

David Moore Where is time? Tsi esi piou?

Maria Gouma

L'espace... ment

Spacing out

Numéro 83, printemps 2008

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/9169ac>

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Éditeur(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN

0821-9222 (imprimé)

1923-2551 (numérique)

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Citer ce document

Gouma, M. (2008). David Moore: Where is time? Tsi esi piou? *Espace Sculpture*,(83), 29–31.

David MOORE

*Where is time? Tsi esi piou?*¹

An Interview by
Maria GOUMA
of Nafplion Art Gallery,
Nafplio, Greece

A narrow table of chestnut wood reaches the full-length of the gallery, a distance of ten metres. The table is made of curved sections and takes the form of a meandering river. Placed on the far end of the table is the bust of a goat-figure and on the near end, the bust of a researcher. They confront each other from the full distance.

The head of the goat-figure is made of carob wood with actual goat's horns and eyes of stone. Along the table are placed various anthropological objects, such as carob beans, goat's bells, a flute, a model boat, dolls made of found objects, a miniature tapestry, as well as some old objects evoking the Tsakonika reality: a chest full of red wool, posts with carved heads of ancestors and shepherd's sticks. At the other end of the table, the bust of the researcher, by contrast, is metallic, surrounded by equally metallic objects, including suitcases of various sizes, measuring tapes, an hourglass and fake books. These are juxtaposed with actual books, referring to the disappearing Tsakonika language. Exactly over the centre

of the table is a circular mirror that turns gently in the air, with two suspended figures on either side made of bleached sticks. On the wall is a quotation from Sikelianos, *Where is time?*

MARIA GOUMA: *This is indeed a portrait of the area. Believe me, it's very difficult for someone to understand this kind of work here in the Peloponnese, in Nafplio. Of course, people can see installations in Athens, it's true. But here it's different. I want to say that in this work they understand immediately what you have to say. There's a Greek word, "singinitico"—I don't know how to translate it. Perhaps kinship. But they understand. I saw that everyone who came to see the exhibition, whether they were educated or not, immediately understood.*

DAVID MOORE: I'm very happy to hear that. It emerged from my interest in how culture is evolving, as well as the idea that there is a mythological figure with goat's horns in the same province where I spend time, Arkadia. Is this an accident? I would say that it seems like an accident, but as an artist, I can't let it go so easily. I could not dismiss this cultural

fact, along with the fact that most of my neighbours at the present moment rear goats as a central part of their lives. So I had to do a piece about Arkadia, actual Arkadia, not historical Arkadia. So I don't call it Pan. The idea of Pan has already been relegated to the past. But culture is a living thing. This also talks about the village now, and how these people live with goats. You see this figure has goat's bells on it—there's a direct connection. You could call it a goat cult. This figure comes from far away but I feel that it is still here. Otherwise I wouldn't do this piece. This installation is here to talk about that and dialogue with a technologically-based world that is supplanting it. It's about cultural confrontation. It's not a question of better or worse. We all enjoy eating feta cheese, yet some people would say goats are the past. It's a complex question and I wouldn't exclude values of judgement, not in relation to ideas about progress and modernity, but to climatic and planetary survival as well as some deeper human needs.

