



Manolis Baboussis

I. Photography

Manolis Baboussis

(b. 1950, Athens) studied Architecture at the University of Florence (1968–1975), where he worked under the mentorship of Adolfo Natalini, a founding member of the Superstudio collective. In 1976, he attended the restoration programme of ICCROM in Rome and subsequently worked as an architect on projects for the Organisation of School Buildings in Greece.

Since 1973, Baboussis has developed an interdisciplinary artistic practice that encompasses photography, drawing, installation, projection, and text-based works. His work investigates environmental degradation, collective trauma, institutional structures, and the conditions of visibility in contemporary culture, bringing together poetic, social, and political dimensions.

In 2003, the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens presented Manolis Baboussis: Works 1973–2003, the first major retrospective survey of his photographic production. In 1999, he founded the Department of Photographic Studies at the Athens School of Fine Arts (ASFA), where he taught until 2013, playing a significant role in the development of photographic education and digital arts in Greece. As Vice Rector of ASFA, he conceived and oversaw the transformation of the School's parking area into a garden in 2011, creating a dialogue between landscape, ecology, and urban space.

Between 1994 and 2017, Baboussis maintained a close friendship and collaboration with Jannis Kounellis, contributing interpretative insights informed by his sustained visual engagement with the artist's work. His work has been exhibited widely in Greece and internationally, including at documenta 14, the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Rome, and MOMus in Thessaloniki. His works are held in important public and private collections. He lives and works in Athens and on the island of Kea, Greece.

Cover photo, Untitled , 2006, 150 x 150 cm

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Volterra, 1973-1974

Baboussis's "Volterra" series has been exhibited in various venues, including Galleria Zona in Florence (1975), the Photographic Center in Athens (1981), and the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST) in Athens (2003).

Manolis Baboussis's Volterra series commenced in 1973–1974 when, alongside fellow students from the Cherubini Conservatory and the Florence School of Architecture, he visited psychiatric hospitals in Volterra and Imola—vast complexes resembling entire cities. During these visits, they provided patients with improvised percussion instruments, facilitating a unique interaction. This initiative occurred during Italy's anti-psychiatric movement led by Franco Basaglia, highlighting its significance. Baboussis captured these experiences through frontal color photographs, predominantly devoid of human presence, at a time when black-and-white street photography was prevalent.

In a subsequent phase, Baboussis integrated this work into his architectural thesis under Professor Adolfo Natalini. Rather than designing a new structure, he proposed demolishing the existing psychiatric hospital buildings, preserving only an exterior wall of the patients' toilets as a monument to the past. This approach questioned the architect's role when experts deem certain institutions, like psychiatric hospitals or concentration camps, unnecessary.

Curator Barbara Polla reflects on this period in Manolis Baboussis, *The Garden*, 2022, noting that Baboussis, at just twenty years old, encountered the psychiatric asylum in Volterra—a pivotal experience that influenced his perspective on those labeled as "mad." This encounter marked the beginning of his artistic journey, focusing on themes of invisibility and societal marginalization.

Contemporary art historian and exhibition curator Daniela Palazzoli, in *Manolis Baboussis: Photographic Works 1973-2003*, emphasizes Baboussis's intent to reveal the invisible within a dematerialized world. She describes him as an "architect of the void," photographing asylum spaces that bear witness to everyday madness. His images, whether of empty spaces or human subjects, encapsulate both reality and thought, inviting viewers to engage deeply with the existence of the photographed subjects.





Volterra, 1973, photo, lambda c print,
mounted on aluminum, 125 x 180 cm
EMST, Collection



