

Interview with Lydia Chatziakovou / 15.7.2020

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Andrea Iten: Well, good morning, Lydia. It's very nice to have you here on Zoom and that you are coming into my studio and I would like to ask you some questions about magenta, curating and the future during Corona time. When you were last time here in Basel, you brought me espresso cups from Prague. And it was also your first time in Basel. Do you remember what you did in Prague and why you came here?

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Lydia Chatziakovou: Well, it's actually really interesting because for me, Prague was one of the last partners meetings of a project that we were doing then, [Artecitya](#) with Goethe Institute and with nine partners from around Europe. I went for practice for a partners meeting with those institutions. And a few months later, I knew I was coming to Basel for my first maybe series of workshops of a new project that we were starting called [LABattoir](#) that we did together with HyperWerk. It was really the two projects that actually are connected because the *Artecitya* kind of led to *LABattoir*. And for me, it was a moment where something was ending and something else was beginning. And when we chose those espresso cups together with Christos, my colleague in [ArtBOX](#) we knew that you had the habit of drinking sometimes also Greek coffee, and that the cups for Greek coffee are similar. And these were made by a really nice local artisan ceramicist. We thought it was nice, even not from Greece, but a present, a nice present from Prague.

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Andrea Iten: Yes, fine! Can I go a little bit deeper into *LABattoir*? That was really a special project. And we have to think now and later on, what made this project so innovative somehow or why was it needed in Thessaloniki?

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Lydia Chatziakovou: I don't know if it was generally innovative. But for the local circumstances, it was something very new - because ultimately what we tried to do with *LABattoir* acquirers and detains the mentality of people, mostly young creatives in the community at large. The creative communes in the community of the Thessaloniki. It was a project that focused on something we wanted to create a laboratory for applied creativity, let's say, bringing together young creatives and people from the area, the neighborhood around *LABattoir*, in order to empower them and give them new skills for the future. The two approaches were for social change as a practice that brings a permanent change into society through empowering the local communities and also work as invention. So new skills for the participants that would be able to transfer them then into something unique that they do and they can offer - not exactly offer to the market, but go to the market and define it through what they can do.

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Andrea Iten: Thanks a lot. That gives an overview. And so we go a little bit from Thessaloniki away to Basel and back to my studio. You look already as a part of the work. What evokes the installation with the photographs in you?

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Lydia Chatziakovou: Well we can see all these nice, beautiful ladies that you have in the

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background. They feel like members of a family, an extended family - these photos that hang in someone's living room, that you know that they are part of your family, but you've never met them. You've no idea who they are. And it's interesting to see it. I look at them and I realize that we usually think of the past in black and white only, we cannot imagine these people that we see in movies or photographs in color. Which is a really a weird thing, too, we only imagine black, white, grey, the shadows, the light, but not really the daily life, even though we know, of course, that they were in color and everything was in color. We develop this melancholic view of the past that it was more poetic in a way. And I think with the magenta there like you did, you just bring them to the present. Also, you make us imagine a new life for them.

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Andrea Iten: That's great, because, yes, what you said, it's also for me a little bit.

I look at them and then I think maybe they are relatives because I have some relatives they look a little bit like these from this time in my memory. But when I look at them more precisely, they are not. So they are like familiar and not. And relatives are not. And with the color. Yes, great. So as you can see now your cup you brought me as a present. It changed. How does that look for you now?

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Lydia Chatziakovou: It doesn't look like a cup in this sense because of the bright color. It looks really, really cool. I think it looks like grass or something. I don't know if it is lemon grass, the color you used, and I'm not sure I would use it as a couple anymore. Maybe I would use it. I would be glad if the little flower, something in green that would kind of overflow and take over the whole and hide the cup? I would turn it upside down and use it as a small pedestal for something.

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Andrea Iten: OK. I think about that. The installation was finished in the time of the first lockdown in Switzerland. How did Corona change your life personally in Thessaloniki?

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Lydia Chatziakovou: Well, it's changed everything in a way, and I think that nothing will go back as it was, otherwise it would be a bit stupid also for everybody to just want to go back. But because the pandemic could be used as a filter for us to think about what we're doing in general, practically it changed everything because we were in lockdown for a few months. We couldn't go out. I'm a very social person. I like being outdoors. It was really hard to stay at home for all those hours. And also transferring working at home. Of course, with all these teleconference technology, yes, it was easy to continue working with others. I mean, what we do is anyway mostly on the computer. So in theory, it could be anywhere. But being in the same place with people is really important for me and I don't feel the same, even with all of these technologies. We had to adapt the law to in our daily lives, we had to adapt a lot in the way we work. And we completely adapted the project [Common Lab](#) that we were just then starting because all our programming was for physical space and we couldn't do anything in physical space and we couldn't also wait for everything to be over. On the one hand, because we didn't know when it was gonna be over. On the other hand, because

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Common Lab that we do with partners would get an institute and other institutions is about creating a manual for social innovation through art in order to help communities that are in crisis. So you couldn't say, okay, we will not deal with this crisis at all now. We will just let it pass and then we will, you know, go back to business as usual. We had to do something. So we adapted a lot, both personally and in the work area.

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Andrea Iten: That was my next question, you have answered it already half. Looking towards an uncertain future for a strong local and global art world. What kind of structures are needed or visions or opinions?

