

**Exhibition** June 14 – September 18, 2023

Sabatini Building, Floor 3

# Angela Melitopoulos

## Cine(so)matrix



Angela Melitopoulos, *Matri Linear B. Surfacing Earth*, 2021. Multichannel video installation  
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Angela Melitopoulos (Munich, 1961) was a student of Nam June Paik at the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf (Germany), where her training was built on a self-reflective approach to video as a medium. Her artistic practice is characterized by an investigative curiosity that runs through the questions raised in her video essays as well as the technical and expressive mediums she employs to create them and then arrange them spatially in installations.

Just as Gilles Deleuze found in the philosophy of Henri Bergson the key to thinking about the cinematic image, video allows Melitopoulos to rework Bergsonian intuitions regarding *matter-images* and *pure perception* in an even more precise way. By capturing flows of image and sound, and processing and recombining them, video technology is able to imitate the workings of perception and memory. This capacity makes it a useful medium for studying and understanding the processes that shape subjectivity and a tool for confronting dominant representations and their impoverishing effects, from the artistic realm.

In the two works that open and close the exhibit, we see, respectively, anonymous hands weaving rhythmically on a loom (*Passing Drama*, 1999) and the feminist anthropologist Diane Bell holding a piece of woven cloth in her hands (*Matri Linear B. Surfacing Earth*, 2021). In the scene, Bell comments: “This is a piece of weaving done by the Ngarrindjeri women who live in the

southeastern Australia. These are woven with fresh water rushes and they last for a long, long time [...] Weaving has to do with telling stories [...] These women weave objects that are part of their lives and their economy [...] All of them start from this core, here [...] And as they are doing, they tell a story [...] This is about being connected, all the strands are connected”. As the sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato, a frequent collaborator with Melitopoulos, points out, in her work the technique of weaving is both a metaphor and an example of the process of image construction in video, and it suggests a particular way of understanding the flows that constantly weave together and unravel the world.

Melitopoulos experiments with nonlinear editing and narration that is attuned to detail in all of its textures and intensities. “My work speaks of affects and processes that take place before representation and discourse.” In this way, she seeks to expose the observer’s senses



Angela Melitopoulos, *Passing Drama*, 1999. Video essay.  
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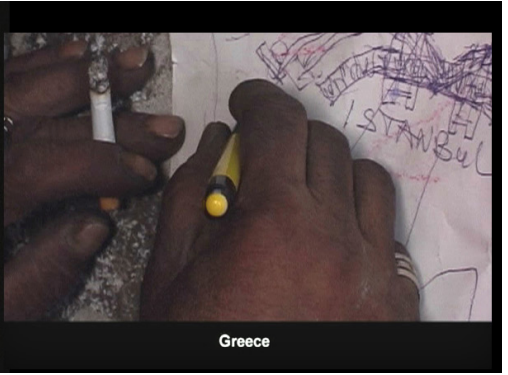
to the incommensurable exuberance present in the material communality of the world, thwarting capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal identifications that close down its meaning, and instead leaving the feeling body always open to new ways of relating to it.

She sees in *Passing Drama* the beginning of a new way of working with video, which, in this case, is centered on the format of short histories of refugees and migrants displaced by capital-*H* History. As Melitopoulos puts it:

As a migrant one lives in a world of differences, singularities, heterogeneities (the “here” that one has migrated into and the “there” that one comes from; the mother tongue and the language that has to be learned and the culture that has to be adapted). One lives several worlds at the same time, but cannot reduce them to one world: they have to be allowed to exist simultaneously. If they are placed opposite one another, differences are transformed into oppositions and one risks destruction. To avoid this destruction one looks

at the singular from a close distance and can see how one detail can be linked with the next detail in every single situation, one singularity with the next. Oppositions can be transformed through the ability to adapt, in other words through creation and innovation. As a migrant, in a sense one is compelled daily to practice a kind of “non-linear editing,” which means linking heterogeneous elements in one’s thinking and actions, which would normally be regarded as contradictory. The kind of action that results is a “micropolitical” behavior, which is denied and ignored by the macropolitical dimension.

