

**NIKOS KESSANLIS, The Queue
The Phantasmagoria of the identity**



Documentary, Beta SP, Duration 46'

Production : Fantasia Ltd for ET-1

MEDIA

**Developed with the support of the
MEDIA Programme of the European Union**

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|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
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| Production: | Fantasia Ltd for ET-1 |

SYNOPSIS

Nikos Kessanlis is one of the protagonists of the “Mec-art” movement of the contemporary realism of the 60’s, well known outside Greece as Nikos. The originality of his approach consists in the re-structuring of the bi-dimensional image using industrial photo-mechanic procedures. Nikos refuses the passive and static perception of his works. The Phantasmagorias of the identity and the Anamorphoses in three dimensions imply the active participation of the spectator.

The documentary reveals to the spectator the creative procedure of the artist while he is preparing “The Queue”, a work that has been installed in the Omonia Station of Athens Metro. The work is a 20 meters long and 3 meters high freeze, composed by 10 images and presenting a series of silhouettes of human figures. This work has been created with a photo-mechanic procedure.

The artist himself, his wife Chryssa Romanos, an artist herself, and the French art critic Pierre Restany will speak about Nikos’ work and his personal artistic quest.

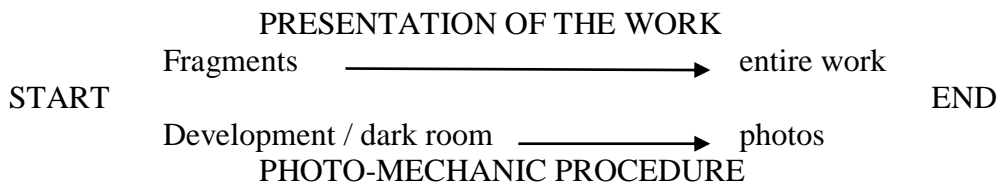
ARTISTIC APPROACH

Nikos Kessanlis' recent work "The Queue" is used as a point of departure for the presentation of his personal artistic idiom and especially his implication in the Mec-art movement of the 60s, a movement using the photo-mechanic techniques. The whole procedure of the creation of the work will be presented to the spectator: the lights, the curtain on which the shadows are projected, the photographing of the human silhouettes behind the curtain, the projection of the image on a canvas, covered with a photo-sensible emulsion and the development procedure in the dark room.

The structure of the documentary will be based on two parallel narration lines. The gradual revealing of the work and the presentation of the photo-mechanic procedure in the reverse order.

The spectator will gradually discover "The Queue". In the introduction of the documentary only fragments of the silhouettes will be shown and later on reflections of the work on the ground and distorted images through a glass ball. The work as a whole will be revealed only at the final part

On the other hand the procedure that has created the work will be presented in several sequences following the reverse order, starting from the final phase and finishing with the photos of the shadows.



Part of the interview of the Nikos Kessanlis will be filmed at a Green Box background to enable over-impression of his image on different background images (paintings, images from the metro station, etc).

Several techniques will be used to manipulate and deform the image in a way analog to the anamorphoses used by the artist himself:

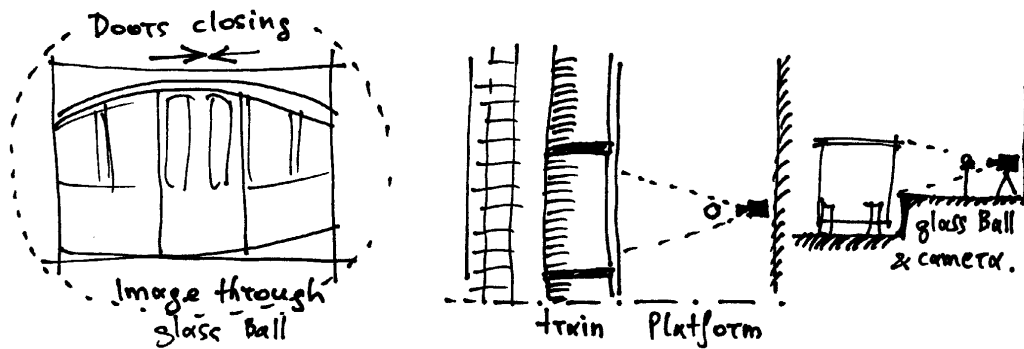
- Part of the shooting will be done through glass spheres deforming thus the image. Nikos Kessanlis is a collector of glass spheres.
- In the editing phase digital effects will be used to create image deformation.

STORYBOARD

1st Sequence: Titles

Plans of a train departing shot through a glass ball. Details (a hand, a face, etc.) of the silhouettes represented in the work “The Queue” at the Omonia Station of the Athens’ Metro.

