



THE ARCHITECTURE OF PUBLIC SPACES AS MUSEUMS: THE CASE OF MOMAFAD

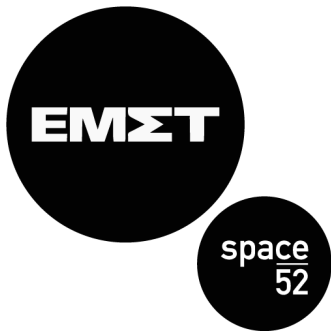
A project by Dionisis Christofilogiannis
 Inauguration - Public
 Discussion:
 18.11.2021 at 18:00
 Temporary Exhibition
 Space (-1)
 Athens, Greece

MOMAFAD, a project by Dionisis Christofilogiannis, in the CITYX Venice Italian Virtual Pavilion of the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale

an article written by Ariana Kalliga

MOMAFAD (The Museum of Modern Art for A Day) is a project/artwork created by contemporary Greek artist Dionisis Christofilogiannis which reclaims spaces and transforms them into museums for the duration of one day. Each edition brings together the works of a group of contemporary artists which are handed over to the project’s organizers for a day. Subsequently photographed, these temporary installations are turned into a permanent piece of the site’s history. MOMAFAD has been invited by the curator **Adrianos Efthymiadis** and is being held as part of “SunShip: The Arc That Makes The Flood Possible,” Arts Letters & Numbers’ exhibition in the CITYX Venice Italian Virtual Pavilion of the **17th Venice Architecture Biennale**. The inauguration of MOMAFAD with the presentation of film documentary and public discussion was held at **EMST - National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens on 18th of November 2021**.

The first MOMAFAD took place in the abandoned terminal of the Ellinikon International Airport of



Athens designed by Finnish modern architect Eero Saarinen in 1968. Both the architectural value of the building and its emotional salience as a site of public memory contributed to its selection. Lying vacant since 2001, the former East Terminal was designated as a national heritage site in 2006 yet remained abandoned until only recently when it was incorporated into the large-scale Ellinikon redevelopment project. As the texts that follow will explore, the space is a site of contradiction, history, memory, and fragility, private, civic, and public ownership.

As an arts practitioner navigating the terrain of architecture, I feel compelled to acknowledge Hal Foster's recent critique in *The Art-Architecture Complex*, where Foster argues that the increasing interconnectedness of art and architecture has wider political, social and economic ramifications. Foster explores how the 'art-architecture complex' manifests in a distinctive spectacle; the reappropriation of factories and disused buildings for the sake of art tourism, gentrification, and display.

MOMAFAD's venue - the Athens International Ellinikon airport - is a long-vacated space. Its derelict grounds have been a popular location for films and artistic productions alike since its closure in 2001. The former East Terminal, designed in 1968 by Eero Saarinen, is a modernist icon of the Cold War era. In its present form, the airport has become a symbol of modernism's decay. The monumental aura of its vast and vacant grounds has only been augmented since the announcement of the airport's redevelopment. Apart from the protected East Terminal, the airport's complex is currently being rebuilt to make way for the Hellinikon Redevelopment Project. To enter into this space at this moment in time is to encounter a building that is in the process of transformation; to be acutely aware of its temporality.



It is within this context that MOMAFAD, a participatory artwork and temporary institution conceived by contemporary artist **Dionisis Christofilogiannis**, is encountered. The project's first edition brings together works by 26 contemporary Greek artists, which include time-based media, namely video, performance and opera, as well as drawings, prints and sculptures that were installed and photographed in the former airport on October 11, 2020.

As an intervention in an iconic and widely discussed architectural site, MOMAFAD raises a number of critical, curatorial and conceptual questions. Crucially, these are connected to MOMAFAD's mode of dissemination; a series of final installation shots, which serve as MOMAFAD's living testimony.

