

# CHEAPART

## **On «Sweat with honor», installation by Nikos Ellinikakis Olinka Migliaresi Varvitsiotis, Art Historian**

"Sweat with honor" is an obsolete expression nowadays. Upon hearing it, we go back to the 60's when it was used with almost religious reverence.

"Sweat with honor" is a phrasal and conceptual stereotype with a left-wing shade, deep-rooted in the morals of the Greek society of that time, something evident in the melodramatic films and the press of this period.

It was a value system, which drove an entire post-war generation of Greeks to "an honest day's sweat" for the reconstruction of their ideas and residential areas, and moreover for the economic recovery and development of Greece.

Today, in the Olympic year 2004, this expression is rigid, meaningless, since governmental politics and the incoming flow of refugees led to a legitimization of the foreign "sweat", that of the immigrant workers, that were used to fulfill the nation's vision. The guilt-lifting effect of having someone else "sweat" and carry out their goal didn't seem to trouble the new-Greeks in the era of retailing lifestyle.

The artist worked on an ideologically complex video- installation that stirs the emotions of the visitor, who passes by several "stations" of the project, without having to listen to a linear narration. At the starting point, deformed sculptured forms made of processed film frames containing repetitive narratives of fictitious stereotypes on society's development and the accomplishment of the objectives of conformity, carry us to the spirit of the 60s. They also define the context of the expression "to sweat with honor", ideologically and historically. The visitor continues his travel in time and space and eventually reaches the screening of an idealized, almost propaganda-ridden video of foreign workers uniformly dressed and situated in a deceitfully beautiful construction site a very realistic moment intensified through slow motion. The fade-out/fade-in of the image crushes the bodies, dissolving the wholeness of the figures and creating a sense of uneasiness.

The visitor walks through the presentation stepping on building planks, placed on the floor in front of a display that exhibits the name labels on the workers' helmets we saw in the previous video. The "honest sweat" of these workers acquires an identity and entity and creates a contrast with the blood stained screens that follow. Intense emotions come forth and this part constitutes the highlight of the project, since the nameless helmet labels signify the contempt we feel for the foreign workers that were killed, the indifference for their names and their humane substance. Sacrificed on the alter of our fake visionaries and in order to promote the up-lifting of our national consciousness and pride for the successful undertaking of the Olympic Works and the Olympic Games, the issue of the working conditions, the lack of security measures, and the fatal accidents that occurred at the works were topics that were never touched. Next and finally, a grotesque portrait of an over-sized female figure, which is sweating unnaturally, raises some issues with its symbolism.

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25 A.Metaxa Str., 10681 Athens, Greece  
office@cheapart.gr | www.cheapart.gr

The artist's purpose is not to make heroes out of these unjustly lost workers, neither to pay them a tribute, but to reveal the facts to all of those that are not aware of them and to raise issues against the "shutting of the eyes" in front of questioning the values and the morality of modern Greek society.

The project -either it was the initial intention of the artist or not-, forces inevitably the visitor to consider fundamental issues, values, and norms of society. Moreover, to re-define the frameworks of a modern morality -as far as living standards, working conditions, and racist stereotypes are concerned- that belongs to a generation that is allowed to "sweat" unlimitedly, only at the gyms or the beaches.

To conclude, the critical subject of this exhibition is the "construction" of reality and the understanding of the artificial reality the Media create, since whatever they choose not to show, is considered as something that never happened at all.

**«Sweat with honor» installation was presented at  
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