





# Christodoulos Panayiotou: One Thousand and One Days

Christodoulos Panayiotou's work asks timely questions about how we come to understand ourselves as part of a general notion of "the public" or more specific entities such as a country or a nation. It also demonstrates how theatrical displays or spectacles evoke a sense of power and authority, and how our interactions with certain spaces, objects, and even natural phenomena transform their meaning. Panayiotou's practice is characterized by rigorous research of archival material, a keen observation of the dynamics surrounding public events such as ceremonies, rituals, and festivals, and the use of a range of mediums and formats. The exhibition is organized according to what he describes as constellations—visual and spatial combinations of new and existing that articulate specific themes and provide the opportunity for altogether new understandings and dialogues to develop. The title, *One Thousand and One Days*, combines allusions to the traditional collection of Middle Eastern folk tales *1001 Nights* and Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s 1965 chronicle of the Kennedy Administration, *A Thousand Days*, (seen in a series of images titled

*New Office* described in greater detail below), to underscore Panayiotou's emphasis on identifying and uncovering hidden narratives in the visual records of history and time.

Central to CAM's presentation is a new multi-part series of color and black and white photographs created specifically for the exhibition. This work features several discrete groupings of images that Panayiotou sourced from the archives of the Republic of Cyprus' Press and Information Office, that depict various ceremonies, meetings, events, and displays during the Presidency of Archbishop Makarios III (1913-1977), the first President of the Republic of Cyprus, from 1960-1977. Panayiotou's selection of photographs demonstrates how a sense of governmental authority, cultural and communal identity is conveyed through otherwise perfunctory rituals, celebrations, decorative presentations, and public functions. The following themes or subjects distinguish themselves within the overall body of images:

*Decorations (Presidential House):* These images present various women alongside the floral displays they created for an official visit) within in the Presidential home of Makarios III. They are significant in their suggestion of both the importance of decoration and display in this residence and the sense of official inclusiveness demonstrated by the women's presence in the photograph.

*The Chair:* This grouping features various views of the chairs reserved for Makarios III at public functions that demonstrate how the President was consistently positioned separately from the general audience of people in recognition of his authoritative position as leader of the country.

*Portrait:* This group of images presents a series of head shots of an anonymous young Cypriot man. Panayiotou includes this group of photographs to emphasize the ambiguous nature of the man's expressions—are the exaggerations indicative of his "real" frame of mind or are they performed for the camera based on the photographer's directions. This reflects the ambiguity in other photographs in the series between authentic and staged situations.

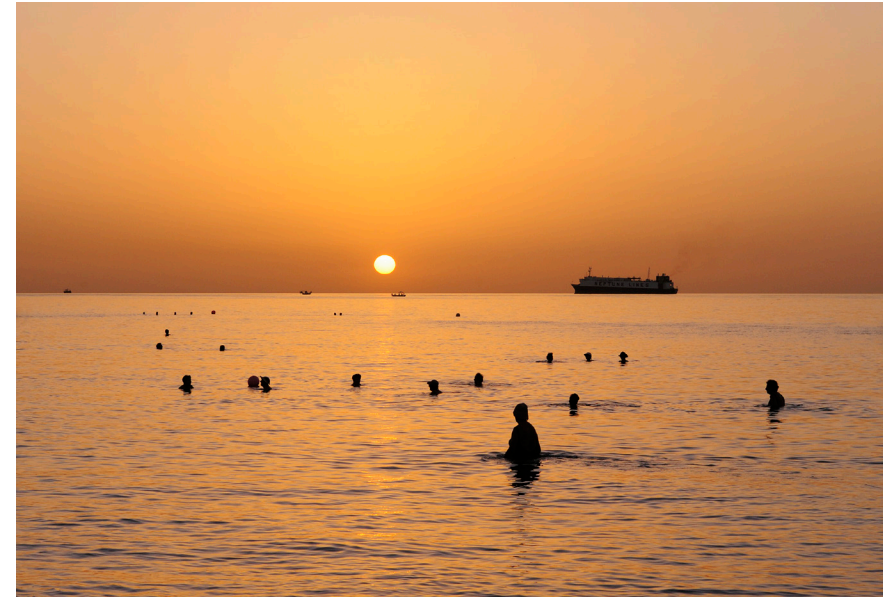
*Decorations (Xmas Streets); Decorations (Xmas Vitrines) and Arrivals: Santa Claus:* These three groups of images respectively feature window shopping displays, street lighting arrangements, and the familiar figure of Santa Claus making public appearances to trace the

appearance of once-new tradition of Christmas celebrations in Cyprus.

