

## DOMOBAAL

Haris Epaminonda.

Haris Epaminonda's work intrigues its viewer for reasons as infinite as the possibilities it poses for them, the many possible meanings and aspects of the work to concentrate on. For one I have always found myself drawn to art produced on a small scale, as indeed hers is with many of her collages small enough to be measured with one of those little rulers you use in primary school. Art like this always seems less attention seeking and more enigmatic, not screaming for its viewers attention but gaining it anyway. The scale is also reflective of the subtlety displayed in Epaminonda's work. I also am always amazed by collage; collage as a medium often seems to have a rather childish image, it always reminds me for one of nursery school, there is something rather kitchen-table about it. More sophisticated collage such as Haris' seems so perfectly formed but if one thinks about it and reminds themselves of that very kitchen-table-top mess of glue and torn paper they 'created' as a child, one really appreciates how intricate an art form this is. Though at the same time Epaminonda's collages seem so perfectly formed at least from a distance that it is almost as if they created themselves, as if they are without an artist or maker. Her films too have an almost ephemeral feeling to them, the unexplained just appearing on screen the how and wherefore are at the back of the viewer's mind when watching them. In Nemesis 52 fabric folds and moves, as if human. In Tarahi II, part of the extensive Tarahi series, a woman speaks, but the only sound the viewer hears is melancholic piano music, what she is saying becomes irrelevant as the viewer watches the concentrated, grainy shots of her emphatic, expressive face. Where she comes from and what exactly she is talking about comes later, or does not even matter. This film continues the trend in Epaminonda's work of using found images: the grainy quality of the film is a result of the fact the star of the film is actually one from a soap-opera.

Haris Epaminonda, 28 years old, lives and works in Cyprus. Not especially known for its artists, more it's divided society: the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot populations living largely separately. Even though Epaminonda never makes much of her heritage, claiming her art is far from political, it is difficult not to make some small links between it and her work. For Epaminonda works in the media of collage and film and her work, as is expected considering her choice of media, is filled with cutting, drawing one's mind back to the divided country she comes from.

As is expected from collage, Epaminonda's work is concerned with cutting, her work is "a matter of incisions, splices, folds and pleats". Cutting up and out photographs, drawings, articles and then putting them back together, interlacing them within a new composition and context, creating something completely different. Somewhat unusually for collage, Epaminonda does not glue the separate pieces of her work together, instead using tape: this gives the pieces created a sense of depth often lost when collages are stuck down so tightly with glue. This is unlike many other collages, for example those by Max Ernst, where the different elements are so carefully stuck together that it is not immediately clear they are collages at all, especially considering they are reproduced for novels. Epaminonda's works however are displayed as they were made, individual pieces, the layers laid bare to the viewer.

Passing comparisons, inevitably, have often been made between Epaminonda and Dadaist photomontage artists, such as John Heartfield or Hannah Höch. There are not many collage or montage artists of note in comparison with those working in other media and the medium itself has not truly been explored that thoroughly in that many different directions. Whilst these artists share an area of work the Dadaists are clearly more politically driven than Epaminonda. More than this however, the style is greatly different. Whilst Heartfield and his colleagues cut and paste haphazardly, creating a barrage of imagery almost assaulting the viewer Epaminonda's work is more subtle. The Dadaist photomontage artists created

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poster-like art (or anti-art), and it was the message of their work that was of the utmost importance. The cutting of the images seem almost incidental, whereas with Epaminonda, this is the heart of her work. The pieces are carefully cut along invisible lines, which only become clear in the resulting work. The collages are practically woven together, one can see and almost feel the texture of her fabric-like pieces. Max Ernst is another artist who comes to mind, predominantly the work he produced in his collage novels, most notably 'Une Semaine de Bonté' (1933-34), it seems that Epaminonda has much more in common with Ernst than with the Dadaists. Even though, I feel the act of cutting is of greater importance to Epaminonda's work than in Ernst's, there is still more of a shared sense of harmony, if one can indeed say that men with chicken feet and birds' heads or women with the horned-wings of devilish creatures are harmonious, to be precise, it is more that the strange, odd and wonderful are made to seem appropriate in each of their works, even though there is still something haunting about both. This is exemplified in 'Untitled \*01 (The Passers)', a collage depicting a train of children processing across what seems to be a park. The children in this image seem to be playing with the slightly older girls wearing veils with the younger boys carrying their trains. Across the top of the piece Epaminonda has cut through the photograph which has been layered over others, the images of which are not quite clear; these out cuts mirror the veils of the girls, protrude from their heads like steam from a train. The layering in this image gives it a sense of otherworldliness it seems that the gaps give the viewer a sense of entering another reality, just as the children do in playing. They aren't even fully walking on the ground as there are splits in the photograph around the feet of the children as if they are also walking their way out of the park with gated lawns and puddles on the ground and into another world.

