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ARTS & CULTURE

## RISE: JANNIS VARELAS

— PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY

With the intent to scrutinise the hegemonic power structures of our time through his latest exhibition, Varelas discusses the concepts around sexuality and the historic influences that attempt to overcome the standardised nature of society

At first glance the art of Jannis Varelas appears reminiscent of the photomontages of the Dada artist Hannah Höch. Unlike Höch, whose expression is driven by a sense of irony, Varelas propels exaggeration and coarseness. Pertaining to the works by the French Renaissance writer François Rabelais, the monstrous appearances of Jannis's figures elope the viewers in the beguiling world of fantasy, satire and the grotesque. In the current exhibition 'Ntῆpῆ Humanism', Jannis explores the reaction to the trauma of standardisation and conformity in society, providing a compelling insight into the social mores and their rituals.

**Dazed Digital: What part of your profession do you enjoy the most?**

**Jannis Varelas:** I always enjoy the beginning of a project, when I am starting to put together all kind of thoughts, ideas, references, materials, things that are totally scattered and - by putting them on a certain order - you start to get the sense of a form.

**DD: Why is the title of your latest exhibition Ntῆpῆ Humanism?**

**Jannis Varelas:** Ntῆpῆ is a Greek word (pronounced "dirty") that combines meanings such as pain, affection, worry, passion. I think that Nadja's (curator) idea was that in Greece there are artists that deal with the idea of individuals attempting to welcome modernity but modernity filtered through the national conception of Ntῆpῆ. So the title indicates this peculiarity.

**DD: Your artworks explore masculinity and femininity, what fascinates you about these concepts?**

**Jannis Varelas:** Masculinity and femininity in my work correspond and compress mainly the concept of sexuality. Sexuality, I think, forms and is central to the structural overview of our society. The forms we use to represent sexuality are very sophisticated but on the other hand often clichéd. In my work, I try to overcome these clichés via the symbolic nature of the erotic as seen through the eyes of authors such as Lautremont, Bataille, Oscar Wilde, and Michel Houellebecq. I also think through sexuality we can create a discourse on the hegemonic power structures of our time and take a stand for or against it.

**DD: What do you try to achieve with contrasts such as between shapes, techniques and materials?**

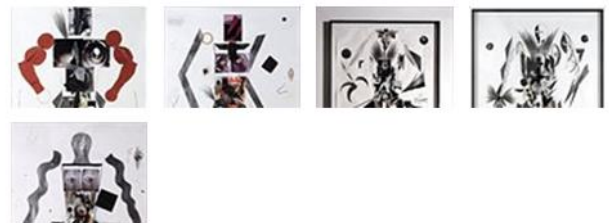
**Jannis Varelas:** I think that the combination of shapes, materials and techniques strengthens the dynamic or the general plot of a project and eradicates the monotony.

**DD: The faces of the creatures you depict appear strange and unsettling. What draws you to the uncanny?**

**Jannis Varelas:** Perhaps the uncanny as experienced through occult symbols that



IMAGE GALLERY



surround us - whether we acknowledge them or not, or even attempt to understand them. The show Mike Kelly curated in 2004, the "Uncanny", is a great reference for me. I see it as thus:- the trauma of the cultural signifiers that frayed modernity at the edges and turned it into a horror show or the appearance of one. This is because knowledge is still available but obfuscated in so many diverting ways.

**DD: How does living in Athens and Vienna influence your work and identity?**

**Jannis Varelas:** Living in between two cities I have many and rich experiences and of course their past and their present influence me a lot.

**DD: What artists do you like at the moment?**

**Jannis Varelas:** At the moment I am interested in the works of John Baldessari, George Bataille and Jean Genet.

**DD: What projects do you have coming up?**

**Jannis Varelas:** In October I have a solo show in Kunsthalle in Athens, in March a solo show at the Krinzinger gallery in Vienna and in May a big solo show in the Contemporary Art center in Cincinnati.

*The Ντέφι Humanism exhibition takes place until August 12, 2011 at the Faggionato Fine Art Gallery in London.*

Text by Darya Antonovna Papko

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JANNIS VARELAS, UNTITLED, 2010 (MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER 253X150CM) COURTESY THE BREEDER ATHENS

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ARTSANDCULTURE

## RISE: JANNIS VARELAS

— 2 HOURS AGO

With the intent to scrutinise the hegemonic power structures of our time through his latest exhibition, Varleas discusses the concepts around sexuality and the historic influences that attempt to overcome the standardised nature of society

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JANNIS VARELAS, F.X.B. 1266, 2010, MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 243X150CM

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JANNIS VARELAS, PROLETKULT-X OPERA COSTUME, 2006, MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 250x150CM. COURTESY THE BREEDER

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