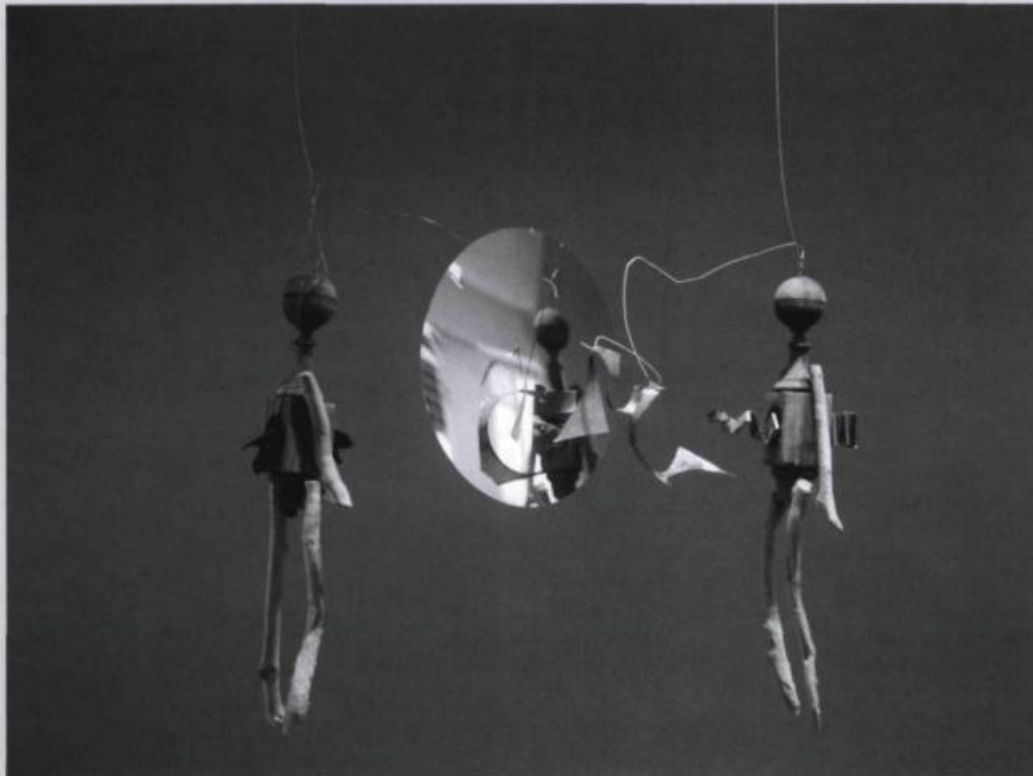
When one sees the installation, Heraclitus' phrase "to panda to rie" immediately comes to mind. It means something like "everything flows" or "everything changes."

Ah yes, when I was starting to form my own thinking back in 1974, I started doing artworks with tea bags of herbal plants. The tea bag would change the water, I would drink the water, and the water would change my body.

An interaction?

Yes. The herbs come from the mountains. I drink the water and my body becomes part of the mountain. For me, it's the same thing with art. I must do art that has change happening within it, so that if you see it in ten years it may not be the same. So my work started having to do with things that had change inscribed in them, first using actual tea bags, then old things, broken things, then archaeological bits and pieces, as well as *in situ* works at specific sites, Delphi, Pompeii, Blasket Island off the coast of Ireland, Santorini, places of natural disaster, and now *Monasteria* on Tinos. The subject of loss has been a powerful force,

David MOORE, *Where is time? Tsi esi piou?*, 2006-2007. Detail. Photo: courtesy of the artist.



hopefully towards reconciliation. For me art is not so important, what is important is the consciousness that art brings. So, if I can bring some consciousness about existence, about something we live, even something small, I think, OK, it was worth trying to do this. But anyway, I'm not so good with, you know, trying to make everything perfect.

Nobody makes everything perfect— (laughter). If you can change something—just a little—it's very important.

D.M. I believe that a lot of my work takes the form of an allegory about time. It's full of allusions. Here, I'm making references to many, many things. For example, the long curved table is a reference to conferences. In mine, the table is very long and the discussion all in curves, meandering like a river, and the discussion only has two protagonists, the goat-figure and the anthropologist. But really, they can never meet without changing each other. Loring Danforth, the anthropologist, talks about this exchange as part of the crisis of representation that post-modernism has brought. Who represents what, and to whom?

