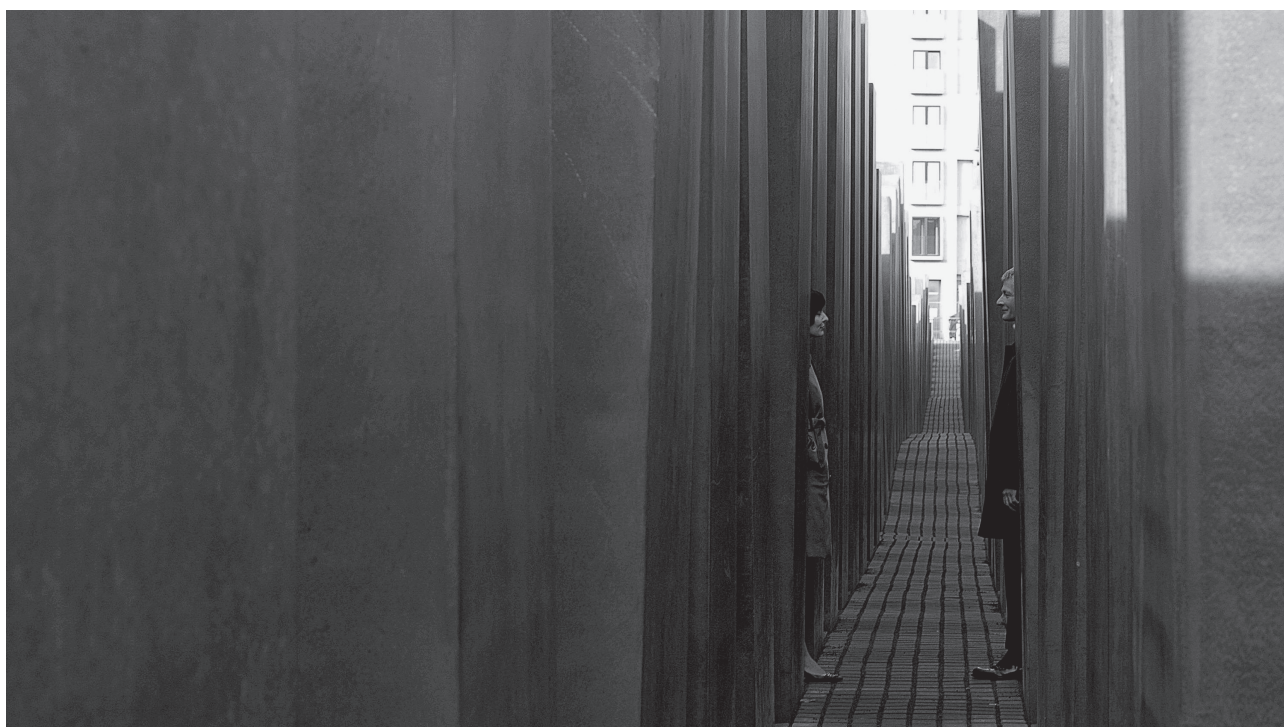


PRESS RELEASE

George Drivas

(un-)documented

Duration: **12/06/2009 – 06/09/2009**



The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, presents the first solo exhibition of **George Drivas** titled **(un-)documented** realized from the **12th of June** until the **6th of September 2009**. The exhibition is part of EMST's policy for the support and promotion of young creators. The exhibition presents for the first time the trilogy *Social Software* (2005-2009) which includes the works *Beta Test*, (2005), *Case Study* (2007-2008) and *Development Plan* (2009), the work *Closed Circuit* (2005) and most importantly the new work titled *Empirical Data* (2009) co-produced by EMST.

George Drivas, one of the most important Greek artists of the younger generation, creates narrative videos that consist of black and white digital photos, intertitled text, music and sound. The result, a hybrid work, combines written text together with cinematic and photographic characteristics. His aesthetic brings to mind classical cinematography, with strong references to modern architecture and an "aesthetic of surveillance" since most of his photographs appear as if have been shot from the viewpoint of a hidden observer. With photographic technical mastery and an objective, almost scientific language, Drivas narrates stories that touch upon the subjects of alienation, social integration, the promise and the disappointment from interpersonal relations in a society of surveillance.

