

RE: ART_ONE TO WATCH YORGO ALEXOPOULOS

Interviewed by **MARIA KUCINSKI**

Yorgo Alexopoulos is a New York-based artist best known for his innovative use of new media and technology. His artistic approach fuses traditional media such as painting, photography, film and sculpture with digital media. Exploring transcendental themes, Alexopoulos creates experiential video installations using animation software with techniques learned as a visual effects animator. He recently mounted his most ambitious project to date, a 24-panel mosaic video wall at the Cristin Tierney Gallery. He is a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Alexopoulos is represented by Cristin Tierney in New York.

YOU ORIGINALLY STARTED AS A PAINTER, MOSTLY DOING GRAFFITI IN ITS HEYDAY IN LOS ANGELES, WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN USING DIGITAL MEDIA IN YOUR ARTWORK?

After making the transition from graffiti to traditional painting after high school I was accepted into the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Once there, I was exposed to all sorts of possibilities outside of painting. This was 1992 and the heyday of digital art. I quickly embraced the technological departments that the school offered and no longer saw a point in making paintings while I had access to the abundant facilities that I was suddenly surrounded by. I saw this as an opportunity to experiment and it was during this time that I started to realize the potential of combining traditional media with new media. I also attribute this transition to my early childhood as I was brought up in an environment surrounded by electronics and engineers. My father was an electronics R&D scientist and he had a laboratory in our garage. I spent hours playing with components and looking at astronomy books growing up. One of my first summer jobs as a teenager was made possible by my uncle who was the Chairman of Electrical Engineering Department at UCLA. I worked on soldering circuit boards and assembling electronic components for graduate students' thesis projects in the school of electrical engineering. I have always been interested in creating new

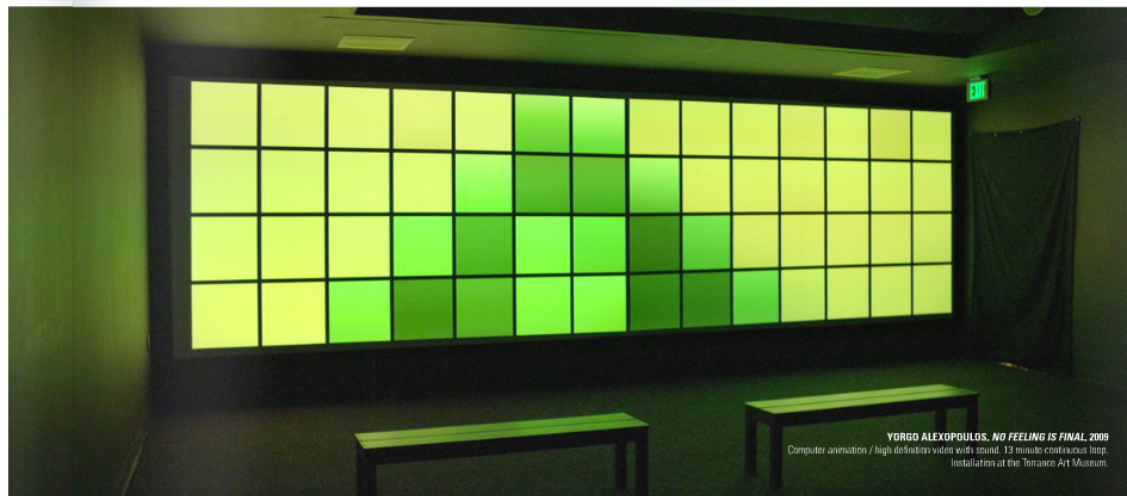


YORGO ALEXOPOULOS, *TRANSMIGRATIONS*, 2012
24 channel video installation with sound, Cristin Tierney Gallery installation view.

ways of experiencing art so naturally I saw using digital means to achieve this effect could yield wonderful results.

VIDEO IS A MEDIUM THAT ARTISTS HAVE BEEN USING SINCE THE LATE 1960S, EARLY 1970S SO THE MEDIUM ITSELF IS NOT NEW, BUT YOUR APPROACH SEEMS TO TAKE PAINTERLY ASPECTS IN THE FINE ART MANNER, AND INFUSE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY INTO SOMETHING GREATER THAN A SUM OF CODE. CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT YOUR ARTISTIC PROCESS IS AND HOW YOU CONVEY THIS THROUGH THIS MEDIUM?

