

Artist Defined.....

by Cheryl Kolak Dudek

"What else is the present if not a multi-layered structure made up of memory as well as intention and imagination." M. Lypiridou

".....philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts." Deleuze & Guattari (1991)

" 'Memory' labels a diverse set of cognitive capacities by which we retain information and reconstruct past experiences, usually for present purposes. Memory is one of the most important ways by which our histories animate our current actions and experiences." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (plato.stanford.edu 2010)

Defining consciousness is another way that an artist can mine their creative source. In Margarita Lypiridou's practice, it may well be her primary process. She strives for, and achieves, a heightened self-awareness thru reflection, and by tracing experiential links for analysis and comparison. Repeating motifs, found throughout her artist books, paintings, prints and videos, are cross-referenced and re-contextualized to accumulate meaning and create hyper-textual pictorial narratives. Her project is an autobiographical and philosophical exploration; an existential pictorial narrative created thru and by her experiential filters.

Artist Books: Aesthetics, Memory and Culture.

It is in Lypiridou's artist books that we see her exuberance for materiality and a reverence for our collective histories. More visual object than manuscript, Margarita's elaborate, labor-intensive book constructions reference the portable sculptures, miniature altars and reliquary containers of the Middle Ages. A small 8th c carved Carolingian votive, or a miniature ivory 14th c French Gothic altar, inspires contemplation and delivers its narrative message thru an intimacy of scale and portability, all attributes that describe Margarita's bookworks. Compared to contemporary, commercially printed books that still have the cache of communicating a manuscript, Margarita's

artist books are experiential vessels for aesthetic texts. She has been working with book forms for almost a decade, and her explorations of the scroll, codex, container and sculptural object mirrors the ancient cross-cultural development of the book. *Earth Book (2001)*, *Low Tide (2001)*, and *Impressions (2002)* are books as collection and painted narration, like ancient Egyptian papyrus scrolls and early codex. *Vertigo (2002)* is pivotal in that it is a multi-paneled painting that can fold flat or stand, like a miniature Asian screen. The book form, and its value for all humans who have had pictorial and written language as a means of expression, is in itself a cultural text that has engaged Lypiridou from the beginning.

Pain and Joy (2003) is a black wooden reliquary box. It holds a collection of objects including a bookwork covered with a plaster cast of Margarita's handprint, her first person narrative of being forced to write with her right hand as a child, and photos. The references for archiving a cast of her own handprint in the custom of a sacred relic could well suggest Lypiridou's disconnection between personal and cultural practices. On one level, a handprint refers to the primal gesture made when one first encounters mud or clay. The themes of innocence and memory are critical in Lypiridou's oeuvre, and here she links them with personal creativity in juxtaposition to authority. *The Plethora of Horrors (2006)* is a portable altar. However in Margarita's construction, the crucifixion (one of the most violent Christian images) is replaced by an iridescent ruin of miniature dolls, flanked right and left by symmetrical panels of flying white origami planes, contrasting all in black grounds. Margarita exchanged the religious signifiers with toys so that they simultaneously refer to lost innocence, sacred authority, death and war.

Media and the Artist's Book: Documentation, Exchange and Transformation.

While print and electronics are technologically driven media for mass communication, Margarita Lypiridou's focus is on the use of media to document, exchange and transform her imagery. Experienced as a professional designer and photographer, she has been using digital imagery with traditional print processes since 2003. By 2004, she was mixing digitally manipulated photos, traditional print processes and mixed media in both editioned and unique artist books. Like *Vertigo (2002)*, *In Transit (2007)* and *Home Within, versions I, II, & III (2006)* are all examples of artist books in the form of multi-paneled freestanding sculptural objects. Perhaps

more significantly, *InTransit* and the *Home Within* series are examples of a convergence of digital imaging and print processes complete with the incorporation of video images. Video and still cameras are tools for documentation, and Margarita uses them to facilitate sequential multi-perspective imagery. Toys, water, origami boats, marbles, and her hands are all recurring subjects that are manipulated and transformed in the *Home Within* series. The media translations, overlays and exchanges enabled Margarita's desire to image movement and the temporal.

