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NARRATIVES OF CRISIS: REPRESENTING CAPITALIST REALISM PART II: THE GREEK CRISIS



The Tourists

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THE TOURISTS:

A CAMPAIGN

Depression Era collective

Independent

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

touristification
visual culture
postcolonialism
immigration
exoticization

"The Tourists" is a subversive tourism campaign by the Depression Era collective, reflecting on the simultaneous influx of refugees and global tourism in Southern Europe. Through diverse media, it exposes landscapes marked by hidden violence, portrays individuals in states of flux, and blurs the line between idyllic tourism and harsh reality.



DEPRESSION
ERA

DEPRESSION ERA Founded as a response to the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis, Depression Era was a collective of 26+ art workers, active for almost a decade (2011-2019) in Greece. It documented the local expression of this crisis as a 'debt terror' leading to unprecedented social upheaval (mass pauperisation, riots, suicides, the enclosure by private capital of welfare, the environment, public urban space, housing, art and education). One of the largest socially engaged lens-based art collectives in Europe in the 21st century, the Depression Era collective presented its text and image-based narratives in numerous group and solo exhibitions in Greece and abroad, as well as organised presentations, public discussions, urban interventions, and a series of free workshops for artists and photographers, among others. The group was constantly exploring issues of authorship, process and self-governance, autonomous curation and unmediated artistic expression, as a collective endeavor.

THE TOURISTS: A CAMPAIGN

"The Tourists" is a collaborative project for those who cross Southern Europe and for those who reach out to or watch them go by. Devised and run by the Depression Era collective, the project operates as a subversive tourism campaign.

Originating in 2015 in Athens as a collective research and open discussion platform, "The Tourists" has since evolved into various forms, including a public space, a poster and digital campaign in Spring 2017 (under the tagline "Make Yourself at Home"), a publication, and a series of exhibitions. The visual, textual, and video works of "The Tourists" were prominently featured in the "Decline of Heroes" exhibition at Basel's Antikenmuseum in 2017, where they engaged in dialogue with ancient works of art from the Mediterranean and were displayed as street posters. In 2018, the project was showcased as part of a house installation or tourist pavilion at the Unseen Festival in Amsterdam. A more extensive pavilion installation was conceived and set up in the "13,700,000km3" exhibition at ArtSpace Pythagorion, Schwarz Foundation in Samos in 2019.

One pivotal event that significantly contributed to the momentum of the Tourists campaign was Documenta 14, which took place in Athens (2017). Within the Greek art community, there was criticism circulating about a certain hegemonic stance. (Documenta was publicly using the catchphrase: "Learning from Athens", which sounded condescending or even ironic, as it was coming from a high-brow German institution, while Greece was still grappling with its Europe-related financial crisis trauma.) As a matter of fact, Documenta's gaze upon a city in upheaval and flux, could not but be perceived as exoticizing the crisis. Another point of criticism was about the manner in which "indigenous" was being used in Documenta's curatorial concept in the context of a city in Southern

Europe. One of the DE collective's responses was mounting some of the "Tourists" campaign posters on the walls outside the School of Fine Arts at the time of the Documenta exhibitions there, and in the streets of Athens. The images that we chose to process and present brought up the issues of the European refugee crisis, the exoticization and touristification of Greece, the relationship between North & South, etc.

"The Tourists" responded to History-in-the-making: the waves of refugees and mass migrations from Asia and Africa to Europe, alongside the simultaneous surge in global tourism in the Mediterranean. These are ongoing parallel and converging global events that have generated states of emergency, distress investment, collateral conflicts and cultural patronage in the same geographical area and at the same time. The Tourist, in this context, resides within a divided, burned-out, hyper-mediated public sphere. Their identity and citizenship remain in flux; they often find themselves adrift, marked by perpetual anxiety, alienation, resignation, or resistance. They become mere simulacra of social engagement, unable to encapsulate history in anything more than a postcard, slogan, or tweet.

Amidst the narratives of power, encounter, arrival and departure featured in Global Media and contemporary art, the images and slogans of "the Tourists" expose seemingly idyllic landscapes containing the debris of unspeakable violence; frame portraits of women and men in alien places, strangers in their land, visitors among ruins, stateless, networked, indolent and conflicted; and document a generation of fearless children. It is not clear whether these images belong to tourism advertisements or disaster news streams.

