

Nemitsas Foundation Prize in Visual Arts

Artist Christodoulos Panayiotou was this year's winner of the Nemitsas Foundation Prize in Visual Arts. The President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr Nicos Anastasiades, presented him his award at the Nemitsas Foundation's 6th annual award ceremony on 8 October 2015.

The Foundation's Board of Directors reached the decision unanimously at its meeting on 18 July 2015.

Its reasoning: "The Nemitsas Prize 2015 is awarded to Christodoulos Panayiotou for his internationally recognised, wide-ranging achievements in Visual Arts, and specifically on the identification and uncovering of hidden narratives in visual records of time. His work is subtle and clever, touching on History, Archaeology and Politics. With his traces, fragments and manufactured objects, he is widely recognised for his success in telling stories and alluding to past events. His work has been presented in both solo and group exhibitions in prestigious centres of art worldwide".

Award winner, Laureate Christodoulos Panayiotou

I would like to talk about the syntax of success and the grammar of distinction. You see, it is with some unease that I am standing here before you. That is because through my art I always seek to discover, and therefore, reveal, the points that have not been manifested, the words that have not been spoken (at times because they cannot be uttered and at other times because they are not allowed to be heard). I am trying, after all, to uncover that which the absolute say of power levels, and what the dominant rituals repel. However, since whatever can be distinguished can



also be seen and can therefore be prioritised, distinction calls into question that valuable transparency which my own, parenthetical speech seeks to accomplish. I am using this sharp prefix "dis", as heavy as it may lie on words, separating people and their actions, prioritising everything in the sliding scale of good-better-excellent.

Distinction, though, is also, paradoxically enough, our ability to produce meaning. How else would it be possible for us to perceive passion, had we not been able to distinguish between infatuation and love? Without this analytical capability, Euripides could never have conceived the function of love and thus created the monster known as Medea. That would leave us all unable to identify with her, or even simply understand her, while distinguishing how close far away can be. Without the distinction between responsibility



President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr Nicos Anastasiades, addresses the ceremony



Nemitsas Foundation Prize in Visual Arts winner Christodoulos Panayiotou (fifth from left) and members of the Foundation's Board of Directors



President Nicos Anastasiades and First Lady Andri Anastasiades are welcomed by founders Takis and Louki Nemitsas

and morality, Sophocles could not have written *Antigone*, nor could we have been able to understand where power ends, where freedom begins and how these two come into conflict (in this case, let “sacrifice” be discerned as collateral damage).

Allow me to express a wish. Let’s imagine arbitrarily (superficially even) that ideas can be released from their CVs and that the character of this distinction aims merely to make us understand. Thus, it is with this distinction between distinction and distinction that I would like to accept the honour that is conferred on me today. As this applies solely to my ideas. Mr President, Ms Louki Nemitsas, Mr Takis Nemitsas, dear committee, thank you.

On the other hand, I am fonder of the word “success”, as here the “dis” that distinguishes, is replaced by a parasitical “in” (as in “successful in” or “succeed in”), even if I prefer parasites to words. You see, “in” is a parasite upon words, wearing them out, merely to emphasise their meaning. So here is another paradox, as I like to refer to the parasitism

of being in luck as my second point - which lies on the fact that I am “in luck” to have the support of an exceptional family, meaning my parents and my sister, as well as the constant companionship of exceptional friends who are here now, or of others who are unfortunately far away and of those friends who will always be far away - and of a wider community of imaginary and real fellow travellers who have helped me doubt the obvious and pursue a less absolute filter for approaching reality.

I acknowledge the limits of tradition within which I move – the tradition we have awkwardly and “timelessly” named “contemporary art”. I often hear about the difficulties of understanding the language that I have chosen to use alongside many others, a language that I think can be justifiably considered self-referential or even “self-consuming”. I will not speak as an apologist of contemporary art – I have never worshiped it anyway, I hate doctrines, I changed directions several times, as well as ideas, sensations and aesthetics – but I take this opportunity to explain exactly where I

believe its importance lies: it stands against the insecurity caused by the sense of the incomprehensible, as well as the convenience of the reasonable, and acknowledges the need to support complications. The world we live in is bewildering. So, I think that contemporary art is one of the most flexible rituals that help one understand the vicious circles of our time. Indeed, one could certainly say: “Yes, but isn’t precisely this very inclusiveness what allows so many misplaced incongruities?” I am not cynical, however I do believe that we must allow space for incongruity, as meaning cannot be realised without its opposite nor can

experimentation emerge without relaxation.

These are not glorious times we live in. On the contrary. We are going through tragic and painful processes so as to defeat once and for all the “glory” that we inherited through a series of rigidities and brutalities. If we ever succeed in that, the victory will certainly be important. Although we are now fifteen years into the 21st century, it seems that we are not done with the 20th yet, and the “glorious past” is one of the most dangerous links in our endless regression. Within this framework, “contemporary art” is still an admirable and



(Left to right) Artist Christodoulos Panayiotou, President Nicos Anastasiades and Takis Nemitsas



Nemitsas Prize winner, artist Christodoulos Panayiotou



The ceremony was attended by an array of distinguished guests

useful genealogy, parallel to the “glorious past” and its own history. Consider, for instance, the hopes pinned on the future by the movement of Futurism and all the desires of the other pioneering acts during that time. Avant-garde is by definition a parachronistic concept, as it is manifested in a given present as a reaction, projecting its contributions in the future. Now, a century later, we all know that this future never happened and it never will. Therefore, there is nothing left for us to do other than be done with it once and for all.

