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ARTFORUM

"The Magic of the State"

LISSON GALLERY | LONDON

29 & 52-54 Bell Street

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A curatorial collaboration between Lisson's Silvia Sgualdini and *Beirut*, a Cairo-based exhibition space and art initiative, this show is presented in Lisson's London gallery following an exhibition featuring the same artists at Beirut's Cairo space. And though the backdrop to "The Magic of the State" is an Egypt that has been shaken to its foundations and a Europe continually faltering on its structural apparatus, the seven artists in this show ponder the mechanics of state power.

Stand Behind Me, 2013, a performance by Liz Magic Laser at the London opening and documented by a video recording in the space, draws attention to the intense theatrics of performing the role of leader. Here, a dancer silently re-enacts the rhetorical hand gestures of the likes of Angela Merkel or Ed Milliband during recent political speeches as we read their words rolling by on an Autocue.

Anja Kirschner and David Panos's video installation *Ultimate Substance*, 2012, filmed in Greece, suggests that the invention of coinage in that country ushered in concurrent developments in mathematics, geometry, and abstract thought. A more ritualistic, oblique expression of power is played out in Lili Reynaud-Dewar's multimedia installation *Cleda's Chairs*, 2012, which includes stacked monitors playing clips from Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Notes for an African Oresteia* (1970), combined with a video of two bikini-clad girls in blackface smothering a set of fabric-covered chairs that belonged to the artist's grandmother in black polish, as well as a sculpture made from the chairs themselves, as a way of conveying a transformation in different forms of rule.

Christodoulos Panayiotou's two subtly arranged collections of small black-and-white photographs from the photographic archives of Nicosia's Press and Information Office, taken between 1960 and 1977, are perhaps the exhibition's highlight. The series "New Office," 2012, depicts the transformation of the state office of Archbishop Makarios III, who became the first president of Cyprus in 1960. What begins as a spartan bureaucratic room fills up over time with auratic objects—antiquities, treasures, encyclopedias, and artworks—markers of history, economy, knowledge, and culture, the tools used to build a state. "New Office" is an apt reminder of the way in which powerful ideas become divested in objects and people, transforming both into conductors of a mystic charge, open to appropriation, and exploitation.



Anja Kirschner & David Panos, *Ultimate Substance*, 2012, HD Video Installation, 34 minutes.

— Laura McLean-Ferris