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Lydia Chatziakovou: Well, this is a really tough focus and that is very hard to answer. So I don't have a specific answer right now, at least not yet. What we are currently doing with *Common Lab* is a new project *the state of the art* where we are trying to create a think tank with art practitioners from Greece and from abroad to think about the challenges that this pandemic has posed on the way we do things. Challenges all the way of producing or circulating, disseminating and seeing contemporary art. And an important aspect, I think, to realize that this pandemic didn't bring up new challenges. I think it is a kind of accelerated what was already underway. So a lot of artists, I think, have been thinking already before about the digital and the physical and what kind of experience they want to create for the public. What we need to take is at least for the next two months, a lot of venues like museums or concert halls are gonna be closed. And there is an urgent need for supporting the artists and the producers and everybody else who works in the artwork. This, I think, is a more urgent issue that is solved more or less in most of the countries by supporting the workers as in all financial economic sectors. In the long run, I think we want to focus on how what experiences we want to create and how we can bring this experience to the spectators, to the audience through maybe a mix of physical and digital means. We need to think about the use of technology in a more imaginative and creative way. And we need to think of new formats, maybe new financial models and new audiences, because in a sense, if we are talking about producing art that circulated through the Internet, then our audience suddenly becomes immense. This is scary on the one hand, but it may be also an opportunity. We just need to redefine the experiment a little bit and see what we are gaining and what we are losing.

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Andrea Iten: Right. Yes. And I think the same a little bit and these forms, we try like capturing in different ways and to transform them and give new directions, not new. You've probably also I see in the images. Old ways and put it together and mix it in new possibilities to go on furthermore. Now another subject I want to discuss with you. Can we talk about women in the artworlds? Do we need another approach from our side, caring what we want to achieve?

Lydia Chatziakovou: Well, I'm not sure I would associate women only with the act of caring. Surely, yes. Women are traditionally charged with this role and solely women labor, not only in the art world, but everywhere else in society, as professionals, as care givers is

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undervalued. It is not appreciated, however, that I would not identify women's role in the art world with the act of caring. I think that we could argue for a more feminist and therefore a more humanist approach. Again, I would say that the pandemic can't exist as a filter, an accelerator that revealed developed was a little under way, especially with the civil society, the civil rights movement. So I would like to say Black Lives Matter. I think it will not happen like that. If it were also for the pandemic at the same time. So I would go for a broader, more feminist, more humanist role. Women and men and everything else that exists in the spectrum could undertake.

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Andrea Iten: Yes, I agree. And on the other hand, with all these women's in my back, I have to say I agree with the caring rule that may be declaring ways, could also be like channels in going differently with things we really dear and want to have more in the focus and maybe we have or we find other ways to put it more in advance. And if I remember I have now a student doing her diploma and she's going to bring medications with her own car to different old people or in jail or wherever. And she tells me that she has very new approaches towards people now doing this "inbetween." And it's from her that the care thing changed into a very strong and direct contact in seeing very deeply in our society structures. So we have all these places and terms of categories where women and men and all the in-between of categories are like connected. But probably through the pandemic we will find or try out other ways also to implement things into the society. And therefore, we have been forced to do things that are also different somehow and my hope is that through other channels things are also different to achieve. Maybe the question in that way is a little bit less or black and white or women and men and those in power probably or that covers something that is another approach, or that changes things that are still the same: but something else.

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Lydia Chatziakovou: I think is maybe the approach to general has shifted to a more kind of care-ing strategies. I can think of [Jeanne van Heeswijk](#), the Dutch artist who is one of the leading figures in arts for social change. She has been talking about strategies of care for a long time before the pandemic given. And maybe we could take the example of a longer lasting approach to the issue. And now during the pandemic, I came across into another project that was called [Pirate Care](#), which is actually providing curriculum and a platform for people to have a compact education on specific issues that are related to the pandemic. But they're not only about the pandemic, they have given a broader information, or give like sorts of similar workshops that someone could do with a small group of people. So, again, I would say that it's time to rethink what we do. And in that sense, caring should come. Yes, maybe higher in the priorities.

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Andrea Iten: Yes. So now the Magenta question. What means the magenta color for you personally?

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Lydia Chatziakovou: There is a graphic designer community in Thessaloniki which is very

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strong. Some years ago they all, for some reason, started using a lot of Magenta in that time in what they did. Even some of the things that we did at *Artbox*, had the Magenta for a few years. It is a very strong graphic design associated color. And for me, it is just one of the CMYK is cyan, magenta, yellow and key for black colors for printing.

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Andrea Iten: OK, thanks. Now, at last the question, how do you interpret the term curating for your work or for a focus in intercultural relations?

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Lydia Chatziakovou: Well, curators in the contemporary art sense of the word have always taken the role of interpreting the artwork, of making creating new narratives or associations or connections between different works, different times, different geographical areas, different places. In that sense, saying that a cultural dialogue is always embedded in what we do as curators, even if it's not done deliberately or specifically for a certain concept or a certain exhibition. But it's at the center of what we do. We try to connect different things, different cultures, different concepts, and bring them closer to the public, interpret them and translate them in a sense.

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Andrea Iten: Thank you so much for answering so many questions. And it was really nice to have you here again in my studio. Now. You are among those who are saying where the cups should go on the wall. And it will stay and you are then more than a part, you are then an author.

00:18:59

Lydia Chatziakovou: Well, I would put it next to the one the top. The one with someone sitting on a table. No, one floor up. Yes.

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Andrea Iten: OK. That is the lady with a table and on the table she has something like a lyra. It's called "Zhitter", and she's playing music there and is looking very directly to you. And I think that's a good ending point of this music clinging wherever you are on the worldwide web.

Lydia Chatziakovou: Please put a small plant also for her in the cup. Something small and green, bright green.

Andrea Iten: OK. I will do it! Lydia, thank you very much for joining the speech.

Lydia Chatziakovou: Thank you. Thank you also for inviting me.

Andrea Iten: Bye bye. And have a good day. See you.