

CHRISTODOULOS PANAYIOTOU: ACT II – THE ISLAND

Review by Paul Carey-Kent
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While not billed as a retrospective, this show includes wholly new conceptions alongside recent and older examples of many of the streams of work which the Paris and Limassol-based Cypriot Christodoulos Panayiotou has developed over the past dozen years. The result is 40-odd works which typically look like simple found objects, but turn out to be largely tailor-made from charged materials, and so are complex in themselves as well as in their inter-relationships with each other and the space. Many connections might be made, but I was struck by how often Panayiotou reverses the usual conventions of what is concealed and what revealed, so undermining the established point and value of objects and systems. The titular work *Act II: The Island*, 2008, encapsulates this. What looks like a tablecloth or tapestry is folded on the floor. It is, in fact, a theatrical backdrop, the function of which is denied us. We are freed, though, to speculate on the nature of the island, and what parallels might be implied. Is this a disillusioned setting aside of narrative performance or of art more broadly? Is it a reference to Cyprus and Britain as islands with peculiar problems, neither being able to summon the clarity of purpose to solve divisive issues?

Untitled (5/10/20/50/100/200/500), 2016, consists of seven large monochrome canvases made from decommissioned and pulped euro banknotes, one 'painting' for each denomination. The abstract nature of money, normally concealed, is foregrounded. The somewhat washed out, pastel-tending results might be taken as undermining the rather masculine tradition of monochrome abstraction and critiquing the extent to which owning such work may already be less about aesthetics than about hanging money on the wall. An extra twist is provided by *Common Denominator*, 2017, a grey monochrome made from the same notes, all mixed. Might that be a demonstration of the underlying richness of a grey in which individual colours can still be discerned up close, or a comment on how the EU homogenises national cultures? You pay your money ... Speaking of which, for *Chiaroscuro*, 2018, Panayiotou has cast ingots from the coins fed into the mechanised lighting system which illuminates the famously dramatic darks of Caravaggio's *The Conversion*

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of *St Paul* in Rome. Light is, in a sense, captured by the flow of money which generates it.

Panayiotou engages very fully with the space of Camden Arts Centre. He has, for example, opened up areas not normally accessible to the public, removing – and visibly stacking – several doors to facilitate that. He takes visitors down a staff corridor to see the three-screen slide show *Never Land*, 2008, which on the one hand interrogates the image of Cyprus prior to its EU membership through 135 selections from its best-selling newspaper's archive of the 1990s, and on the other hand stands in for the artist's own memories of the circumstances which informed his development. A floor work pushes the contrast of covering and uncovering furthest. *Spoil Heap*, 2015, both hides and calls attention to the parquet floor in Gallery Three by laying another parquet floor on top of it – laboriously installed with handmade terracotta tiles produced using earth which has itself been removed from an excavation site in order to expose the antiquities beneath. In another twist on art history, whereas you can walk on a Carl Andre but it obviously isn't the floor, this actually is a floor – as well as a visibly irregular and handmade work of art.

What is usually the drawing studio looks empty, but a vase of flowers on its paint-stained table proves to be *Untitled (September, October, November, December, January ...)*, 2019. A fresh flower is placed in the vase daily from the start of each month, so that a mixture of the blooming and the withered accrues. Four alternate vases are unobtrusively lined up on a shelf, ready to take their turn in chronicling future months: a calendar of the exhibition as *Vanitas* in which it is the death of the flowers which is made the unorthodox centre of attention.

I have run out of space without even mentioning, for example, the 'pseudomorphs', jewellery made from mineralogical curiosities whose internal composition has changed under geological pressure; the long-running series of shoes made from the handbags of women in Panayiotou's life; or his abstract versions of gold icon paintings. That simple appearance as you walk in conceals - of course it does - a notably rich and complex show. My thoughts returned to politics as I left: Panayiotou's subtle thinking might be used as a didactic corrective to the crude and distorting sloganeering which currently prevails.