

MINUS SPACE

Cris Gianakos

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The Cris Gianakos exhibition at the State Museum of Contemporary Art, which presents the work of a creative artist from the Greek overseas community, is something of a journey through time, through an era when the rapidity of developments in the domain of the arts in Europe and America took artists by surprise, stirring up public likes and dislikes and demanding a redefinition of the trends and terms used to describe them.

Caught up in this whirlwind of developments, Cris Gianakos felt the influence of the trends that were taking art towards late Modernism, and most notably minimalism, as one of the most extreme forms of abstract art. From the very first he was totally swept away by the sense of the supremacy of ideas and concepts over "things"; and his art, given his inevitably anti-formalistic choice of approach, is spare and uncluttered. Using the rules of geometry and the logic of mathematics, he created works with a geometric face and an intellectual fullness. By this time the postulation of "pure art" had become virtually an artistic necessity, with a history of its own, right from the beginning of the Modernist movement, while the Russian Constructivists and their successors had played a very special part, as too had the symbolic idiom of Malevich. If line is what determines form, it also delineates meaning, with no need for cosmetic ornamentation or other similar artistic "products".

The quest for the essence of things led Gianakos to the use of more strongly dynamic lines, such as diagonals, which have the additional advantage of referring to cultural values that are diachronic in appearance and cross-cultural in behaviour.

One of his favourite subjects, for example, is the "ramp": it is one of those motifs that he has worked and reworked time and again, giving them interesting abstract properties. These are austere works, conceptual definitions of form that create new spaces, suggest variably dimensioned constructions and project a sense of polysemy.

In this catalogue the American art critic Thomas McEvelley attempts, via the obvious and less obvious elements of the artist's work, to penetrate in a truly unique fashion the multiple civilizations of a variety of times and places, in order to demonstrate just how revealing a work of art that is distinguished by an immediacy of expression and an inspired approach to human values can be.

This is the third time Gianakos has exhibited his work in Thessaloniki. The first was on the occasion of the city's year as Cultural Capital of Europe (1997), with the exhibition at the Alaça İmaret of a large composition entitled Gridlock. This composition, which now stands in the courtyard of the Moni Lazariston arts complex, comprises two huge iron bars carrying multiple connotations (demarcation, division and separation of spaces, expansion and contraction of volumes, etc.).

The public of Thessaloniki had a second opportunity to get to know the work of Cris Gianakos with his participation two years ago (2000), in the group exhibition at Moni Lazariston entitled Modern Odysseys. Greek American Artists of the 20th Century. This year's exhibition, by contrast, is more of a retrospective, assembling from major collections in Europe and America a selection of works by a sculptor, draughtsman and constructor of objects upon whom art critics around the world have bestowed solid and sincere praise.