

## **Interview with Irene Orati, Curator of the Alpha Bank Art Collection**

### **1) What would you say are some of the main ambitions and goals for the Alpha Bank Art Collection?**

**Irene Orati:** The Alpha Bank Collection nowadays consists of the collections of four banks. The collections of Emporiki Bank and Citibank were added in 2013 and 2014 respectively to the collections of Credit Bank and Ionian Bank, which have formed the Collection in 2001. Most of the works are not in public view but some are in the Bank's branches all over Greece and a big number is in staff offices. We try to show the public specific works concerning important periods or trends in Greek art, for example the exhibition "Greek Art from 1950 until today", currently circulating in various towns all over Greece. Our main goal is to show the works from our Collection and to bring the public closer to these works and show the cultural face of the Bank, which was always orientated to Greek art.

### **2) Do you feel that the Collection has been an important contact point between existing and future clients of the Bank?**

**IO:** Certainly. The clients are interested, they attend speeches concerning the exhibitions and like the fact that the Bank owns such a collection. We are currently preparing a special programme for our clients' needs concerning their private collections; advising them in issues relating to their works, their condition, or their desire to buy or sell.

### **3) Are there any particular artworks which stand out for you? Perhaps because they were difficult to find and then you finally acquired them?**

**IO:** The Collection includes some very important works from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, which are valuable to us because they stand out because they were difficult to acquire. They have now become part of our Collection, which is one of the two most important bank collections in Greece. Some years ago we acquired a group of contemporary works of Greek art, dating from 1980 until 2010, which have strengthened our Collection in the contemporary art field.

### **4) When was the decision made to start collecting albums, books and graphic arts material? Have they also been displayed in the offices of the Bank?**

**IO:** Prints, old maps, artists' books, graphic material, posters were accumulated by the Ionian Bank since the 1980's, a museum quality collection and one of the most valuable in Greece, which has been part of the Alpha Bank Collection since 2001. We do not display them in the offices, due to their fragile condition.

**5) Do you see collecting as a form of preservation and protecting? I am thinking about your archive**

**IO:** We want to form a collection that can show the development of Greek art from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when Greece became an independent state until today. We have a different programme, “The defacements that hurt”, protecting and preserving statues and buildings damaged by tags and demonstrations and located in Athens and Thessaloniki. Our archive is mainly an artists’ archive, containing all the information about our works, plus we keep a very well-informed library on Greek art, exhibition and auction catalogues, magazines et cetera. We also organise exhibitions focusing on maps of various regions of Greece (the Archipelago, northern Greece, Peloponnesus), print and poster exhibitions, which travel around Greece.

**7) Can you tell me about the last public exhibition which included artworks from the Collection and also about one of the last loans to a museum?**

**IO:** The last public exhibition which we were involved in was the “Genii Loci. Greek Art from 1930 until today” at the Manege National Museum in St. Petersburg (31.10.2016 - 31.1.2017). We are currently discussing the possibility of a permanent loan of some of the artworks from the Collection to the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Greece. We also organise a visit for our colleagues to such exhibitions.

**9) Do all staff members have access to the digital artwork archive and what else can they utilise?**

**IO:** Access to the archive is possible for our department’s staff only, but we have an intranet program named Alpha Culture, showing works from the Collection, as well as our exhibitions and activities. Furthermore, there exists a monthly online magazine, named “Mazi” (Together), where we present the artworks in our network; their story, a description and photographs.

**10) Can you summarise how your collecting activities reacted to the economic down turn in 2008 and even the current situation? Do you feel a sense of improvement and that things are starting to get back to how they were pre-2008?**

**IO:** Since Greece is in a worse condition than the rest of Europe, many activities have been reduced and our budget has been limited. We organise low key exhibitions, but we still strongly support young artists through sponsoring and organising exhibitions. The current exhibition of this type is “Print Discussions. Young Greek Printmakers Facing Greek Printmakers of the Past” at the Institute of Contemporary Greek Art in Athens, and as a result we also buy their artworks for our Collection.

**11) What advice would you give to corporations who are considering starting an art collection?**

**IO:** To focus on something very specific, a period, a trend, an art movement, so that the collection has possibilities to become important. We must not forget that the very valuable works are already in museums or in big corporate or private collections. Focusing on something very special now is a prerequisite for a significant development in the future.

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