The photographs themselves used by Epaminonda in 'Untitled \*01 (The Passers)' are a primary example of the type of source material used in her work: the picture is clearly several years old: it is black and white and the dress of the characters depicted is obviously dated (from the 1940s or 1950s), this, like all of Epaminonda's source materials is a found image from an old magazine or book. Epaminonda's use of images from mass produced publications is especially interesting as it is the content of these repeated images that Haris subtly reorders the composition to create something unique and new. At the same time it is Epaminonda's choice of sources that provides another similarity between Epaminonda and Ernst who created his collage novels using old illustrative fantasy or romantic novels from the 19th century. Whilst Ernst specifically chose his source material for not only its content but its contemporaneous context, Epaminonda chooses her images at random, purely deciding on the images they depict: in choosing images for one of her collages she was completely unaware at first that one of them showed the Arc de Triomphe. Buildings themselves are another theme in Epaminonda's work, especially her more recent work, using them in roughly half of her collages. In one of these collages 'Untitled \*32', L'Eglise Saint Nicholas, as it is depicted in the caption below the photograph Epaminonda used, is shown to be an impressive church the scale of which is highlighted by the minute cars and throng of people in the surrounding street. The different sections of the building and its walls are delicately cut away to reveal sky. All that remains is a scaffolding of turrets and buttresses, it seems, holding up the sky. The people on the streets around it, going about their business, ignoring the church behind them, makes this seem like an entirely normal building, makes the surreal appear normal which, along with the precise technique Epaminonda employs, again gives this work a sense of another reality. In her use of church buildings and landmarks or iconic buildings in collages, Epaminonda destroys their iconic stature and heritage that defined them in their former context.

The incorporation of original text in much of Epaminonda's work, that comes from the source material (as part of magazine articles etc.) also ties them oddly to some sort of reality, even though she imbues the collages themselves with the feeling they depict an alternate one. Another collage from afar merely seems like

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a French article on some kind of new school. In 'Untitled \*02' the full text of the page is intact, the left hand side clearly shows where it has been cut from a magazine and the smaller photograph on the top-left is 'intact'. However look down at the larger image of schoolgirls playing amongst trees and there are cuts to their eyes and the ground is falling away underneath them, similarly to 'Untitled\*01' (The Passers). However the lack of expression in their eyes makes the image more disconcerting, they almost look war-like in their screams which I am sure were previously playful and more innocent. This collage especially exemplifies the power of the collage: how one single image can be completely altered, convey another tone, scene or entire reality by just the adding or even taking something away from it.

Epaminonda uses children in much of her work, as well as 'Untitled \*01 (The Passers)' and the schoolchildren, 'Untitled \*03', initially looks like some Victorian postcard. An illustration or print of three girls, similarly dressed (as seen from behind) except for their size, walking in a row along a path, towards the unknown. Again the floor underneath them is cut out, in rather more geometric shapes than in some of Epaminonda's more flowing collages, peeping through the page however here Epaminonda uses colour. The mere presence of three girls walking along a path (presumably sisters) reminds the viewer of fairytales, are they possibly walking into danger, 'the-big- bad'? The juxtaposition of the colour photograph cut in geometric shapes coming through the paper and the previously idyllic scene of the children, the two media: one more modern, the other much older; the superimposing of time, the idea of the involutions of time come to the fore of Epaminonda's work in this piece.

Epaminonda's less figurative work utilises different perspectives more than the other pieces. 'Untitled \*06' depicts a dining room, for those who can make out the French this part of the collage seems to come from some dated lifestyle or furnishing magazine, three chairs and a round table of 'regency style' are in the foreground of the collage. Yet instead of being in a dining room they stand on what seems to be a patio, even stranger is the background: people in the far distance seem to be skating over the frozen ground, juxtaposing seasons in this work. There is no real floor to the 'patio' just three sections of a carpet whilst the heads and bodies of passers-by peep through between where the floor would be, neither are they part of the background winter scene, instead they walk along a street in again dated autumn dress. What divides the two scenes is the fence of the patio but this does not seem to divide them completely as their juxtaposition is somehow harmonious, subtle and not initially noticed easily.

When discussing the medium of collage, many critics centre their arguments around the compositions and therefore the juxtaposition of the different elements of the image, as the Dadaist's photomontages juxtaposed images with different meanings to highlight their political plight. However I find the most integral part of Epaminonda's work to be the action of cutting the images up and subsequently putting them back together, but not in some haphazard manner but instead with the delicacy of weaving a textile or sewing up a wound. By initially destroying one thing, Epaminonda creates something entirely new.