George Drivas was born in Athens in 1969. He graduated in 1994 from the National & Kapodistrian University

of Athens with a degree at Political Science and in 1998 with a Masters Degree in Film and Media Studies from Freie Universitat in Berlin. He has participated in the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens , exhibitions *Transexperiences Greece 2008* in Beijing and *In Present Tense, Young Greek Artists*. He has participated and awarded in a number of international festivals, such as the *VII Media Art Forum*, *XXVII Moscow International Film Festival (MIFF)* (2nd Prize), the *1st Zebra International Poetry Film Festival* in Berlin (2nd Prize) and at *New York EXPO*, New York exposition of film and video shorts (Jury Award for Experimental Short Film). He lives and works in Athens and Berlin.



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(un-)documented

a conversation between George Drivas and Stamatis Schizakis

(Extracts from the catalogue interview)

STAMATIS SCHIZAKIS: Your works occupy a field between cinema, photography, video art and literature. In order to produce them, you often collaborate with film production companies, actors, directors of photography, stylists. You work according to a specific script that you have written, checking every detail in its implementation. The primary material, however, you choose to be high-resolution black and white digital photos, which you combine with sound, music and text arranged on a time line in order to tell a story. How would you, as an artist in a field where different arts and media, different temporalities and different languages meet, place this hybrid work?

GEORGE DRIVAS: I do not think that I would be interested in “placing” my work in a specific context. My background, in terms of both my curriculum vitae and my personal aesthetic preferences and references, or influences, is clearly the cinema. This, I believe, is what I did and will continue to do. In this process, the cinematic approach to production, which you mentioned, is, of course, not an end in itself, but often a necessity imposed by the very media with which I choose to work and the size and complexity of the story of each film I make. (This is perfectly understandable if one compares *Closed Circuit* with my latest project, *Empirical Data*.) However, while I increasingly veer towards a cinematic mode of writing, what might also characterise me is an ongoing confrontation with my medium of reference. While I consider my work as filmmaking, at the same time I question the limits, the essence, and of course the potential of the cinema. I therefore arrive at a production process which begins from a structured script only to be decomposed and rearranged. I start out each project in an academic way, a classical way if you will, in terms of design and production, yet I ultimately produce and use few elements, a few indispensable lengths of film, excerpts from an essentially “complete” film product, and I (re-)create the film in the end using them. Perhaps the more I approach cinema the more intense my confrontation with it becomes.

S.S.: Your works could be compared to films that do not have the motion effect created by 24 frames per second. Moreover, They bring to mind narrative photographic practices like photo essays, and even experimental filmmaking in the 1960s and '70s, in which photographs were used in a similar manner, for instance in Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) and Hollis Frampton's *Nostalgia* (1971). These two are well known examples of films made up of photographs. Being two film essays on memory and its workings, they have an organic relationship with photography as a medium associated with the mental recollection of persons and events of the past. Is it anything similar that you are attempting? What is the role of the still image in your projects?

G.D.: The still image is the origin of the cinema. We should not forget that the cinema came into being when certain people thought of building a kind of camera that essentially shot pictures so fast that when projected gave the illusion of movement. That was cinema. The still image is the raw material for creating the moving image and that is precisely how I use it. I suggest movement without considering it necessary to reproduce it. I only use photography as a distinct part of a film, as a film frame, if you will. For me, each photograph is a piece extracted from a film sequence, a piece of a film that theoretically is out there somewhere, irrespective of the fact that I do not choose to ever show the whole, but rather a few fragments. In this sense, I usually employ sets of identical pictures, series that “recall” their origin, their relationship with the film as a whole, while also claiming the right to become autonomous and find their own importance in the course of my work. The way I use photography invites the viewer to wonder about the relationship and importance of each photograph with respect to other ones, with the story the viewer is watching and with the (deliberate) gaps in the narration of any

story in my film. My photograph as a film frame highlights details in a story, which we watch as it stops and starts again, often removing not only pieces of the film structure, but even frames from specific scenes. The viewer is invited to fill in those gaps. To fill in the missing frames in the film that is unfolding in front of his eyes. The use of this absence, and the reduction and “emptiness” which result from the use of a single frame, rather than a constantly moving image, allow just enough space and time for the viewer to project his own thoughts on the story and, ultimately, to complete the work in his own way.

S.S.: Apart from these two “visual” types of storytelling there is also the element of the written word, in the form of intertitles. The language used in these captions is the detached language of scientific experiment and observation. The use of captions allows the image to remain independent of the written word and the text to remain independent of the image. These are two autonomous narratives, whose fusion creates a third one. How do you consider this new, composite narrative?

