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 Artworks Co-Founders  
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Marili Konstantinopoulou: We founded Artworks with Dimitra back in 2017, in order to find a way to support young Greek artists – primarily financially, but also in other ways. We wanted to fill a gap we found that existed, which is mostly related to the way in which artists can apply for funding in Greece. This process is usually made possible when these artists are supported by a legal scheme. We wanted to change this, so we decided to give support and help directly to the artists themselves, without asking them to reciprocate the help we offer in any specific way. So basically we run a program that offers cash prizes to young Greek artists who work mainly in the field of visual arts, cinema, dance, and choreography, or they may as well be art curators. It was very important for us to maintain the freedom of our program participants to use the money they receive as they see fit. This means that we don't ask them to explain how they will use the help, nor do we ask them to produce something in particular. However, we would like them to participate in some of the events we organize, which mainly pertain to artists' talks, curators' talks, talks by professionals in the field of art, by and large; to present their work to the other program participants, to openly share their ideas and their work, to exchange views and opinions, and, generally speaking, to coexist under the same roof of the program we have created. So from the outset, freedom has been very important to us – and we believe that we have achieved it.

Dimitra Nikolou: Yes, exactly, and it is the first, say, “value” in our frame of thinking. In other words, it is an organization that obviously operates within a framework. As we would say in a more “operational” language of organizational culture and what values it can have, in our case the first thing was freedom, which of course we can further reinforce. Besides, we have on our side our founding donor, Stavros Niarchos Foundation, who gave us the opportunity and the space to offer these cash prizes to a very large number of artists. This was done in order to put more emphasis on the process and not on the result, on the so-called “deliverable,” let's say. This means that we have immediately solved a big problem, that of resources. From the moment we secured this, with the generous support of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation – which is always in collaboration with us, granting us a lot of space to organize this project in the way we thought best while testing it on an everyday basis – we put in the center of our work a second value: Precisely because we talk about a significant number of artists (since the launch of the program in 2018 to this day, we have supported 310 people, which means that the scale is very large) and despite the exchange of the challenge, we always try to operate within a framework of care, understanding, and appreciation. Actually, I'm tempted to use the word tenderness, in the sense of intimacy. I mean, giving space as you want to be given, giving space to artists to perform what they know best, to experiment, research, listen to all that happens around us and to find a place in the way they wish. So this is probably the second value. It is a value that of course is not taken as a given, it is not gained and it stops at that point. It is something we process on an everyday basis, while trying several ways to see how it can bear fruit. Therefore there is a constant sense of trial-and-error, assessing different things models. I will insist that it is a challenge, because there are so many alternate voices coming from diverse artists across different fields. We think that this is a wonderful pluralism, whose exact orientation we constantly try to estimate, so as to recognize what is the need that arises and how we can meet it, in order to improve ourselves as well – after all, we only count four years of activity. Now, these are the two core values we keep on our axis of action. As for the value we wish for the future, can we announce it, Marili?

MK: We sure can! So, focusing on the freedom that Dimitra mentioned, as well as mutual support, understanding, tenderness, care, and because our organization has only been active for four years now as we run the artists' support program, the longevity of

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the venture comprises a very big challenge for us. So how can we achieve the value of sustainability? [We are talking about sustainability in the sense that we have created a group of people, the program participants, counting 310 members to this day, as Dimitra mentioned earlier.] So how will we be able to stand by their side in the course of time, how will we be able to meet other needs that will arise in the future, since each artist participates in the program for a specific period of time that usually ranges up to nine months? Thus as we alternate the program cycles, we try to keep in mind to stay close with the previous participants, but at the same time we are always ready to welcome new ones. Yet, at some point, in addition to the cash prizes and events we organize during each cycle of the program, we want to find ways in which we can support these participants through other means, through other programs, ideas, or processes. Therefore this is our challenge, to see how we will manage to build parallel programs so that this support can last over the years and does not end with the completion of each cycle of the program and the graduation, so to speak, of each artist from our program. There are various ways and strategies we could follow. Dimitra, would you like to say a couple of words about that?

DN: When you talk about sustainability and longevity, I was thinking more about duration in the organization's life span and in the time of the artists themselves – so what concerns their own sustainability. From time to time, we have extensively seen various initiatives that are not sustainable over time, for several reasons that mainly have to do with the inherent difficulties that exist in this area. Yet again, the challenge and the bet is how to manage to ensure coherence, cohesion, and continuity for this project in the course of time. This continuity is by no means a given. But when this initiative was launched, the goal was to start from the bottom up, that is, from two professionals in the field who were already interacting with artists, precisely because we had already identified all these difficulties, in other words the “blank spots” in the field. We are constantly discussing how to ensure this sustainability both for the organization itself and for the artists who have participated so far (or those we will meet in the future). It's not that easy, but that's why we say it's something we wish to happen: it is a desire.