I despise nostalgia because it is nothing but a caricature of the past. In any country I have been to, in any society I have been over the past few years, from Asia to Europe and the Americas, I saw people being nostalgic of their “glorious past”, through a series of choices and misfires that placate and idealise the past. Thus, unlike the futurists and the nostalgics, I would rather focus all my thoughts on how to win both the present and the responsibility that we have in this present. I do not wish to sound pessimistic, quite the opposite. Pessimism is valid where there still remains

some fear that something may be lost, but now when everything is lost, there is nothing left for us to do but be optimistic. So I think that contemporary art can function dynamically in this charged field as it rests on memory and imagination, past and future, those two abstractions that the concept of “restoration” dangerously coordinates. I like to think that my work serves our responsibility to have a voice against “restoration”, to reconcile with the past and to capitulate, even now, with great delay, to the present.

Address by the President of the Republic, Mr Nicos Anastasiades

Politicians rarely express themselves on fine arts. I wish to be frank and honest. We rarely do so because it is a field with which, as a general rule, most of us have little affinity. Perhaps we are even intimidated by artists, due to the fact that they express themselves in a very different way to us. They express themselves through their work, which is sometimes allegorical, other times hyperbolic,



Distinguished guests included (from right to left) former President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr George Vassiliou, his wife, former European Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou, and MPs Averof Neophytou and Maria Kyriacou



Reception party in the Gardens of the Presidential Palace in Nicosia, following the ceremony

surrealist or even - at times - harshly realist.

We, the politicians, often say that we deal with day-to-day issues, that we are pragmatic. We also often say that we like to resolve – or in the opinions of others to create – problems.

Regardless, politicians and artists are united by a crucial common point: politicians, as well as artists, have an obligation to contribute to the development of society, of a world with critically thinking citizens. Each, with their own way and means: politicians, with their interventions and with legislation, and artists, with the sharpening of senses and the quest of meaning beyond the obvious.

Fine art is a concept inextricably linked and traditionally associated with culture. In their contemporary form, fine arts touch on history, archaeology, on each and every science, even on politics.

As I read the impressive biography of today's honouree, it is evident that Christodoulos Panayiotou has achieved distinctions through his art, in a cosmopolitan manner, achieving something that for many seems perhaps impossible: to live on the edge of the world –if you allow me that expression- and to do so

by utilizing at times even a tiny old picture of our small island.

While there are many distinguished personalities, experts on art who can testify to the artistic stature of Christodoulos Panayiotou, I wish to highlight the fact that Christodoulos is a most well-educated citizen of the world. He is someone who can create art in Brazil with references to the history of Cyprus. And what is remarkable is that wherever he is, he manages to stir the interest of the audience.

I congratulate you on your choice; I congratulate the international committee of critics, based in Paris, for the challenging task it has successfully carried out.

The Nemitsas Award is a relatively new institution, which becomes more important every year with its exceptional, timely and topical choices. It brings to the forefront distinguished Cypriots, who live and work abroad or in Cyprus, whom we would probably have never had the opportunity to meet, had the Nemitsas Foundation not taken the excellent initiative to honour them.

I would like to highlight the particular

symbolism of the timing chosen for these awards – the first days of October – linking in this way this awarding of exceptional Cypriots to the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus.

The first award ceremony was in November 2010, on the occasion of the fifty years since the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus. During that first ceremony, a donation by the Nemitsas Foundation to the Republic of Cyprus was announced.

Allow me to pay tribute to the work of the Nemitsas Foundation, and to the generosity of Takis and Louki Nemitsa, who donated the Foundation, with all its movable and immovable property to the Republic of Cyprus. I must also refer to the fact that the Governing Council of the Nemitsas Foundation, as well as the Academic Council, the Secretary and the Coordinator of the Foundation, whose contribution is certainly invaluable, operate selflessly, on an unpaid basis.

Today's honouring of a distinguished artist, who has truly excelled, constitutes yet another opportunity to bring to the forefront our ability as a country to have a creative path to the future.

I believe that the recent economic crisis, which has had a serious impact on Cypriot citizens, has taught us a lot. One of the lessons we must all draw from the crisis is that we must be decisive. Delaying necessary action –due to fear perhaps- of political cost can be very detrimental to the country. Economic developments are rapid, particularly when credibility and trust are eroded, and recession can follow in a speedy, spiral manner.

The second lesson we can draw is that promoting structural reforms delivers, even in the short term. In Cyprus, it was the loss of confidence that led to the whirlwind of events. To regain the credibility and trust, effective action and real reform is required. Commitment and decisiveness are vital.

It is universally accepted that the full benefits of the structural reforms are obtained in the long term, and in the case of Cyprus, even



a long time after the government's term. Nonetheless, structural reforms are of utmost importance also in the short term, because they act as a catalyst for regaining the country's lost credibility and trust.

We have every reason to be hopeful and optimistic about the future. I will not elaborate further on the economic and social measures taken by the government, and the major reforms that are underway.

I would, however, like to underline that a source of optimism is that we are in the midst of a crucial and difficult - but at the same time hopeful - negotiating process for a solution to the Cyprus problem. If we succeed in reaching a comprehensive settlement, firmly anchored on European values and principles, I have no doubt that our future will be most promising, and that Cyprus and its people will prosper in a secure, modern European country in which we will honour distinguished Cypriots in all fields.

And it is in this effort that we, the politicians, should emulate these gifted artists such as Christodoulos Panayiotou, to transform our vision into a creation that will bring about admiration and praise by all those who will be fortunate to experience it.

Dear Christodoulos, we thank you for the honour and pride that you offer us through your art and distinctions.

At the same time, I wish to thank the Takis and Louki Nemitsas Foundation for its contribution to our country.