

Richard Pincott: "Contemporary Greek Photography"
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Unlike any nostalgic, travel brochure vision of Greece, "Image and icon: the new Greek photography 1975–95" is a photo-survey of changes in the way Greeks themselves have photographed the things they see and care about. The exhibition successfully challenges how Greece and its people have been seen by the rest of the world.

Current photographers clearly reject the received image of ancient ruins, history, mythology and pastoral romance more typical of a picturesque, tourist view of Greece. Shedding foreign filters that often gloss over reality, these new photographs by an inspired cross-section of individuals – each with a distinct authorial presence – shift focus to address what actually affects or amuses Greeks today.

With its eight concentric walls, the Octagon Gallery makes a particularly fitting venue for the first two sections of this show: "The exploration of place" and "Reading the medium." The layout creates a dialogue between sections, not unlike that between one generation and another, allowing the installation to recreate a fascinating sense of the interaction that was taking place between the earliest Greek photographers (who founded the first independent photographic gallery out of their own pockets and taught many of the talents that were soon to emerge) and succeeding generations.

Regrettably, the last section, "The artistic dimension", is removed to a separate room, due to limitations of space at the Royal Photographic Society, so that this connection is not as clear. Lack of space has also meant that the original exhibition as seen in Thessaloniki, Bratislava and Rethymnon has been whittled down to 160 pieces from the 240 or so that appear in the accompanying catalogue by John Stathatos, *Image & Ikon: the new Greek photography*.

In terms of sheer enjoyment an overview of this kind is by nature unable to do much more than to whet the appetite for more examples of the strongest work. In terms of variety, it has a bit of everything and lives up to its promise to introduce us to each of the waves and crosscurrents that inform succeeding stages in the autonomous development (and, to many, fairly unknown quantity) of recent and contemporary Greek photography.

Certainly, there is no doubting the vitality of most of the work included in this travelling exhibition, sponsored by the Greek Ministry of Culture, and slated to visit France, Canada and the US, nor the commitment of its curator, John Stathatos. A writer and photographer, equally at home in London as in Athens, and himself included in the show, Mr Stathatos provides the introduction to the catalogue, a useful account of earlier Greek photography and attitudes, "Greek singularities", together with "New Greek photography: a chronicle", as well as three illuminating essays on each of the sections in his survey.

Stathatos' s most recent work *The Book of Lost Cities*, a fascinating photographic exploration of archaeological sites and their legends, was shown at the Wigmore Gallery in London, during May and June. This series has been completely remade since its first appearance two years ago at the

Rencontres d'Arles and is due to be published next year in book form by Actes Sud.

"What has always fascinated me about photographic imagery, whether curating or writing about it or using it myself, is the fact that it is so essentially fluid, more so than any other medium."

In summing up the current exhibition, Mr Stathatos said, "Qualitatively, some of the best contemporary visual art coming out of Greece is photographic or photo-based, and I think it's there to stay."

"Image & Icon: the new Greek photography, 1975–1995" is at the Octagon Gallery, Royal Photographic Society, Milsom Street, Bath (until 19 July).