

VLASSIS CANIARIS**Selection of works**

June 10 – July 29, 2022

Opening: June 11, 6 – 8pm

Project space, Rämistrasse

On occasion of this year's Zurich Art Weekend, Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to announce a project with works by Vlassis Caniaris (b. 1928 in Athens, d. 2011 in Athens) in the project space at Rämistrasse. The presentation brings together works on canvas, on paper, sculptures, assemblages and installations from 1960 to 2003.

In the early 1970's Caniaris began to focus on matters of national identity, social inequality and immigration, producing his most significant works during this period. The drawings, plaster sculptures and figures were created as part of the series *Immigrant* (1971–76), a body of works developed initially in Paris and later continued in Berlin (1973–75). Considered a seminal work of this series is the installation *Garbage Child*: a soiled striped shirt stands tall on an armature of wire netting, with proud shoulders and a red carnation in the front pocket. Inside the transparent wire structure, one can see cigarette boxes and Kodak photo rolls lying at the bottom.

Applying elements of daily use and found domestic objects such as worn clothing and toys, Caniaris gradually initiated to create a human form: a person-object. Caniaris described his sculptural figures as "witnesses", although stoic and headless, without ears and eyes. The sculptures create a strong interweaving of reciprocal observer positions and roles, positioning the artist as an observer who is always part of the observed situation, as for example the sculpture *Observer* (1980), a headless figure in a sweater, torn jeans, slippers and hands in pockets. In the installation *Untitled* (2003), a figure holding a newspaper behind his back gazes at a painting from Caniaris' well-known series *Homage To The Walls Of Athens*. The painting has the desperate and liberating energy of graffiti. Red, bold brushstrokes blur the Greek letters that translate as "What ever the people want from back and the front", an ambiguous phrase with a slight sexual connotation. Like an exclamation, the words seem to emerge from the figure made of makeshift-looking sack and plaster. A selection of earlier works shows Caniaris' characteristic handling of plaster as a material, such as the early painting *Surface-Space* (1960) or the work *Untitled* (1970) that captures a children's toy in plaster.

Caniaris used found objects to respond directly to social and political concerns. All elements, from the plaster and used wire mesh to objects such as the newspaper or the red carnation, carry a symbolic meaning related to the uprising and student's demonstration of 1973 against the military dictatorship "Greek junta". An immigrant himself, Caniaris was sensitive to the hostile environment that the right-wing Greek junta had brought about and translated this feeling into his artistic practice. Two years after the start of the junta regime in Greece, he was forced to leave the country. Only many years later did he return to Athens.

In 2016, Galerie Peter Kilchmann first showed works by Vlassis Caniaris at the main gallery space at Maag-Areal, with a large installation at Art Basel Unlimited, also in 2016.

Vlassis Caniaris is considered one of the most important protagonists of Greek post-war art. His distinctive visual language was cutting-edge for his time and earned him invitations to exhibit at the Venice Biennale (1964 and 1988) and documenta 6 in Kassel (1977). Caniaris' work has been influencing a number of artists ever since. Relevant solo exhibitions include the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1970), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1972), ICA Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (1976). Recent exhibitions include "Atopolis", Mons, (2015, cur. Dirk Snauwaert); Gwangju Biennale (2014, cur. Jessica Morgan); Venice Biennale (2013, cur. Massimiliano Gioni); Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (2012) and Thessaloniki Biennale (2011); as well as major solo shows at the GAK - Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst Bremen, Germany (2013) and the Benaki Museum, Athens (2009). In 2017, four seminal installations by Caniaris were presented at documenta 14 in Kassel, including *Hopscotch* and *Coexistence* (both 1974) from the *Immigrant* series. Works by Caniaris are found in the collections of the following institutions (selection): Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris; MMCA Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; National Art Gallery - Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens; National Museum of Contemporary Art - EMST, Athens; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; SMAK Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Gent; Tate Modern, London and The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. In April 2022 two important works by Caniaris from the collection of Dimitris Daskalopoulos were donated to the Tate Modern in London, expanding their existing body of Caniaris works.

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