

## Dispatch from the field

August 10, 2023

Vorres Museum, Paiania



Tonight, another milestone was reached on the planned events at Vorres within the EMPACT series of gatherings exploring issues of empathy and sustainability at the crossroads of societies within the European Union. The Vorres Museum was one of five institutions that hosted residencies. Those who took part in the planned events were admonished to follow the lead of Aldo Leopold (1949) who coined the term “think like a mountain” which is understood as an effort to locate ourselves holistically within the world’s ecosystems. Three established multimedia artists came to Paiania, two from Spain, Veredas Lopez and Alva Moca, and one from Bulgaria Venelin Shurelov.

Tonight, the participating residency artists welcomed the museum's friends and showed their work in their studios, spoke about it, and took questions from the audience. Despite the short duration of the residency, the works shown were interesting and each provocative in its own way. I do not know how mountains think, but I know how the Greek poet Odysseas Elytis shows us how to feel about the mountains. In his most famous poem about Greece **Worthy, it is---** Elytis is telling us that we are part of the mountains....

**My roots are in the mountains.  
and the people carry the mountains on their shoulders.  
and on top of them, memory burns  
unburnt bush**

**Memory of my people your name is Pindos, your name is Athos.** (English translation by K.P.).

Worthy it is to have empathy for humans, non-humans, and inanimate objects alike as one among equals, to live sustainably for the good of all, and to stop pretending that what ails our earth, and our societies will fix itself....

### **Veredas Lopez**



Veredas landed at the Athens International Airport with a small carry-on bag and a huge, checked package that was remarkably light—it contained the materials to be used for her EMPACT Residency project at the Vorres Museum.

Her big package included bits and pieces of recycled plastic cleaning containers—saved for her by family and friends. She came to Greece to tell a story about her family, COVID, and the sustainability of products and persons; her practice after all is about the relationship of self in its many iterations with other persons and nature. She uses recycled materials in imaginative and symbolic ways, finding realistic narratives restrictive.

The story she wanted to share with her colleagues, museum personnel, and audience took place in Spain during the COVID-19 pandemic/quarantine. It is a story of loss and a way to remember those who died; she lost her grandfather from COVID and two grandmothers from other causes. The grandfather's loss was the most difficult because she identifies with him—she would like to become like him.

I found it interesting that the plastic she brought for the project is from bottles that contained cleaning agents—it felt to me as a cleansing ritual, an offering for a new beginning. To date she has created a raised painting, very colourful, using worked over plastic, heated, melted, scrunched plastic that has a feel of a quilted blanket--sharing a personal story but making sure that what is told, at least symbolically, protects those who it speaks about.

At the center of the work there is clock-like drawing signifying the beginning of her grandfather's life. He is depicted as a vibrant deer, exploring its surroundings; then in his adult years he is depicted as a strong ant, working away to look after his family. But life marches on and later grandpa is depicted as an old elephant, who as the legend goes, knows when it is time to go to the other side where the two grandmothers welcomed him, grandmas depicted as geranium flowers, foxes, and owls. The work is an exuberant painting celebrating life by connecting the various stations in life of the protagonists with bright pink ribbons. As Walter Benjamin once stated, *"to live is to leave traces"* and Veredas Lopez succeeded in sharing the traces of her family with us. She brought a family story to Greece, and she takes back with her the symphonic sound of the cicadas from the Vorres Museum gardens—a fair exchange of give and take in a world of equals.

## Alva Moca



Alva Moca arrived at the Vorres Museum with a vague idea of doing an art piece via the process of cyanotype and have it cover a column. The unbearably hot temperatures put this idea to rest—the extreme heat and sunshine are not the best ambient elements for cyanotype. Not to worry: the museum’s collection is so vast that he found a new source of inspiration.

Moca has a degree in advertising but over the years he has managed to teach himself about all media between nineteenth century’s cyanotype to street mural art. He has become interested with public murals, their exuberance, beauty, and ability to tell their stories in vivid colour. His extensive travels have given him a visual agility to “take in” and asses new environments quickly and situate himself in them creatively.

He spent time perusing the collection, how it presented through art aspects of recent Greek history, and he decided to tell part of this story by focusing on Yiannis



Moralis and Lucas Samaras—If an artist can put within a frame those two is Alva Moca. After all, he has worked with Pedro Almodovar.

Moca has created a mock-up of the final mural to assemble the parts of his narrative and what his two artists might contribute. Just before last Friday's studio visits, he added a Caryatid as shown in the Acropolis Museum.....who knows? She might become the interlocutor between Samaras and Moralis. Moralis has said something to the effect that his works are like his diary and something similar can be said about Samaras' innumerable self portraits; there might be an opening for an exchange and Moca has an ear and eye for the unexpected.

The work we saw during the studio visit has a strong Moralis vibe; a closer look reveals collage pieces that represent the universe, images of COVID or other virus lab shots, architectural pieces that depict the many doors, windows, and mini gardens of the Vorres grounds. And it has for now the Caryatid on the right-hand side of the work...in search of a visual focus, is there a polaroid portrait on its way to the mural? I look forward to the final piece.

### **Venelin Shurelov**



Venelin Shurelov lives and works in Sofia, Bulgaria where he is a professor of Digital Arts at the National Academy of Arts. He is active with many local and international arts groups. An enduring leitmotif in his work is the human body and currently he is focusing on the level of violence against women in Bulgaria and Greece. Shurelov has authored numerous interactive performances where he is their author and actor, his way of by-passing readings of body misappropriations. By his own account he is given to walking about—*peripatitikos*—literally and metaphorically, a habit that opens him up to *aleatoric* encounters, unexpected ones that become a focus for theoretical or creative interpretations.

Venelin walked extensively in the village of Paiania as he did within the museum's beautifully appointed gardens. In his museum walks he encountered a Strofilia, a wine press, part of the folk tools collected by the late Ion Vorres. He meticulously drew two versions of the Strofilia on two separate drawings and during the studio visit was still working on his pieces. The works can be read as "postcards" from Paiania or an allegory on the perils of unexamined patriarchy. Let me elaborate a bit.

On the drawings we see write-ups about people he met in the museum or village; Venelin has the GPS coordinates of the studio location and drawings of architectural details from the museum grounds. On the threaded rod that is the backbone of the wine-pressing mechanism, he has written adjectives that describe violence and arrogance. Below the round press in both drawings, in the middle where the basket full of grapes would go, he has sketched his feet on one and his head on the other—the work is still in progress.

Choosing to work on a wine press is an aleatory moment at its best: going back to myths about Dionysos' visit to Attica, legend has it that Dionysos gave the recipe on how to make wine to Icarius, a farmer that gave the god a place to stay. Icarius shared wine with other farmers who got drunk and thinking he poisoned them, they killed him. Later, the sober farmers decided to make amends with Dionysos, built him a temple—near where Stamata is today—organized a festival in his honor and the prize was a goat/ a *tragos* hence tragedy was born.... theatricality and chance encounters define Shurelov's career till now. An aleatoric moment brought Strofilia to the project and, just maybe, symbolically the press will cleanse patriarchy's unexamined atrocities. **Caterina Pizanias, PhD**