This book encloses these images (26 photographs), a series of original essays that were born of their subsequent study, and archival material collected from municipal, educational, local and international archives. The publication should be used for educational purposes; as a manual, it seeks to inspire further study of the Ellinikon site and an exploration of some of the central issues embodied by MOMAFAD; the function of contemporary art in urban spaces; architecture, preservation, and civic intervention; monuments, documents, and archives; memory, nostalgia, and temporality.



Summary of Essays

The essays in this publication draw the reader into a range of historical perspectives. Beginning with **Giorgos Tzirtzilakis'** essay, 'L'éphémère est éternel: The Melancholy of The Modern and The Vibration of a Moment', this essay situates the interest in the Ellinikon airport in a contemporary desire to preserve modernity's past. Driving this desire is the *fear of loss* which manifests as an aesthetic attitude. According to Tzirtzilakis, MOMAFAD specifically investigates how one can momentarily preserve the past through actions of the contemporary. It asks: What sort of certainty could the momentary give birth to? The project comes with no reservations or guarantees. Rather, MOMAFAD infuses the kind of modernism we dream of, ensuring the ephemeral acquires duration.

Turning to consider the role of photography, **Sotiris Bahtsetzis'** essay 'Curating Ephemeral Icons' explores the impact that MOMAFAD's photographs have on their prospective viewers. By looking into the influence of installation views and photographic documentation of site-specific shows from the 1960s onwards, Bahtsetzis explores the recent plethora of temporary exhibitions-as-events. Similar to these, MOMAFAD and its photographic documentation offer a platform for new negotiations between viewers and that which is viewed, a negotiation that is, arguably, more epistemologically fruitful. This essay seeks to establish how the MOMAFAD project

challenges the traditional role of the spectator, whilst situating MOMAFAD within a wider economy of images.

Continuing this line of inquiry, **Eleni Riga**'s essay 'Fleeting Vulnerabilities' looks at the project's photographs through fundamental questions connected to an artwork's aura, the institutional identity of museums, and the role of photography as performance. Particularly, Riga's essay is interested in these artists' intentions to activate, embody and mark the experience of locus (geographic place) for the duration of the photographic shot. The performative mediation of 'the body' within the derelict airport exposes the viewer's vulnerabilities, and, in thinking about the 'enduring reality of the body', Riga proposes that the power of photography is its ability to communicate a certain sense of nostalgia. For Riga, this nostalgia is ultimately directed towards a place not experienced, permitting visibility to the *fleeting* and *vulnerable* through reference to the 'here and now'.

Loukas Triantis's essay, '*Beyond cultures of privatism For-A-Day?*' details the emergence of a 'new era' of the Ellinikon airport, exploring the impact of current urban redevelopments and private interests on Athens's urban planning. In light of questions regarding the future of the city's urban fabric, this essay poses a central question that touches the heart of modernism and its architecture: *who really owns the city?* In discussing the building of the East Terminal itself, Triantis explores the contemporary legacies of modernism and its contradictions. The modernist East Terminal of the Hellinikon airport designed by Eero Saarinen is protected as a listed monument, while other sections of the airport will be demolished so as to give way to retail, hospitality and new residential developments. By intervening inside the building for a day, MOMAFAD temporarily disrupts given positions and ongoing processes of privatisation. Such an intervention forms cracks in normative structures and creates "threshold" places that activate a horizon of alternative possibilities.

Finally, **Theophilos Tramboulis**'s essay 'The Silence of the Ruin', situates the project in a recent history of exhibitions and contemporary art interventions in public spaces. According to Tramboulis, in choosing the site of the former airport, a place whose future is still an open and much disputed issue, MOMAFAD marks a departure and more closely resembles the artistic squatting projects at the Market of Kypseli in 2007 or the Embros Theatre in 2013. And yet, as the author points out, MOMAFAD operates with the approval of the building's managing authority. Instead of opposing the site's redevelopment, MOMAFAD calls for the creation of an alternative space of culture within the business and development plan. Tramboulis draws attention to MOMAFAD's play on words, which directly reference New York's MoMA as well as artist Martin Kippenberger's 1992 MOMAS on the island of Syros. This Greek precedent differs from MOMAFAD, however, as it strove to take down the museum's walls while MOMAFAD is calling for their reconstitution. Forming a multiple '*mise en abyme*' MOMAFAD's images, co-authored by the participating artists and Dionisis Christofilogiannis, operate within an economy of property, rights and reproduction. Tramboulis claims that while MOMAFAD can be connected to a history of exhibitions that activate historically charged locations and rethink notions of the 'institutional', this project ultimately signals an ending. Whatever happens next, Tramboulis notes, Saarinen's building now belongs to the post-pandemic era, to a distance and to an interminable silence.

