



Thessaloniki
biennale: 6
of Contemporary Art
ΜΠΙΕΝΑΛΕ ΣΥΓΧΡΟΝΗΣ ΤΕΧΝΗΣ ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗΣ



Thessaloniki, 7 December 2017

Press Release

Opening of the temporary exhibition ***“Into the Vortex of the Great War: Thessaloniki of the Armée d’Orient (1915-1918)”*** at the Museum of Byzantine Culture, on **Friday 15 December 2017 at 19.00**. The exhibition will be inaugurated by the Deputy Minister of Interior (Macedonia-Thrace) Mrs Maria Kollia-Tsaroucha.

The Museum of Byzantine Culture organizes the temporary exhibition titled ***“Into the Vortex of the Great War: Thessaloniki of the Armée d’Orient (1915-1918)”*** at the “Eftychia Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou” multi-purpose room. The exhibition will be on from 14 December 2017 to 30 September 2018 and is a production of the Museum in the context of the main programme of the 6th Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art and is co-funded by Greece and the European Union (European Regional Development Fund).

The occasion for organizing this exhibition was the conservation and safe-keeping that the Museum of Byzantine Culture undertook for the original architectural drawing by Ernest Hébrard in the collection of the Technical Chamber of Greece-Section of Central Macedonia. The drawing depicts the part of Aristotelous Square situated above Egnatia Street where, according to the architectural plan proposed after the fire, the City Hall and the City Administration were due to be erected.

Diverging from the usual practice that treats Hébrard’s drawing individually, as the crowning moment of Thessaloniki’s urban planning, the present exhibition seeks to integrate the work within the historical context of World War I and the presence of the Armée d’Orient in the city as evidenced by representations of foreigners, both military and civilian.

Thessaloniki found itself in the eye of the storm of World War I in the autumn of 1915, when the Macedonian Front was created as a consequence of the Bulgarian attack on Serbia and the subsequent arrival of the Armée d’Orient in the city. Turned into an immense “entrenched camp” in the rear of the front lines for the period from 1915 to 1918, the city welcomed about 900,000 soldiers and large waves of refugees, who temporarily settled in camps, public buildings and churches, it treated many injured in its hospitals, and it constituted “a nest of spies”. Thessaloniki emerged as the central scene of the National Schism in Greece, as it was here that the National Defence movement of army officers supporting Eleftherios Venizelos was manifested. The turmoil that the city experienced culminated with the devastating fire in August 1917.

However, all this human crowd that came together in the city was located in the rear area of the Macedonian Front; Thessaloniki remained a supply centre of living and physical material for the Entente military operations in the region. Its most severe losses came from diseases rather than conflict, while the greatest material damage occurred due to the fire of 1917.

Original photographic albums, taken by Section Photographique de l'Armée d'Orient, SPAO, as well as others of amateur production, glass transparencies for projection, paintings, postcards, drawings and contemporaneous editions attempt to historically reconstruct the time and the place.

These are representations conveying the image that into the vortex of the Great War Thessaloniki was literally found in the “eye of the storm”. An apparent lull was distinguished by the stereotypes created or maintained during this period: “the Gardeners of Salonica” for the encamped soldiers due to the idleness in the rear area, and the “coveted city” and “the pearl of the Aegean” for the picturesque and exotic Thessaloniki.

The exhibition comprises original artifacts of Georges Kiourtzian’s donation to the Museum of Byzantine Culture.

The institutions that have contributed to the exhibition offering exhibits and material help are the following:

Technical Chamber of Greece-Section of Central Macedonia; Library and Centre of Information, AUTH; Historical Archive of Macedonia; Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Thessaloniki; Historical Collecting Archive of Thessaloniki-Manos Malamidis; and Yiakoumis / Pierre de Gigord, Kallimages, Paris.

Moreover, exhibits were offered by the private collectors: Arsen and Roupen Kalfayan; Giorgos Konstantinidis; Byron Metos; Vassilis Nikoltsios; Alkis Xanthakis; Dionyssi Stergioulas.

Duration of exhibition: 14.12.2017 – 30.09.2018

Opening hours: 9.00-16.00 (until 31.3.2018), 8.00-20.00 (from 1.4.2017)

Guided tours on: 20/12 and 27/12/2017, 10/1, 17/1, 24/1 and 31/1/2018 at 11.00.

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