Photos from Votera action ,1973-1975

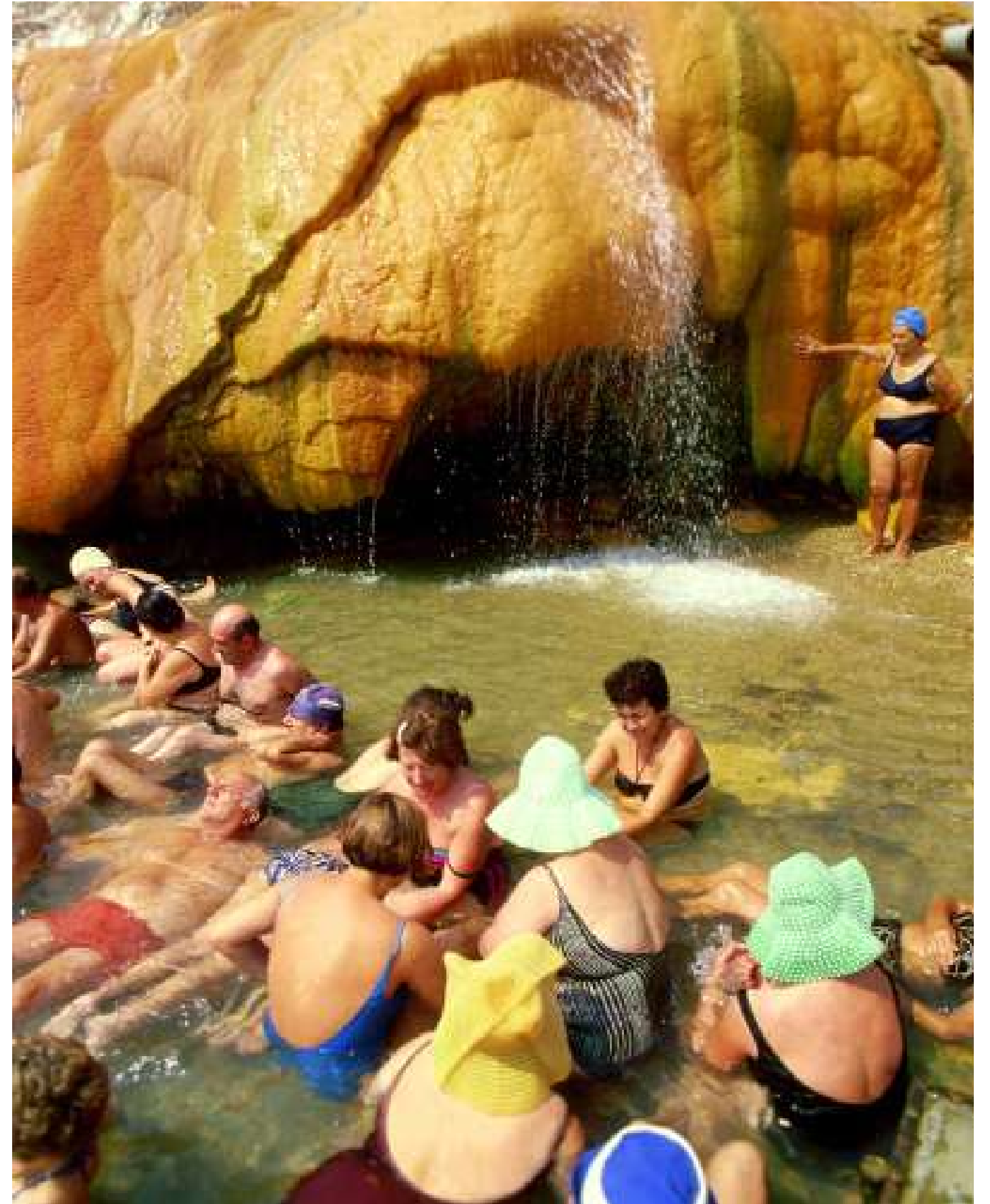


Ipiros 1976, color photo,
Christoforos Marinos, Collection

Aidipsos, 1985

Baboussis's "Aidipsos" series has been exhibited in House of Cyprus, Athens, 1987

Baboussis approaches the unique sculptural dimension, the color and the ritual of the thermal baths of Aidipsos. He discerns the dialogue between the different bodies and the rocks of singular beauty, decay, nature and time, healing and hope.





Athens, 1985-1996

“Athen’s Monuments”, Ileana Tounta, Center of Contemporary Art, Athens, 1997

Manolis Baboussis’s photographic series Athens, 1985-1996 offers a profound exploration of the city’s urban landscape during a transformative period. Captured through black-and-white analogue photography, Baboussis documents the wear and tear, constant mending, and perceived ‘sloppiness’ of Athens, juxtaposed with its unique charm resulting from non-intervention. This body of work critically examines the indifference, abandonment, and absurdity of human activity within the urban environment.

In 1996, Baboussis sought funding from the Ministry of Culture for his book Athens. However, officials viewed the project with apprehension, considering it defamatory, as it contradicted the prevailing political correctness that favored a Europeanized aesthetic and rationalization of the city. At a time when Athenian reality was often ignored in films, advertisements, and publications, Baboussis presented a city that its own inhabitants were rediscovering as if they were visitors. This perspective challenged conventional narratives and highlighted the city’s authentic, albeit neglected, character.

Reflecting on his work, Baboussis observed residents gazing at their own city, standing silently, bearing their own weight. Like immovable monuments, they served as critical spectators of their existence within a living museum characterized by irrational construction, destruction, deferred maintenance, abandonment, decay, absurdity, and indifference. He captured images of rooftops, pavilions, decaying trees, skeletal buildings, concrete structures, factories, and a now-demolished chimney in Piraeus—traces of destruction amidst ongoing urban life.

Curator Barbara Polla notes that Baboussis has consistently been a photographer of space and action, utilizing photography as a tool to document activities and convey presence—or the concept of presence—through depictions of empty spaces. His ambition to conceptualize the void invites spectators to engage thoughtfully with the absence and presence within urban settings. In his Athens series, the sparse human figures resemble statues or judges, embodying gravity and introspection.

These images not only demonstrate exceptional technical mastery of light but also offer an unflinching political analysis of the city’s deterioration, addressing what critic Apostolis Artinos describes as “the autistic stagnation of the Greek authorities and institutions regarding the evolution of the city.” This harmonious blend of form and symbolic content is emblematic of Baboussis’s work, allowing viewers to appreciate both the aesthetic beauty and the compelling message conveyed through his lens.

Through Athens, 1985-1996, Baboussis provides a candid portrayal of a city in flux, prompting reflection on urban decay, societal neglect, and the resilience of both the environment and its inhabitants.