This reflection on the dispersal of migrant memory is the point of departure for understanding the notion of *timescape*, which Melitopoulos dedicated several years to developing theoretically and practically in the first decade of the 2000s. During that period, she launched the online platform *Timescapes*, which brought together artists, researchers, and activists connected by the internet, who each contributed their own



Angela Melitopoulos, *Corridor X*, 2006. Multichannel video installation  
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footage to create an image bank in order to explore new narrative techniques as a constitutive space of the common, against the logics of segmentation imposed on memory, communication, and the spaces of the imagination. The work *Corridor X* (2006), which Melitopoulos describes as a double-screen road movie, is part of this cooperative project. Produced as an audiovisual essay, the piece registers the impact that large-scale communications infrastructure projects have on the psychic geography of the populations they affect.

Just as *Corridor X* and its epilogue *Unearthing Disaster* (2013)—produced with the artist Angela Anderson—experiment with the road movie genre, the documentary *The Cell. Antonio Negri and the Prison* (2008) questions the genres of biography and the interview, exploring nonlinear narrative possibilities opened up by the DVD format: structured as a prologue and three chapters, the work includes Melitopoulos's interviews of Negri carried out in three moments (his Parisian exile in 1997, his imprisonment in Rebibbia in 1998, and his house arrest in Rome in 2003), suggesting distinct viewing

options based on their interconnected subplots.

On the other hand, the video essay *The Language of Things* (2007) takes pleasure in the experience of a material communality that allows for communication between beings and things, a condition that Walter Benjamin argues for in his essay *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man* (1916), from which Melitopoulos extracted fragments to accompany a montage of images shot in the hypertechnological landscape of contemporary Japan. This piece foreshadows a clear interest in dissolving the anthropocentric dichotomies of nature/culture and subject/object, work that Melitopoulos would continue along with Maurizio Lazzarato in the 2010s. Picking up the idea of *machinic animism* proposed by Félix Guattari, Melitopoulos and Lazzarato's research gave rise to the three-screen video essays *Assemblages* (2010) and *The Life of Particles* (2012). In these works, Melitopoulos continues paying particular attention to the spatial redistribution of visual and sonic stimuli that conventional film systematically centralizes using a single



Angela Melitopoulos, *The Language of Things*, 2007. Video essay  
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Angela Melitopoulos, *The Life of Particles*, 2012.  
 Multichannel video installation  
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screen and highly standardized acoustical norms.

This is also the case of *The Refrain* (2015), spread over four screens. It picks up the concept of *ritornello* introduced by Deleuze and Guattari to make visible and audible the repetition of and variations in the gestures, signs, words, and chants that accompany and give form to how communities on the islands of Okinawa (Japan) and Jeju (South Korea) defend and are tied to their territories, which have been under military occupation by the United States for years.

In recent years, the ecological concerns present in her earlier works have come to the fore in the ongoing project *Matri Linear B*, the first two parts of which are on view in this exhibit: *Revisionen* (2022) and *Surfacing Earth* (2021). This line of

investigation takes as its point of departure the expressive powers of the earth's surface to understand it as *speaking landscapes*, agencies of utterances that we must learn to see. The project explores the forms of seeing and relating to one's surroundings that result from the prevailing extractivist culture, with their accompanying technologies of seeing, interrogating them on the basis of recent research into the pre-Neolithic sites of Lower Austria or the cosmovision of Aboriginal peoples of Australia. Far from presenting a romantic or nostalgic outlook, these works highlight the urgency of tuning in to a *deep time* capable of "understanding the constellations, stardust, or the future of the world as real, geological, and cultural narratives" and to formative cosmologies in which "living force acts on everything, transversally, and through different levels of life."

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