During the summer of 2007, uncontrolled fires raged in the Western US and Greece, near Margarita's family home where she was visiting at the time. *Remnants (2007)* was created out of her impulse to understand a catastrophic event. In contrast to the extensive global media coverage, Margarita documented the aftermath of burnt trees and ground in a video, print series and books. Historically and culturally, fire is a loaded image. Fire is associated with both the destructive fires of Hades, as well as the creative fires of energy and passion, in Greek philosophy. Margarita's work demonstrates the dualities of fire that have made it so emblematic in mythology and religion. Each form of *Remnants* expresses a different aspect, and ideally they should all be exhibited together. The video is a tight shot of fire that reads as cascading and shimmering red verticals in opposition to the horizontal, landscape format of her corresponding multi-paneled print series. For the video, she composed a sound track of asymmetrical notes that parallels the asymmetrical placement and irregular widths of red vertical panels in her multi-paneled print also titled *Remnants*. The heat of the color red, in both the video and panels, contrasts to the charred grey trees. Their skeletal structures reveal the effects of fire and look vaguely like expressionistic Chinese pen and ink drawings. Symmetry imparts harmony through balance as in Greek and Federal architecture, while asymmetry suggests the incomplete, the continuous, and the infinite. Both symmetrical and asymmetrical structures can be found in nature, supporting Margarita's poetic observations on the fluid and ephemeral nature of fire.

Geometry and Representation.

A smaller freestanding art book titled *Remnants On the Shore (2007)*, adds textual elements from philosophy and Mathematics to the construction of meaning in the *Remnants* series. Lypiridou made photographs of ashes and debris washing ashore that were mounted on freestanding

triangular pillars. Plato associated fire with the tetrahedron, formed by four triangular faces, three of which meet at each vertex (*Timaeus* 350 BC). In Plato's schema, this makes fire the element with the smallest number of sides, which he regarded as appropriate because the heat of fire is sharp and stabbing like a tetrahedron. Margarita layered her references to Plato by tying strings around the standing triangular vertical structures in a mesh of triangles and other pointed shapes. Contemporary computational meshes, a standard technique for rendering the virtual in computer graphics for decades, are referentially linked to Margarita's fragile white string mesh and Plato's philosophical concepts in a circuitous and autobiographical narrative. Moreover, hyper-textually referencing mathematics (imaging the virtual thru computation), philosophy (Plato's concepts on the nature of the world), fire as a metaphor (religion, Plato), with personal narratives (home and family) opens interpretations of the work to questions about existence, order and the eternal.

Boat Structures (2006), predating *Remnants* by one year, demonstrates Margarita's in-depth exploration of geometry as representation. *Boat Structures* is a print series depicting four sculptures that do not exist in the real world and are completely virtual, computational representations. An origami boat was documented using photography, and then deconstructed and reconstructed using a computer to create a series of mysterious asymmetric and idiosyncratic geometric structures. They are confounding images of a construction that is familiar yet distinctly different, round but not a circle, cohesive but disjointed, sharp yet fragile, too technical to be organic, and too improvised to be high tech. Ancient cultures used geometric motifs to represent the spiritual. In *Boat Structures*, Margarita's geometric fictions become a metaphorical and philosophical riddle.

The Cycladic Figure: Philosophy/Culture/Aesthetics.

Lipiridou's work has come full circle from her early red, blue and purple figurative paintings to the current media saturated life size images of people. Her paintings and artist books, *Vertigo* (2002), *En-trophy/Transformation*, versions *I and II* (2003), *Fugitive Figures* (2003) and *Red* (2003), all contain stylized figures provocatively reminiscent of Cycladic figures from the Greek islands. Cycladic figurines are artifacts of great mystery and, like clay pre-Columbian fertility figures from South America, or Greek Kouros, we can only speculate on their true cultural

meaning. Traces of red, purple and blue paint have been found on many of the white marble Cycladic figures, along with incised marks believed to represent geometric tattoos. Ninety-five percent of Cycladic figures are female, but unlike most ancient female representations, such as the voluptuous pre-Columbian fertility figures, Cycladic figures are slender geometric votive sculptures found in and near gravesites. Margarita's use of their aesthetic form is a multi-level reference that includes the Cycladic culture's belief systems, as well as a signifier for her Greek heritage. Thru their historical and aesthetic trace of form and color, Margarita's Cycladic-like figures signify the meaning of the original artifact in addition to new meanings when the form is re-contextualized in her contemporary works.