*The architect’s award, 2003, photo, inkjet b/w print, 150 x 150 cm
EMST - National Museum of Contemporary Art, Collection*

Με μια φοβερή έκρηξη δόθηκε το βραβείο στον καλύτερο αρχιτέκτονα Ζενέτο. Κόψανε το κτίριο στη μέση. Η μία πλευρά του υπόλοιπου μισού το ντύσανε με πέτρα

With a huge explosion the prize was awarded to the best one architect Zenetos. They cut the building down the middle. One side of the remaining half was covered in stone



Pnika, Silver print 25 x 38 cm, Gerasimos Yiannopoulos Collection



Kavalas Ave, 1885, Silver print 25 x 38 cm, Gerasimos Yiannopoulos Collection





Waiting, 1989 - 1999

When I was working as an architect in a public technical service at the Organization of School Buildings, I observed the space around me: I saw half bodies, half faces, I heard half voices, and the rest was like radio interference. In the city, I saw only half the trees and the sky. We saw our half-life protected behind desks—shields, markers of a boundary within an unhomely environment. Once, I wanted to see my colleagues whole, on top of their desks.



INSTITUTIONS

Includes the works : Busto, 1997-1998, / secrets, 2000-2001, / The judgment, 2000-2020.

BUSTS

American sociologist Alvin Toffler analyzed in depth the transition from an industrial, materialistic society—obsessed with producing goods, objects, and images destined to circulate—to the new electronic, immaterial society. In his book *The Third Wave*, he profoundly examines the mechanisms of immaterialization in post-consumption society. He traces, for example, the evolution of money—from a medium of exchange during the barter system to currency, and now to multinational companies and a globalized economy. Coins and banknotes are becoming obsolete, replaced by credit cards and personal identification numbers that provide access to our accounts.

Notably, certain companies issue their own credit cards and conduct internal monetary transactions for their clients, effectively creating their own currency—a privilege once exclusive to the state.

While the world of global communication and entertainment offers comfort of all types and colors, a pervasive network of supervised and interconnected institutions has established a system of management and control that often escapes our perception and immediate attention, operating undisturbed to oversee almost everything.

It is difficult for a photographer to depict something as intangible as immaterialization. However, Baboussis's familiarity with the traces of the invisible has perhaps enabled him to find the end of the thread in this Babel of contradictory signals, where the most significant elements are often the least visible. To describe the evolution of this condition, Baboussis identifies a new symbol, a totem, with which we interact so frequently that we hardly notice it. This monument of our immaterialized daily life, in one of its most globalized forms in our everyday monetary transactions, is none other than the ATM (Automated Teller Machine).

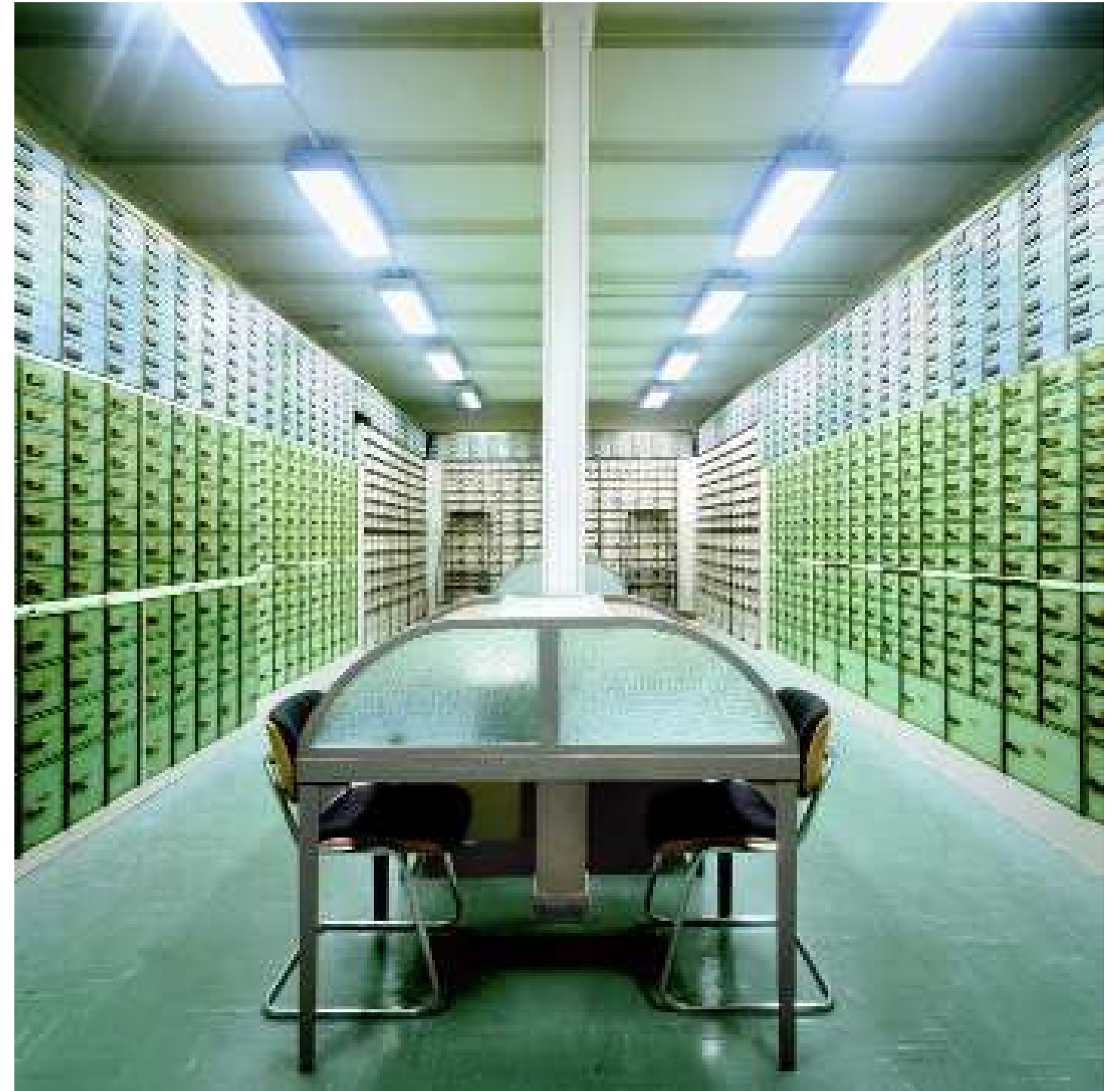
In 1997, Baboussis photographed, frontally and in color, the 'busts' of ATMs, which stand precisely at the intersection between the materialistic society of urban centers—those managing money—and the new mechanisms that exercise and control the global economy through electronic signals and pulses of bits. Practically, ATMs exist to provide a specific service: allowing people to access cash at any time without having to carry it, by entrusting it to the bank. Symbolically, behind the ATM lies the banking institution and global electronic control. In a world that has embraced globalization, human beings lose their identities as autonomous individuals and become digits, personal identification numbers, abstract entities.