Sound: the characteristic sound warning the passengers that the train doors will close, followed by the sound of the departing train.



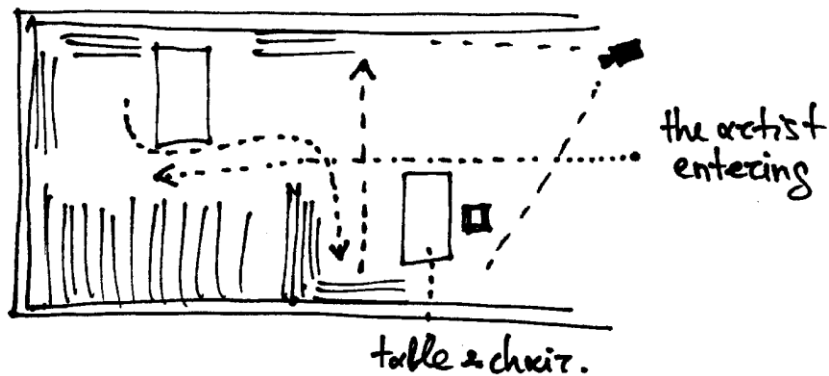
2nd Sequence: The artists' workshop

We are at the principal workshop space. The camera will be fix, filming a great part of the main workshop. A table and a chair in the foreground, the rest of the space is covered with a great number of works dating from different periods. Nikos Kessanlis enters the cadre following different trajectories. He walks around examining and arranging his paintings. In the editing phase two or three images of the painter will co-exist in the same time in the plan (multiple images).

Sound: voice off of the artist making an introduction about his work in the Athens metro.



The artist in his workshop



Plan of the workshop and position of the camera

3d Sequence: Painting using photography

The sequence starts with Nikos holding his photo camera and taking pictures. Follows a number of plans of works (details and close-up movements on the surface of the works) belonging to the first Mec-art period of 1960-62.

Sound: voice-off of the artist describing the approach of the Mec-art movement of the 60s, which reacting to the abstract art tried to represent the object in a different way to that of the 19th century realism. He also describes his "discovery" of the procedure of using light to project shadows on a curtain, a procedure the artist often used during his artistic career. The images are projected not painted on a cloth or a white surface, in a way similar to that of the Chinese Shadow Theater.

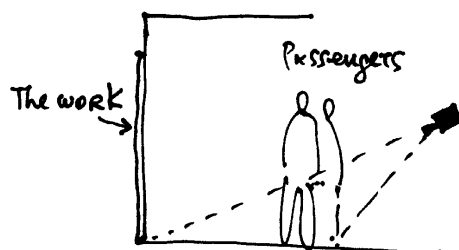
4th Sequence: In the Metro, Shadows and Reflections

The space of a platform in the Athens Metro.

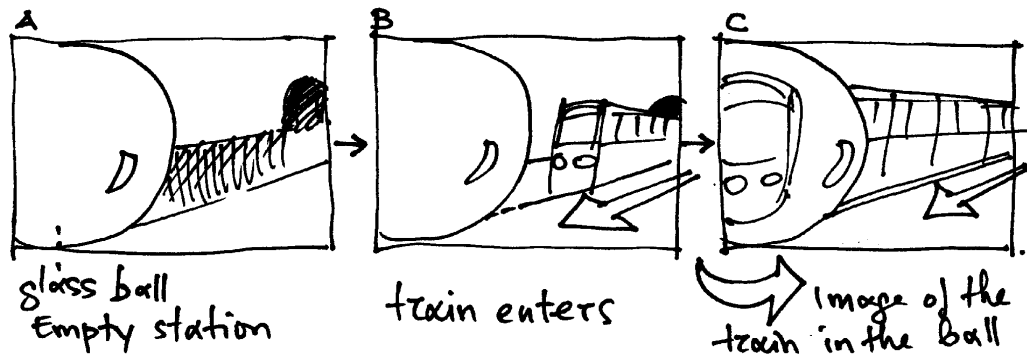
First scene: Reflections of the work on the floor. Feet of passengers passing by.

Second scene: The camera is looking towards the opening of the tunnel. The left part of the cadre is covered by a glass ball. A train enters the station and after a while we see its reflection in the glass ball entering from the opposite direction.

Sound: the sound of train, passengers, etc.



