



Άγγελος Μακρίδης, *Μεγάλη Ελληνική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια* (1972)

displays 3

Μαρίνα Γεραλή, Εικαστικός.

A/M 1545 | Άγγελος Μακρίδης, *Μεγάλη Ελληνική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια* (1972)

The Book as Conceptual Space

The artists' book became a developed artform in the twentieth century when artists began producing their own books as complete artistic statements. The field of the artists' book emerges with many spontaneous points of origin and appears in every major movement in art and literature. This development is marked by a number of artists who began exploring books more actively and in a serious way in the early part of the twentieth century.

It's not surprising that the book installation piece *Μεγάλη Ελληνική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια* by Άγγελος Μακρίδης is created during the early 70's. By that time, the artists' book had come of age in the U.S. and in Europe, and another era of book related activity began to develop: book-like objects or book sculptures. A most notable example is Duchamp's *Do Touch*, a piece with the female breast cast on its cover, as well as his large *Green Box* that functioned as a conceptual book with sculptural elements. Although a single definition of the term 'artists' book' continues to be problematic until now, one major factor is the flexibility and variation of the book form. And Makridis's book installation points to the development of the 'sculptural book' or 'book sculpture', that had fewer precedents in the history of twentieth century arts than does the artists' book.

What drew me to Makridis's work was not only the fact that it was conceived in 1972, when perhaps very few Cypriot artists, if any,¹ were engaging with the book format, but in particular his use of the encyclopaedia as his central object of exploration. Upon viewing the work in the State Gallery, at first the piece feels immediate and multidimensional. The books are situated inside four acrylic-glass boxes (added later for exhibition purposes at the State Gallery, and removed for the present *display*). They are fixed in an open arrangement (double spread pages), thus creating the base. The artist intervenes further into and onto the four encyclopaedias by blocking some areas of the textual and visual elements and erasing others, and by cutting the pages directly to create a space or a window within the pages. The artist then adds glass and synthetic paper into the removed parts. Two metallic tower/cage-like structures rise from the base of two of the four encyclopaedias.

By transfixing the codex in an open structure, the artist immediately cancels the rigid act of turning the pages sequentially and thus breaks continuity. This new arrangement comes to define the restructured fixed books as a book sculpture. The codex is a set of uniformly sized pages bound in a fixed and intentional sequence. However Makridis nullifies every aspect of that order, structure and sequence and so the rules of its reading are transformed. By adding the tower-like structures, one reads the dimensional space of the book rather than the flat space of the page. With this act the artist foregrounds those habitual actions of turning the pages. This is achieved because the book

¹ A history of artist's books in Cyprus has yet to be studied, therefore I am not sure if there were other artist's engaging actively with the book format.

provides a reading or viewing experience that moves us from a finite space of text and or image to the artistically conceptual space of a book.

Focusing on the actual practice of altering the existing book by cutting text blocks, the intervention becomes also a metaphorical interruption into the text of the world, as it is already written, catalogued and described for us. Traditionally, the encyclopaedia functioned as a platform for organizing and conveying the most relevant accumulated knowledge during an historical time, by employing a systematic method of organizing information, making it a highly usable reference tool.

Indeed, if the artist's intention of intervening into and onto the encyclopaedia is a means of interrogating the conceptual space of a book, he has succeeded precisely because he interweaves the original purpose of the books with a new one. And if there is the desire to believe in the book, in the encyclopaedia as a source of real knowledge, the act of insertion or defacement raises questions about this compendium as such.

In general, artists' books are by nature self-conscious of the structure and the meaning of the book as a form. Investigating the book as an art form through specific inherent qualities such as text, imagery, sequence or narrative and structure, allows these objects to interweave conceptual and critical issues with materials. In closing, Makridis's approach is an examination of the book as a whole, as an entity and an object. The new narrative he has supplied to us produces an alternative viewing experience of what is a book.