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# Kalliopi Lemos

CRETE, RETHYMNON

at Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete

by Janet Koplos



The work of London-based Greek sculptor Kalliopi Lemos is the subject of a three-part decade survey organized by Maria Maragou, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete and curator of the Greek pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale. The first section was shown in the Benaki Museum in Athens last winter, the second part over the summer in Crete; the third is on view at the Crypt of St. Pancras Church in London through Nov. 30.

In Crete, Lemos's works (all 2011) were installed in the disused Mosque of Ibrahim Khan, a 16th-century building that is one of the few intact structures within the ramparts of the dramatic fortress that looms above Rethymnon's picturesque old town. Bound into the site are time and change, beliefs and wars, endurance. Reflected in the exhibition title, "Navigating in the Dark," is Lemos's frequent use of boat imagery to allude to migration (emotional, spiritual, physical, generational). The four large works blend boat shapes and abstracted figuration.

On a low platform of widely spaced dark boards were seven plaster forms that looked like twisted surfboards. The center of each contained tightly bound lengths of reeds, recalling both reed boats and the female genital cleft (*Blade Boats*). Across the room were seven standing wooden forms of various heights, which resemble compressed canoes, their dark exteriors refusing access to their pale interior slots (*Boats Full of Secrets*). Perched on a metal stand, a single dugout boat of wood, whose beautiful grain suggests water currents, held 12 heads made of salt. The heads were grouped or isolated, some hollow-eyed, some open-mouthed as if howling (*Odysseus Boat*).

The most striking work—if not, to me, the most moving—was the central piece, *The Big Egg and the Hairy Goddesses*. Standing on a metal grating within a 13-foot-tall, egglike, rocket-ship structure composed of metal and glass are three columnar pink figures. The glass panes were smoked, clear or reflective, fracturing the view. Each figure seems to have buttocks in front and back and a misshapen, three-sided head with patches of grayish hair for eyes. The torso of one has numerous bulbous eruptions like the multibreasted Diana of Ephesus,

while the other two have dozens of protrusions reaching out all around —tentacles or fingers or penises— with grayish hair tufted around the bases. They evoke Cycladic sculptures although their size is monumental. The work has a sci-fi edge that contrasts with the others, which were in harmony with the site. In all these powerful, solemn works, Lemos points to big themes and does not limit her allusions.

*Photo: View of Kalliopi Lemos's exhibition "Navigating in the Dark," showing (center) The Big Egg and the Hairy Goddesses, 2011; at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete.*

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