

Meet Atopos Contemporary Visual Culture

Text by Piriita Litmanen

I want to introduce Atopos Contemporary Visual Culture to you.

The word "atopos" is drawn from ancient Greek "ἀτόπος" referring to the strange, the unwanted, the eccentric and the unclassifiable.

Atopos Contemporary Visual Culture is an organization, based in Athens, Greece, running since 2003. It researches and executes projects of contemporary visual culture.

Atopos cvc truly is the unclassifiable.

It collaborates and co-produces with museums, galleries and independent artists in the form of exhibitions, publications, installations, workshops - as a cultural think-tank. It spreads to small galleries, exhibition halls of metropolitan cities, studios of painters and photographers and as importantly into the lives of us - viewers, visitors, the ones taking selfies, the ones looking for a visual experience with a story.

Atopos cvc connects the dots. It simply has a great taste. It is the exact mix of things which in combination catch our attention.

The mix may also be seen in the background of this organization. It is founded and run based on the vision and interests of three men: **Stamos Fafalios**, **Vassilis Zidianakis** and **Angelos Tsourapas**. Their backgrounds stretch across art, architecture, anthropology and mathematics, creating a rare and intriguing platform for art.

I personally find Atopos cvc somewhat extraordinary.

Let me share three previous (and some still on-going) projects of Atopos cvc to prove my point.

RRRIPP, an exhibition designed by Atopos, first seen in 2007, is based on the research of Vassilis Zidianakis, into the little known phenomenon of paper fashion.

Paper took over fashion in the US during the late 1960's, with the wave of everything disposable. There was disposable cutlery, cups, raincoats, razors and then the pop-art print dresses, some of which even came with patterns for the consumer to color in.



The RRIIP exhibition didn't only take into account the historical context of paper fashion but also sought new and innovative ways of examining paper as a material as well as the processing methods of woven and non-woven fabrics (such as paper or paper-like materials).

It also documented various uses for paper within today's fashion industry through design, art and advertising, sound and video installations, fashion shows and contemporary creations by today's most innovative fashion designers.

We are not talking about hobby crafts.

The paper dress collection, which you can still see in Atopos premises in Athens, includes rare items by **Issey Miyake**, **Helmut Lang**, **Maison Martin Margiela**, **Walter Van Beirendonck** and **Hussein Chalayan** among others, as well as the Campbell Soup Dress after **Andy Warhol**, the Lisa Dress by **Robert Wilson** and the Yellow Pages Dress by **Howard Hodgkin**. The pieces on show change from week to week.

Paper Fashion was, and still is, a touring exhibition that adapts to the different visual angles and challenges of each venue. Since its original presentation at the Benaki Museum, Athens (2007), Atopos cvc has presented Paper Fashion at numerous museums around the world, most recently, in Galerie Stihl, Waiblingen (2013).

Then there was ARRRGH! Monsters in Fashion,

a project based on the idea and research of Atopos. The collective noticed that since the 1990's monstrous characters had been appearing on the catwalks. They researched this phenomenon for three years, questioning the phenomenon - had fashion become the result of our childhood spent watching superhero cartoons and playing video games?



Maybe not exactly, but fashion had become a way to become someone else, even something else.

Participating artists and designers of the ARRRGH! -exhibition, held in various museums during 2010-2014, included **Rick Owens**, **Issey Miyake**, **Bernhard Wilhelm**, **Walter van Beirendonck**, **Viktor & Rolf**, **Bart Hess**, **Charlie Le Mindu**, **Maison Martin Margiela** and **Craig Green** - known for their extreme volumes and shapes, feeding our imagination before being practical - bringing us something else than just fabric to cover our bodies in.

The extraordinary feature of ARRRGH! exhibition was that the designs were exhibited on the ground. The visitors were face to face with the monsters - with someone else's idea of beauty.

Very accurately ARRRGH! asked us: Do we accept things that are different to us or just things that may compare to ourselves?

The research made on ARRRGH! was also published as a book *Not a Toy, Fashioning Radical Characters* (Pictoplasma Publishing, 2011).



Lastly, and most recently, Atopos launched a project called Unlocked.

Unlocked is a book in the form of a photo diary that attempts to "unlock" the photographic representation of the naked body in the digital age. The project brings together over 100 artists of the unmapped and constantly evolving field of the depiction of nudity.



Nude pictures by professional and amateur artists flood the Internet. Our bodies, depicted in everyday life activities as well as in their most intimate moments, are captured and posted on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr and other forms of social media. This is what Unlocked is about.

The project is executed in the form of an exhibition and the outcome of the research will be presented in a publication in the summer of 2015.

As part of the Unlocked research Atopos cvc launched the Atopos Unlocked -program and Occupy Atopos -residency in October 2014. Occupy Atopos is an artistic residency that presents artists discovered during the Unlocked research. The artists live in Atopos in Athens for a week and produce new works related to the Unlocked subject.



The resulting works are presented along with exhibitions at Atopos. So far a number of artists also presented in the Unlocked book have participated in the program, including 16-year-old artist **David Marinos**, art critic **Clo'e Floirat** from France and Greek photographer **Kostis Fokas** - who "occupied" Atopos cvc headquarters and exhibited their work.

The program continues with Ren Hang, a young and established photographer and poet from China, whose exhibition opens on April 22nd, 2015.

If you are in Athens you can visit the Occupy Atopos #RenHang exhibition that finishes on June 10th on 72 Salaminos st, Metaxourgeio, Athens.