*Flowers:* Makarios III is depicted in these photographs walking in various official processions with flowers and other decorative effects strewn in front of him in recognition of his status as the country's political and spiritual leader.

*New Office:* The only grouping intended to follow a chronological order these images depict Makarios III seated in his new office and receiving guests and dignitaries. In addition to the repetition of formal poses, greetings, and gestures, one's attention is drawn to the furniture and decorative effects that serve to contextualize this political figure. The progression of images traces the decoration of the presidential office after the Greek-inspired coup against Makarios III and the subsequent Turkish military offensive that led to the division of the island in 1974. The gradual appearance in the space of Greek vases, a statue of justice, a painting depicting a scene on a Greek island, and the book about the Kennedy Administration from which the exhibition takes its name, tells a story about how objects and effects create a particular perception of the Republic of Cyprus—especially its relationship to both Eastern and Western cultures.

*The Public:* The only color photographs featured in the overall project, they were culled from the Municipal Archive of the City of Limassol (Panayiotou's birthplace) and depict audiences at various events



Above: Christodoulos Panayiotou, *Sunrise (1 October 2010, 6.15)*, 2010. Color print.

after 1977. The center of their attention is left out of the frame of the image, leaving us only to focus on the people themselves and the standard nature of structures and seating arrangements constructed and assembled to facilitate their spectatorship. Panayiotou was initially drawn to the image with the first row of empty seats, presumably reserved for officials or dignitaries who were yet to come or did not come at all. The noticeably vacant seats serve as a reminder of the hierarchical structures—even seemingly perfunctory or insignificant ones—that create physical, psychological, and social separations at otherwise collective public functions.

Panayiotou encourages the viewer to appreciate both obvious and latent thematic relationships between these

groups of images—for example, the significance of decoration as evidenced by floral arrangements in the President's home and in lighting the city streets at Christmastime. Despite their direct connection to the culture, society, and tormented history of The Republic of Cyprus, his arrangement of the photographs also suggests how greater scrutiny of documentary imagery in general reveals the aesthetics of power—in other words, how visual representations in official situations create hidden narratives and understated assertions of authority.

This interest in reconsidering how spectacle and display confer a sense of significance and importance is echoed in Panayiotou's work *Operation Serenade* (2012). Commissioned for this exhibition,

the installation features rolled carpets sourced from major Hollywood award ceremonies (such as the Oscars and the Emmys among others) arranged throughout CAM's galleries. The "red carpet" portion of these events has almost superseded the significance of the award presentations themselves, with televised interviews and photographs of the award nominees and other celebrities dissected later in the media for insights on the stars' personalities and fashion sense. Its title alludes to the official codename for the 2004 funeral of American President Ronald Reagan (1911-2004; President 1980-1989), who, before becoming a politician, was a celebrated actor in Hollywood. Panayiotou's use of the title is inspired by the strangely poetic nature of the funeral's codename, by descriptions of its elaborate planning and theatricality, and by the implied sense of anticipation and closure that characterized the event. *Operation Serenade* thus suggests the striking similarities between a ritual such as the funeral procession of an important head of state and the red carpet portion of awards ceremonies: both are publicly observed spectacles involving the movement of people from one place to another to acknowledge and ascribe a sense of finality on human achievement. The artist's presentation of carpets rolled up and not unfurled withholds our access to the aura of celebrity that they imply.

Panayiotou extends this investigation of visual context and perception in his wall painting, *Festival* (2012). The work is a re-creation of a backdrop for a festival in Cyprus in 1985 by set designer

Lula Shoosmith bearing an uncanny resemblance to various celebrated abstract paintings from twentieth-century art history. His reconfiguration of the set within the museum displaces this abstract painting from its origins in spectacular entertainment into a space where it can be appreciated solely for its aesthetic properties of color, form, and gesture.

Panayiotou's reconsideration of everyday phenomena based on their representation in the mass media also informs the work *Sunrise (1 October 2010, 6.15)* (2010). This image of silhouetted swimmers enjoying themselves as the sun rises off of Cyprus's Mediterranean coast seems immediately familiar based on the ubiquity of pictures of sunrises and sunsets found in postcards, posters, and travel brochures. The date that this apparently "generic" image was shot commemorates the fiftieth anniversary Cypriot independence, and the inclusion of the time of day in the title identifies it as a particular moment that the artist actually experienced and, notably, photographed by the artist himself near his home city of Limmasol. Ultimately, this otherwise unassuming work encompasses key ideas and issues that define Panayiotou's practice, including how "the public" is constructed through rituals and a shared use of space, and how nationhood or nationality is constructed and perpetuated through ceremonies, iconic images, and other forms of visual spectacle and display.