

Κερύνια – Καράβι – Αρρής – Πανάγος –
Καπετάν Μιχάλης – Πολικός – Πυξίδα

Γνώθι σαυτόν – Μηδέν Άγαν [μικρό σχέδιο αγκιστριού]

Τσακίλες – λιθόστρωτα
Χελιδόνια – ανάγκες πουλιών
Πέτρες – κόψιμο γυάλισμα

Σπίτια Κερύνιας

Χρυσοκάβα – λατομείον

Σχ. μολύβι

Πετάσια – βάρκες

Λευκωσία – Ακουαρέλλες

Σπουδές – Μη διστάσης να αλλάξεις

Libero –

Αρχιτέκτων – Κινεζ. παροιμία

Πρακτική

Ήλιος κλίσεις

Υποτροφία – απόρριψη

Παγωμένο δωμάτιο

Σακκούλα με εμπειρίες και ερωτηματικά

Πολυτεχνείον – μέθοδος σκέψεως –

Μουσεία – εκθέσεις – Σκάλα

Πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος –

Άνθρωπος – Ήλιος – Αέρας – Φύσις

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Maria and Neoptolemos Michaelides Residence

by Neoptolemos Michaelides
Photographed by Hélène Binet

Parallel readings by Petros Phokaides and pick nick

5.12.2014 - 31.01.2015

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Point Centre for Contemporary Art presents an exhibition featuring photos of Maria and Neoptolemos Michaelides' residence by the renowned architectural photographer Hélène Binet. Point commissioned Binet to come to Cyprus and photograph the house which was designed by Neoptolemos Michaelides and was constructed in the mid-sixties.

The exhibition places the focus upon the outstanding work of Neoptolemos Michaelides, one of the key figures of architectural modernism in Cyprus, and simultaneously opens the discourse around it at an international level. Through the lens of Binet the interior and exterior of the house that the architect and his artist wife resided, is being reduced to the qualities and core values that characterised Michaelides' working idiosyncrasy; nothing excessive, clear forms, simple but not simplistic, local traditional structural elements and materials in dialogue with modern elements and tendencies. Before setting up her heavy analogue cameras and beginning to structure her images, Binet spent time in and around the house, engaging in an intimate experience of the building following a ritual-like procedure. Her frames emphasise the strong concept behind the residential building and highlight the qualities represented on its structural elements. Binet (re)introduces us to the world of the architect with images that trigger thinking processes and dreams and invites us to reflect on the essence of things, a process that defined Michaelides' working and living philosophy.

Binet, who is internationally acknowledged as one of the world's leading architectural photographers, established her own personal style in this field during the past twenty-five years. She has developed a unique way of looking at buildings, penetrating to their core, capturing the values and truths that they encapsulate and exposing them in her photographs. The underlying theme in her work is the interplay of light, shadow and texture of materials and architectural elements. She has an extraordinary ability to orchestrate these three elements and reveal the buildings' power. By choosing to focus on certain details, elements or lines and to position them together in her frames, she initiates a dialogue between them. Thus, her work goes beyond documentation and is best described as a compositional process that brings forward essential connections and associations. Her images present us with an experience of the building instead of a view and at the same time they reveal the architect's vision, which is often juxtaposed or distorted by the lived reality.

*Special Thanks to Maria and Neoptolemos Michaelides Foundation

Parallel readings

Petros Phokaides, revisits the abandoned library of Neoptolemos Michaelides's desolate architectural office at 39 Perikleous Street, in Nicosia aiming to gain insights into the architect's creativity and highlight its ties to post-war international architectural discourses.

His project involves the production of a volume comprised of selected notes, traces and bookmarks found inside some of the architect's books, magazines, and key architectural publications of post-war era.* A selection of this material will also be presented during the exhibition. Transcending the fragmentary condition of the material- as the official archive remains inaccessible to researchers and away from the public eye - the project attempts to formulate critical perspectives across Michaelides's work and the larger postwar architectural culture, through a series of discussions with historians and theorists of architecture.

