

Vlassis Caniaris

16/1–28/2/2015

Opening: 16/1/2015

6–10 pm

„As far as I am concerned, there is real space (for instance, a room, a kitchen, a gallery) and the work, which is also a thing (a chair, for instance), a colour (such as blue), a relationship (for instance small/large, pleasant/repulsive), a treatment of the space i.e. reality (for instance, crumpling, destroying) and of those within it. The form, the dimensions and the content which I give to this work of art- if it is a work of art- is an attempt to make the viewer see everything I've already described from another point of view and from the very beginning, in such a way that our connection to the world and our position in it is constantly put to the test.“

(Vlassis Caniaris, „Autobiographical Notes“ 1975)

Vlassis Caniaris (GR 1928-2011) ranks among the most influential artists of his generation. In the 50 years of his artistic work, he created an oeuvre of international relevance. His object-like paintings and expansive installations resemble sculptural tableaux and testify to his subtle talent for observing reality. Although formally akin to the New Realism of a Duane Hanson or Jasper Johns, he is foremost concerned with showing and understanding human qualities, wishes and longings positioned in relation to a specific reality. Due to the political conditions in post-war Greece, Caniaris lived in Rome, Paris and Berlin between 1956 und 1976. He returned to Greece only at the end of the 1970s. This view from the outside, both to his homeland and his respective places of residence, had a strong influence on his observing, socio-critical approach and is prominently expressed in the recurring figure of the “Witness” (1980s).

The installations “Interieur”, Untitled (Bicycle) and the sculpture „without words“ belong to Caniaris’ most significant group of works, “Gastarbeiter - Fremdarbeiter”, created in Berlin between 1971 and 1976 and exhibited in numerous european museums including the Galerie des 20. Jahrhunderts, Staatliche Museen Berlin; Museum Bochum; International Center of Art London, London, and the Musée d’Art Moderne,

Paris. The works strikingly displays Caniaris’ understanding of art as a diagnostic instrument to attain a subtle view of social, cultural and personal asymmetries that are pathological signs of our society, both then and now. Caniaris rearranges his ready-mades to gain insights into the ways of life that they express. Caniaris developed a “love of things”, his rearrangements make the qualities, wishes and weaknesses of their owners concrete. The artist uses them to reflect on the psychological conditions of a group of people whose lifes are defined by improvisation. His sculptural tableaux show a situation between limitation and freedom that is still highly relevant today.

Caniaris’ sharp eye on the reality of life, on art and its conditions, can already be noticed in the 1960s in his series of wall reliefs titled “Raum im Raum” and the sculptures Zum Wirtschaftswunder, created during his stay in Paris. Parts of the series are included in the collection of the Musée d’Art Moderne in Paris. On the one hand, the pieces are related to Concrete Art in that the material becomes the actual object, on the other, Caniaris uses found materials not just for their own sake,



Interieur / Interior, 1974
mixed media installation,
200 x 160 x 100 cm

but also takes their historicity into account. In this sense, the art historian Michael Fehr coined the term Concrete Realism for Caniaris' work. The sculpture "Vorne und Hinten" (1962) belongs to Caniaris' key works of this period. Found articles of clothing are detached from their original function and draped on a construction of wire and wood. At the same time, Caniaris addresses the actual consistency of the clothes. Their worn state refers to the personality of their former owners and to the general course of history that incessantly alters the conditions for the individuals moving through it. All his life, Caniaris himself was a traveller alternating between the roles of being an insider or outsider of different political convictions and social groups of his times.



Untitled (Fahrrad) / Untitled (Bicycle), 1974
mixed media installation,
70 × 250 × 160 cm

Caniaris' visual language is distinctive and surprising for its period, leading to invitations to show his work at the Venice Biennale (2012, 2003, 1988, 1964) and Documenta 6 (1977), along with numerous solo exhibitions at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1970), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1972), the ICA Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (1976), Kunstverein Hannover (1976) and more recent at GAK – Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen (2012) or Henry Moore Institute in Leeds (2012). In June 2015 Wiels Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels will present works by Vlassis Caniaris. His work is included in many public collections including Tate Modern, London; SMAK Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent; Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris; Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum, Hagen or National Art Gallery, Athens.



Vorne und Hinten / Back and Forth, 1962
mixed media installation,
170 × 80 × 35 cm



Ohne Worte / Without Words, 1973
mixed media installation,
80 × 50 × 150 cm

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