In this work, I was concerned that the Greek audience might consider it was none of my business, as a foreigner, to be trying to represent these changes. So, it is important to emphasize that all this emerged from my meetings with actual people in the village and does not come from a purely outsider's observations. I have a lot of empathy with the people, and the question of change, there are no judgements being made in this work. Danforth's own study was about fire-walkers, and he quotes the exchange between Dionysus and the king Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae* as central to this exchange. What a discussion! Whether to continue with the tried and the true, or to actively embrace the new. It's everywhere, and different everywhere. In Quebec, within our art context, it takes another form, the discussion of the place of digital technology in relation to, dare I say it, the traditional arts. But here, in this village I inhabit, the goat-figure has the dimensions of both myth and subsistence farming, and the culture it supports will go on for a while, I'm sure, very much an integral part of the mountainous landscape. Meanwhile television, pickup trucks and cell-phones are well-established facts. So I say, in answer to your comment, it is about what Heraclitus might have to say now. Changes are happening before our eyes that nobody seems to notice. What's interesting here is that the cultural changes do not appear to create a breakdown in the family unit, at least not yet. So while the changes are, in the span of history, absolutely revolutionary, they are in fact very smooth. Forest fires, earthquakes and uncertain political neighbours are far more upset-



ting and get far more press-coverage. But then I'm not a journalist.

And what about art?

Well thanks to a revolution in art, I can expand the way the perceptual world of art is being used, and move towards sociological and anthropological questions, as well as the extraordinary phenomenology of the public's relation to the art gallery and museum as specialized spaces of experience. I'm trying to use art as a kind of mirror, more thoughtful than provocative, and hopefully, leading to a point of greater discussion on where we are going and how to live with our fellow man. But styles, movements are there in various ways, a little ironically: minimalism, abstraction, found objects and performance art. The goat-figure is made in a very rustic way, and the anthropologist is in metal. More allusions. It's all vocabulary. There are forms I make and forms I find. A sort of continuum between objects of life, and this privileged space, this art space, this consciousness and clarity of thought one aims for. It's important to be able to feel through one's body the binding concept that orchestrates the elements into an installation.

For me, it's a meeting place of many things, and the two figures, one at each end of the table, is an old theme I've used in many, many works. It's a theme of exchange. So the goat-figure is in a discussion with the metal-man, the anthropologist, who brings a world of technology. I would say it's about technology and traditional values.

And what about space?

There's also the discussion about the gallery

space. It's a long gallery, so I put one figure at one end and the other at the other end. In this discussion, there is the person who comes in the gallery and looks. The thing that's being looked at is art. So the goat-figure is the primary figure, as it is there to be looked at by both the spectators who come in and out of the gallery and the anthropologist who, together, are portrayed in this discussion. In this way, I could add that the anthropologist also represents the person who comes in and looks at the art. There is a kind of allegory about participation. Remember Hamlet and how he set up the court players to enact, as a play, the murder of his father that had just happened. What are we doing when we look at an art piece? We see both the work and our situation, if it is a good piece. The work only exists when somebody comes in the door. That's when it comes alive. But the first person I am concerned about is the person who is sitting in the gallery for two or three weeks, whether they feel comfortable with the piece. You remember, Maria, this scythe blade I had in the installation when I first set it up?

Yes. It brought back bad memories of an accident I witnessed. I didn't like it.

So I took it out and put in the spool of red wool as another solution.

I prefer this solution because it seems to speak about a new beginning.

Perfect. Your view is personal.

Yes (laughter). It is personal. But other people can understand it too.

I try to keep the work open. There are many aesthetic considerations. For example, how

David MOORE, *Where is time? Tsi esi piou?*, 2006-2007. Installation. 1,52 x 4,57 x 9,14 m. Various materials, principally wood, metal and organic material. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

→ David MOORE, *Where is time? Tsi esi piou?*, 2006-2007. Details. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

high off the floor the table should be. I wanted it to feel like it's floating. It's a table, but it's not like any table you know. It's a metaphor for a river of words between people.

What I realised is that it's a river, a dialogue, but it comes first from the back and then to the front. I find this very interesting.

Ah yes?

Yes, from the back. We say anthydroma. From past to future, and from future to past. All our life is a discussion between new and old.

Very much. There is a discussion between this table, and the table you saw in my catalogue that is called *The Table of Unequal Complicity*, from 1987, I think. I wanted a table again, but this time, not straight. It's more specific because social reality in a particular context is being evoked. The first table I did was very abstract, like archaeological pieces, maybe from Egypt.