The architectural office and former family house of Neoptolemos Michaelides at 39 Perikleous Street, in Nicosia, was abandoned since the office's close down in the early 1990s. The building and its contents were exposed to physical deterioration and even most likely to theft for decades. Despite the considerable destruction, a significant number of architectural magazines and books remained on shelves, but this important archival resource continued to be exposed to humidity, dust, and other forms of destruction. In light of these threats, some concerned individuals (architects Georgia Frangoudi, Aimilia Siandou and Petros Phokaides, and visual artist Kyriakos Lyras) rescued the material by collecting what remained in the architectural library of the office, and, upon coordination with Cyprus Architects Association, which was in charge of safeguarding the building, the material was transferred to the Mesarch Lab, of the University of Cyprus's Department of Architecture, which also began to clean, catalogue and make efforts to preserve the material for future researchers.

*The volume was produced with the collaboration of Georgia Frangoudi, Kyriakos Lyras and Alkis Hadjiandreou

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pick nick became intrigued with the prospect of meeting and talking with Maro Yiakoumi, a former architectural designer working with Neoptolemos Michaelides. Crucial in the realization of the architect's oeuvre, pick nick were fascinated by the idea of 'following' in short time the narrative as retold by this woman, decades after her lifetime experience. As she says,

"...until the very end of Neoptolemos Michaelides' life, when the office finally closed, Anneta the typist, young Androula from Karavas, and I, were the last to leave the office behind us".

Interested in processes of (de)constructing narrative and memory, in what one chooses to 'recite', to 'keep back' or 'enhance', pick nick's approach involves a practice of reciprocating by actively listening and reconstructing the conversation, which occurred on the 15th of November, 2014 in Pera Pedi, Limassol.

Neoptolemos Michaelides

Excerpts from the preparation of the speech Neoptolemos Michaelides gave when he received an honorary award from the Association of Cypriot Architects on 25 January, 1991.

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I was lucky to live my childhood in Kyrenia, Cyprus. That experience was like the greatest university. I remember the black hull of an unfinished boat. We used to get in from a hole near the keel, climb up to the gunnel and become sailors and captains on imaginary trips. The sea was even brighter blue seen through the black oarlock, and the rocks even more golden. I always carried that boat inside me and it obsessed me. When I went back after many years, it was not there and no one could tell me what had happened to it.

[...] Standing near the black hull, I often observed mastre Panayos the carpenter making his hulls with exquisite craftsmanship, infusing the lifeless wood with life.

[...] I collected pebbles from the seashore. As a result of the waves, they appeared shinier and more polished than the rest, and I admired them with my eyes and hands. The cobbled alleys of Kyrenia always used to glimmer with the colours of the pebbles after the rain.

[...] The small room where I slept faced south and even during the winter I always asked to keep the window shades open so that I could see Saint Hilarion Castle. The view obliterated the size of the room, extending it all the way up to the mountain. I did not only look at Pentadaktylos from the window, but I also explored it on foot, discovering its flora and fauna. I gathered semi-transparent stones in a great variety of colours and shapes. Later I would cut them with a handsaw and I struggled to make them smooth by rubbing them against other stones and with sandpaper, but without any spectacular results. They would only reveal their colour when water was poured on them. The plain, unadorned houses of Kyrenia and the surrounding area had rooms on different levels, made with soil from the nearby village of Karmi. There were fine stone walls with small pebbles and also rough-cast ones, doors in wood that the rain would caress, revealing its grain, and the shadows of the sun that would change every hour. I used to sketch all this in pencil on a drawing pad and on the back of my uncle's cigarette packets. The curved forms of the old quarries and the arched caves of Chrysokava with the drawings of the saints are also imprinted on my memory and subconscious. The boats and ships taught me another lesson, that of simplicity. Nothing excessive, only the real essence of the sea that washes away anything fake.

