

PRESS RELEASE

**Nikos Leontopoulos**

**On the margins**

16 December – 28 January 2023

**Ikastikos Kiklos DL** presents on **Friday 16 December 2022** the **solo photography exhibition** of **Nikos Leontopoulos** titled « **On the margins** ».

*Photographing the marked fleece of existence*

*...The purpose of our life is our infinite mass. The purpose of our life is the useful acceptance of our life and of our every wish everywhere at every moment in every fervent disturbance of the existing. Our life's purpose is the marked fleece of our existence...*

Andreas Embirikos, (*Roses by the window*), *Ypsikaminos* {(Blast Furnace)}, 1935 (extract)

*Take our wreath, take our geranium  
we no longer have life in Drapetsona...*

Tasos Livaditis, *Drapetsona*, 1961 (extract) \*

Are these hyperrealist verses of Andreas Embirikos really without a logical conclusion and are they developed “outside the conscious limits”? Are the lyrics of one of Mikis Theodorakis most emblematic popular songs a cliché or is the reference - devoid of any romantic neologism- to the genesis of a handmade refugee tin neighborhood that was founded and defined - a hundred years ago - by the industrial shell of the “Lipasmata” Factory out of place and time?

With his great series of photographs, aptly titled "On the Margin", Nikos Leontopoulos rearranges the traces and draws the boundaries of a historical, sociological and aesthetic search of the dystopian landscape of Lipasmata from its very beginning.

At the beginning of the 60s, it was decided to demolish the shanty town near the "Lipasmata" (i.e. the Fertilizers Factory) of Drapetsona. "... Tasos Livaditis, I remember, had come to my house in Nea Smyrni and had listened to a part of a piano concerto that I had started to write", recounts Mikis Theodorakis. "At that time, the government wanted to evict the refugees from their shacks, in Drapetsona, without giving them compensation. For them it was a struggle for survival, a struggle for life or death, as the bulldozers came and demolished their houses. One day, while driving to "Columbia" for a recording, inspiration suddenly came to me, in front of the Kalouta theater. I stopped short and wrote down the melody. In the evening I called Livaditis, I sang him the melody over the phone, and he wrote the lyrics for "Drapetsona". That's how we got into the folk song...".

The Anonymous Hellenic Company of Chemical Products and Fertilizers (A.E.H.P.L.) was founded in 1909 by N. Kanellopoulos, giving its name to an entire region and marking its history for ninety years. Operating as a monopoly in the field of fertilizer production from 1910, it gave the people of Piraeus work in times of dire poverty, while soon an agricultural department was organized as well as a glass factory (in the 1920s). With the arrival of refugees from Asia Minor to Piraeus, the settlement expanded and the new workers of the chemical fertilizer factory created the dense residential fabric of Drapetsona around it. The factory in Hetiona Coast (this is the coastal front that extends from the Krakari jetty to the area known as Fertilizers), during its heyday, operated with building facilities covering 146,000 square meters on an area of 245 acres, while the company possessed 109 acid, fertilizer and pesticide production units. In 1934, the workers employed in "Lipasmata" were close to 4,000.

During the Second World War, the factory was bombed resulting in the destruction of a significant part of its facilities, while from 1946 production was brought back to pre-war levels, giving the residents work again, but contributing to the suffocating atmosphere that gradually worsened after 1960. By the late 1970s, the glass factory was loss-making while recovery efforts remained fruitless.

In 1993 the company was put into liquidation, passing to the control of the National Bank, while the factory, with the main argument of protecting the environment and the regeneration of the seafront, was closed for good in 1999. In 2003 and despite the efforts to declare the industrial buildings as listed, most were demolished or parts of them remained intact but in a dilapidated state. With them, an important part of the history of Greek industry was lost forever. Only the glass factory of the building that later housed the “Nikolaos Kanellopoulos” Institute, some of the concrete auxiliary warehouses and the virtual faded red and white chimney, visible like a distant land lighthouse, are now preserved. \*\*

Today, after some development scenarios that even included the on-site staging of F1 Races also seem to have been forgotten, "Lipasmata" remains a largely deserted seafront with a jarring scenic field of viewing and recalling the past, with an awkward functional present of alternative multi-space and, mainly, with an unknown future.

Nikos Leontopoulos' fascinating shooting of the ruined buildings that, as he says, "we kill when they grow old", took place two years ago, and was completed shortly before entry to the premises was banned.

In this eerie landscape that is uniquely captured, between the dry grass and the soil, the transverse ruins that were once hives of toil and cheap human life stand erect. Volumes and webs of metal, unstable staircases, bare walls, beams, chimneys, and imprints of machinery that have successively disappeared in successive pillages, mounds of stone and awkward cogs, or hollows of ash and rust, are rescued from their oblivion and brought forth with noble thoroughness, but never beautified by the lens.

This unsullied graveyard of machines and fragmented memory, however, is illuminated in places by intense colors and re-inhabited by dense graffiti. The black-and-white monochrome of the sleeping photographed surface is interrupted by tags and circular signs on the wall, by short-lived iridescences and masterful color fireworks: sometimes the eye is dominated by the glossy emphatically emphasized red of the chimney or the cold green of a metal pipe and sometimes by the gloomy yellow of a pump or the intense blue in the frames of the broken windows that evoke a forgotten island. But above all, this wild and restless gray sea of rust that moves silently into this forgotten valley and swallows everything.

Referring to his *Lost Collective* series on the derelict industrial buildings that he photographs around the world, Brett Patman describes his need to excavate the immovable surface, to search for traces of past lives and to rescue structural tissues of memory that once played an important role in community where they belonged and which, though abandoned, still somehow unites those people who made them important. Often, he concludes, finding the sight of this huge mass aesthetically impressive in itself, he challenges himself - without result - to locate at least one object designed solely for aesthetic reasons”.

“My photographs give life to dead places,” writes Ilan Benattar in his turn, explaining the initiation of his series *Lost Factories*. While photographing industrial buildings frozen in time that often keep their machinery intact, he is most interested in imagining the people who once worked here. In some of the factories, traces of past life are still visible beneath the thin surface. Others, however, are according to him “time capsules”, trapped in a surreal condition of stasis and oblivion.

In this metaphysical and ravaged landscape saved by the lens of Nikos Leontopoulos and where the complete absence of man paradoxically reinforces the conviction of an earlier presence, the issues of aesthetic value and historical tracing, the praise of form and gushing memory and emotion, are treated with knowledge and moderation and finally balance, saving the simple timelessness and complexity of the markings of the “Lipasmata” shell and indelibly inscribing it in the viewer's gaze.

Iris Kritikou  
Art Historian and Independent Curator  
December 2022

\* “Drapetsona”, from the celebrated 1961 album “Politeia”. Lyrics: Tasos Livaditis, music: Mikis Theodorakis, first performance: Grigoris Bithikotsis

\*\* Some of the historical information concerning the Fertilizers buildings was taken from M. Hulot's article “[www.lifo.gr/Drapetsona's Fertilizers when they were ruins](http://www.lifo.gr/Drapetsona's_Fertilizers_when_they_were_ruins) | LiFO”.



**Exhibition opening:** Friday 16 December 2022 at 18:30 until 21:30

**Duration:** 16 December 2022 – 28 January 2023

**Opening hours:** Monday - Sunday closed  
Wednesday - Saturday 11:00 - 16:00  
Tuesday - Thursday - Friday 11:00 - 20:00

Admission to the exhibition is free.

\*The gallery will remain closed from 1/1/2023 until 10/1/2023