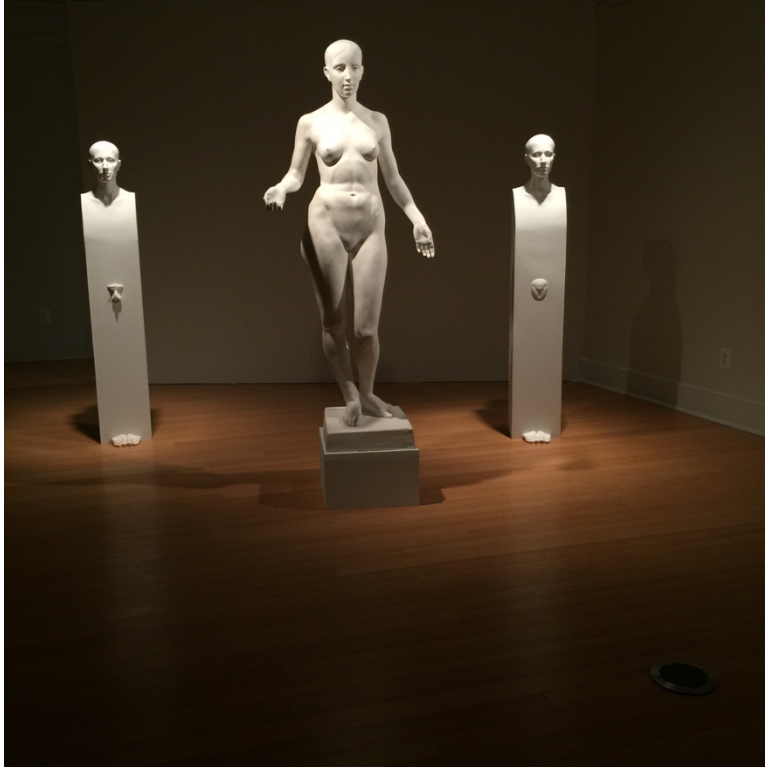


Thanasi Papapostolou

Eikona/Image

Kaplan Gallery, VisArts

January 14 – February 14, 2016



Thanasi Papapostolou brings the classical and contemporary together in a carefully calibrated installation of figurative sculptures in his solo exhibition

Eikona/Image. Yes, Papapostolou has a Greek name. His knowledge of ancient Greek sculpture, history and philosophy is extraordinarily deep. He is an exceptionally talented sculptor of the human body. He is also a contemporary artist; one whose research and artwork question the impulse to make images of our time with history and experience as context.

Upon entry to the darkened gallery, the visitor encounters a wall that prevents the visitor from

seeing the entire installation at once. It encourages the viewer to move toward the left where a single herm* (a human bust with a quadrangle base) stands against a wall lit by a single light. Moving clockwise inward toward the center of the gallery, more herms stand along the walls of the gallery. All are average human height and bear the same head, but with subtle erosion of the features. At the center of the installation, two herms with explicit genitalia marking one as male and one as female flank an idealized full-sized female figure.

Placement, lighting, space and proportion set up a powerful relationship between the sculptures and the viewer. The visitor slows down and discovers. Cast in white plaster, the outer herm sculptures are mysterious and vague. Their incomplete features suggest a liminal state. They guard the edges of the gallery, standing metaphorically between public and private space. The idealized figure in the center is clear and complete. The sculptures and atmosphere contribute to a sense of becoming whole, of moving from a place of anonymity to full individuation.

“The gallery becomes,” says Papaostolou, “not a sanctuary for a specific god or individual, but a place for secular contemplation. The installation sets up a sensual, perceptual experience with figures in space. Not unlike a temple, the gallery environment is designed to elicit an emotion or a reaction. It elevates the objects that are placed within it.” The installation stands parallel to and informed by the current cultural landscape of indiscriminate, hyper-mediated static and compulsive, narcissistic documentation. Moments of quiet contemplation are rare in a world filled to the brim with distraction.

Papapostolou acknowledges that being a figurative sculptor leaning strongly toward Classical forms may not seem particularly contemporary. There are many who laud his skills, his loyalty to perceptual representation and his commitment to the handmade. He admittedly gets considerable satisfaction from having control over his materials and processes. However, the larger issue for Papapostolou is how the impulse to create human images remains relevant, pervasive and meaningful. Slowly, meticulously and sensitively shaping mud into an arm or a fingernail is different from snapping a selfie. Neither is qualitatively better or worse. What is significantly interesting is that both practices exist in this contemporary moment. Together they continue a conversation centered on the process of what Papapostolou describes as “seeing ourselves, relating to ourselves, being in and outside of oneself, being on the edge, being one of many and being individually whole and complete.”

-Susan Main, Gallery Director and Curator, VisArts

*In ancient Greece, the earliest herms were piles of stones standing on boundary lines as symbols of protection. Passerbys or visitors added their own stones to the pile as an act of reverence. The form of the herms evolved into a sculpted human head representing the god Hermes that was placed upon a rectangular stone pillar of human height with sculpted genitals. The herms were places both inside and outside of the home as a symbol of protection and stroked or anointed with oil for a blessing of fertility.