[...] The first time I travelled to Milan, I carried with me several stones I had collected from Pentadaktylos in the hope that there they could be cut and polished. I was fortunate to become acquainted with a fellow student, Libero Cecchini, whose father was a marble mason. He cut and polished them for me, surpassing my expectations. During the second year of my studies, World War II broke out and I was forced to return to Cyprus. Georgios Paraskevaides and I launched an informal partnership to create air-raid shelters and a few houses that I designed. As I supervised the construction, I learned the construction workers' language and terminology that I would eventually employ. I became an architect after the war was over and I had completed my studies – in fact the word architect literally means “the first among the builders”. I have in mind a Chinese proverb that made an impression to me. It goes:

‘I heard something and I think I remember it.
I saw something and I remember it.
I build something and I know it’

I decided to try and become acquainted with all of the different occupations involved in constructing – that of the builder, the plasterer, the carpenter, the plumber, the electrician, the painter – all trades that I would be confronted with.

[...] Following a seven-year intermission, I went back to complete my studies carrying a sack filled with questions and the experiences amassed during the years of practice I had had during the war. At the same time, I brought with me a clear set of beliefs based on my childhood memories. The Milan Polytechnic provided me with a method of thinking that assisted me in answering my own questions. Simultaneously, I ensured my horizons were constantly expanding by frequently attending intellectually stirring events, museums, exhibitions of painting and sculpture, and concerts at La Scala – the best ones of course. As I strongly believe that ‘Πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπος ἐστίν’ [Man is the measure of all things], I studied the corporeal and spiritual needs of human beings, so when the time arrived I would be able to satisfy both and apply them in all respect for the physical environment, taking into consideration all necessary parameters: people, sun, air and nature.

[...] You can imagine the difficulties I was faced with during those times when I did not want under any circumstances to betray my beliefs for the sake of financial benefit. To my very few clients I used to say, “The house belongs once to you and ten times to me, and my property could never be expropriated or sold and change name.” How could I compromise when I believe that the symbol for civilization is a minus - and the symbol for barbarism is a plus +? I am interested in quality and not in quantity.

[...] If I were to give advice to young people, it would be: Discover how the essence of our land is an entire world in itself, and ascend the steps of architecture, which is both a science and an art, slowly and steadily.

HARIS HADJIVASSILIOU

'L'auteur original ne pas celui qui n'imité personne, mais celui que personne ne peut imiter'

– Chateaubriand

Neoptolemos Michaelides is widely regarded as the father of twentieth century architecture in Cyprus.

He studied at Milan Polytechnic during the 1940's, and developed an understanding and appreciation of the contemporary Milanese avant garde architectural scenes. These undoubtedly had a strong bearing on the formation of his own autonomous architectural process, as seen throughout his life's work.

In Cyprus, his legacy comprises a large number of important modern buildings dating back to the early fifties, each one a master class in poetic simplicity and honest structural expression. It is for these attributes that his architecture is greatly appreciated in his homeland. His true originality lay in the adaptation of indigenous building types and the use of natural, local materials to create something new. One of his most important completed buildings is residential: a house, designed and constructed in Nicosia during the mid sixties for himself and Maria, his artist wife. The project's typology is a progressive variation of the residential types seen in his earlier work, but this particular building is a tour de force. The construction is subtle, the use of form both sophisticated and refined. The design approach is 'critically regionalistic', a position that many architects would later adopt.

The project's form and 'gestures' are dictated by the elongated site on which it rests. Upon seeing this villa for the first time, one soon experiences its power to transfix and wonders at its inherent beauty. It is a home like a Minoan palace: majestic and yet humble; complex yet beautifully plain. It appears almost to float above the horizon, cushioned softly in its verdant surroundings. The receding white walls and projected grey slabs create horizontal zones and give the space its human and generic scales, which titillate the eye. There is a regularity, a rhythm to its structure and a refined, measured proportion to its composition.

