

HARIS EPAMINONDA

Haris Epaminonda interviewed by Cristina Travaglini
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Cristina Travaglini: *You moved first to London and then to Berlin, where you live and work at the moment. Would you like to tell me about your roots?*

Haris Epaminonda: I grew up in Nicosia in a peaceful environment despite the undercurrent of political problems that have been present on the island since the Turkish invasion in 1974. I remember my grandmother's house and her blooming summer garden. My two cousins and I often visited the nearby river playing hide and seek. At night, we could hear the birds trapped in the mist-net put up by the old woman next door. When I think back, my childhood seems to have circled around my grandmother's house.

CT: *Childhood seems such a strong presence in your research. Childhood and home, and the distance of past, and the confusing fascination with memory. What can you tell me on this subject?*

HE: I guess like everybody, I'm seeking to find that place where I can feel most at ease. I don't think home is just about one place but also about all those people I love, memories and dreams—the place where I like to return again and again. The more distance one has to things, the clearer the view gets. As time passes, we often forget the details that have constellated that which originally took place. This is perhaps what gives space for imagination to occur. Childhood is a time where reality and fantasies overlap.

CT: *Yes, this is exactly how it feels when one looks at your works. It is as though there was a short circuit between past and present, reality and fancy, as if you were recovering pieces of lost memories. It seems to me like a struggle against the dictatorship of speed, against a concept of*

*time characterized by what looks like a kind of irresistible magnetism towards the Future . . .
What do you think?*

HE: The future is an irresistible force but it is also one that gives possibility. If we were to define past and future as concepts that can be touched via mediating means of remembrance and hope, I would then add a third concept of time perhaps, which neither ceases to being itself nor is it ever reduced to being present. I am thinking of a time that reflects itself in images, and in turn, these images generate other kinds of images or emotions.

CT: *What are your main aesthetic references in your work? And, considering that collage feeds largely on images of 'generic' sources—I mean that it sucks its lymph not only and not primarily from art—where else does your inspiration come from?*

HE: Usually I have no idea what I will come up with. I choose the image and let it guide me. It all happens intuitively. Like a chain reaction, everything influences everything and in effect all things are interrelated with each other. If I was to use a sentence to describe what I wish one day to achieve, it would be Lao Tzu's saying: "Take everything that happens as it comes. As something to animate, not to appropriate."

CT: *Thus now you stun me with Taoism?*

HE: I'm not a Taoist but I find its teachings very beautiful and in tune with the natural order of things.

CT: *What else do you find beautiful? Name the names.*

HE: The face of my mother, the smile of my father, Maria's harmonious profile and Annita's thick black eyelashes. I'm a huge fan of plants also. We always had flowers and plants in our house. My father's business was to do with flower shops. I think my dog is beautiful also.

CT: *When I listen to you, it is as though you don't give much importance to this thing of art as a career; and you don't seem to be obsessed by this reality/circle and nor are you overly emphatic when explaining the starting point of your work. Am I wrong? What can you tell me about it?*

HE: I don't really like forcing things. If something is meant to happen it will happen. If not,

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perhaps there was a reason for it. I don't mean being passive: I'm just focused on what I do and see where that takes me. I think the struggle to always reinventing oneself time and again is in itself hard work. For me there is only one way. Everything is in transition. Who knows how life develops.

CT: *And how would you describe your work if you had to?*

HE: I'm not so good in describing my own work. I think it's very open and dreamy and somehow escapes affirmation but then again I don't really know.

CT: *Today I had my lunch watching your videos. I read somewhere the images are drawn from 60s Greek movies and Cypriot TV broadcast archival footage. What is striking about them is that despite the reassuring, inoffensive, and peaceful qualities of the images, the outcome is disturbing and almost thrilling, as though you had drawn out their hidden monstrous nature. This is something that can be found also in your collages. Sometimes it feels like you wanted to bring the hidden truth of the images that you appropriate to surface...*

HE: I try to work with the essence of the image. In some ways I think some images have something unsettling in them, a turn. The power images have is that they can throw you into the desert and let you find your way. You have to have trust. Images don't give themselves easily. They demand something from you. It's a very seductive process.

CT: *What did they take from you?*

HE: You need to respect the nature of the image. If you go too far with it, the image withdraws—I mean, what was there initially is no longer. That's what is most difficult, to know when to stop. Sometimes I go too far and destroy the image. But it's all part of the game and that's where the challenge lies.

CT: *So what you like in collage is also the fact that, in order not to destroy the image, you need to exercise this form of control, discipline, and concentration?*

HE: I suppose it's a push and pull relationship.