

# *A GLIMPSE AHEAD: HARIS EPAMINONDA*

Text by Giovanna Manzotti  
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Plunging into the visual vocabulary of the Cypriot artist Haris Epaminonda, one should immediately notice how meditative yet strong her fascination with dreams, suspension, and lost memories is. Notice, too, her interest in processes of association and recontextualization of both found and crafted elements—from miscellaneous objects and pages of outdated magazines to archival footage of broadcast television, footage of personal material filmed during her travels, and Greek movies, mostly from the 1960s. As visually perceptible in the mirage effects of her Super 8 film *Chimera* (2019), recently presented at the 58th Venice Biennale—where the camera-eye dwells on desert dunes' reflections combined with zebra stripes along with fragments of Pompeian statues, diamonds, dancing girls, and classical paintings—Epaminonda's work is a powerful dip into a remote dimension, with no nostalgia for the bygone, where multiple visions weave unimagined narratives.

A dried palm leaf is delicately suspended from a metal structure, and its reflection creates a shadow above a sheet of gold foil and on the ceiling. A wooden goldfish sidles up to a small box on the floor, or maybe has just jumped out of it, leaving the scene. A found image hides behind an aboveground board painted like the sky, acting like an apparition in the clouds. A model of an Oriental temple is fenced on two sides by mirrored and lacquered wooden panels, as if they want to protect the temple from its own reflection. The soft colors of *pa-stellone* volumes (held together by brass hinges and thin brass bars) throw you into the rooms of a Venetian palazzo. A Japanese bonsai sculpture recalls the print of fabric hanging nearby, while ceramic vases, bowls, and statuettes are placed in solitude on plinths, with suspended draperies resembling walls of solid velvet.

It's always unexpected to feel how—next to each other— these objects emanate a kind of powerful and seductive halo, creating a series of vibrating images and visual jumps in the frame of the space around them. Although we used to see such objects in landscapes of symmetries and repetitions in the ongoing series of numbered exhibitions that the artist refers to as consecutive “volumes” (the first time she paired collage with found sculptures and other objects was for the 5th Berlin Biennale in 2008, at the Neue Nationalgalerie), the interrelation between these life-size images remains somehow enigmatic. Nothing is taken for granted. These palpable individual elements—organized in tableaux of forms and architectural patterns—in fact outline deceptively simple installations: the poetic effect given off by each set is the result of a meticulous *modus operandi*, a long and introspective process of gestures, selection, juxtaposition, and displacement of elements, in full awareness of their materiality, surface properties, meanings, and symbolic references, which have informed Epaminonda's practice for a long time.

“I'm sure [she] will have just finished moving that little sculpture in back half an inch to one side because this imperceptible movement will give visitors a better viewing angle,” said Massimo Minini in a letter that served as a press release for Epaminonda's show in his gallery in 2014.<sup>1</sup> There, as in *VOL. XXVI*—her current project hosted at Galleria Massimo Minini in Brescia—and in all the other “volumes,” the artist has arranged the spaces in levels of visual revelations, like the way she composes collages and creates subtle incisions on pages of found travel and nature magazines.

The essence of images, along with the secret logic internal to them, is an element that has resonated massively for her. After graduating from the Royal College of Art in London in 2003, Epaminonda returned to Cyprus, and by accident she bumped into a stack of French magazines from the 1950s in a secondhand shop in Nicosia. It was 2004. The next year she started making black-and-white collages, turning then toward architectural images of ruins and monuments. Around 2007 she introduced color into her work, either by using color pictures or by placing colored paper in the space between the pictures. “I think some images have something unsettling in them, a turn. The power images have is that they can throw you into the desert and let you find your way. Images don't give themselves easily. They demand something from you. It's a very seductive process.”<sup>2</sup>

As stated by W. J. T. Mitchell in his book *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, “the aim is to look at the varieties of animation or vitality that are attributed to images, the agency, motivation, autonomy, aura, fecundity, or other symptoms that make pictures into

‘vital signs,’ by which I mean not merely signs *for* living things but signs *as* living things.”<sup>3</sup>  
Thus, like an afterimage, Epaminonda’s installations definitely act *for* and *as* living things.

Conveying a sense of apparent stillness, her spatial compositions create, in fact, a series of rhythmical and choreographed live sequences. It’s here where symbolic references coexist at multiple and sensible levels. It’s here where enigmatic interrelations arise from unexpected pairings and manifest themselves not only as accurate intermingling but also as an open structural system of references to be mixed, repeated, reconfigured, and expanded endlessly. This approach is, without doubt, deeply personal, but it functions as a ritual act of “depiction” that opens up individual mental spaces where the encounter with fragile and minimalistic forms finds one of its best manifestations. To Epaminonda, less is more, for real.

## Notes

1. In conjunction with this show in Brescia, Galleria Massimo Minini produced Chapter IV at Fondazione Querini Stampalia in Venice. The project was supported by Ballin, Fiesso d’Artico, and the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture.
2. From an interview published in Mousse Magazine 11, 2007, 15.
3. W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 6.