It is worth noting the variety at play across the villa's three storeys. The parking spaces and quests living areas at ground level contrast a far more reserved second floor, the piano nobile, comprising living quarters for the owners. The third floor, an isolated den for study, is crowned by a beautifully articulated at the top slab parabolic vault, thus completing the villa's intrinsic classical components: base, torso, and crown. These are connected by flights of marble steps embedded in concrete that irrevocably draw any visitor to ascend, to experience the pure drama of the vertical space. Impressive collections of art and artefacts are seamlessly integrated into the domestic space. Patios and terraces penetrate or extend from the interiors to complement external conditions: the sun's arc or a cool breeze.

HARIS HADJIVASSILIOU

Maximum use was made of local materials, which have maintained their natural colour and texture. The building's reinforced frame, walls and ceilings are fair-faced concrete. Their moulds were meticulously fashioned and sandblasted so that the finish reveals the rich pattern of the timber surface. The external cavity walls and internal partitions are hollow brick plastered with lime mortar and white marble sand, a traditional technique used to waterproof walls and vaulted Church roofs. There is not a single drop of paint used.

Natural light pours in through carefully controlled openings, enlivening the fair-faced texture and transforming the interior into a relaxed, almost mystical space. It is worth noting the architect's intelligent use of detail: the wooden balustrade, left in its natural form, which grows more beautiful with age; the double-faced artefact displays; the protruding concrete gutters, which became a trademark in his later work.

On a theoretical level, the architect had no interest in elevations, as he once stated. The rational yet poetic plan formed his basis. Things were made beautiful through honesty, refinement, and purity. This principle draws from modern philosophical, even oriental, thinking. Michaelides and his fascinating wife used to travel to Japan and Korea in the sixties, a rarity among Cypriots. For those fortunate enough to have known him, it was clear that the principles he applied to architecture and those he applied to everyday life were the same: his architectural philosophy was born out of his day to day experience, rather than any adherence to stylistic fashions. Looking more deeply at the structural elements of his work one can easily draw a parallel to the structural principles of Le Corbusier's *Maison Domino* and *The Five Points of Modern Architecture*, but then these manifestos and Michaelides' work hail from similar times; times when a search for new ideas in the construction of reinforced concrete was the norm. These were the times of masters like Nervi and Ponti, about whom the young architect must have been aware during his time in Milan. At any rate, the result in this case is a sophisticated house that relates to, and integrates with, its physical and personal environment, and this is where its true value lies.

MICHAEL ANASTASSIADES

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.

'When I was young, my uncle brought me a vine leaf and placed it on the palm of my hand and said, "Touch this leaf". It had a very delicate feel. You have to be sensitive to everything around you. You have to be sensitive to the sun, to the light, to the shadows, to the water, the wind. Today, we ignore all these elements, we are inhuman, we violate nature. This worries me...'

I was 12 years old when my father announced that he was to build a house on a family plot of land outside the village where he was born. I had never seen the site before, but from what I had been told, it was an olive grove of trees that were hundreds of years old.

In preparation, he decided to cut them all down, levelled any sign of undulating landscape, and poured gravel over the remaining green: all ready to go! Now he had to find the architect. After all, his best friend had convinced him that he should build a proper house and not a prefabricated unit with basic facilities, as was his original plan. The same friend was wise enough to insist on recommending a man he knew and praised as 'the best architect'. There was not much convincing to do: my father has always valued his friend's opinions, and shortly afterwards he assigned this architect the task of building him a home. Carte blanche.

Many years later, I learned that great houses are created through a relationship of trust between the client and the architect. However, only now do I know that what my father really had in mind was literally providing this man with a blank piece of paper, a naked plot of land where any sign of its landscape history had been erased.

Neoptolemos Michaelides could not have wished for a worse curse. Around his own house, he never pruned a single tree. 'It's as cruel as amputation' he used to say.

