

TUESDAY MAY 26, 2020

LIFE 04.10.2006

An installation about hope, suffering and human values

By Alexandra Koroxenidis - Kathimerini English Edition

One of the most tragic moments in modern Greek history, the «Asia Minor Disaster,» still haunts Greece's collective memory. This traumatic episode of national uprootedness sent thousands of Greeks living in Asia Minor cities away from their homes, turning them overnight into refugees, into people with nothing to carry with them except hope for the future. For Kalliopi Lemos, the Asia Minor Disaster is charged with a special symbolism. As a child, she would listen to her great-grandfather and grandmother, Asia Minor refugees who landed at Oinousses and Chios, recount the stories of their fellow refugees. She still remembers the emotion in their voices and their longing for the homes they had left behind. These memories resurfaced when Lemos discovered a scattering of abandoned, ruined boats, deserted off the shore of Chios. She soon discovered they were the boats which have carried, for the past 70 years, foreign illegal immigrants from Turkey to Greece. The sight which she came across while vacationing on Oinousses, her birthplace, reminded her of the stories of hope and desperation that had been embedded in her mind since childhood. The emotions were too overwhelming to ignore. Upon receiving permission from the local port authorities, Lemos removed some of the boats and used them to construct «Crossing,» an engaging, open-air installation that is presented in Elefsina, at the city's former oil-pressing factory off the coastal road. (The exhibition is part of the 2006 Aeschylea cultural events organized by the Municipality of Elefsina.) Resembling an elegiac tribute to all those who left their homes in search of a better future, the work is made of seven boats (the highest measures 70 meters) that are positioned vertically and in a circle with their interior side facing the viewer. Each boat is the metaphor of a human story, of a human presence. Their broken parts and damaged interiors bring to mind human wounds. The beeswax with which Lemos has covered them is meant to heal, purify and offer prayer. Surrounding the central installation is a low-level wooden, open kiosk on which Lemos has written the first names of immigrants (she collected them from the archives of the Chios port authority but also from the researchers of two Greek anthropologists, Zoe Tsioli and Nadina Christopoulou) and has painted human figures, each depicted encased in a boat-like construction. A recurring motif in the work of Lemos, the boat is used as an archetype, a metaphor for the passages we make in life, whether an existential voyage, self-awareness or the journey from one stage of life to the next. It appeared as a womb-like or ark-like construction in «Rites of Passage,» which was presented in Syros in the summer. In that particular work, the boat was about birth and creation. It was the beginning of a journey whereas in «Crossing» it is its unhappy ending. Despite their differences, both works were site-specific pieces, especially made to be exhibited in Syros and Elefsina respectively. The optimism in «Rites of Passage» was compatible with the radiance of the natural light in the Cyclades whereas the darkness in «Crossing» echoes the «underworld» in the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Interestingly, both works are the

time Lemos has exhibited her work in Greece. Until now, her work has been unknown to the Greek public mainly because Lemos lives in London. Married to the shipowner Christos Lemos but of a shipowning family herself, Lemos has been living in London for the past 35 years. Although Lemos started painting as a child, she actually trained to be an artist when she was in her mid-30s. By then, her two children had reached adolescence and Lemos had more time to follow her longtime wish to become an artist. She studied painting and engraving and worked as a painter for most of her career. Around seven years ago, she decided to try sculpture. Interestingly, she chose Greece to first show her work in sculpture publicly. The fact that the artist plans to spend more time in Greece, especially now that the main offices of her husband have moved from London to Piraeus, may be related to that decision. In a way, both «Rites of Passage» and «Crossing» are the artist's «return back home,» both an actual and a sentimental journey to her homeland and childhood memories. The message in both works, however, is universal. Inspired by particular episodes in modern history and contemporary political reality, it is a moving tribute to human pain and man's struggle for a better life. «Crossing» is on show through November 15 at Elefsina's former oil-pressing factory off the coastal road.

Δεν τυπώνω. Πι?οστατε?ω το πε?ιβάλλον.