

Georgia Kotretsos: First things first, may you please introduce us to the Vandaloop Collective; then discuss the connection between Chaosmos and the Freigeist Verlag publishing house in Berlin; how does it all relate to gold and to the formation of Chaosmos?

CHAOSMOS: We could describe our story like a little fairy tale: three friends met in Berlin to create a contemporary oracle in the catacombs of communist ruins. Inspired by the mushrooming of grassroots spaces in Athens – as the story goes – we later founded our own space Chaosmos in Exarcheia, both to build a contemporary temple and to host collateral events and festivals.

In 2018, we published the collective book ‘love & politics’ with our sister publisher Freigeist Verlag in Berlin, a great project which we expanded to a group exhibition and public program inside Chaosmos Athens. While spending day & night in the then semi-autonomous and culturally diverse district of Exarcheia, we were struck by the golden beer cans of a Greek brand which – paradoxically – were consumed by the poor and the excluded. Based on our research on alchemy, we decided to use empty golden beer cans as the base material of our site-specific large-scale installation *Trash Temple*, which formed the conceptual and physical framework of all following events until its closing with the rise of the pandemic in spring 2020.

In the new climate of the lockdown in Greece, we went infinite ∞ (‘apeiron’ in Greek), that is: understand Chaosmos as a virtual or conceptual space. In these months, we made film works, online talks and publications, DJ-sets and DJ-lectures, and organized an intercontinental online conference *Philosophy and Mysticism*. The future of Chaosmos remains to be seen.

GK: Two pivotal projects highlight your interests best 1. *Megastructures* and 2. *Trash Temple*. The latter has also been revisited more recently. Nonetheless, I cannot bypass your screening series on Tarkovsky’s mysticism and Jodorowsky’s cruelty. As I browse through your program – you seem to come across as hunters of *poetics* more than anything else. What are you after?

CHAOSMOS: *MEGASTRUCTURES* (2016) was a site-specific exhibition in the catacombs of a former GDR-building in East Berlin, including a 50m large-scale installation made of blue plastic bags. By interacting with this half-abandoned building (which is now demolished) we highlighted the issues of the local community, i.e. the demolition of such buildings in the whole alternative district to build luxury departments and commercial malls instead.

Taking inspiration from prehistoric rituals in caves, this exhibition connected myth and contemporary urban culture. Poetics and mysticism in caves – a disorientating feeling, but also condition for the process of self-questioning and revealing of an “answer” ultimately through the encounter with the “oracle” – was echoed in a contemporary environment. We thus invited the visitors to immerse into an ongoing process of becoming, transferred in today’s context so as to meet their contemporary oracle.

Trash Temple (2019) was a site-specific large-scale installation that was built collectively with golden, empty beer cans found and collected in the culturally diverse neighbourhood of Exarcheia in the centre of Athens. Initiated by the Vandaloop collective, it included collaborations with refugees and local squats, international artists and researchers.

This contemporary temple was co-created on the three upper floors of a business building, spanning over 200m². Used golden beer cans of a Greek brand provided the base material of large-scale installations: golden hybrids from inorganic to botanical, reptilian and bird-like creatures occupy the space, build gates and tunnels, climb up walls until the rooftop ...

The project was inspired by our research on mysticism, particularly alchemy. Most people think that alchemists were keen to get rich by making gold from minor metals, that alchemy was a pseudo-science which – according to a linear narrative of history – was thoroughly replaced by modern chemistry. What is fundamentally ignored, is the spiritual dimension of alchemy, namely the Magnum Opus as a spiritual quest

for beauty, i.e. a poetic process which – in our case – spans from the mundane level of trash found in the streets to the sacred zone of a temple.

Following its opening, *Trash Temple* became the venue of various events, from open talks or screenings to entire festivals. What most people did not realize is that – put this way – the original artwork is no longer an object but the space itself, blurring thus the boundaries and radically challenging the modernist ideology of the white cube. When revisiting *Trash Temple* at our online conference *Philosophy and Mysticism* in 2021, we noticed that global mysticism was a driving force throughout our past events – including those on Jodorowsky and Tarkovsky – and it still remains pivotal for the three of us. Although we love to explore the infinite possibilities of a conceptual space, the spaceship at some point has to go down to Earth again in order to become manifest in new temples and oases.

GK: On September 7th, 2017 the Smithsonian magazine published an article by Ben Panko entitled “The World’s Parasites Are Going Extinct. Here’s Why That’s a Bad Thing”. That, that we do not see with a naked eye, it does not mean it does not exist. In the case of earth's 7.7 million known species, up to half are parasitic. Allow me to rephrase the opening question of the article and address it to you today. What, if the art world’s parasites suddenly went extinct? What will we be left with?

CHAOSMOS: Let’s assume that the art world’s parasites were the grassroots spaces in the underground. We may then speak about a mainstream of high culture (institutions and commercial galleries) which is self-sufficient, and an underground which may survive only under the conditions of the former. But if the latter went extinct, there would no longer be experiments and novelties, so that the art world would repeat itself in a never ending loop.

All true novelties of culture rise from the underground and – put this way – the mainstream may be considered as the actual parasite, extracting new ideas from down below for more prestige and commercialization.

But this is also not the truth. In truth, the concept of the ‘parasite’ – in our opinion – is a Neo-Darwinist idea which favors competition over collaboration. This is to say that actually there are no parasites at all and that no instance would be wholly self-sufficient, except for the Absolute which, however, is not manifest: there are no parasites but only symbioses. While the underground brings forth novelty, the mainstream may provide support and adequate manifestations of unique ideas. Without this understanding of symbiosis – we believe – the whole art world will go extinct.

CHAOSMOS PEER RECOMMENDATION:
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