By presenting ATMs—using them as visible reference points for an invisible process, away from the circulation of capital that envelops our financial lives 24 hours a day—Baboussis invites us to reflect on the reality in which we are immersed: a reality largely invisible and, therefore, challenging to capture on camera. True to his photographic style, he discovers a commonplace object, familiar to the average person, and selects it as both a natural reference point and a stimulus that could lead us all to broader reflections. He continues his exploration of the relationships that define financial and monetary value on one hand and invisible objects on the other, which are nevertheless considered precious, as they are hidden in the vaults of a bank's basement. Behind the metal shutters lie the objects each owner deems valuable.

If we compare the first images Baboussis captured in mental clinics with the more recent ones taken in bank basements, we realize they possess a perfect circularity. The forms of the institutions constitute the visual level. 'Value' is absent. The gaze leaps from the starting point and, as it is obstructed, returns toward the artist and ourselves: we gaze together with him. The gaze resumes exploring the visual level and finally turns inward to ponder what is missing here and what lies beyond this very image.

— Daniela Palazzoli, Contemporary Art Historian, Exhibition Curator









Busts, 1997 - 1999, installation, View,
EMST, Collection,
six photos lambda c print,
mounted on aluminum, 150 x 103 cm / each

Secrets and Judgement, 2000-2020

Exhibited at the Centro di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, La Spezia, 2006, and the Ileana Tounta Center of Contemporary Art, Athens, 2007.

“Safety deposit boxes are not in common view like ATMs. They contain carefully selected objects. In the photographs, they remain condensed indications of a ‘dead’ space where personal, precious secrets are deposited and enclosed. In the corridors of precious talismans, we see only numbers, and occasionally reliquaries.”

—Manolis Baboussis

“Organically contemporary with his time, Baboussis is a child of utopian architecture, anti-psychiatry, the denunciation of bureaucracy, penitentiary control, and the policing performed by classification and identification; he is a child of Deleuze, Castoriadis, and Foucault. Just as Foucault envisions, in the final lines of *The Order of Things*, the end of anthropocentric knowledge coming like a wave that passes over the sand and erases the face of man, so Baboussis’ photograph inscribes this movement and specifies it by erasing the outline of the ‘face’ to open up the space of its absence. The photograph now functions by erasing any face from the rhetoric of staging and the discourse of the choral arrangement.”

“To judge means to separate, to discriminate, to distinguish, to compare, to exclude, to decide; finally, to condemn, elect, reward. An activity that is part of the creative process itself.”

In the section on spaces of judgment, Baboussis photographs various empty meeting rooms: courtrooms, schools, senates, academies, rectorates, boards of trustees, ecclesiastical meetings, and parliament. These images document the decision-making centers of institutions, mapping a nervous system that forms the basis of a value system grounded in the dichotomies of right or wrong, good or bad, beautiful or ugly. It is the image of a space where morality is formally shaped, democracy is expressed, and freedom is preserved. Human presence is not implied, as in the case of the Volterra psychiatric clinics, but is indicated by the seats, benches, and microphones, corresponding to the severity of the photographs that completely deactivate these spaces and sever them from any possibility of narrative continuity.