[Text by Petros Babasikas and Pasqua Vorgia, for the Depression Era collective]

**YOU'VE GOT
A GREAT
FUTURE
BEHIND YOU**

makeyourselvesathome

Figures 1-4: Images from the *Make Yourself at Home* campaign, 2017

EMERGING ECONOMY



makeyourselvesathome

**WE DID
NOTHING**

makeyourselvesathome

HOMELAND

makeyourselvesathome

**CURRENTLY
BASED
IN
ATHENS**

makeyourselvesathome

Figures 5-6: Images from the *Make Yourself at Home* campaign, 2017



THE STATE OF EMERGENCY HAS BECOME THE RULE

makeyourselvesathome

Figures 7-8: Images from the *Make Yourself at Home* campaign, 2017

EATING PEOPLE IS WRONG



makeyourselvesathome





Figures 10-13: *Make Yourself at Home* campaign, 2017







Figures 14-17 *Make Yourself at Home* campaign, 2017





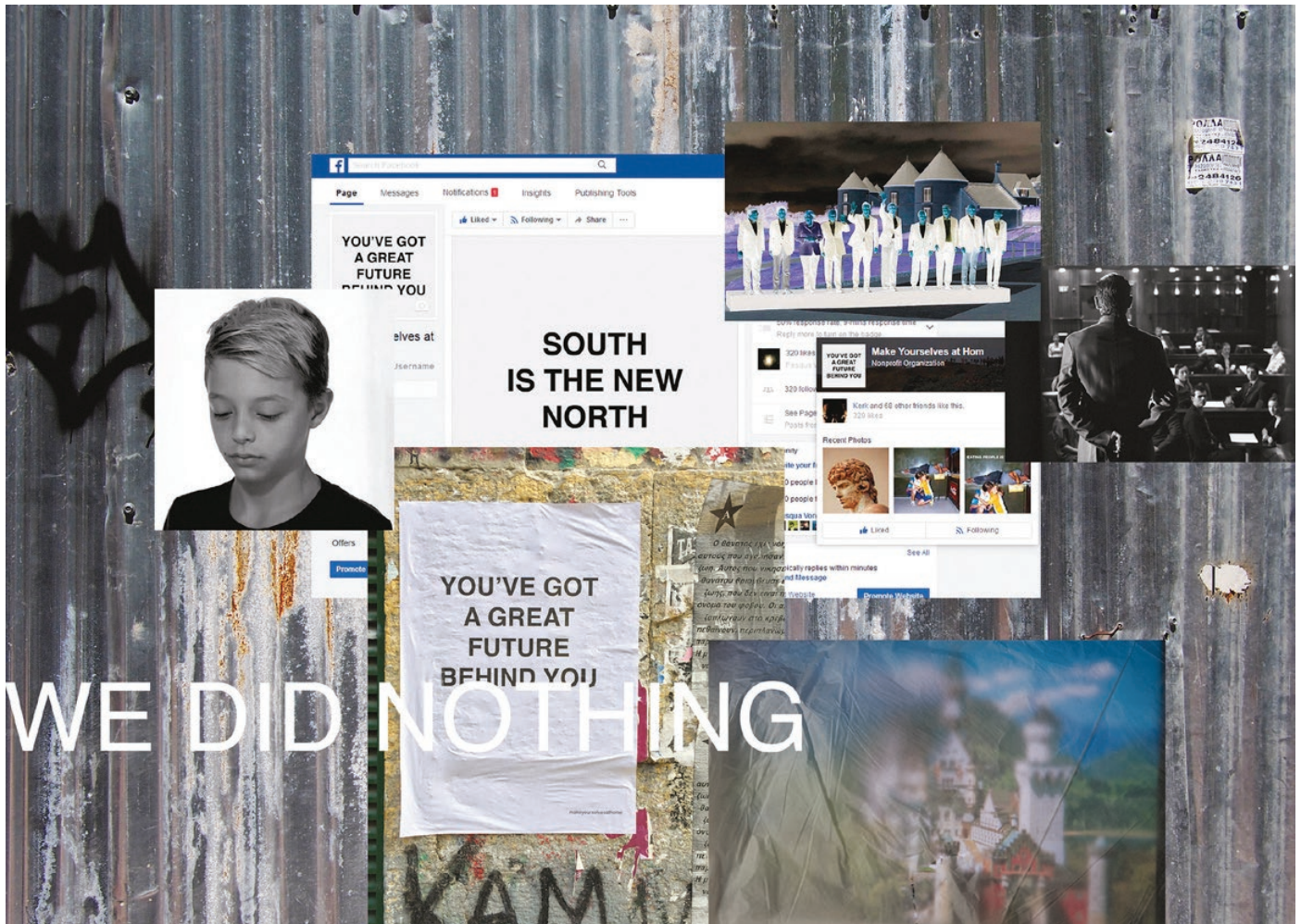


Figure 18: Excerpt from the Tourists Campaign publication for the "Decline of Heroes" exhibition at Basel's Antikenmuseum, 2017

Figure 19 (up right): Installation shot of the Tourist pavilion at the Unseen Festival in Amsterdam, 2018

Figure 20 (bottom right): Installation shot from the 13,700,000km3 exhibition in ArtSpace Pythagorion, Schwarz Foundation in Samos, 2019