G.D.: The written word essentially creates a version. An interpretation of the image in a specific fashion, reminding us that we are not watching something that is trying to “seduce” us by an illusion of reality but, on the contrary, that what we see is an interpretation, one of several versions of reading a story. You could say that my texts are another film, which evolves in parallel and, simply, rather than being watched, it is read. The text does not explain the picture, does not follow it in the classical sense, but interprets it in its own distinctive, overt and sometimes a little incoherent way, at first sight. Instead of completing the image, it gives another dimension to it –sometimes misleading for a while–, stressing perhaps more than the image the impossibility of neutrality, the ultimate absence of an “authentic” image, a true history, an absolute truth. The text conveys, or rather reminds us that every moment in a narrative is a construction. Each photograph is an interpretation, each shooting angle a moral stance.

S.S.: Your work is fiction, yet bears a close relationship with reality. *Closed Circuit* states from the beginning that it is “case 22” in a (fictional?) case file. *Beta Test* begins by announcing that, “This test takes place on Thursday, November 9th”. *Case Study*, similarly, that “all information is based on interviews, private and public image banks and official documents”. You sign all three projects as “Documented by George Drivas”, as someone who claims to document reality. Camera work and shooting angles contribute to such an illusion. Do you believe that it is necessary to render your fictional videos as factual events in order for them to communicate their full meaning? Could it be that they are not entirely works of fiction, after all?

G.D.: After all, what is real and what is not? How do we experience the difference? How real is a documentary, an interview, a news story, a surveillance camera shot? I do not think that I can precise that, and that is exactly what I want to say through my work. Is it true because I consider it true, because I call it thus, because the viewer must accept it as such, or perhaps it is not true and is simple irony, mere word play? If you are satisfied with this response, I would suggest that you watch news broadcast on television tomorrow as total fiction and my films, on the contrary, as something quite “true” and then try to determine the differentiating factor between them.

I sign my works, not as director and script author, but as a recorder, a documentarist (*documented by George Drivas*). It is I who chooses to call something real, to call a process a documentary process, to call my films documentaries. This, of course, reflects my point regarding our view with respect to the existence of any truth and its documentation, such as it may be. It is not only documentation that is a construction after all, but its subject itself. Any truth exists only by common consent. There are no differences any more in my mind. In this respect, truth and lie become one. Existing becomes non-existing, recording becomes non-recording, what is documented is fully undocumented at the same time. By its title *George Drivas (un-)documented*, the exhibition as a whole seeks to make a comment even on myself and my work. Is my exhibition a documentation of myself at the same time? Are my works a documentation of mine?

Vittoria Capresi

About the work of George Drivas

(Extracts from the catalogue essay)

[...]The films of George Drivas concern single spots of a story; they are like frozen moments, cut out from a much longer process which started in an indistinct past and continues into an unknown future. The beginning is not clearly defined, and the same applies to the conclusion, in the sense of any explanation of the plot. The end often remains open, it is only alluded to, and all the questions which accompanied the narration are not completely clarified. Does the story continue in the mind of the spectator? Yes / maybe / maybe not.

Drivas proposes an end indeed, an apparent conclusion to the stories he tells and documents. But this end is not absolute and definitive. It is far more the entrance to a *labyrinth*, to a situation which could continue endlessly, in the same way it began and was narrated. The architectural details, the light, the movements could change and be different, but not the perpetual cycle of actions, identical to themselves every time, a labyrinth from which it is difficult to find an exit. [...]

[...]Architecture is not used to provide visual familiarity, it is not used as orientation, and it doesn't help us to recognise what is up and what is down, or provide a physical order of the actions.

The buildings have no ground level, the framing doesn't show architecture rooted on the ground, with a main entrance, a main façade, a street in front of it (see: *Happy End*, 2004). The possibility of orientation never exists. The images look towards the sky, they cut off lines, pieces of buildings, of windows, of roofs. It is impossible to become orientated, to understand buildings as three dimensional objects, to recognise the same house twice. Never do we see a reassuring picture which shows the entirety of an edifice. [...]

[...]But the locations which Drivas chooses for his films don't touch on the same concept: from one perspective they are filmed in pieces, disorienting the Cartesian sense of space.

