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Katerina Gregos will lead the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens as artistic director

The museum looks to a “new era” after a difficult history, including long delays in the opening its new home and the termination of two of its directors by the Culture Ministry

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Katerina Gregos was the founding director of Greek collector Dakis Joannou's Athens-based Deste Foundation and has organised a number of international exhibitions

Katerina Gregos, a Greek-born writer and curator who has worked at a number of major international biennials and organisations, has been appointed the artistic director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST) in Athens. The museum reopens today after an extended shutdown due to pandemic restrictions, which are being eased with the aim of opening the country to much-needed tourism.

Gregos takes up her post on 1 July.

“After working 15 years abroad, it is a great honour for me to take over this position,” Gregos said in statement, adding by email that she is “looking forward to this challenge and to be able to contribute to the discussion on what a contemporary art institution can meaningfully contribute to society today, in these challenging times.”

Gregos, who studied in London at the Courtauld Institute of Art, King's College and City University, was the founding director of the Greek collector Dakis Joannou's Athens-based Deste Foundation from 1997 to 2002. She moved to Brussels in 2006, where she has been based until now, to take over as director of the Argos—Centre for Audiovisual Arts and then served as the artistic director of the Art Brussel fairs, while also working as an independent curator.

She has also led a number of major art events, including the 1st Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art, the Göteborg Biennial, Manifesta and the Thessaloniki Biennial. She curated three national pavilions at the Venice Biennale, for Denmark, Belgium and Croatia, and in 2016 was appointed curator of visual arts of the non-profit Schwarz Foundation, in Munich/Athens. She helped organise a map of independent art spaces in Athens in 2017 during the Documenta festival.

Gregos is known for presenting socially and politically engaged art, maintaining, as she calls it, a “red thread” in the exhibitions she has organised. She says that she is plugged into “the relationship between art, poetics, politics and the radical imagination”, and that the ways in which artists convey these themes, “probing issues outside the box beyond dominant stereotypes and narratives”, underpin her thinking.

“With her international experience, her rich exhibition and publishing history and her numerous collaborations with international institutions, Katerina Gregos is the person who can lead EMST to its new era: towards a museum of contemporary art that is welcoming to the public, active, dynamic, at the forefront of developments in culture and which serves to

unite the visual arts community in Greece,” says Greece’s minister of culture and sports, Lina Mendoni, in a statement. “The aim of this new era of EMST is to contribute decisively to the enhancement of Athens as a major European centre for contemporary creation, which will promote the work of Greek artists, engender and promote innovative ideas and foster a dynamic and meaningful artistic dialogue.”

The National Museum of Contemporary Art opened last year just before the global pandemic in its new home in the former Fix brewery in Athens. But it has had a difficult history over the 20 years since its founding, with several long delays in the construction of its new building. Its founding director, Anna Kafetsi, was unceremoniously fired in 2014 because of the hold-up, causing a stir among Greece’s art professionals. The next director, Katerina Koskina, was also controversially terminated by the then-cultural minister in 2018 during a government reshuffle, and an international search was announced to appoint the museum’s next leader, with candidates selected by a jury.

“Contemporary museums need to be hospitable, generous and always open to new perspectives in contemporary culture,” says Nicholas Yatromanolakis, Greece’s undersecretary in charge of contemporary culture, in a statement.

“In this context, Katerina Gregos is the ideal choice, as she combines the international experience, the artistic track record and the vision for the artistic programme of EMST, as well as the skills to promote contemporary Greek art, in dialogue and within the context of the international art scene, through a dynamic museum.”

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