

ISTANBUL

Kalliopi Lemos

Ioakimion Greek High School
for Girls

We arrived breathless after several flights of ruinous brick stairs to find—in an abandoned Greek school for girls overlooking Istanbul's Golden Horn—an installation of hybrid women/animal sculptures that left us...breathless. Mutilated, human-size figures appeared against the peeling blue paint of halls and classrooms, accompanied by a soundtrack of girls chattering and singing, just as they might have done when school was in session. White pages on the desks bore baleful stories of women's abuse—rapes, beatings, traffickings. A young woman escorting me gasped and said, "Incredible."

The figures, made from steel filings mixed with resin and sand, then sandblasted and oxidized, appeared dark and granulated, but this surface roughness was countered by sinuousness. Two figures, *Deer on Altar* and *Hen with Two Faces*, looked out vacantly at eye level; *Hen on Crutches* and *Mermaid Coming out of a Well* were headless; *Hanging Hare* was suspended by a noose; *Goat* and *Memory* were missing body parts.

Kalliopi Lemos's installation, collectively titled *I Am I, Between Worlds and Between Shadows*, was resonant with meanings to the point of producing dissonance. The photocopied white pages jarred with an epic and theatrical tone. The keen pathos of crime against women is not the same as the pathos of Istanbul's former Greek community, preserved by the generosity of Turkish conqueror Sultan Mehmet in 1453 only to be driven out by riots 500 years later.

In a catalogue essay, Curator Beral Madra told us that Lemos, a Greek island-born, London-based artist, loves myth, and also that it can be hard to tell whether her figures are victims or assailants. Experiences like those recounted on the white pages may have traumatized them, turned



Above left: Kalliopi Lemos, *Hanging Hare*, 2013, 130 x 60 x 284 cm. Right: Kalliopi Lemos, *Deer on Altar*, 2013, 126 x 67 x 131 cm. Below: Kalliopi Lemos, *Goat*, 2013, 184 x 48 x 213.7 cm. All made of steel filings, fiberglass, and mild steel.



them into victims (like Leda, changed into a swan, or Daphne, changed into a tree), and caused their deformities, which in time will disillusion the singing girls. Others have been turned into sacrifices (like Iphigenia), as in *Deer on Altar* or in *Bridge of Alta*, whose accompanying white-page story recounts a mason's wife immured in a stone bridge to arrest its collapse. On the other hand, for figures with more aggressive aspects (like the frenzied Maenads around Dionysus or the Gorgon Medusa), deformities somehow become their source of strength and not only survivors' scars.

Lemos's installation suggested such narratives ambivalently while sustaining its own narrative, one in which the immediacy of seeing was in tension with tortured hesitations between abjection and reclaimed power. A similar intensity also characterized parts of the 13th Istanbul Biennial, running concurrently across the Golden Horn.

—Michel Oren