But on the other hand, they are places with a perfectly recognisable identity, they are Tempelhof airport, the Neue Nationalgalerie, the dome of the Reichstag, the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Alexanderplatz (see: *Beta Test*, or *Closed Circuit*). And in *Happy End* it is possible to identify the Columbus Circle, or Times Square. They are architectural *icons*. And if compared with the dry plot of the stories, these places don't have the same objectivity, they are not completely free of connotations. The spectator will recognise some pieces of buildings already seen in the past. Suddenly, in his memory, he will start to reconstruct connections relating the story back to the real world. The alienation produced by the series of lines and architectural surfaces is broken unexpectedly, if only for a brief second. Suddenly, there is a stronger relation between spectator and place. [...]

[...]The characters who act in Drivas' films seem to be holograms, but inside their story they are perfectly real. And at the same time, they become a projection of the spectators who look at them, who see and recognise in the characters a *reflected image* of their own needs and fears. The models / characters are simultaneously real for their story, and a copy (or reflection), in the sense of actors in an unreal plot added by the external spectators, who reflect on them.

For Heraclitus everything flows, nothing stays still: nobody reads a book twice in the same way. And Drivas' films exemplify this concept: considering his works as a mirror, they reflect a different context every time; it is not the plot that is the important focus, but the pauses in-between. It is not the action or the conclusion, but the stasis, the thoughts which stay for a second before being substituted by other thoughts. And above all, what the real spectator sees, feels or remembers inside the pauses, by means of his reflection. The spectator finds a link with his private dreamlike world using the free-spaces which the film leaves open. We can speak of a spiral movement, which starts from the film, and afterwards generates uncontrolled phenomena in the mental space of every viewer.

Sotirios Bahtsetzis

The fragmentary experience of supermodernity

(Extracts from the catalogue essay)

“Berlin is not only Berlin, it is also the symbol of the division of the world and what is more a ‘universal point’, the place where reflection on a unity that is simultaneously necessary and impossible happens in each person that lives there, and who, in living there, experiences it not only as a dwelling-place, but also as the absence of a dwelling-place.”¹ Maurice Blanchot’s words from his essay “The Name Berlin” (1964), first published shortly after the Wall was built, may express the experience of the creator of works such as *Betatest* (2005-06) and *Case Study* (2007-08). Drawing attention to the author’s biography would be of no interest if this biography was not inextricably related to this city-symbol and everything it stands for. The united Berlin in the 1990s was the baptism by fire for all those, such as George Drivas, who lived in the city under the condition of division, or rather under the condition of a promise that this division was to end eventually. No reference is made to the small personal dramas of the people in this divided city –psychological idealisation is totally absent from Drivas’s filmic essays anyway– nor to the social and political examination of the consequences of this division, but rather to the semiotics of division itself, to contemplation of the unachievable unity, what according to Blanchot, “[...] calls into question the intellectual security and the possibilities for communication”.²

[...] In the case of Drivas’s work, the repetition of patterns in the picture (the same building, interior or person seen often and from many different angles) and the use of static images only (to fend off the illusion of motion established by twenty-four frames per second due to the absence of moving images) creates in the viewer the impression of a narrative flow that freezes in the memory, referring us to an aesthetic that Thomas Y. Levin described as “recalibration of eventhood.”⁵ Drivas’s films resemble concentrated scenes originating from a surveillance camera’s or other tracking equipment’s image database – only nominally, of course, as they are perfectly structured and highly poetic photographic compositions. [...]

[...] The image of each place functions merely as reference. Motorways, hotel rooms, airports and stores, the areas in which Drivas’s camera usually moves, bring to mind Marc Augé’s essay on an anthropology of supermodernity, which is defined by examples of non-places where the contraction of space, the acceleration of history and the elimination of differences anthropologically define their subject, man without memory, either historical or personal memory. According to Augé, in order to enter these non-places, which lack identity and history, we are “required to prove our innocence”.⁸ In the face of the self-referential, distanced, lonely, fragmentary non-places of supermodernity we must assume the same attitude as that of the characters in Drivas’s films, elegant angels without an identity, on which all trace of location and time is lost.

In this urban mapping of modern experience anonymous figures –as is often the case in Drivas’s films two persons unknown to each other– face each other and the places in which they move in fleeting encounters. How effective is this meeting? And thus how charged or indifferent, on an emotional or even existential level, is it?

