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Transition and displacement

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Immigrants have always faced problems of integration and have also posed intricate challenges for the countries that receive them. Migration has always been a complex phenomenon throughout history. But it is only in the past decade or so that it has become a recurring theme in contemporary art. As a growing, acute phenomenon, it has prompted artists to express their own views on the matter. Another reason may be traced to the field of contemporary art itself, as the field is constantly expanding into new markets and embracing artists of different nationalities in order to revitalize itself and meet the demand for new ideas and artwork, while it also has to speak of global themes that are pertinent to people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. At the same time, by addressing issues like migration, art may sensitize people to the problems of migrants and prompt people to better accept cultural differences. «Migration: Reflections on Art and History,» a one-day conference held last week at Istanbul's Bilgi University, and «Round Voyage,» an art installation by Greek artist Kalliopi Lemos which was presented at the university's campus, manifest this growing tendency in art. They also are tangible proof that contemporary art is increasingly seen as an effective and widely used mode for conveying ideas. Both events were organized by the Hellenic Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO) in cooperation with Istanbul's Bilgi University Center for Migration Research (CMR), the first migration research center in Turkey. Both events were held on the university grounds, the same property that is home to Santral, a restored power station building turned into an energy museum, contemporary art center and public library. The initiative came from IMEPO. Founded in 2002 and supervised by the Greek Interior Ministry, this is an institute that does research work on migration and helps the Greek government to draw up migration policies. Its speciality is politics, not art, yet it has organized art-related events in the belief that art can help to sensitize more people toward migration issues and offer a different perspective on this complex, contemporary phenomenon. At the Istanbul conference, specialists from mostly the contemporary art field but also from the worlds of literature, anthropology and history each offered their own perspectives on the topic. Among them, distinguished British art historian Robert Lynton used examples from 20th century history to speak of «how culture migrates.» Turkish art historian Beral Madra presented examples of contemporary artwork that have delved into migration, while professor Ayhan Kaya - also director of the European Institute, Istanbul - spoke of Turkey's domestic migration and the massive demographic movements, the causes of which some claim have been covered up by the Turkish government. Anthropologist Nadia Christopoulou, who has been working with migrant children in Greece, used the story of the young Stivan (an Iraqi immigrant) to speak of migration as a «palindrome,» a constant movement between past and present, memory and reality, roots and a new beginning. This sense of the palindrome is very much present in «Round Voyage» thePrivacy

installation by Kalliopi Lemos. In the installation, two battered boats hang from a steel arch construction made of seven sections, each separated from the other by a different color of the rainbow. The two boats form the shape of a seed: One is positioned on top of and at a small distance from the other. One faces upward and the other is inverted. One faces one direction and the other the opposite direction. Like the two halves of a whole, the installation alludes both to separation and unity, tension and harmony. It is a metaphor of an immigrant's voyage, his memories and roots that he carries along with his hopes for a better life - his past and his future life. As Robert Lynton notes in the catalog on the installation by Lemos, the two boats «speak of continuity in situations driven by contradiction.» «Round Voyage» is the second work in Lemos's trilogy on migration. «Crossing,» the title of the first installation of the series, was presented in Elefsina a year ago. In that installation, seven boats standing together in a circular, towering shape were a tribute to all those immigrants who drowned during their journeys from the shores of Turkey to Greece. Both in «Crossing» and in «Round Voyage,» the boats used are the actual vehicles that immigrants used for their journeys. Lemos found the battered vessels, abandoned on the shores of Chios, the island from which she comes (Lemos comes from and is married to a family of shipowners). Deeply moved by the story behind the boats and sensitized by her childhood memories (as a child she was brought up listening to her grandparents recount their painful flight from Asia Minor) she purchased them from the local authorities for the purposes of her work. In both installations, the motif is the same, yet compared with the work shown in Elefsina, the Istanbul installation seems to put across a more hopeful message. The seed-like shape alludes to birth, the colors of the rainbow to hope and the arch-like steel structure to reconciliation and the bridging of differences. «Where the journey ends, a new one starts» she notes in the exhibition's catalog. Her work sensitizes the public to the problems that immigrants face but also is an occasion to raise further thought on what remains a complex, political, socioeconomic matter faced by contemporary societies. «Round Voyage» will be on display at Santralistanbul, through March 2008.

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