Also like sarcophagi.

Yes. But this piece is sociological, specific to Greece. So if I bring it to Quebec, or Canada, I think it's a different work.

Of course. Exactly. It's a good balance. And now if you do this installation in Leonidion or in the winery in Nemea I mentioned, it may be something else.

This stage of my life is connected more and more with Greece, and this is the first large work I have made in Greece, it's about what I am living. You're right: it is a portrait. I think inside myself I feel for the goat-figure, also for the technological aspect. But you can see

in the piece, I think, that the goat is the heart, the seat of the emotion. The researcher, the metal-figure is closer to analysis, intelligence, many things related to technology now.

It has simplicity. I think it's the simplicity that's the most intelligent thing about the work.

Well thank you, if you say that, it pleases me immensely. I'd like to make a comment about the space. This gallery space is made up of two areas in one, with the back space being larger. It was important that I put the goat-figure in the best position, in the back space. So I placed it nearly in the middle, but not quite, so the spectator can also be almost in the centre. I created a double space, one for the installation and another for the spectator. The spectator is part of the piece.

That's very good. It makes a connection with the other part.

I think so. And colour. Colour is important.

And these two doll-figures hanging on either side of the circular mirror over the centre of the table are very, very important.

They are. They resume the goat-figure and the anthropologist in a form where the two figures have been miniaturised and now resemble each other, as if the effect of the exchange is now at a further point in time and their separate identities have become mixed. I've been working with mirrors of exactly these dimensions for five years. It appeared in my last five solo exhibitions. Its function is always different, except that it is always at the level of our eyes. Its function

concerns the instability of our looking. Here, each doll-figure sees itself as if it was the other. It sees the self in the other. As the mirror turns, it also shows us something that is outside the art piece, which then becomes part of the art piece. You might see a house out the window on the other side of the road, or you might see your friend who is beside you also looking at the piece. There's something unexpected, a bit voyeuristic. The sensation of looking and being alone with an artwork is suddenly reversed when one might, for an instant, be looked at with the same scrutiny by another person. But it's only for a split second.

But it has another function. It transports light; it makes ovals of light travel on the wall, illuminating elements in an aleatory fashion. Sometimes it makes a fine metallic sound like cymbals far away, when a little wire touches it. As the air turned it, that's what occasionally happened in this exhibition.

It also makes an allusion to virtuality. I work with materials, what one calls traditional sculpture, but, in my case, a shadow is considered on an equal footing with an object, so the materials have to be considered in an expanded context of virtual images. The shadow, like material, is real, as are reflections from a mirror. Our either/or attitude seems to me to be a barrier to a fuller understanding of the complexity of looking, so I try to find bridges between the so-called real and the virtual. This happens in the mind. It needs an open mind. But the mirror is very useful.

I'm very interested in how you describe this because up until now I thought this part with a mirror and doll-figures was a poetical comment. But now I realize it is a political comment. You know in Greece the word "political" originally comes from the word "polis," meaning "the city." It's a comment about the movement between larger and smaller forces.

Well, yes, there is a question of power. That's what the title to my original table clearly stated, *The Table of Unequal Complicity*. I agree that my work is – well, I would call it soft politics rather than hard politics. I want people to have the right to their own thoughts, but also to think and to discuss their thoughts with generosity. ←

NOTE

1. Tsakonia is a diminishing area of Arkadia, now only ten villages, whose language has survived from Dorian origins. It is now threatened with complete disappearance. *Tsi esi piou?* means "how are you?" in ancient Tsakonika, a phrase I use and hear around me in the village where I live. This installation continues the themes of loss and absence that I have been exploring since my early works *Blasket interventions* (1978) on Blasket Island, a small island off the coast of Ireland, abandoned by its population in 1955, continuing now in another abandoned village, this time with *Monasteria* on the Greek island of Tinos. Loss and absence were further explored in the *Pompeii Project* (1977–1981), which concerned sudden death due to the volcanic eruption in 79 AD.