Perhaps ultimately the erotic element, which is often implicit in many of Drivas’s films, refers to this constitutive condition of simultaneous presence and absence, which informs this relationship with the other? Characters especially in works such as *Close Circuit* (2005) seem to flirt with the idea of a promising erotic passion but to constantly wonder whether this is actually possible, remaining in a state of indeterminacy until literally disappearing at the end of the film, effectively corroborating their self-negation. Indeed, the viewer often

wonders if the film is a love or a detective story, and if it is ultimately the solution of a crime or a reception of erotic passion. Yet, unfortunately for us, the mysterious, implicit crime, if there is any, is the fact that we cannot know whether it was or was not about love!

[...]Blanchot conceptually captures in "The Name Berlin" the paradoxical reception of the other, of the foreign, the beyond, and defines it as a statutory condition of signification, which remains fragmented although this does not mean that it is partial. Perhaps the "strangeness" [étrangeté] to which Blanchot refers, conceived not only on psychological or sociological terms but rather as a philosophical discourse, as the discourse of the fragment, of small, subtle details in a fully organised and controlled whole, may be the reason why Drivas's work is an exemplary commentary on the supermodern experience and of the investigations of contemporary art, beyond any claims to universal, equalitarian, totalitarian discourses.

Sotirios Bahtsetzis is an Art historian and independent curator

Notes

1. Maurice Blanchot, "The name Berlin" (1961), in *The Blanchot Reader*, ed. Michael Holland, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995, p. 266.
2. *Ibid.*
5. Leighton 2008, p. 39.
8. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, London: Verso, 1995, p. 102

List of exhibited works

Closed Circuit, 2005

Single channel video

Duration: 4'29''

Black and white, with sound

Beta Test, 2005

Single channel video

Duration: 12'56''

Black and white, with sound

Case Study, 2007-2008

Single channel video installation

Duration 17'38'', Black and white, with sound

National Museum of Contemporary Art, Inv. No. 604/08

Development Plan, 2009

Single channel video installation

Duration: 5'

Black and white, with sound

Empirical Data, 2009

Single channel video installation

Duration 47'

Black and white, with sound

BIOGRAPHY

George Drivas was born in Athens in 1969.
He lives and works in Athens and Berlin.

Education

- 1998 M.A. in Film and Media Studies, Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany
- 1994 B.A. Political Science and Public Administration, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2009 *Contemporary Flânerie: Reconfiguring Cities*, Oakland University Art Gallery, Rochester, Michigan, USA
Format: Photocinema, International Photography Festival, Quad, Derby, UK
- 2008 *Erosion 2008, Photo Art Klaipeda*, Klaipeda Exhibition Hall, Klaipeda, Lithuania
Transexperiences Greece 2008, 798 Space, Beijing, China
Athensville, Art-Athina International Contemporary Art Fair of Athens, Athens
- 2007 *In Present Tense: Young Greek Artists*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, Greece
Karaoke Poetry Bar, Into the Pill, Space 417, Athens, Greece
UN_SPACE, Paraflows 07 - Annual Convention for Digital Arts and Cultures, Vienna, Austria
- 2006 *Space, Place & Interface*, LiveBox, Chicago, USA
- 2005 *Pixelpoint, International Digital Art Festival*, Nova Gorica, Slovenia
Point of View, Euroscreen21projects, Museum Wesel and Art Gallery Verbands-Sparkasse, Wesel, Germany / Fournos Center for the Art and New Technology, Athens, Greece