Denys Zacharopoulos, Art Historian, Exhibition Curator



Untitled, 2006, 125 x 125ccn MOMus Collection



Untitled, 2003, photo, lambda c print, 170 x 225 cm.

Untitled, 2003, photo, lambda c print, 170 x 225 cm. kamara Collection



The Nature, 2000-2010

Athens School of Fine Arts, 2022 / Nikos Kessanlis Venue

Nature is disappearing, fragmented into symbolic, scattered relics. The waterfall turns into a fountain, the forest into a garden, animals into decorative elements. We are part of nature, we come from it. Nature is under threat. We are perpetrators and victims.



Untitled, 2004, photo, inkjet c print, 105 x 242 cm,, Yiannopoulos Collection







Skeletons, 2000-2009

Benaki Museum, Athens, 2010, Asfa 2022

“Whatever escapes from the object is also what rescues it, what traces it in the realm of the conceivable. It is on this constitutive folding of form that the nuclear truth of the object cannot be established, but only its enacted side, its ectopic reality, where Baboussis also crafts his critical discourse, in fact his de-obsession from the status quo.”

— Apostolis Artinos

Building skeletons stand awkwardly in the landscapes of Kea, exuding an identity of abandoned ruins that contradicts the supposed prospect of their structural completion. Architectural entities appear dead and eternal in time through their photography, failing to satisfy their latent functionality, emerging as traces of human presence in the natural landscape and as inglorious moments of the futility of architectural ambition.

Uncertain, unfinished, and absurd.

Unfinished, like the constructions that hang in the second room: large photographs of one of Greece’s most open wounds—concrete wounds. More precisely, concrete columns, future unfinished walls erected in the countryside, on the islands, everywhere. The goal is to be able to affirm that one has built, even if it is to never complete the construction nor to live in it. Once the roof is on, the building is indestructible and its existence is validated by the State.

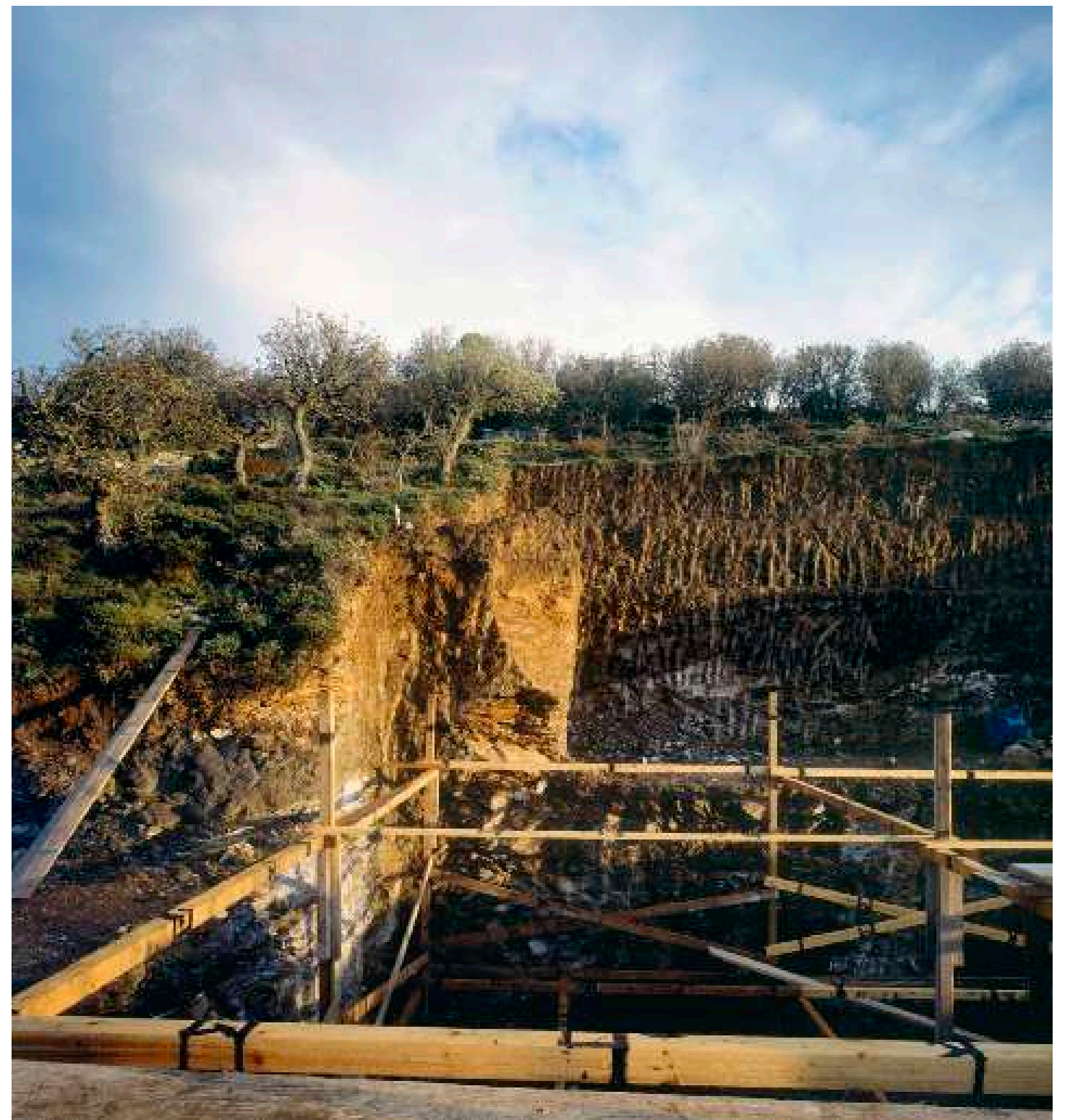
The aesthetic is impeccable. The reality is implacable: these constructions are skeletons before the flesh even exists (Squelettes, 2000–2010). Alone remains Baboussis’ Vitruvian Woman—a naked woman, body inverted, practicing yoga, in search of a meaning that is expected to come from elsewhere, but which, in reality, will never come because absurdity reigns here.

