

JUNE 2010 £5.95

# APOLLO

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE FOR COLLECTORS

## Celebrating Picasso

Gijs van Hensbergen on the Spanish Decade | A Dialogue with John Richardson

ART FAIRS  
SPECIAL  
PREVIEW



COLLECTOR DIMITRIS DASKALOPOLOUS by Simon Grant | PETER MARINO's Bronzes at the Wallace  
ALAIN DE BOTTON On Beauty | GEORGIAN FURNITURE REVISITED by Jeremy Garfield-Davies



# Body of Art

*Dimitris Daskalopoulos's collection of contemporary art, on show at London's Whitechapel Gallery this month, is a visceral celebration of life*

WRITER SIMON GRANT

PHOTOGRAPHER TREVOR LEIGHTON

**W**e come from a dark abyss, we end in a dark abyss, and we call the luminous interval, life. As soon as we are born the return begins, at once setting forth and the coming back; we die in every moment. Because of this many have cried out: "The goal of life is death!" But as soon as we are born we begin the struggle to create, to compose, to turn matter into life; we are born in every moment.'

These words by Greece's most illustrious 20th-century writer and philosopher, Nikos Kazantzakis, taken from his influential book *The Saviours of God*, published in the 1920s, are not what one would normally expect to guide the decisions of an art collector. However, Dimitris Daskalopoulos says that Kazantzakis's learned text has been important

in shaping his way of looking at the world, and in particular how he looks at art. *The Saviours of God* is an interesting choice of text, since it reads as part philosophy, part metaphysics, part sacred manual – a personal guide for thought and action. It is filled with passionate declarations, such as 'Heart, naïve heart, become serene, and surrender!' and 'Behind all appearances I divine a struggling essence.' Art market gossip this is not.

Daskalopoulos talks about the 'great affinity' he feels with Kazantzakis's words as he takes me on a tour of his Athens office building, which holds but a fraction of his vast art collection. (Most of it is either in storage or on loan to various museums around the world, including Tate and the Guggenheim, and Daskalopoulos also keeps a few works at home.) The ground floor lobby alone has

23 pieces, including Mona Hatoum's *Deep Throat*, in which we see an endoscopic camera travelling down an oesophagus; Sherrie Levine's *Caribou Skull* (Fig. 4); a work by David Hammons made from the print of his body; and drawings by Jim Hodges made with ink and the artist's saliva. Elsewhere, in one of the meeting rooms, is an important and very rare early Damien Hirst – a mixed media collage from 1985 (Fig. 2) – sitting opposite an assemblage by Greek artist Alexis Akritchakis. In his own office, Daskalopoulos displays an assortment of cow-related objects (though there are no mini-Hirsts) from his time as Chairman of Vivartia (a global food production conglomerate that began life as his father's dairy business) alongside more intimate works by Hammons, Sue Williams, Dieter Roth and Greek artist Dimitra Vamiali.



SOUL



Previous page

- 1 Dimitris Daskalopoulos pictured with *Unfolding Door*, 1989, by Robert Gober. To the left is *The Naked Soul of Captain Shit and the Legend of the Black Stars*, 1999, by Chris Ofili
- 2 *Untitled (Collage 2)*, 1985  
Damien Hirst (b. 1965)  
Mixed media, 69×46cm  
© Damien Hirst  
All rights reserved, DACS 2010

In all, Daskalopoulos has over 400 works in his collection, some of which will be on view at the Whitechapel Gallery's exhibition opening this month, 'Keeping It Real: An Exhibition in 4 Acts', curated by Achim Borchardt-Hume. Part one is a themed selection entitled 'The Corporeal', and it is clear to see why, because what stands out most about Daskalopoulos's collection is a particular focus on artists whose work is visceral and centred on the body. Works here include Louise Bourgeois's phallic sculpture, *Fillette (Sweeter Version)*, 1968–99 (Fig. 3). There is Robert Gober's sculpted midriff designed to look like a sack, *Untitled*, 1991, made from beeswax with human hair; Sarah Lucas's surreal stuffed stockings, originally a part of her 1997 *Bunny Gets Snookered* installation (Fig. 6); a piece by Paul Thek – a 'recent discovery' for Daskalopoulos – called *Meat Cable* (1969); and lastly, Marcel Duchamp's iconic ready-made of the urinal, *Fountain* (1917/1964; Fig. 5).

