

CHRISTOFOROS DOULGERIS. THE SCHOOL PROJECT

by Lina Manousogiannaki

«I started my research and found out that throughout the Greek territory there are more than 1200 school buildings abandoned and closed. I consider this series my most important work in a period of difficulty and disappointment in the midst of the Greek crisis.»



© Christoforos Doulgeris from the series ‘The School Project’

Why photography?

Christoforos Doulgeris (CD): Photography became part of my life in an early age. My family had just moved to Dusseldorf and while attending high school I started following, fanatically, the exhibitions of the Museum of Modern Art of the city. This habit became an action and I discovered in this particular medium of expression a personal space which could express my own interpretation of reality. Photography had thus become a space in which I could create images. It actually replaced my first love, the cinema. However, my study on cinema and cinematography helped me transfer to “my” photography an internal tension which gradually started being part of a reasoning. The evolution and the perfection of this reasoning came with time elapsed. Until today I judge my images with the same criterion: complete freedom and peace at heart!

What did actually push you to choose the photographic practice as your medium of artistic expression?

CD: The reason for which I have chosen the medium of photography is that of straightness. It is the idea of a form of art which provokes the imagination and has countless ways of seducing. I would say that it is the power of creating a small dream, as well as a magical image, that drew me to photography. I work with ideas which are quite realistic but do present a concrete, tectonic side, usually expressed through architecture or sculpture.

When did it all start? Tell us a bit about the beginning of your photographic work.

CD: I was only thirteen when I realised that I could be making images that would have an importance, a kind of sentimental value for me. So, I started making portraits in my immediate circle, family and university mates, and eventually developed my technique. The idea always preserved

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in my head was that the more an image is original the more the image would have an importance to me personally. For me aesthetics and philosophy of the image have always been a priority.



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**Henri Cartier-Bresson declared: «Your first 10000 photographs are your worst.» How do you think your work has evolved during the time elapsed?**

CD: I will have to agree and disagree at the same time. On one hand I don't believe that maturity comes by mastering the technique or by the cultural savvy of the photographer, but rather by intuition. However, my 10000 images are my worst!

As time went by my photography started evolving on forms, and texture. After a while I started understanding the power of photography in combining different kinds of arts. I have always believed that photography is a way of poetic expression. Even though I tend to have a specific approach on my photography, mostly evolving around architecture, I do try to vary my interests. The procedure of my creation can also vary. Sometimes it can take years to create a single image and sometimes a whole series is completed in less than an hour.

I would dare to say that I am drawn to the simplicity and the simple side of things, even if I have to travel for ages to come upon the right moment!

**Let's talk about your latest work. How did you get the idea?**

CD: My latest work, presented in the IFA DONOPOULOS gallery in Thessaloniki, is entitled 'The School Project'. I basically travel around Greece photographing abandoned schools. The idea came to me by chance while working on another project in a region of northern Greece called Serres. While driving through a village I came across this beautiful building which used to be a school. I started asking around about it and discovered that the school had been closed due to the fact that there were no more children to attend. In the middle of the economical crisis history repeated itself and families had left this village in search of a better future elsewhere. I started my research and found out that throughout the Greek territory there are more than 1200 school buildings abandoned and closed. I consider this series my most important work in a period of difficulty and disappointment in the midst of the Greek crisis. I interpret these schools as symbols of the Greek culture forgotten and abandoned to nature. Memories of a "has been" fading in time!



*© Christoforos Doulgeris from the series 'The School Project'*

**What would you like to express through this series?**

CD: As already mentioned the Schools are beacons of Greek culture. They are part of Modern Greek history, occupying spectacular landscapes of the country side and hiding secrets of various historical eras of modern history. Their architectural details, even architectural relics left behind fused with memories enclosed within their walls, are parts of lessons to be learned. They are parts of the past bringing to the future an aura of another era which has frozen in a specific moment in time.

**How did you organise your research?**

CD: My research has many levels of concentration. I examine archives of the state in local and national libraries, as well as on the internet. A number of information comes from friends and acquaintances through social platforms. However, the most important source is the human element. Locals, who know the history of the place and the region, present me with the most important details; they basically carry on through time the oral tradition of the local history, which otherwise would have been lost in time.

**What are your future ideas and on what would you be interested to concentrate?**

CD: I have already started working on a new series on artists of my generation. It is a portrait series and my interest derives from the work of these artists as well as their personality.





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**Is there any contemporary artist or photographer, even if young and emerging, that influenced you in some way?**

CD: I admire the work of [Wolfgang Tillmans](#). His research on various and very different subjects has helped him keep an open eye. I believe that his ideas reveal an extraordinary human beauty within the reality of an unconventional landscape.

**Three books of photography that you recommend?**

1. Nobuyoshi Araki, TASCHEN limited series.
2. Wolfgang Tillmans, Wako Book 2. Tokyo
3. 'Jpegs' by Thomas Ruff

**Is there any show you've seen recently that you find inspiring?**

CD: 'Flying over the abyss' is the title of the exhibition I recently saw. It is organised by the NEON Foundation and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete. The exhibition runs through September ([Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete](#), Rethymnon, 2 May - 27 September 2015).

Kazantakis's work Askitiki (*Ascesis: the saviour of God*) is a book regarding the path of life of the human being from birth to death. In this exhibition, NEON in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art of Crete, have brought together pieces of internationally known artists, such as Marina Abramović, Matthew Barney, Martin Kippenberger, Doris Salcedo, Louise Bourgeois and others, based on the idea of this particular piece of literature by N. Kazantzakis.

The passage from life to eternity, as well as the idea of the ephemeron, which always has an expiration date, are ideas which have tormented me during this phase of my work, and I have found answers through the work exhibited of the various disciplines presented in this particular exhibition.

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