

"TRANSCULTURES"

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Curated by the director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens, Anna Kafetsi, "Transcultures" gathered together the work of an impressive group of artists, among them Gary Hill, Mona Hatoum, Wolfgang Laib, Shirin Neshat, and Bill Viola, who were asked to address the subject of identity in relation to the modern condition of encounter, interaction, and confrontation between different cultures. Greece might be, in fact, an ideal place for dealing with such a topic, not so much because it hosted last year's Olympics, but because exploring the variables of human nature while rooting them in displacement and journeying has preoccupied the Greeks since ancient times.

Addressing the issue of forced migration, Emily Jacir's twelve photographs from the series "Bethlehem and Ramallah, April 2002," and a work in progress titled *Memoorial to 418 Palestinian Villages Which Were Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied by Israel in 1948*, 2001-, connected the show to one of the world's most unstable and troubling places. The former work documented the daily life of the inhabitants of two towns that form an epicenter of the Palestinian-Israeli military conflict; the latter featured a refugee tent embroidered with the names of Palestinians displaced from their homes. Less specifically, but with equal force, Kendell Geers spoke about the persisting potential for danger in his *Akropolis Redux (The Director's Cut)*, 2004, in which he displayed rolls of security fencing on steel shelves, arranging his installation in a configuration that suggested a storage room inside a military facility or a film studio. According to Geers, "What is considered violent or dangerous in one culture is not in another. I work with danger, violence, transgression, and taboo because I believe it's the only way to confront the ideological makeup of a person." The same is true of other political works in the show.

Yet the most engaging works in "Transcultures" were those that dealt with the condition of today's world in a more meditative than polemical fashion. Do-Ho Suh's *Staircase II*, 2004, enchanted with the immateriality of a narrow staircase leading to a platform, both made of pink translucent nylon, suspended a few feet below the ceiling. The piece floated in space as if accessible to the senses only. A glowing jukebox speaker attached to the wall and slowly revolving while emitting a sound



Bill Viola, *The Raft*, 2004, video and sound installation, 10 minutes 30 seconds. From "Transcultures."

mix of Tibetan, Gregorian, and Islamic chants, Kim Sooja's *Mandala, Zone of Zero*, 2004, might be one of the most beautiful readymades ever found. The only paintings in the show, George Hadjimichalis's three near-monochromes on wood, *Burial X*, *Burial XI*, *Burial XII*, 2004, recalling tombstones, suggested that one might approach death as a subject of contemplation rather than of protest or rage. Danae Stratou spent ten months traveling to seven locations in various parts of the world, from Brazil to India to Austria, known for their splendid, large rivers, and filmed those places while sailing in a small boat. The resulting installation, *The River of Life*, 2004, comprising seven videos presented simultaneously in a panoramalike structure, shows places where beauty often meets decay. Stratou managed to convey with her camera that even as we are crossing cultures in an unprecedented fashion, the world at large keeps minding its daily existence—and remains quite oblivious to the presence of the traveler.

—Marek Bartelik