

Retrieving the past for contemporary culture

Exhibit studies ties between archaeology, photography

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KATHIMERINI ENGLISH EDITION

When, in the mid-19th century, photographers took pictures of archaeological sites it was often in conjunction with a trend toward colonial tourism and taste for the exotic prevalent among the European middle class at the time. But also tied to this type of photography was the development of scientific archaeology and the rise of ethnographic or geographical expeditions. Photography became a necessary aid to archaeology, and in turn archaeology helped advance the documentary aspect of photography.

"Archaeologies," a photo exhibition taking place in the context of the Photosynkryria photo event in Thessaloniki, examines this mutual relationship between archaeology and photography in respect to contemporary photography. The exhibition's

curator, John Stathatos (an independent curator, photographer and founder of an annual conference on photography that takes place in Kythera) has brought together the work of 14 photographers and through it explores the nature of documentation, collection and classification. It also considers the significance of retrieving the past — common to both photography and archaeology — for contemporary culture.

Conceptually tight and lucid as well as visually elegant, "Archaeologies" questions the notion of an objective documentation and, it also seems, of empirical knowledge and suggests that both archaeology and archaeologically related photography cannot be seen as value-free documentations of the past. Their representation of the world is filtered through the eyes of the photographer and the historical interpretation of an archaeologist, just

as our vision is colored by our cultural conditioning.

This is not to say that "Archaeologies" engages in a rigid, one-sided argument. Broadly speculative rather than insistent on a specific point, it draws the broad affinities between the work of an archaeologist and a photographer. The photographs of Socrates Mavromatis taken during the Acropolis Monuments Restoration project is perhaps the most straightforward example of photography in direct relationship with an archaeological project.

Other works including Lizzie Calligas's magnified images of mosaic shards or Keith Arnatt's objects collected from a rubbish dump bear no direct relationship with archaeology except in the photographers' method of collecting and documenting, which approximates the work of an archaeologist. Other images expand our notion of "archaeology" and render odd and seemingly ordi-



Ian Walker's 'Las Incantadas' juxtaposes recent photographic images of the 'Enchanted Ones,' which stood at the Agora in Thessaloniki, with engravings taken from Revett and Stuart's Antiquities of Athens. The image parallels the medium of photography with that of engraving. It also suggests that a comparative study of documentary evidence can lead to false assumptions.

nary sites worthy of documentation. Anthony Hernandez's "Landscape of the Homeless" (images of deserted, run-down building interiors) and Kai-Olaf Hesse's nondescript, urban spaces intimate much more than they reveal, therefore drawing our attention to the hidden meaning of an image.

Broad-ranging and visually diverse, "Archaeologies" uses the traditional relationship between photography and archaeology to draw interesting, currently relevant notions.

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