

Keeping up the tradition that started a few years ago and in an effort to delve deeper and expand on the themes of its permanent exhibition, the Museum of Byzantine Culture organizes temporary exhibitions of particular interest to both the professional and general public, which are related to its exhibits, aspects of Byzantine and post-Byzantine civilization in general, and their impact on modern and contemporary artistic creation.

One such example is the exhibition / installation titled “Banners – Valuable Interactions” by the artist Maria Kompatsiari.

Maria Kompatsiari chooses to express herself by experimenting with different artistic themes, different materials, techniques, forms and textures, as well as with different types of art. After all, there are no limits to expression.

“Banners” was born from her personal experiences and associations, as she herself reveals, in connection with historical memory. She automatically draws an association with the banner of the 1821 revolution and the flame of freedom it inspired. However, the beginning of the labarum (banner) takes us even further back to late antiquity and the early Byzantine era.

A museum is an absolute place of memory; it is a space for the collection of cultural memory and, above all, a place where collective memory is recorded and reproduced, while at the same time serving as a place of preservation and dissemination of this memory. A museum’s exhibitions, in particular, are among the basic cultural tools used by collective entities to transmit memory. Every exhibition is a representation that is intermediated by selected means of expression, which are mainly based on language and images, and at times on sound.

It is for these reasons that we chose the Museum of Byzantine Culture and, specifically, room 10 of the Museum’s permanent exhibition named “Byzantium after Byzantium”, as the most ideal space to present the nine banners (labara) created by the artist, the smallest of which is 140X45 cm and the largest 190X83 cm in size, using an abundance of skill and mastery, out of “products” of gold-thread embroidery which were intended for the creation of holy vestments. These pieces were selected carefully from the “waste” of ecclesiastical tailoring workshops and combined in such a way as to convey their own new messages through the second chance they have been given by the artist Maria Kompatsiari.

This room exhibits relics and works of art which present the continuation of Byzantium and its legacy after the Fall. In the midst of the cultural works which are divided into two main units those from Venetian-occupied areas and those from Ottoman-occupied areas, standing at the centre of the room, are two exquisite vestments and remarkable samples of ecclesiastical gold-thread embroidery: an epitaphios (embroidered religious icon) created by the priestmonk Symeon (1647) and the sakkos (prelatical vestment) of the Bishop of Melenikon Ioannikios (1745-1753), which is the work of the renowned Serbian artist and hierodeacon, Christopher Zefarovic.

It is with these vestments that Maria Kompatsiari's "Banners" interact, standing lined-up on transparent acrylic glass (Plexiglas) poles in two groups of four; functioning as the trailblazers and protectors of our cultural heritage, with the central banner serving as the link between tradition and renewal.

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