'The body,' explains Daskalopoulos, 'is the carrier of our existence for this finite period. And what fascinates me about the human being is our finite nature, that which knows its limitations and its definite death. Despite that, we have so much creativity, and a willingness to influence things around us and to make and enjoy beautiful things.' Here, again, are echoes of Kazantzakis and his emotive concept of the 'luminous interval'. Daskalopoulos sees the artist as embodying 'the luminous part of our dark side' – the ones who see what we perhaps cannot. And the sense of the visceral is important for Daskalopoulos too. It is a thread that runs through his collection, he says, that 'has been there right from the beginning of my collecting, so...it's part of my "self".'

In this respect, Daskalopoulos differs from those collectors who often go for flashy 'brand' artists – he has 'never [been] interested' in discovering the next Jeff Koons or Damien Hirst. Instead, it is clear that he has thought about and reflected upon whether the work fits into his personal aesthetic, using a criterion that is primarily philosophical: 'It's about how I feel an artwork expresses a deeper questioning or a deeper expression of this



2

marvel that is the human being, this struggle to survive...the essence of the finite aspect of the human being.'

Daskalopoulos is currently pondering whether Joseph Beuys makes sense in the context of his collection as it now stands. He has, with the help of his assistants and advisors, been researching 'very carefully and deeply' into Beuys's works. He will follow his gut instinct, which he describes as a feeling that is 'something inner...in my stomach, or in my head, that is very clear to me.' He then likes to 'sleep over a work for one night at least' to gauge his reaction to it in the morning – a process that he says has been likewise very useful in his business activities. At the moment, his instinct tells him that Beuys is 'probably an artist that one should leave uncollected...He's an artist you cannot express in two or three works.'

All this soul-searching is a world away from Daskalopoulos's day job as a business entrepreneur. Born in Athens in 1957, from 1983 he grew Vivartia into Greece's largest food company, with 13,000 employees in 29 countries, before selling the business in 2007.



3



4

He is now Chairman of DAMMA Holdings SA, a financial services and investment company, and sits on various boards including the National Bank of Greece. He is also on the board of Trustees of the Guggenheim Foundation and is involved in the New Museum, New York, and the Tate International Council. While many of his contemporaries in Greece may remain unaware of the scale and scope of his art collecting, he is already an established figure in the global art world. Yet for all his influence he remains flattered to have been asked to show his collection at the Whitechapel.

But how did he get this passion for art? His father, he says, had 'nothing to do with art', was always working and had 'no hobbies'. But Daskalopoulos did have two 'enlightened uncles', who introduced him to culture first through music and then, in 1969, on a trip – his 'first venture' outside Greece – to Munich and Vienna. There they toured the galleries and went to concerts. 'I found myself mesmerised in front of the Rubens paintings at the Alte Pinakothek,' he says. 'I remember it very strongly because art is not necessarily

a priority when you are 12 years old.' The experience clearly had a lasting impression. Several years ago, when Daskalopoulos returned to Munich, this time to see an exhibition of Paul McCarthy at the Haus der Kunst, he returned to the Alte Pinakothek to see the paintings again that had so moved him as a child. 'I needed to go to see how I felt after 30 years of being a contemporary art collector,' he explains. He was not disappointed: 'I sat on the same bench as I had done as a boy. Not only was I moved

**'The body is the carrier of our existence for this finite period'**

- 3 *Fillette (Sweeter Version)* 1968–99  
Louise Bourgeois (b. 1911)  
Latex over plaster, hanging piece  
59.6×26.6×19.6cm  
© Louise Bourgeois  
Photo: Adam Rzepka
- 4 View of Dimitris Daskalopoulos's office, showing *Untitled*, 2008, by Guyton Walker. To the left is *The Fortune Teller*, 1998, by Maro Michalakakos, and on the wall is *Caribou Skull*, 2006, by Sherrie Levine
- 5 *Fountain*, 1917  
Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968)  
(replica, 1964)  
Glaze cast ceramic urinal with black paint, 35.6×49.1×62.6cm  
© ADAGP Paris-OSDEETE Athens 2010  
Photo: Sotheby's Images



5

by the paintings again, but I bought little postcards of the works and gave them out to my team with a little note saying: "Be humble".