Neoptolemos had a very unusual relationship with nature— at least, one that was unfamiliar to me, though very intriguing. He once told my father that he had something to give him. I remember him pointing at a location on the map by the side of a small road, on the way to the Troodos Mountains. One day Neoptolemos drove with my father to this spot and said, 'Here is your present! Take it home and I'll tell you where to place it'. It was a huge rock of red jasper. It was like an act of adoption, 'borrowing' a piece from nature and repositioning it, with exactly the same painstaking skill that ancient Chinese scholars had used before. The rest of the rock's family was in his own home, the smaller siblings that he had managed to 'rescue' and relocate years earlier.

I had never experienced the art of viewing to such a degree.

Shortly afterwards, my father returned the gesture, offering Neoptolemos and his wife, Maria, various objects ranging from a bronze, plastic desk clock with his company's logo on it to African souvenirs, like a hand-carved wooden bust of a woman, which he had picked up on one of his travels to Burundi. 'Look!'— Maria grabbed my father's attention one evening when we went to their house for a drink. 'Look at the beautiful shadow it casts on the wall, like a crawling panther ready to attack'; the ordinary statue had acquired a whole new value, becoming a gobo next to the accidental light that her husband had informally, but beautifully, put together.

MICHAEL ANASTASSIADES

From that day on I realised that nothing had ever been thrown into its place accidentally. Each object in relation to others around it and everything in relation to the human scale and the environment, with curated views from carefully positioned seats in the austere setting.

I remember the first time I walked into their home, after an evening invitation from him and his wife, entering a dimly lit space, just enough light to be able to move slowly through the different spaces. I immediately thought that this was a beautiful way of slowing someone down, adjusting your pace to appreciate an environment of such beauty. My father immediately complained that everything was so dark, in a tone that almost required more lights to be installed for the next time we would be around, when Neoptolemos answered softly, 'There is a reason why there's the night and there's the day, and we should not try to turn one into the other'. I sometimes think that his statement was the reason I became a designer of lights.

We started to walk up the marble cantilevered steps, the rail being nothing but the trunk of a young tree that became thinner to the grip as you reached the upper levels. And standing vertical was the main support, another tree, wider at its base, thinning out to almost a point, rising well above the last rail, a few feet below the cast-concrete ceiling in wood-grain relief. It was like the ones Giuseppe Penone carved out years later from these old beams, exposing the young tree within before it grew and was cut square. Only that the passage of time was no longer suggested through the removed layers, but through the appreciation of the younger part as you climbed up.

With the same type of wood were these beautifully simple display cabinets, full of fossils, shells, stones, and minerals, found on their travels or collected locally over the years. I remember going on an excursion with Neoptolemos; with the task of finding crystals, we searched and searched for hours without luck, when suddenly he picked up a perfectly formed round stone that just about fit his palm and offered it to me. 'Here, a true sphere!' he said. 'You can't beat nature!'

His search for purity was clearly embedded in his refined environments. He always believed that 'the symbol of culture is the mathematical minus $-$, and the symbol of barbarity is the plus $+$ '.

It was the time that our opinion started to 'matter', my brother and me in our early teens, when my father asked us what requests we had from the man who was to build our house. We suddenly felt important, grown up, and bombarded him with spontaneous, superficial ideas. Anything that came to our minds, probably images borrowed from the homes of fictional characters we admired. I remember specifically asking for a pitched roof, one with an extreme pitch that created this 'amazing' space inside. We were both present when our father passed on these requests, when the small gentle man looked at us and just smiled. We never got anything we asked for, only the swimming pool; after all, we shared the same passion for water. Years later, I heard him advise the younger generation in one of his talks 'to learn the place where we come from, the real one. Not the one with borrowed foreign structures, with roofs of 60 degrees inclination, in a land where we pray for rain'.

'The British have a very wise saying: doctors bury their mistakes, architects can't; these structures say a lot about the people who built them'.

