

# ART-ATHINA: THE ART OF RESILIENCE

Giancarlo Politi

**GIANCARLO POLITI:** *An art fair during a time of economic crisis is new to Greece. What has enabled you to survive?*

**Alexandros Stanas:** Established in 1993, ART-ATHINA is Greece's largest annual visual art event. In defiance of the recession, this year's edition was a resounding success. At the Faliro Pavilion we showcased the work of more than 350 artists represented by 58 galleries from nine countries (Belgium, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) as well as 42 institutions. It was the most successful year of the last three, both in sales and attendance with 18,000 visitors.

**GP:** *Yet the international art market is slowing and there is a serious national economic crisis. How are ART-ATHINA's participating galleries and collectors managing this moment?*

**AS:** The number of ART-ATHINA's 2011 participating galleries did not decrease, proving the fair's potential. The crisis impacted the turnover of the Greek

art market in general, but good art has been selling even more briskly than previous years. The inflated market of recent years is now being corrected, moving towards either established values or promising younger artists. For Greek galleries the fair is a must. In many cases exhibitors make a statement with solo shows. For example, this year Gilbert & George designed a special booth for Bernier/Eliades Gallery in order to present their latest series of works ("The Urethra Postcard Pictures" project).

**GP:** *ART-ATHINA is held concurrently with other art fairs such as SP-Arte, the São Paulo International Art Fair, Art Amsterdam and VIENNAFAIR. Do these events undermine each other, or are they driven by national interest?*

**AS:** It seems that we do not really have common exhibitors with the above fairs. Of course, it would be better not to overlap, but it is almost impossible to find dates when no other art fair is taking place around the world. Evidently, international collectors who travel will have to make a choice!

**GP:** *The last edition of ART-ATHINA was held in the midst of street protests because of economic restrictions. Despite that, were there sales? How did the show do in general?*

**AS:** ART-ATHINA brought a wind of optimism and a breath of culture to the city. On the opening day there were protests in the center of the city, but the fair was packed. Despite the tough financial situation, the commercial interest was very significant, and

sales are being reported every day.

The success of this year's ART-ATHINA on all levels was beyond expectation. The enthusiasm of all participants and visitors alike showed that the current crisis should not be used as an excuse; contemporary art is a social catalyst as well as a vehicle for development. The future will not be easy, but since we already managed to succeed we will continue from this solid ground.

Alexandros Stanas, general director of ART-ATHINA.