Just what Daskalopoulos's staff think about his enthusiasm for art is unclear, though he has occasionally overheard the odd remark along the lines of, 'Is it art?' Perhaps they were referring to Nikos Kessanlis's *Geste* (1961), a sculpture by the underrated (in international terms) late Greek artist made from cloth and the metal casing of a toilet flusher – a work that predates the Arte Povera aesthetic.

His passion for collecting began, he says, when he bought a 'very cheap' statue while travelling in Thailand as a teenager. This was the moment when he got his 'first really strong feeling about an artwork' – so much so that he couldn't bring himself to stuff the statue into his suitcase, deciding instead to carry it around with him for the rest of the journey. He went on to collect small items such as 18th-century pipes from Italy and Greek paintings from the 1950s, but his serious collecting in contemporary art didn't begin until the early 1990s. The watershed moment – when he realised that his collection was

- 6 *Bunny Gets Snookered #10*, 1997  
Sarah Lucas (b. 1962)  
Tan tights, red stockings, chair, steel clamp, kapok and wire, 104×71×89cm  
© Sarah Lucas  
Sadie Coles HQ, London
- 7 Dimitris Daskalopoulos in his office, pictured with (from left to right) *Untitled (Everything So Alive Lively Living)*, 2006, by Jim Hodges, *Untitled*, 2007, by Gelitin, and *Untitled (from the series Krieg Boese Wicked)* by Marlin Kippenberger, 1991



6

getting 'serious' – occurred when he purchased Duchamp's *Fountain*. The auction had been held in New York and he had bid over the phone from Athens at 2am; 'I looked up at the stars,' he remembers, 'and had a great feeling that I had made the right decision.' Not only had he bought a work that engendered a lot of the thinking that formed the premise of contemporary art, but he was also poised to 'go deeper into this quest that I have'.

The quest has taken him on an extraordinary journey, resulting in a collection filled with energy and life. Daskalopoulos seems to enjoy the humour entrenched in the work of such maverick artists as John Bock and Martin Kippenberger (Fig. 7) – artists who have fun with their work. With Matthew Barney, he enjoys the fact that he does 'not understand at all' what the work is about, but notes that whenever he has met Barney he has admired 'those deep eyes where you can see behind that there's this world trying to manifest itself in a new way...and that's what you see manifested in the works.'

It is noticeable that Daskalopoulos's collection largely excludes painting. In its place, he has acquired large-scale works, including Mona Hatoum's *Current Disturbance* (1996), made from 228 metal cages and light bulbs (and which will be shown as part three of the Whitechapel exhibition); Thomas



7

Hirschhorn's *Cavemanman* (2002), a labyrinthine installation described by one commentator as 'a hybrid of a dorm room, Al-Qaeda cave, hermit's lair, philosophical nerve centre and subterranean beer-drinking hideout'; and Christoph Büchel's warehouse-sized installation, *Simply Botiful* (2007). Why is this? 'I feel that through the larger works, this essence of human existence, its grandness and its frailty, can be better expressed through scale,' he explains.

This is an interesting take on these pieces, some of which will hopefully come out of storage and be put on public display once Daskalopoulos's plans to set up a not-for-profit art institution based in Athens come to fruition. The institution will not only show works from his collection, but will also be 'as educational as can be', with a focus on interaction between artists, curators and the public (especially for younger visitors). Although he is as yet undecided on the

specifics, Daskalopoulos has been looking at other contemporary museum models and those that other collectors have used, and the project sounds promising. He explains his motives thus: 'I think here in Greece we are a little stuck in the achievements of our ancestors. Contemporary art can be very useful in putting our contemporaneity in context in the world in which we live today.' We have the chance to see what he means this month when part of his collection is unveiled in the Whitechapel Gallery exhibition. In the meantime, Daskalopoulos will, no doubt, be continuing in his quest to seek out new artists who inspire him. **A**

*Simon Grant is the editor of Tate Etc.*

*For information on visiting 'Keeping it Real' at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, telephone +44 (0)20 7522 7888 or visit [www.whitechapelgallery.org](http://www.whitechapelgallery.org)*