The exhibition 'Statecraft (and beyond) presents alternative models of statehood

The artists of Statecraft (and beyond) the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, curated by Katerina Gregos, critically dissect questions of statehood.

by Dilpreet Bhullar
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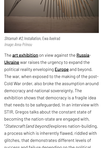
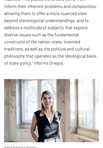
The world is constantly moving, so are the people. This movement, for it accosts borders, between states, legal or illegal, is characterized by the network of bureaucracy and governance. The geographical territories hastily marked and bordered, are the result of the neo-colonial security system in the 20th century-implanted prominence with the rise of globalization. The international group exhibition *Statecraft (and beyond)* the National Museum of Contemporary Art in **Athens** (EMST) curated by Katerina Gregos, artistic director of the museum—examines the subconscious of statehood and its challenges. The 39 artists in the **exhibition** critically dissect issues and questions related to statecraft from a wide perspective. The works in the exhibition unravel the mechanisms of statecraft and power to talk about the issues of democracy, citizenship, rights, inclusion, and exclusion.



Diamond #2, Installation, Fani Dimitriadi
Image: Nikos Pilos

The **art exhibition** on view against the **Russia-Ukraine** war raises the urgency to expand the discourse on the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian The war, when exposed to the making of the post-Cold War order, also broke the assumption around democracy and national sovereignty. The exhibition shows that democracy is a fragile idea that needs to be safeguarded. In an interview with STIR, Gregos talks about the current state of democracy, the rising anti-democratic sentiments, "Statecraft (and beyond)" presents holistic vision, a process which is inherently flawed, riddled with problems, and dependent on different sites of success and failure depending on the political situation and degree of democracy and transparency in each country."



Installation view of work by Tatjana Pavanelli
Image: Nikos Pilos

The participating **installation artists** envisage the conventional model of nationhood and political organization to address challenges of mass migration and the post- and trans-national realities. The places the artists come from inform their inherent problems and complexities, allowing them to offer a critique that leans more beyond stereotypical understandings, and to address a multitude of subject matters and diverse issues such as the fundamental constructs of the nation state, internal tradeoffs, as well as the political and cultural philosophy that underpins the ideological basis of state policy," informs Gregos.

Artist Katerina Gregos
Image: Courtesy of Nikos Pilos/Eyes

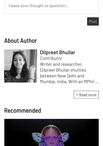
The *Flight of Passage*, a collaborative film by Danny Bergel (**Thalwil**) and Oliver Resetter (**Vienna**) is related through a series of interviews with the **migration** theorists including Anita Anisky, Antonio Negri and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The interviews initiate the discussion around the idea of citizenship in **Barcelona**, which is routed not only as the multicultural hub of European cities but also serves as a home to a diminishing process being "without papers". The film shot in the dark tones of night suggests the exclusionary practices of nation and citizenship. It is from the place kept away from the mainstream, the place of the marginalized community could give voice to the tribal and tribulations they experience in the nation.

The Flight of Passage, Danny Bergel and Oliver Resetter
Image: Courtesy of Nikos Pilos

Cuccia-based Damien Ortega's work with the **installation art** practice develops anticolonial and anti-racist narratives as a way to challenge the edifice of the colonial, patriarchal and capitalist power. Her work ARC of Racist Europe takes the viewers across the making of the anti-racist narrative. The work in the series of 12 drawings made from 35 alphabets juxtaposed with the individual images. The **art installation** tracks the network of connections between the dynamics of the migration control system and the history of **colonialism**.

ARC of Racist Europe, Installation view, Damien Ortega
Image: Nikos Pilos

The performative work Aujournouvelle by **Paris**-based artist Kamal Kaz critiques the institutional power system of surveillance and control. As part of the performance, the individuals hold the police emergency lights in their hands to destabilize the autonomy of state power and responsibility. The police siren, synonymous with power and danger, when shifted to the control of the public catches the attention of the passer-by. This transfer of responsibility creates a sentiment of authority to give individuals a sense of liberation, even if it is momentary.



Aujournouvelle, art performance, Kaz Kz
Image: Nikolas Kaloudis

The year 2021 marked the Bicentennial Anniversary of Greek Independence from the Ottoman Empire. Against this milestone occasion, the exhibition is an opposed one. Gregos discusses issues of critical importance for the future direction and development of the European continent from diverse viewpoints, including the migration crisis, its links with colonialism and the resurgence of nationalistic attitudes." The exhibition opens the floor to the questions, as Gregos puts it, "Can we imagine other models of social organization and political organization that require identification with a particular flag or passport? What does the notion of belonging and community outside the nation-state might come into focus? How can we imagine the future of democracy of nationalism while retaining the benefits of the nation-state? Is the concept of 'global citizenship,' which is gaining currency in light of the need to find shared solutions to shared problems, at all possible or even plausible?"

In these times, punctuated by authoritarian and nationalistic rhetoric, the fluid concepts of identity, language and ethnicity are exponentially shifting. The objective nature and sovereignty of states is an uphill task to build. The artists critically relook at the constructed notion of nation and statehood to reveal their hidden complexities. Collectively, they offer the display capsule as to nourish our understanding around models of social organization and statehood from unexpected and imaginative angles.

Exhibition view of 'Statecraft (and beyond)', EMST
Image: Nikos Pilos

The exhibition *Statecraft (and beyond)*is on view at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (EMST) until November 20, 2022.

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