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Gagosian Athens Presents *Ruins and Fragments*

Bringing Together the Work of Three Generations of Local, Regional, and International Artists



Adriana Varejão, *Cuadrado Blanco (White Square)*, 2020, oil and plaster on canvas, 70 7/8 × 70 7/8 inches (180 × 180 cm) © Adriana Varejão. Photo: Vicente de Mello

I went in search of myself.
—Heraclitus, Fragment

We might be at the end of our Rome.
—Ed Ruscha

ATHENS, February 10, 2022—Gagosian is pleased to present a group exhibition that brings together richly varied works by international, regional, and local artists that reflect on the poetic power of ruins and fragments—in the city of Athens, a thriving contemporary metropolis charged with the traces of ancient histories. For some of these artists, this will be the first time that their work will be seen in Greece. *Ruins and Fragments* is organized by Louise Neri and Christina Papadopoulou.

Architecture, sculpture, and material culture in states either ruined or incomplete stimulate the mind to imagine what might have been, or could be, in the elusive human quest for certainty and completeness. Ed Ruscha is drawn to desolate and melancholy places, to voids both physical and spiritual. Throughout his career, he has found countless new ways to depict these landscapes with “no past—just what passes for a future.” In the *Metro Mattress* paintings (2015), working in acrylic on paper, he depicts derelict bedding and wrecked box springs, discarded on the streets of Los Angeles, isolated in empty white space. These unlikely characters slump and sag with age, their ribs

and stains attesting to the bare life they once supported. For Rena Papaspyrou, the city of Athens is a perpetual site of experimentation as well as the material and conceptual source of her art. In works such as *Image through Matter* and *Geography (Images through Matter)* (both 1981), she removed the cutaneous layer of wall segments and modified them with pencil or marker, reconstituting them as autonomous artworks that possess the visual complexity of maps or abstract paintings, wherein the viewer can discover images ingrained in surfaces by the actions of time.

For the *Brick Reliquaries* (2020), Theaster Gates experimented in his Chicago studio with the breaking point of clay. These elemental wall reliefs, made with raw bricks and manganese, were fired to a temperature far in excess of the usual limits. In the process, the material begins to buckle and collapse, its known properties transforming into the mysteries of heat-based sculpture. Finding alternative creative possibilities in the cast-offs of the studio, Cristina Iglesias builds schematic models from cardboard and other refuse, photographs them, and then scales the images up into haunting mental architectures silkscreened onto gleaming copper panels.

Most Greek philosophical texts as we know them today survive only as “fragments”—the collective term given to quotations preserved in later writings. Although these texts may constitute but a small proportion of the originals, their significance lies in their capacity to illustrate the more striking or novel aspects of their authors’ thoughts. In her latest series of “tile” paintings inspired by Mexico’s *talavera poblana* ceramics, Adriana Varejão ruminates on the relationships between cultures in Latin America, where Indigenous traditions intersect with the Spanish colonial and international modern. For *Cuadrato Blanco (White Square)* (2020), Varejão takes her motif not from a modern Suprematist masterpiece but from an ancient Indigenous Mexican vessel—trumping official history to reveal other obscured narratives from the margins. Maria Loizidou also turns to ancient vernacular traditions—in this instance, textiles from her native Cyprus—for inspiration, handweaving stainless-steel mesh into a weblike tissue draped over a cubic frame. She explores these woven structures further in *Pelage (Pelt)* (2019), a twenty-part drawing of textile fragments in various states of deconstruction, rendered in blood-red ink.

Embodying Robert Smithson’s concept of “ruins in reverse,” Sarah Sze’s poetically titled sculpture *Wider Than the Sky* (2021) is an eroded parabolic structure made up of many mirror-polished cast steel elements that absorb and refract the environment around them. A recent painting, *Pause to Let the First One Pass* (2021), shows Sze’s analog approach to the picture plane in a fleeting composition of part-images, paper scraps, and vivid drips and brushstrokes. In the installation *Corpo di pietra—rami (Body of Stones—Branches)* (2016/2021), Giuseppe Penone evokes the natural processes of growth and decay by exposing the vascular system of a sliced fragment of marble, and embedding in it cast bronze twigs, while Tatiana Trouvé reflects on human evolution and adaptation in a series of cast bronze cyborg sculptures that unite discordant objects—a string shopping bag, a furled projection screen and tripod, an electrical cord, and thistles. Hewn from polystyrene then cast in aluminum and sprayed in a radioactive color palette, Katharina Grosse’s untitled sculpture (2017) suggests a technological shard exhumed and sent back from some future civilization.

In the spirit of Smithson’s “nonsites,” Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige’s ongoing multipart *Unconformities* project (2014–) actively explores what the artists call “a missing interval in the geologic record of time.” *Time Capsules of the Site: Monesteraki (Athens), From 0 to 150 cm, From 150 cm to 300 cm, From 300 cm to 450 cm, From 450 cm to 600 cm* (2017), a series of geological cores preserved in resin, makes visible the actions of accumulation, displacement, and entropy that lie beneath the three cities of the artists’s personal imaginary: Beirut, Paris, and Athens. Recovered from construction sites that discard them after use, the cores register the temporal ruptures and geological movements—both natural and human-made—that form the palimpsest of history. This group of indoor earthworks is shown with the related *Trilogies* (2018–20)—descriptions of the cores, photographed, illustrated, and interpreted in collaboration with archeologists and scientific illustrators. Christodoulos Panayiotou is also directly inspired by the processes of excavation, documentation, restoration, and reburial that constitute the principles of archeology. For the series *Mauvaises Herbes* (2020), a continuation of his 2015 Venice Biennale national pavilion presentation, Panayiotou studied the mosaics of the archaeological site of Kourion, Cyprus, and the new surface that emerged with their reburial. Finding weeds growing among the mosaics, he described them in exquisite detail using the same tesserae of the ancient mosaics that lie beneath, thus incorporating living nature into a new archeological image.

No exhibition about ruins would be complete without a broken statue. In a typically iconoclastic gesture, Douglas Gordon made a black marble shadow replica of the Scottish National Gallery's statue of celebrated poet Robert Burns, smashed it, then placed the shards at the foot of the white marble original. A related work titled for the poet's nickname, *Wee Rabbie Burns* (2017), is presented in Athens for the first time, returning the poet to the scene of his reverie.

Opening February 4, the Benaki Museum of Greek Culture in Athens will present a group of Theaster Gates's recent clay *Vessels*, installed among the collection's storied archeological artifacts.

#RuinsandFragments

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22 Anapiron Polemou Street, Athens

Press

Gagosian

pressathens@gagosian.com

+30 210 36 40 215

Vasso Papagiannakopoulou

vassopap@icloud.com

+30 693 748 5660