Epaminonda also applies this idea to her video work. In many of her video including 'Barka', 'Gramophone' and 'Postcard', Epaminonda employs a technique of two images cut together, altering the meaning of the images. In the foreground Epaminonda plays either an original or even a found, obscure film whilst the background shows either a still image or a slideshow of images. In 'Gramophone' a crackling faded European film, dating possibly from the 60s, plays the poor quality sound crackling along with it. Behind it a still of a half nude woman, shown down to the waist, stands leaning on a table with this gramophone, holding her brunette hair and looking directly at the viewer, if only the film was not obscuring her face. The film switches between scenes of the lives of European high society, parties and glamour fill the lives of the young men and women in front

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of the viewer, yet ultimately in the film nothing actually happens. The moving feature of is ultimately static and stale in comparison to the still image behind them. It seems the nude female represents all they long for but she is just left waiting, hanging around at the back of the film, in the back of their minds, but this longing for something to happen, both on the part of the characters and the viewer, remains unfulfilled. What is hidden in the back of the mind is another theme of Epaminonda's work, the worlds of the mind are somehow brought out in her collages and videos. In another of the 'Tarahi' series, a middle-aged, moustachioed man with an intense expression, stares and stares with a shot of an exploding volcano overlaid in the shot. The film goes on to depict parts of his violent life, played out without voices, only music, as in other films in this series, with the volcano erupting continuously behind the actors. The volcano from the start conveys the man's inner-turmoil, the film depicts this in a few minutes, more adeptly than the tele-movie the images come from ever could. Epaminonda seems to convey the impossibilities of life and contradictions that do not need the incisions of collage to be brought out.

Despite this clear incorporation of collage into her film, Epaminonda's apparent lack of editing in many of her films is intriguing. In some of Epaminonda's videos such as 'Nemesis 52' as well as 'Gramophone', there is a distinct lack of cutting, the effects of post-production are subtle, if present at all. In 'Nemesis 52', one of her few works produced without the incorporation of found images or film, the viewer may be fooled into assuming that the folds and symmetry of the vibrantly-coloured fabric that assumes most of the screen-space is being altered after the film itself was made, but in actuality all the effects in the film were produced in camera, in the process of filming of the piece. This reflects the link in Epaminonda's work between the finished otherworldly pieces and the everyday: although the works have alien ephemeral qualities they ultimately all come from rather everyday images, altered with simple methods, cutting up sticking together, placing things in a certain way. In 'Nemesis 52' non-descript objects are arranged together to form something surprising and slightly unnerving. A vaginal object continuously self-inflates two blue balloons attached to its sides, forming what looks like a surreal version of the female sexual organs, until the balloons are so big they reach the table and eventually fly off the sides of the object. There are six such surreal sections of the film, at the end of each the screen fades to black slowly but still surprisingly, leaving the viewer with little explanation of what they have just seen. Objects are somehow comically sexualized, from these two bright blue balloons to phallic objects which are later placed down symmetrically on the fabric covered floor of the film. Throughout the video inanimate objects are vivified: from these objects, which are made to seem separate parts of the human body, to the fabric itself which folds and pleats itself.

Yet there are hints of human presence in the video, some scenes depict a person, so covered in draping fabric that they seem merely another object in the video, the figure moves slowly and carefully, moving the fabric with it or pulling or folding the fabric. However the complete symmetry of the images, take the figure further away from humanity. The symmetry in the video imbues it with a sense of perfection; although ideas of human beauty are supposedly based on symmetry, this is exactly what makes the figure less human, and just like another of the inanimate objects in the video, which are in its course animated as the figure. The use of repetition in the film and the fact everything in the video is done with such seeming precision means that the events are elevated to a kind of ritual. This seems to give the actions some purpose but as with foreign or alien ritual, the viewer is still oblivious as to what it is. What is truly topsy-turvy about 'Nemesis 52' is that despite this hint of human intervention, it is the props that become the performers as much as the figure, they are given equal significance in the film.

Epaminonda uses her medium in a unique way. She recreates the old to create some-

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thing new and completely alien to its origins. The worlds she creates in her art are formed from not just the past but the lines in-between. Like all great and subtle art Epaminonda's pieces do not dictate a response from the viewer as much as to whisper an implied one, and to find this one has to look at the in-between: her work stems from the gaps and spaces she has cut into and out of in her collages and film, the in-between worlds she creates in them.

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