikes are much funkier, artist-modified machines sprayed gold, tiny stunt bikes and big mountain bikes. Here it's done with panache. Everywhere you go there seem to be empty buildings, and they seem to have lain empty since the 2007 ReMap event, despite rumours of gentrification in the area.

In fact, some things have got worse in KM since 2007. Plots of wasteground hosting artworks also have used condoms and syringes lying on the ground. There's a lot of prostitution and drug addiction here, and recently there's been a spate of drug-related



stabblings and shootings in the area too. And yet, at 11pm, on the pavement outside

The Friends restaurant (officially a bar, the excellent, cheap food isn't listed on any menu, and gets whispered to you when you arrive), you feel like you're in Athens' best-kept, most charismatic secret. It feels like a village in the Greek islands, with its crumbly white-painted walls and shuttered windows.

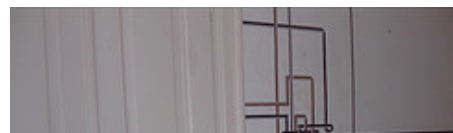


The only place more bombed-out looking than KM is the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon. We learn this from an exhibition of photos taken by 500 Palestinian children with cameras given them in a project called [Lahza](#) — the arabic word for

"glimpse". Elsewhere, we encounter old friends: Michael Portnoy's gambling pieces, David Woodard's [Wishing Machine](#) (I entered the wish "David, wish you were here!"), and a wonderful hammock by Bless.



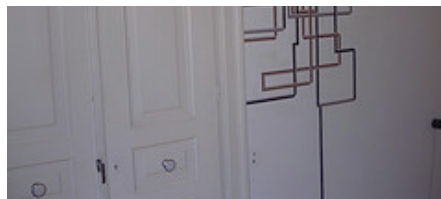
We'll be back in KM today to sample more of the (free) delights of ReMap 2. Thank God — well, the gods — it's on, and here, just a short walk from where Hisae and I are staying. Today we'll borrow funky bikes and see the bits we missed, and visit the nearby [Puzzle Festival](#). Tomorrow we might trek out to the [Deste Foundation](#),



on the recommendation of Javier Peres. Deste is the creation of billionaire collector Dakis Joannou — a big fan of Jeff Koons, apparently. It's housed in the suburb of Nea Ionia, fifteen kilometers outside Athens.

Bigger pictures on Flickr.

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On his 49th birthday, Momus reflected, naturally, on the big downside; that it's a ridiculously old ("pushing 50!") age to be, and that even older ages are lined up on the other side of it, and then (eventually) The Big Nothing. On the other hand, on the upside, his lovely girlfriend Hisae said: "You're very lucky that you're still cute at 49!" (And dangled an orange rubber massage ball over his bad eye.)

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Those sadly missed during the year: Rod Allen - founder & frontman, The Fortunes Neil Aspinall - "fifth Beatle" Jeremy Beadle - presenter and promoter Joe Beck - jazz guitarist

[AN EVENING WITH MOMUS](#)

Getting ready for next week's shows in Berlin, Newcastle and Glasgow, I've been programming some new backing tracks for old songs. Some of them I've never performed before live. The retro format started when Craig Wilson, who's organised the Newcastle show, asked me to make quite a long, intimate, cabaret-ish show, something like "An Evening with Momus".

[THE ARROW AND THE FRAME](#)

It's 1987. Art is a zone for the enactment of symbolic reparations for real injuries to real people: natives dispossessed by colonial adventures, women oppressed by patriarchy, blacks up against apartheid, gays besieged by AIDS. Welcome to the art world depicted in Sandy Nairne's series of films State of the Art, now available in its entirety for free in the art documentaries section of the Factual TV website.

[\(DON'T\) LEAVE THEM ALL BEHIND](#)

A potted history of every UK independent label ever: there's a flamboyant hustler guy who spends all day making deals on the phone, and a quiet boring guy who stays in the back office, shuffling paper, balancing the books, tapping at a calculator. The hustler guy aspires to be as big a pop star as the artists he handles, but never quite gets there, though he outlives and outearns them. The boring guy keeps the business afloat, but starts to develop issues about being undervalued and overlooked.

[WHERE ART AND MONEY MEET](#)

My latest columns touch on the subject of the relationship of art to money. Satirizing Luxury introduces New York Times readers to Chim ↑ Pom's "reverse auctions" and Michael Portnoy's "abstract gambling", both satires on financial procedures.
