

**YORGOS SAPOUNTZIS *Sculptures Cannot Eat*, 2017**

**Viva Arte Viva | Venice Biennale 2017, curated by Christine Macel**

In his installation *Sculptures Cannot Eat* (2017) Yorgos Sapountzis focuses on the potential and the significance of the human body in public space. In this multifaceted, extensive work of art, he weaves together past and present, interior and exterior space, the studio as the place of artistic production and the exhibition as the place where art is received. Vivid reciprocal relationships unfold between sculptures (bodies made of bronze) and bodies made of flesh and blood.

Sapountzis is known for his dynamic works in which performance, video, sound, and installation unite to form complex environments. The major elements of his very specific artistic vocabulary are colored textiles, aluminum poles and plates, plaster casts of sculptures, and preserve jars sealed in plaster, all of which he combines to produce consistently new kinds of temporary architecture.

Sculptural and quasi-architectural elements divide the space in the Arsenale where the installation is on display. Grid-like structures and reflective aluminum objects allow a variety of paths through the installation. Playing to a soundtrack composed by Øyvind Torvund, a video is projected onto a surface integrated into the installation.

The video's point of origin is the artist's studio, which becomes both a stage and a place for social interaction. In the performative workshop to which he has invited a group of friends, participants dress up, eat together, or are arranged into tableau-like scenes amid cloths of various colors. As is the case with his performances in public space, which often resemble processions, joint activity and the relationships created in the individual scenes are of major significance here.

Sapountzis incorporates the human body as a living subject into his work, along with public sculptures and monuments that represent the body. He sees monuments apart from their specific historical context, as part of a city's overall appearance, and he takes the liberty of approaching their bronze and stone bodies in an unconstrained, emotional way, integrating them into life and his art.

The scenes from *Sculptures Cannot Eat* created in the studio are edited together with footage of sculptures from parks around Sapountzis's studio in East Berlin, most of them nude male and female figures filmed at twilight. For the artist these sculptures are a kind of mirror reflecting the citizens of a country (East Germany) that no longer exists as such. His earlier pieces, such as *Forgotten Tactic* (2006), *Fast Cast Past* (2011), or *Die Arbeiter und die Badenden* (2013), also incorporated Berlin's figurative sculptures as protagonists.

In terms of content and form, the video and installation refer to each other, interlocking the studio and exhibition situations. Each of the installation's aluminum grids—lying on the floor, leaning on the wall, serving as movable walls and pictorial media—is the size of the main wall in Sapountzis's studio. The colorful fabrics the participants interact with in the performance become a motif for monotypes in the installation. The reproduction of the fabric is reminiscent of the actual event, while at the same time it refers to earlier pieces in

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which these textiles were the basic elements of construction—for instance in *Die Landschaften Griechenlands* (2014). The meal shared in the atelier has its counterpart in the preserve jars that are cast in plaster and scattered across the floor of the installation, as if they were notes for dance steps.

These jars also connect the two poles characteristic of the artist's work: the living, temporal, digesting body made of flesh and blood, and the memorial made for eternity out of hard, lifeless material. Eating, chewing, digesting—in Sapountzis's work this process has to do with form and the dissolution of form, and is therefore closely related to his own artistic practice.

Yorgos Sapountzis's work raises fundamental questions of how we deal with and how we come into contact with our surroundings, the past, and other people. In his work real physical experiences—such as touch, movement, and emotion, which require the actual presence of the participants—form a counterpoint to an increasingly digitalized, non-physical, and individualized world.