

Artist wows public in Syntagma

Maria Fragoudaki talks about the project she presented in central Athens and her exhibition

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Informed visitors and passers-by at Syntagma Square in central Athens were treated to a rare sight on the night of April 27, as the lights went off suddenly on the Grande Bretagne side of the public plaza, and for a few minutes the hotel's facade became a huge screen for the "BedSheets" art project, an initiative conceived and realized by a young artist.

Using performance, painting, mixed media and a public intervention, as well as pioneering 3D mapping technology, Maria Fragoudaki presented a three-dimensional artistic experience unlike anything seen in Greece before.

The action started on a white bed on the pavement of the square, where the stars were the artist herself and her sister, Anastasia Argyriou, also a performance artist. It then expanded to the historic hotel's facade, as the bed sheet was briefly transformed into a fascinating image packed with symbolism. "Everything about this event was carefully calculated," says Fragoudaki.

Born in Athens in 1983, Fragoudaki started out as a science student at a UK university before realizing that her heart really lay in art and making the leap into the unknown. She moved to New York a couple of years ago and has since pursued a career in the US. Greece, however, is always on her mind and this latest project brought her back to her homeland, following a recent successful show at the Greek capital's Jewish Museum.

Why Syntagma?

"I chose Syntagma because it really is the heart of the city and I wanted to make people who may never decide to cross the threshold of a museum or visit an exhibition a part of my endeavor. I think it's a much more democratic approach," says the artist. "The other reason is that it's a hub where space is united with the history of the Greek nation and therefore a location of particular significance, appropriate for the artistic experience I prepared. It was an intervention that does not harm the city but



The facade of the Hotel Grande Bretagne in Athens was used as a huge screen for the 'BedSheets' art project, conceived and realized by Maria Fragoudaki (right), who came back to Greece from the US for its debut.

provides a breath of fresh air through the potential of art and technology."

The main idea behind the "BedSheets" art project – which includes an exhibition opening today at the SG Gallery at the St George Lycabettus Hotel in Kolonaki – started to come together about a year ago.

"I was closely observing the imprint the human body leaves on bed sheets, like a unique trace. The very next day, I started taking photographs of the sheets from this point of view. As I went through the photographs, I was struck by the thought that in sleep, we and our bodies are completely free. But what happens in the moment when we leave the bed and throw off our sheets? How free are we? How aware are we of all the things that stand in the way of freedom of expression, movement, emotion



'BedSheets' goes on show at the St George Lycabettus Hotel's gallery today.

and, ultimately, free will?"

The artist then went on to create a series of three-dimensional works where the canvas plays the roles of a rumpled bed sheet. She also worked on the event presented at Syntagma Square, which,

she explains, was aimed, "especially during the crisis, at helping each of us recognize the fundamental issues that pertain to freedom and, therefore, the quality of our thoughts and decisions."

"This is a constant and uphill battle that is about our inner world but also about our relationships with others and the outside world. It is the dualism of freedom that motivated me and gave meaning to this series of works," adds Fragoudaki.

There was a time when the artist had to explore her own limits. Even though she studied chemistry, pharmacology and business management, she eventually decided to do something entirely different.

"My studies were excellent training for becoming an artist," she says. "On the one hand, chemistry and pharma-



cology satisfied my innate sense of curiosity about matter and how materials behave; on the other, business management helped me set targets and not regard art in a utopian or romantic manner. I made the decision to become an artist, for example, when I realized that this was the only thing I wanted to invest my time and spiritual energy in – it was something of a need. And to move to New York, I told myself that I would first have to sell all of my works in Athens. I moved to the United States without knowing anyone there, but that did not prevent me from making my desire a reality," says the artist, whose work has been picked up by the likes of Google.

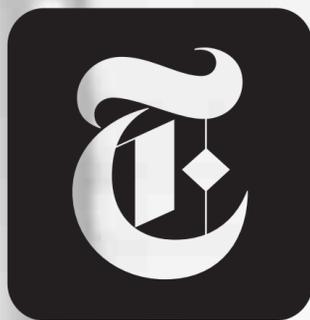
The New York show that resulted in that sale was called "Superheroes," in fact.

"What my time in America has taught me is that in order to succeed, you need to become a small hero, to amass your strengths, set goals and be strong. The satisfaction I get from art is so great that it gave me the courage to persevere," says Fragoudaki.

The artist started painting everything with her hand, without a paintbrush, putting the emphasis on color. She is also interested in exploring materials and their ability to produce a tactile experience, such as rubber, plaster, duct tape, string and rope.

"I think the public will get a better understanding of this work at my solo exhibition," says the artist. "The canvas's two dimensions become three, just like the 'BedSheets' project transcended my personal point of view to become a part of the public sphere."

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