My process always begins by working backwards. I start by asking myself, "What is the effect I want my artwork to have on the viewer?" When working in video there are two initial obstacles, the artwork and the technology. I typically deal with the technology first since that is my canvas so to speak. Prepping the canvas for me means ascertaining all of the technical specifications of the systems that I will be using: testing cables and media players, setting up the computers for production, etc. As for the artwork itself, after the concept is in place I work like a painter. I create a first layer or a first pass, and then a second, then a third and I keep building on to the last. From there I take away and then I add more. I create and destroy what I've made



YORGO ALEXOPOULOS, *NO FEELING IS FINAL*, 2009
Computer animation / high definition video with sound, 13 minute continuous loop, installation at the Tanager Art Museum.



YORGO ALEXOPOULOS, *TRANSMIGRATIONS*, 2012
24 channel video installation with sound. Cristin Tierney Gallery installation view.

until I get to a point where I feel that the effect I am looking for has come to fruition. A good example of what I'm talking about is portrayed in the film *The Mystery of Picasso*. In this film you see how he creates and destroys what he makes along the way until he gets to a place where he feels finished. I approach making video art in the same exact way, creating and destroying. Whether this is ultimately conveyed to the viewer is not necessarily relevant but that is my process.

YOUR WORK OFTEN DEALS WITH METAPHYSICAL AND TRANSCENDENTAL THEMES, HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR WORK IS ABLE TO TRANSLATE THESE IDEAS THAT MAY SEEM ROOTED IN TEXT AND MORE BASIC FORMS OF EXPRESSION?

I understand that each person who sees my work brings their own subjective experiences and worldview into the equation. The pieces I make fuse my interests and worldview into an artwork that has some mystery or abstraction but enough common symbolism that anybody can relate to. Ultimately, the audience makes their own

interpretation but along the way the artist and viewer share a collective experience. When creating an artwork, I first seek to make something that is visually compelling to draw the audience into the work. Once drawn in visually and the technical effect has taken root, the viewer can begin to peel away the many layered concepts and themes that are assimilated into the piece. My themes are universal and deeply rooted in our collective psyche. The common thread is aimed at getting the audience to transcend their own egos to experience things bigger than themselves. I use color, light, sound, representation, abstraction, adapted imagery, photography, film and anything necessary to achieve the effect I want the viewer to experience.

YOU SEEM LIKE A BIT OF A TECH GEEK, AND I KNOW WE NERDED OUT ABOUT ELECTRICAL OUTPUT AND HDMI CORDS AND MONITOR LUMINOSITY FOR YOUR INSTALLATION, *TRANSMIGRATIONS* AT CRISTIN TIERNEY IN THE SPRING OF 2012. SO, HOW DOES THE TECHNICAL COMPONENT OUTSIDE OF SOFTWARE FACTOR INTO YOUR WORK? DO YOU ENVISION THE

FULL PICTURE BEFORE? DOES IT COME TOGETHER IN PIECES?

The technology behind any of my work is usually thoroughly figured out beforehand. It's the artwork, or content, that incubates and goes through a series of transformations along the way. Like I mentioned before, it's very much like working in paint, done over the course of multiple passes. From the moment you make the first mark you take on the role of "fixing" the piece. When I make a painting I am basically trying to fix an image as I work through it. It's very much the same when I work in video or animation. Making art is like forcing yourself to fix something. You have to fix what you start or you abandon it and the piece dies.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE EXPLORED MULTI-CHANNEL, IMMERSIVE ENVIRONMENTS, WHAT'S NEXT? HOW DO YOU PUSH THE BOUNDARY ON SOMETHING ESSENTIALLY ROOTED AND BOUND TO A TECHNOLOGY FRAMEWORK?

I don't consider my artwork bound or rooted to technology. I see it the other way around. Though I use technology, my work is rooted in traditional media. In the past few years, I've been very immersed in working with synchronized video installations and animated video artworks. But over the years I have worked in a variety of media. Each time I make a work I am not just considering the artwork I am making, I am also considering how the work fits into the overall arch of art history. As an artist you have two audiences, artists and everyone else. I ask myself, how can I change the way people experience art and how can I help change the medium? How can I change or inspire how other artists work? I am currently exploring paintings using chemicals and mediums that are self-illuminating as well as a slew of new video and LED sculptures for 2013.