MK: Naturally, we don't use the concept of sustainability only with the technical term, it is not only related to the financial part. It is very important for us to have sustainability also in terms of the moral support offered – and I am not only talking about the support we offer to the artists, but also the support artists share with one another: this sense of belonging to a group, a community of people. Of course, our goal is for this group to keep growing and growing, and not to stay limited to a few participants. And this is quite important for us, to become even more inclusive than we are today, perhaps by integrating other artistic fields, by changing the criteria on the basis of which we accept participants in the program... All of this is constantly being discussed and examined by us. Four years are not enough. Our operation and activity remains probationary and experimental. And yes, it's a big challenge for Artworks to sustain itself as an organization over time, but it is also crucial for the artists themselves to feel that we stay by their side...

DN: Actually, probably the best outcome, the most interesting part, is to see all these artists who have participated as fellows (even those from earlier times) as they “blossom out” – and we are stressing the quote-unquote here – to stay on their path, to grow better and better, to evolve, so that we will be able to help and support them in every way; be something like companions on the road.

MK: We can mention some of the ways we have tried so far for what follows when someone completes their participation in the program, having received the cash prize as moral and material support, but also having participated in the various events we organize. Some of the fellows do have the opportunity to participate in international residencies with which we collaborate. These are mostly located in large urban centers, in contemporary art metropolises: New York, London, Istanbul, among others, as quite soon more cities will be added to the list. So this is a small but quite important step for us, because in this way we prove that the support we offer to artists after their participation in the program is not over, there is this short period of time, even if it doesn't last more than a couple of months. Unfortunately, this is only possible for some of the participants, but that does not mean that we cannot find other ways, so that everyone can benefit from our own actions. In other cases, all of this might be possible through the exhibitions we have...

DN:... organized. In fact, all the support comes from collaborations – we think this is very important in this field, to have different entities and organizations working together, inventing ways to bring artists together; giving them ground to show their work. Similarly to that, we also try to give space, more space for the artists to deal with different projects and to get to know other people through various collaborations. To sum up, we strongly wish to reinforce and enhance our exhibitions (as means of promoting the work), definitely the hospitality schemes, and the artists-in-residence programs. Also, we are thinking about collaborations with different entities and various other projects... We are now trying, day by day, to do increasingly more things and see how it goes. Now, as for the second part, about what we could add as an axis to Artworks' operation, we could establish a department geared towards the development of the relation between the organization and civil society. We have gathered feedback coming from many different artists and the truth is that the needs are way too many. A lot goes through our minds.

MK: We could also implement something that is very common in the corporate world and well-known to all of us: a R&D department – in the sense that art is equally about research and experiment. So this term makes perfect sense. The development part may be a little more controversial, but we don't refer to commodities or to the creation of added or surplus value: we think of it in the sense of developing ideas. So if such a department is set up, even though there are many programs running, it could aim at inviting people who are not necessarily part of the art world – such as scientists, technologists, engineers, politicians, journalists, or even professionals that are more closely related to art, such as philosophers, writers, musicians, historians, researchers, theorists in general. They would all sit at the same table with the artists, in order to discuss issues that concern society and the ordinary citizen. These issues could be relevant to all the crises we face today: the health crisis, the refugee crisis, the environmental crisis. They could also be relevant with the role of technology and science in producing new knowledge; they could be issues that actively concern each of us individually to a certain extent, and perhaps to this extent the correlation between art and art production might not be direct – nevertheless it is certainly fueled and informed by these issues. The aim would therefore be for artists to come closer to civil society, and for both men and women to realize that there is a connection.

DN: Plus, these problems and crises are particularly complex and there is no one-sided solution. We need something that may as well be described as an interdisciplinary vein: we need to connect people from different backgrounds, so that everyone can offer their own know-how or add their two cents to the discussion, in an effort to find ways to solve these highly complex problems; this would can only have positive results, and at the same time it would provide an example of what we name “civil society.” We are all preoccupied by many social problems, each from their own position. It will be very interesting for the public sector to cooperate with the private one, precisely because this complexity can not be... how to say, explained, analyzed by individuals. So it would be good for everyone to sit around this table and discuss, building a common path in the way in which solutions will be found or in which we will try to find a solution, in any case.

MK: Perhaps the aim is not to figure out solutions, the aim is this process, this dialogue: the way in which we will all be inspired, we will imagine the future where we will live together. Solutions may not always be the issue.

DN: Yes, and even if all of this sounds chimeric, we still believe that it is absolutely possible for different people to gather around the same table, to discuss, bridge their differences, and find a common place of communication and action. This is what we have in mind. But, as always, we are still at the beginning and we try, we test, we see what works and what doesn't. So it would be very nice, at least on an imaginary level. We visualize a new department that could have the time to research, question and comment, to find alternative ways of expression, new ideas, different ways of sailing.