

Word ANYA PIRES

WHERE LARRY GAGOSIAN GOES others follow. From New York onwards, he has pulled both influential collectors and other galleries in his wake. As a result, eyes will now turn to Athens, where the latest Gagosian space, his eighth gallery, opens on September 24.

Fortunately, there is enough vibrant art activity in the Greek capital to justify all the arriviste attention. It's not hard to argue that the cream of the global art world has already been spilt across the Athenian pavement. With a new Kunsthalle, a National Museum of Contemporary Art under construction and a boom in heavyweight collecting, now is the time. Gagosian's gallery occupies an intimate 90m<sup>2</sup> in Kolonaki, Athens' swanky area. It's a deft manoeuvre by the gallerist: moving up but sizing down in the current fiscal crisis. Bringing on the big guns, it commences with new works by Cy Twombly in a solo show inspired by the Greek poet Alkman, 'Leaving Paphos Ringed with Waves'.

Twombly fans will have no reservations: fantastic new work! Shown in Athens just a healthy walk from the Greek history that has long inspired the American artist!

It's no coincidence. A look at this summer's social diary reveals why. 2009 has seen an intriguing site-specific collaboration between Matthew Barney and Elizabeth Peyton for the new DESTE Foundation on the island of Hydra; and also the mass immigration of European galleries into the Athenian red-light district for the ReMap 2 project alongside the Athens Biennale.

In true Athenian style, the inauguration of mega-collector Dakis Joannou's new DESTE Foundation project space on Hydra was visibly democratic. Occupying a former slaughterhouse on a cliff edge, the new space opened with the sunrise recovery of a sunken cabinet of Elizabeth Peyton drawings from the sea by Matthew Barney.

The rendezvous was at 6am above a remote cove past the slaughterhouse. A rosy fingered dawn lit up a hand-picked cross-section of collectors, curators, critics, consultants, dealers and artists alongside kids from the village, goat herds, deckhands, cats in trees and dogs running free. Not quite the usual Manhattan-to-Mayfair line-up.

A fishing boat in the sea was just about capsizing as the crane on deck grappled with something heavy and deep underwater.

A couple of divers surfaced as a rusty *Wunderkammer*<sup>†</sup> emerged, was set ashore and then carried up a winding path. A heroic, excruciating sight as the weight of it nearly crushed its bearers with each thrust. Once in the slaughterhouse, Peyton's drawings were extricated and hung on the stone walls.

The show is on until next summer, when word has it that Maurizio Cattelan will be next. His 'horse' piece (currently in Mr Joannou's Athens residence) would seem at home in the new DESTE space where the cages, meat-hooks and drainage pipes are still in situ from its abattoir days. Quite a contrast to the main exhibition at the sleek DESTE Foundation and the annual exhibition of DESTE Prize Nominees at the Cycladic Museum in uptown Athens.

In downtown Athens, ReMap 2 – the idea of collector and entrepreneur Iasson Tsakonas – has invited international and local galleries to exhibit during the Biennale in vacant spaces in Kerameikos. 2500 years ago it was the potter's quarter; more recently prime location for junkies, working girls and drunks. Now, this sector is extending its repertoire to artist's studios, nightclubs, rooftop pools and a couple of the chief native galleries. Rebecca Camhi has reopened her gallery in a deserted Neoclassical villa, while the Breeder gallery has taken centre-stage on the main strip of bordellos, converting an ice cream factory into an ivory tower of concrete minimalism.

Until mid-October, Eva Presenhuber is using a shop-front for a solo presentation of black columns by Valentin Carron. Giti Nourbakhsh and Isabella Bortolozzi are neighbouring up to show a mix of European and Greek artists, and Peres Projects are exhibiting paintings by John Kleckner and Mark Flood. Ibid Projects have taken over the two penthouse floors of an office block with a group show of large installations, small-scale paintings, a video room and an outdoor arrangement of Daniel Silver statues set against the city skyline.

Talk of the town is the presentation by Bernier-Eliades, the historic Athenian gallery whose pioneering shows over the past three decades (including Richard Long, Carl Andre, Richard Serra, Ed Ruscha and Gerhard Richter) have helped pave the way for today's scene. They have taken over an abandoned mansion with a two-person

show of new paintings by Moshekwa Langa and a composite installation by Norwegian artist Ylva Ogland, whose alter ego in the lower-east side you'll know as Snøfrid. At the core of the installation is a distillation of the artist's own vodka through stone fragments and olive-leaves from the facade of the Acropolis.

Even the Acropolis itself is changing face, with the recent unveiling after much anticipation and controversy of the new Bernard Tschumi-designed Acropolis Museum. Athens, Greece is on the map.



CY TWOMBLY  
*Leaving Paphos Ringed  
with Waves* 2009  
acrylic on canvas  
105 1/2 x 83 1/2 inches (267 x 212 cm)  
Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

<sup>†</sup> The cabinet of curiosities, or *wunderkammer*, was designed to facilitate an encyclopaedic enterprise, the aim of which was the collection and preservation of the whole of knowledge.