

Speech of Dimitris Daskalopoulos

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I am considered to be and often referred to as an important collector of contemporary art. But the word “collector”, in the sense it is mainly used/interpreted, does not represent me.

Though I have been collecting, it has never been as “an act of aggregating similar objects for the creation of the largest possible group” as it is defined in dictionaries, nor has it been for stowing away wealth or the creation of financial gain as it is popularly believed.

My interest in art has not been limited to the framework of building a collection. Its main characteristic has been the constant pursuit of being in touch with the beauty of art and the joy and fulfilment that this contact brings.

Therefore, I have enriched my life with innumerable visits to museums and art exhibitions, with travels, journeys and deviations to find myself close to important works of human creativity all around the world and to works of all eras of human history.

At the same time, I have chosen to be active in the art world in a manifold manner, with an open lending policy for exhibiting artworks, an extensive patronage of museums, exhibitions and artists, participation in museum Boards, sponsorship of curator positions, all culminating with the foundation and activity of NEON.

And as far as the artworks I have acquired for my collection are concerned, I have always considered myself more of a temporary caretaker than a proprietor.

-Because the artworks are the creations of an artist, so primarily and throughout time they belong to them.

-Because an artwork only exists when it is in discourse with the viewer. Its meanings are multiplied each time it is interpreted by a different viewer or provokes a feeling or a reaction to someone. Art takes its meaning and exerts its influence only through its interaction with the public.

This is why art needs communicants more than it needs proprietors.

Furthermore, I have always believed that the creation of a collection, in the sense of merely amassing artworks is not an end in itself.

When a collection has sufficiently expressed its essence, when its array of subjects and its spirit are evident, then it should stop expanding, since then the addition of artworks becomes a meaningless accumulation of objects.

My collection deals with the most elemental, diachronic and age-old issue of the human condition. It explores how the artists approach the human body as a source of creativity and the vessel of existential, social and ideological struggle

My collection has long now completed its assemblage and clearly communicates its message.

For this reason, I have long now ceased buying more works, thus relinquishing the role of collector.

In addition, I have constantly cogitated over the future of the collection and the prospects of these creations over time. I believe that collectors bear a responsibility towards the artworks and their artists: they are

beholden to attend to the future of the collection with the same care and attention they dedicated in creating it.

It is this mindset and this predilection then that find their natural outcome in the decision to gift the better part of my collection to public organizations, that is to important contemporary art museums around the world.

The collection contains important artworks by the most notable artists of international artistic creativity of the last 40 years. Consequently, it is imperative for the works to remain accessible to the international public, to be appraised throughout the years for their artistic value and to remain in dialogue with the art of the future.

Public museums -more so than private museums and institutions- are the most appropriate organizations to fulfill these goals, because:

- As integral elements/components of the public service of culture, they have a guaranteed existence in time.
- Their main mission is the exhibition of artworks to as wide an audience as possible.
- They possess the expertise to interpret and employ the narrative of the collection and to appraise the importance of each work.
- They have the infrastructure and the technical proficiency to handle the storage and conservation of the artworks.
- They can put the artworks in conversation with their existing collections and keep them in dialogue with the art of the future.

Thus, I announce today that (over 350) works from the collection are being gifted to the following organizations: National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens (EMST) (Greece). S.R.Guggenheim Foundation and Museum of Contemporary Art MCA Chicago (USA) (jointly). Tate (UK).

Approximately 110 artworks in each case are intended for the two international gifts and approximately 140 artworks are gifted to EMST.

The criteria for the choice of the museums as recipients of the gift are their ability to meet the aforementioned principles, their organization and financial solvency, the status and history of each institution, their number of visitors and social media followers and the personal assessments of the donor.

The allocation of the artworks between the recipients was conducted taking also into consideration the content of their existing collection.

All museums immediately recognized the importance of the gift and have accepted it with enthusiasm and appreciation, not only because of the significance of the works, but also for its significant contribution in enriching their own collections. The acceptance of the gift was recently ratified by the museums' boards. The international museums have congregated teams, which have produced a medium-term program to capitalize on the gift, that includes exhibitions, digital media exposure, publications, educational initiatives, curatorial exchanges and international collaborations.

These actions are the subject of a Memorandum of Understanding, which depicts the shared enthusiasm for the utilization of the gift in benefit of the public, but also envisages a creative process of exhibition and educational initiatives which will constantly enrich the museums' programming over time.

At a point in history where we are again exposed to the dark side of human nature and its destructive capabilities,

When the global institutions and the universal principles that we considered well-established are being tested,

It is, now more than ever, necessary to highlight the fact that the dominant human condition is the drive towards freedom, creativity and optimism.

And where is this condition more apparent than in art?

It is therefore now vital to advocate for the timelessness and the value of art.

I hope that this act of mine that enhances the dissemination of artistic ideas to a diverse international public will be a fitting gesture in this direction.

It is with sadness that I part with this creation that has absorbed an important part of my own creativity and has granted me with unique opportunities of psychological and mental elevation in the last 30 years.

It is with pleasure that I endow this creation to the international art loving public. This collection of important artistic creations deserves to inspire and touch as wide an audience as possible in the future.

For me, there has never been any other perspective than the transformation of my private collection into a resource for public benefit. I am delighted to be in the position today to realize my conviction.

I thank you, Mr Prime Minister, Mr President of the Hellenic Parliament, Madame Minister, Mr Ambassador, dear friends, dear artists and dear Directors who with your presence endorse this act of mine and honour me personally.