Final Note

While MOMAFAD ostensibly took place for one day, the production of this book followed a year-long process of discovery, excavation and selection. By allowing time to run its course, we

entered a state of ongoing reflection on the meaning of this temporary institution in its aftermath. By distancing ourselves from the immediacy of one day, MOMAFAD gradually became part of a *historical continuum*, to cite Frederic Jameson. In allowing this distance to take hold, this publication invites us to turn our gaze towards the past. In so doing, we are called to explore MOMAFAD through a larger, historical reappraisal and deeper, personal recollection of Ellinikon.



MOMAFAD

Creator and main curator Dionisis Christofilogiannis

Co-curator Ariana Kalliga

Artists

Andreas Angelidakis, Yannis Adoniou, Nikos Charalambidis, Dionisis Christofilogiannis, Martha Dimitropoulou, Christoforos Doulgeris, Annie Fassea, Nikomachi Karakostanoglou, Andreas Kasapis, Panagiotis Kefalas, Nikos Komiotis, Georgia Kotretsos, Antonis Larios, Pantelis Vitaliotis - Magneto, Andreas Mallouris, Eva Mitala, Maria Papadimitriou, Ilias Papailiakis, Poka-Yío, Evi Roumani, Virginia Russolo, Adonis Stoantzakis, Giorgos Tserionis, Stefanos Tsvopoulos, Kostis Velonis, Art.Drone.Projects

Guest Scholars

Sotirios Bachtsetzis, Ariana Kalliga, Eleni Riga, Theofilos Tramboulis, Loukas Triantis, Yorgos Tzirtzilakis, Hesperia Iliadou de Subplajo

Project Coordinator: Charalampos Papadopoulos

Photography: Stathis Mamalakis

Video Filming-Editing: Harris Gorovellis - TRZ Entertainment

Sound Design: Eleni Kavouki

Music: Eftychia Kamenaki & Eleni Kavouki

Catalog Design: Adrianos Efthymiadis

Editing Assistance: Millie Anderson, Suzana Fais, Thomas Macheras, Panagiotis Ioannidis

Silk Screen printing: Eva Mitala

Volunteers: Nikos Larios, Thomas Macheras, Effie Papadopoulou, Adonis Stoantzakis

Archives

Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives, Urban Environment Laboratory of NTUA , Civil Aviation Museum Athens, Olympic Aviation Cultural Center, Technical Chamber of Greece (TEE-TCG) Digital Library, Kathimerini- Historical Archives



References

- Hal Foster, *The Art-Architecture Complex* (London: Verso, 2011), 316.

For more information on the Hellinikon Redevelopment Project, see: Official website: "The Ellinikon," The Ellinikon, accessed October 15, 2021, <https://theellinikon.com.gr/en/>

Recent articles include

- Eleni Chrepa, "Athens' Revival Hinges on a Pre-Pandemic Vision of Paradise," Bloomberg CityLab, May 9, 2021.
- "Parliament ratifies contract for Elliniko development project with broad majority," [e-kathimerini.com](https://www.kathimerini.com), May 24, 2021.
- Eleni Varvitsioti, "Greece finally starts work on €8bn Athens 'riviera'," Financial Times, June 25, 2021.
- Fredric Jameson, "Nostalgia for the Present," in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 287.



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