Baboussis’ photographs illustrate the permanent crisis situation in which Greece has found itself for decades: the loss of urban landmarks, the mourning of an ignored past, and the beauty of its remains. In doing so, they also highlight the functioning of the country’s institutions. “Being Greek,” for Baboussis, means “living in a country of great beauty and inaccuracy. Athens is a living museum of irrational constructions, of restorations indefinitely postponed, of wounds indefinitely repeated.” And of unfinished walls.

— Barbara Polla / Manolis Baboussis, “The Garden”, ASFA 2022











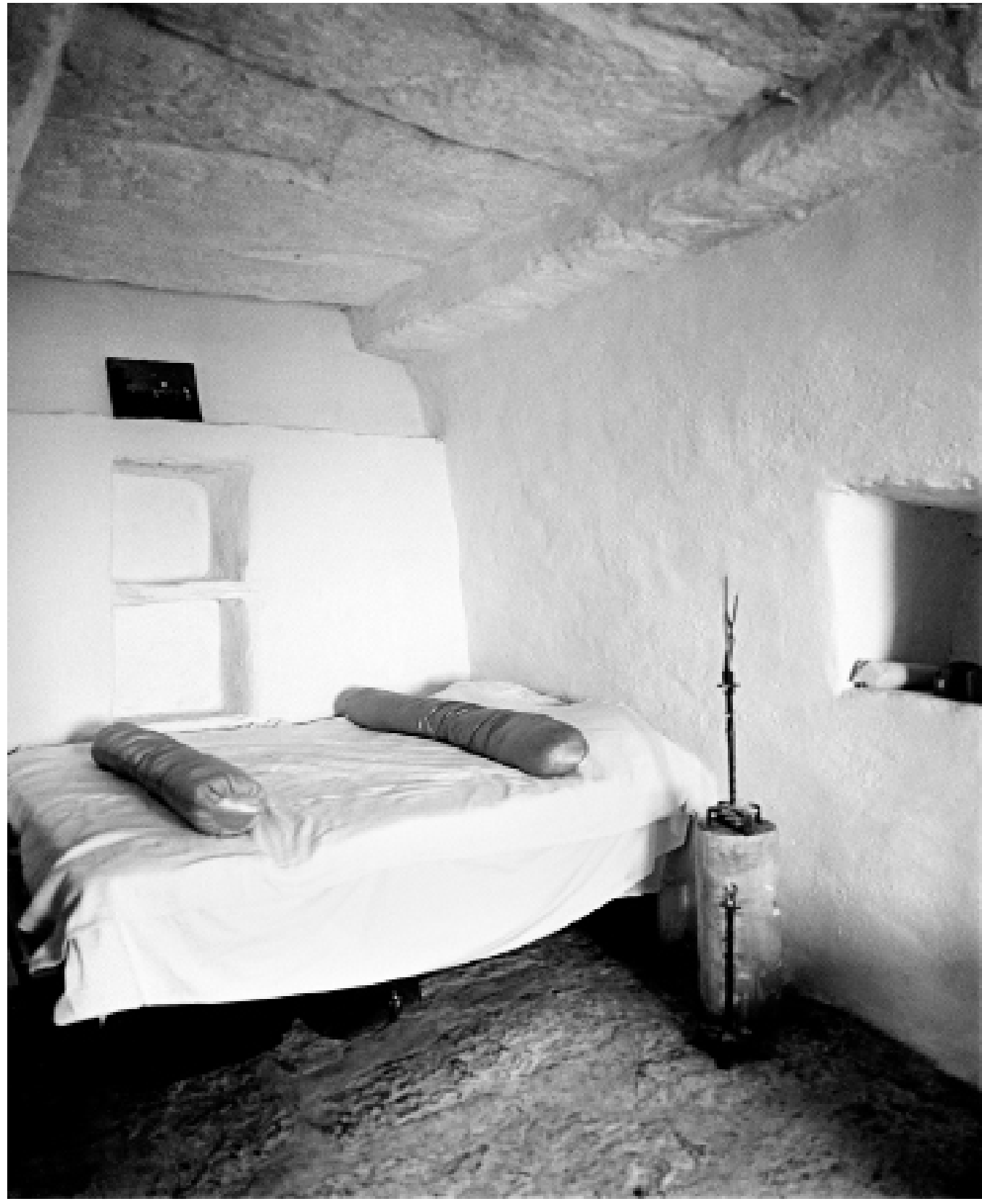


The kea project, 1990-2024

Economy: of water, construction, consumption

Coexistence: with infinite, minimal—
sea horizon, humble earth, bare sky

Alternation, loss: of untouched, minimal.





