

Prime Minister's Speech

Press Conference D.Daskalopoulos Collection | April 13, 2022

Dear Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament,

Dear Minister of Culture and Sports,

Dear Dimitris,

Distinguished guests,

Undoubtedly, this is a very important day for our country, but also a great moment for the global world of contemporary art, as Dimitris Daskalopoulos announces the donation of a major part of his personal art collection to four important public museums, to four public cultural organizations. And as far as the donation he made to the National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens, I need to say that this is the largest donation ever made to the said organization.

Having had many discussions in the past with Dimitris about the present and future of his collection, I know first-hand how crucial this decision was, how much he thought about the different options he had and with how much difficulty and pleasure he stands here today announcing this majestic donation. And I use the term "difficulty" because the moment of the collector-guardian's separation from a work of art he owns is not a painless process. As I am convinced, Dimitris, that you still remember not only the exact moment you acquired these 350 works you are generously donating today but also the feelings that triggered their acquisition.

I would, therefore, call this collection a "kaleidoscope" of emotions, a lifetime journey, that you decided to share with abundant unselfishness with the four museums which gladly accept today this donation.

You said earlier - and rightly in my view - that the importance of this donation is that the private asset is thus transformed into a public good. But I do wonder if a work of art is ever really a private possession. Because a work of art by its nature, apart from the expression of the artist's emotions and quests, has the intrinsic characteristic that it should be shared, in my humble opinion, with as many people as possible.

Therefore, a private collection that limits such enjoyment and fulfillment to the owner and the few ones who may have access to it, could be potentially considered as a selfish act in the face of the essence of art.

An act that I dare say becomes even more selfish when many important art collections end up in warehouses and depots while their owners cannot admire them. And this is what quite often happens when art is converted from cultural commodity to market value. As far as you are concerned Dimitris, I sincerely believe this way of thinking was never part of who you are, and that's why you finally decided to donate your collection not to a single but to four different museums.

I want to make a special reference to the National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens. I want to thank the Minister of Culture, but especially I want to thank Katerina Gregos, the Artistic Director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens, for the great work she has done over the last two years.

And indeed, a major unfinished job is finally concluded as the National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens is now operating with dynamism, vision, exceptional ambition and a collection of 150 commendable works of art much thought should be given to make them more prominent.

But at the same time, new routes of cooperation with prestigious organizations such as the Guggenheim, the Tate Gallery and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago have been paved. And I firmly believe that this dialogue between major international cultural organizations, this ingenuity emerging through cultural synergies will open new doors and create new prospects for the National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens

And even expansion prospects in other venues. We stand today in a unique building, a property of the Hellenic Parliament. A space that will certainly leave an important artistic imprint. Dimitris already intends to exhibit in this exhibition hall a large part of the important works that will be donated to museums abroad. It will be a first-class opportunity for the residents of the city of Athens to immerse themselves in these works before they find their new permanent home abroad.

Finally, while extending once again my gratitude to Dimitris for this exceptionally generous gesture, I wish and hope that his act will be a new standard of achievement to be pursued by others. Greece has many important contemporary art collectors as well as major collectors who are deeply involved in other forms of artistic expression. And I really call on them to learn from this noble act and to reflect on the present and future of their collections.

And even to imagine these young people who will come for the first time and visit the National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens to explore an open space of culture which will subsequently enable them to unlock the portals to other quests, feelings and emotions. And it will be - as the Minister said - in practice what we all understand when we refer to the notion of art: a universal language of communication and solidarity that we so desperately need today.

Allow me to reiterate Dimitris, on behalf of the Greek government and I believe on behalf of the Greek people, those who love art, those who will learn to love art, especially modern art with its interpretation challenges and with the need to overcome old stereotypes, I sincerely hope that this decision of yours will find many followers. Once again, on behalf of the Greek government, we are grateful to you.

Thank you very much.