Selected Participation in Festivals and screenings

- 2009 *Intothepill, Greek Contemporary Video Art*, Synch, Music, Moving Image and New Media Festival, Athens, Greece
Directors Lounge, Contemporary Media and Art, Berlin, Germany
- 2008 *III Festival Internacional de Videopoesia 2008, Videobardo*, Centro Cultural Borges, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Strange Screen 7, Film and Video Festival, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece
4th ZEBRA Poetry Film Festival, Berlin, Germany
Abstracta Cinema, International Exhibition of Abstract Cinema, Teatro L'Orangerie, Rome, Italy
Kodra Cinema, 1st Balkan And Black Sea Short Film Festival, Thessaloniki, Greece
Poetry in Motion, Poetry on Film, Bristol Poetry Festival, Arncliffe, Bristol, U.K.
Directors Lounge, Contemporary Media and Art, Berlin, Germany
- 2007 *Directors Lounge*, Contemporary Media and Art, Berlin, Germany
Entr'acte, Art-athina International art fair 2007, Helexpo Palace, Athens
Demain, dès l'aube 2006-2007, Les jeunes cinéastes d'aujourd'hui, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
- 2006 *Le Festival Signes de Nuit*, Festival international de création audiovisuelle et cinématographique, Paris, France
Alternative Film/Video Festival 2006, Academic Film Center, Belgrade, Serbia
Xperimental 5.0, International Xperimental Film Festival, Pantheon, Nicosia, Cyprus
EXiS 2006, Experimental Film and Video Festival in Seoul, Korea
International Competition on Art and Experimental Video, Unimovie, International Video and Short Film Festival, Pescara, Italy
Too Much Freedom?, LA Freewaves' 10th Festival of Film, Video and Experimental New Media, Los Angeles, USA
Experimental Shorts Programme, Melbourne International Film Festival, MIFF, Melbourne, Australia

- AUTHOR(WRIT)Y: Video Art, TV Art, Experimental Film*, VII Media Art Forum, XXVII Moscow International Film Festival (MIFF), Moscow, Russia
Mobile Exposure, Pocket Cinema, San Francisco International Film Festival, USA
Art Tech Media 06, Centro de Cultura Contemporânea de Barcelona, CCCB, Barcelona / Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain
Directors Lounge, Contemporary Media and Art, Berlin, Germany
- 2005 *VAD*, Video and Digital Arts International Festival, Girona, Spain
Platforma Video Zero Five, Platforma Video Festival, Athens, Greece
Synch Cinema, Synch Electronic Music and Digital Arts Festival, Athens, Greece
- 2004 *Digital Cinema Open Forum, 45th International Film Festival of Thessaloniki*, Thessaloniki Cinema Museum, Thessaloniki, Greece
Machinista-International Arts and Technology Festival, Glasgow, Scotland
- 2003 *Poetry Film Festival*, People's Poetry Gathering, New York
Trash Tracks / Trash Fashion, Trash Art 2003, BIOS, Athens
- 2002 *New York EXPO*, New York exposition of film and video shorts, Cinema Village Theatre, New York
The Short Video Show, Dactyl Foundation for the Arts and Humanities, New York
1st Zebra International Poetry Film Festival, Berlin, Germany
- 2001 *New Filmmakers*, Anthology Film Archives, New York
One Minute World Festival, São Paulo, Brazil
- 1999 *7 Griechische Kinotage in Berlin*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany

Selected Bibliography

- 2009 Yiannis Grigoriadis et al (eds), *Intothepill Vol. 1, Greek Contemporary Video Art*, Futura Publications, Athens
Vagner M. Whitehead (ed.), *Contemporary Flânerie: Reconfiguring Cities*, Oakland University
Louise Clements et al., *Format 09, Photocinema International Photography Festival*, QUAD publishing
- 2008 Virginijus Kinčinas et al., *Fotografija ir Paralelinis meno formos*, Lithuania
Anna Kafetsi (ed.), *Transexperiences Greece 2008*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, Beijing
- 2007 Intothepill.net, *Karaoke Poetry Bar*, Futura Publications, Athens
Tina Pandi, Stamatis Schizakis, Daphne Vitali, *In Present Tense: Young Greek Artists*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens

Awards

- 2006 *2nd Prize Competition Programme AUTHOR(WRIT)Y: Video Art, TV Art, Experimental Film*, VII Media Art Forum, XXVII Moscow International Film Festival (MIFF), Moscow, Russia
Special Mention, *International Competition on Art and Experimental Video*, Unimovie, International Video and Short Film Festival, Pescara, Italy
Special Mention, *Alternative Film/Video Festival 2006*, Academic Film Center, Belgrade, Serbia
- 2002 *2nd Prize, 1st Zebra International Poetry Film Festival*, Berlin, Germany
Jury Award for Experimental Short Film, *New York EXPO*, New York exposition of film and video shorts

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

George Drivas (un-)documented

Editor: **Stamatis Schizakis**

Includes essays by **Vittoria Capresi**, Assistant Professor at the department Baugeschichte/
Bauforschung, Faculty of Architecture, Technical University of Vienna, Austria, **Sotirios
Bahtsetzis**, Art historian and independent curator and an interview of **George Drivas** to the
curator of the exhibition, **Stamatis Schizakis**

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