SHORT BIOGRAPHIES

Hélène Binet (1959) was born in Switzerland and she currently lives and works in London. She studied photography at the Instituto Europeo di Design in Rome, where she grew up, and soon developed an interest in architectural photography. Over a period of twenty-five years Hélène Binet has photographed both contemporary and historical architecture. Her list of clients includes architects Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind, Studio Mumbai, Peter Zumthor and many others. While following the work of contemporary architects – often from construction through completion – Hélène Binet has also photographed the works of past architects as Alvar Aalto, Le Corbusier, Sverre Fehn, Sigurd Lewerentz, Andrea Palladio and Dimitris Pikionis. More recently, Hélène Binet has started to direct her attention to landscape photography, wherein she transposes key concerns of her architectural photography. Binet's work has been published in a wide range of books, and is shown in both national and international exhibitions. She is an advocate of analogue photography and therefore she exclusively works with film. Hélène Binet was selected to receive the Julius Shulman Institute Excellence in Photography Award for 2015.

Neoptolemos Michaelides (1920 -1992) was born in Nicosia Cyprus and he is celebrated as one of the most important representatives of modern architecture in Cyprus. He began his studies in Milan, in 1940, under great architects like Gio Ponti and Bruno Zevi but when WWII broke out he returned to his homeland. After the war ended he went back to Milan and completed his studies. In 1952 he came to live in Cyprus. Michaelides developed a strong personal style through his work. He was a meticulous researcher and enthusiast for local traditional architecture but at the same time an advocate of the modern movement. He had a unique ability to combine, in a very sophisticated and balanced way, traditional and modern elements and materials like light, water, wood, stone, iron, glass and concrete. His work is characterised by use of simple and pure forms, absence of historical reference or decorative elements, architectural coherence and bioclimatic design. He was the founder (1979) and first president of the Pancyprrian Organization of Architectural Heritage and a pioneer for the preservation of many urban and rural examples of traditional architecture in Cyprus.

Petros Phokaides is an architect and a researcher at Mesarch Lab, University of Cyprus, and he is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at the School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) in Greece. He has performed extensive archival research in Cyprus, Greece and United Kingdom on the history of inter- and post-war modern architecture. He has co-curated the installation *Treasured Microcosms* (Treasure Island exhibition, Nicosia, 2014) and the event *Critical Archaeologies* (Suspended Spaces research program, Nicosia, 2011). His historical and theoretical investigations on modern and contemporary architecture have been published in *Docomomo Journal*, *Journal of Architecture*, *MIT Thresholds*, *MONU Magazine* and *A10*.

SHORT BIOGRAPHIES

pick nick is an independent art and research collective, based in Cyprus and initiated by Maria Petrides (independent writer & editor), Panayiotis Michael (visual artist), and Alkis Hadjiandreou (visual artist & architect). **pick nick** draws from everyday routines, sites and infrastructures in an effort to zoom into moments noticing vulnerabilities, paused potentials, hidden details, and intimate silences in order to work with and around these conditions.

Kyrenia – Ship – Arris – Panagos
Captain Michael – Polar – Compass
Γνώθι σαυτόν **[Know thyself]** – *Μηδέν ἄγαν* **[nothing in excess]**
(a small drawing of a hook)
Pebbles – cobbled alleys
Swallows – birds’ needs
Stones – cutting and polishing
Houses of Kyrenia
Chrysokava – quarry
Drawing pencil
Kites - boats
Nicosia – aquarelles
Studies – do not hesitate to change
Libero –
Architect – Chinese proverb
Practice
Sun slopes
Scholarship – rejection
Freezing room
A bag of experiences and question marks
Polytechnic School – thinking method
Museums – exhibitions – Scala
Πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος **[Man is the measure of all things]**
Human/Man – Sun – Air – Nature
Brazil
Polys made the mistake correctly
once on them and 10 on me
– +
Get to know the true ‘face’ of Cyprus
Do not rush
Create beliefs