Temporality: The Figure Abstracted.

Lypiridou has returned to the use of the figure, almost exclusively, in her work of the past three years. The most radical change from her earlier figurative paintings is in the materiality of the image, which is now sourced from electronic media. There is a truism in "material matters," and Margarita is creatively exploring the new freedoms of image capture, scalability, flawless regenerations and image manipulation. All of the figures in her recent work are sourced from camera documentation for use in books, digital prints and video. The *In Transit*, *InTransit I and II* (2007) series, *Shadows* and *Untitled-Shadows* (2008), and *Vertical Time* (2009) are interrelated narrative depictions of humans and animals. Each image, or series of images, explores distinctly different psychological and philosophical gestures as pictorial narrative. We know from past practice that her primary use of the human form is as a signifier, but her human forms are now media saturated representations. People are documented thru photography or video or both, and then their images are technologically processed, more like "cooked", until their newly reduced and minimalized form has shed its specificity. Cycladic figurines are mysterious because we only have the sculptural artifact. Margarita's current figures are de-contextualized, reprocessed technological artifacts of minimal form.

What is familiar to those who know her work is that the abstracted human form remains a syncretism of material and textual references. A relationship between two groups of serial images is implied by their names *InTransit I*, featuring full length humans, and *InTransit II*,

which depicts variations of a thrusting woman's head and arms. Although *InTransit I* and *InTransit II* are both minimally detailed thru their computational reduction to dramatic contrasts, they are substantially different in effect because of the reversals of black and white between figures and their grounds. *Intransit II* is extremely intimate, while *Intransit I* is anonymous. The multiple figures from the *InTransit* series, the *Shadows* series and *Vertical Time (2009)* accumulatively document the passing of time by definition, but meaningfully with no specificity or context. The human forms from *InTransit I* are repeated in an artist's book, video and full-scale digital prints. It is the video that most effectively illustrates the contradictions of time and consciousness. The video is projected life size as a long slow motion image to purposefully make the viewer self-conscious about the passage of time.

Margarita's subject shifts to the consciousness of reality in *Shadows*, another reference to Plato's philosophy. The companion book, *Untitled-Shadows (2008)*, is a complex mix of book forms including the reliquary container, dioramas and scrolls. The floor of its presentation box, mirrored like a pool of water, reflects and reverses figures defined only by shadows and hot while light. The box contains a small multi-paneled book that repeats the isolated shadow shapes on one side and the shadows reversed into a hot while light surrounded by black on the opposite side. Throughout the recent work, Lypiridou locates her philosophical dialogue on the perceptions of illusion and reality in the abstracted figure. A minimalist and surreal form in her oeuvre, figures are either melting mirages on a hot horizon, mirrored reversals, electromagnetic visions or thermal targets read thru their body heat. Their ephemeral gestures are singularly revealed by shadows, and/or transformed by hot while light. More poignant and to the point, these images are rendered electronically in a transient medium that confirms impermanence and dissolution, bringing full circle Lypiridou's material and philosophical concerns.

Cheryl Kolak Dudek is professor of Print Media in the Studio Arts Department at Concordia University in Montreal. She is an artist and writer who specializes in articles about women artists who use technology. Dr. Kolak Dudek's prints are in numerous private and public collections including The Library of Congress, IBM, The Brooklyn Museum and the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou. Since 2001 she has been a research member of Hexagram: Institute for Research and Creation in Media Arts and Technologies in Montreal with a project for the analysis and generation of geometric patterns.