Accumulations, 2000-2008

Museo Camec, La Spezia

“Each photograph is suspended between the judgment already expressed by Baboussis and that of the beholder. A similar mechanism of experience in experience, of photography in photography, leads us successively and invites us to enter rather discordant places: hospitals, museums, schools, courtrooms, religious institutions, political headquarters, television studios, factories, visualizing the shell of actions rather than their protagonists. In addition, Baboussis tends to associate his images, even though they were created in different circumstances, beyond their themes—their subject matter and dates—achieving, through the short-circuiting of associations, a further rendering of meaning.”

— Bruno Corà, Artistic Director, Camec Museum

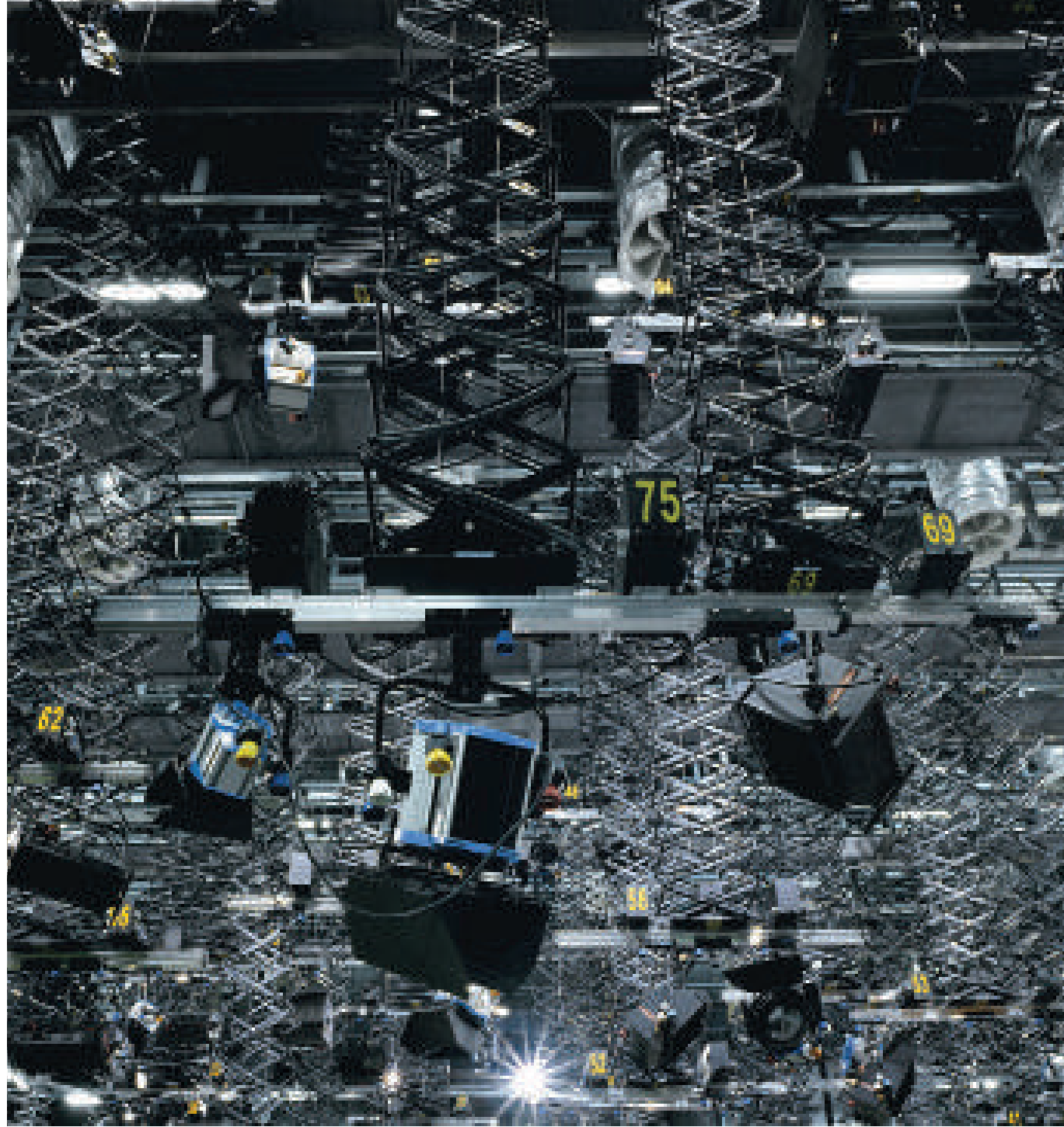
“Accumulation will become for the artist the sign of the times, the ultimate expression of a capitalist society in which the multitude has more to do with the concentration of power (of whatever kind) than with its distribution. From the abandoned archives in complete disarray and the absolute order of the bank vaults he would call Secrets to the crowded cemeteries and the empty amusement centers or the warehouse of motorcycle parts he would label as Squats, these photographs by Baboussis constitute a topology of futility. Manolis Baboussis, not coincidentally, will be intensively engaged in photographing spaces that constitute liminal points of encounter or socializing: waiting, stopping, or movement. He photographs waiting rooms, reception desks, ports with ships ready to welcome travelers, empty dining rooms, and offices. Space becomes a metaphysical void of social reality or a tragic landscape of absence.”

— Christopher Marinos, Art Historian, Curator





Untitled, 2005, Lambda print ,125X125, MOMus Collection





The World of Art, 2004-2026

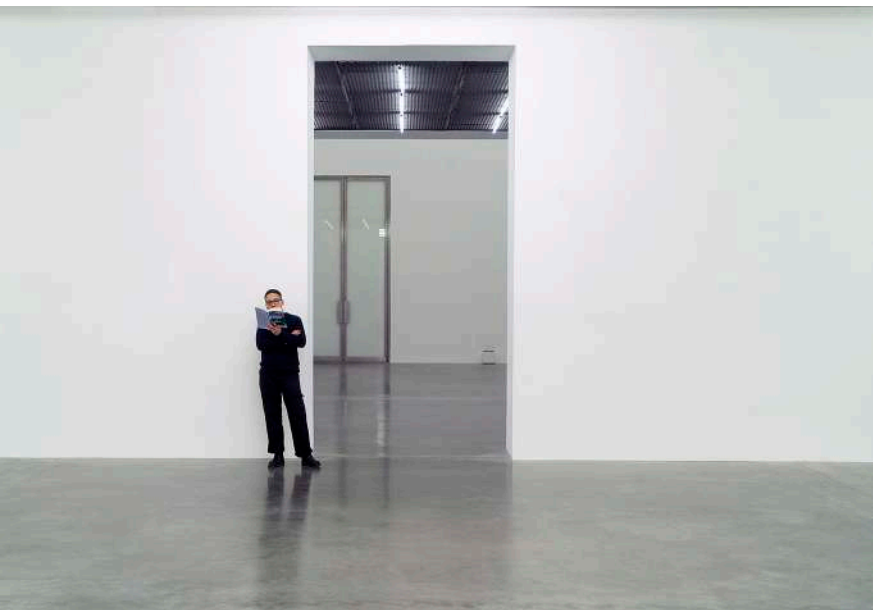
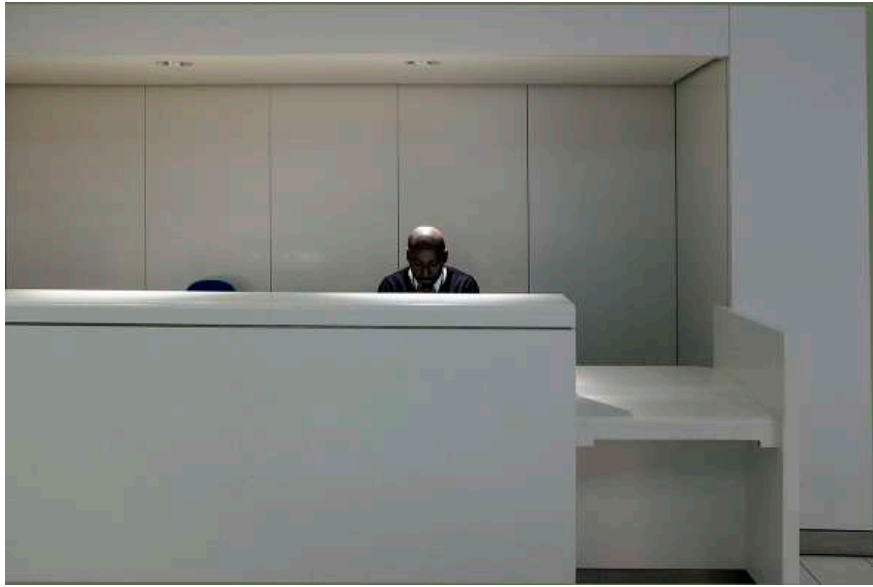
Athens School of Fine Arts, 2022 / Nikos Kessanlis Venue

Momus, Thessloniki, 2023

A large video projection of photographs from museums, galleries, artists' and collectors' homes, and opening dinners tells of another world called "the world of art," whose obsolescence the artist criticizes with derision yet tenderness. This video projection, like most of the photographer's videos, is a fluid slideshow of 180 photographs presented in chapters. It showcases meetings around artworks and spaces dedicated to art, as well as what art generates in terms of travel, sometimes fertile, sometimes perverted encounters, receptions, buffets, white tablecloths, disguises, and servants—all the extravagant human and material means that make art and its beauties circulate around the world.



Untitled, 2015,
photo / video projection,



Without, 2017 -2026,
photos and video -
projection