1st scene



2d scene

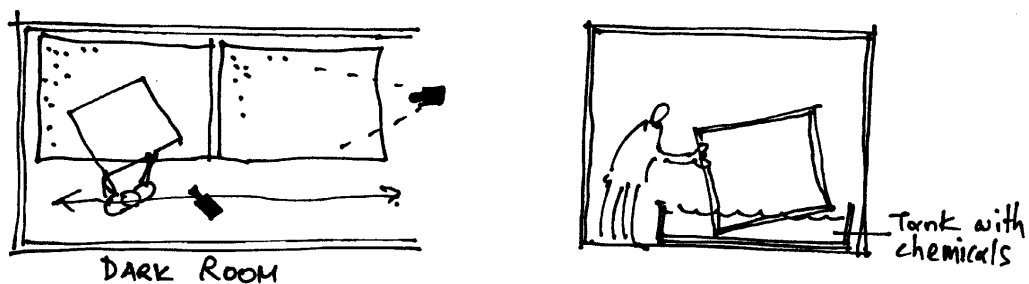
5th Sequence: In the dark room. About Mec-art

We are in a space at the artist's workshop transformed that serves as a "dark room". On the ground are two basins with photographic development chemicals, large enough to contain the canvases.

The sequence will be shot with a portable video camera held in the hand and following the movements of the artist while he is putting a canvas in the photographic chemicals for the development of the image. The video camera will function in the infra red "night-shot" position. As a result the whole sequence will have the characteristic monochrome texture.

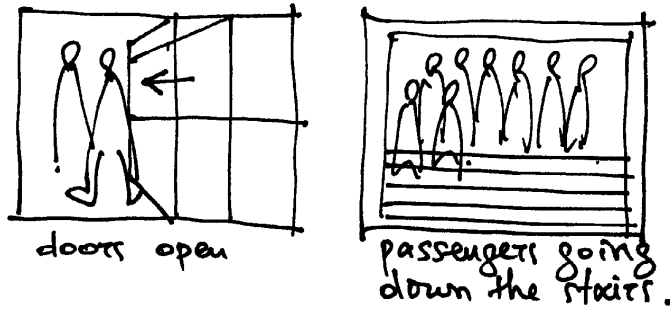
Sound: Nikos Kessanlis describing the basic pre-occupations of the Mec-art movement that searched for a medium not made by hand or copied by a machine.

Part of the description is heard voice-off while we see the development procedure. In the other part the images of the dark room pass in the background and the image of the artist speaking appears in the foreground (Green Box).



6th Sequence: In the Athens Metro.

A train has already entered a station. Doors open and passengers get out. Passengers coming down the stairs.



7th Sequence: Interview of Pierre Restany (1st intervention)

Pierre Restany is a French art critic who discovered in the 60s the artists that used the photographic procedure in their artistic approach, namely Nikos Kessanlis, the Italians Rotella and Bertini and the French Jacquet. Restany is the one that produced the theoretic approach of the work of the four artists and he was the one who named the movement: Mec-art (mechanical art) and the shadows: Phantasmagorias of an identity.

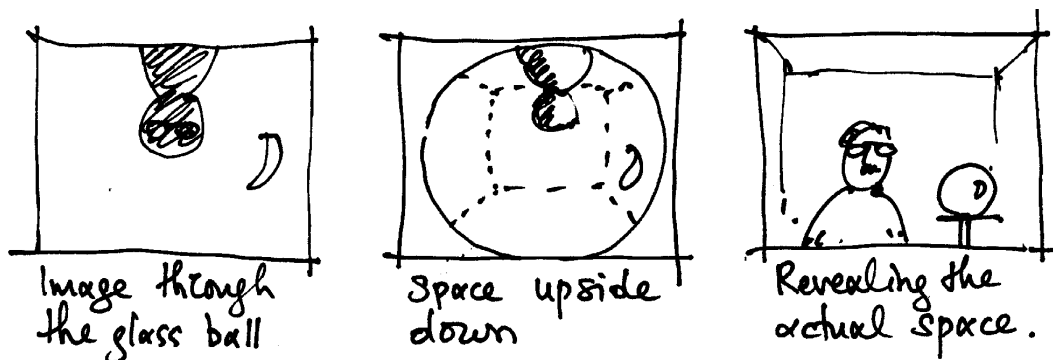
The image of Pierre Restany will be treated in the editing phase in order to get the characteristic form and texture of portraits made by Nikos using his photo-mechanic procedure.

Sound: Pierre Restany speaks about the Mec-art movement and its position inside the industrial expressionist tradition in art, such as the Ready-mades of Duchamp, Neo-Dadaism in USA and Pop-art.

8th Sequence: The glass ball

a) First scene: The sequence starts with a close up of a glass ball in which we see the reversed image of the artist and of his workshop space. A slow zoom-out gradually reveals the real space and the artist.

b) In the second scene the camera is outside the library of the artist, approaching the open window. Through the open window we see the artist reading at his office. When the camera approaches, the artist raises his head and stares at the camera.



1st scene: zoom-out from the glass ball

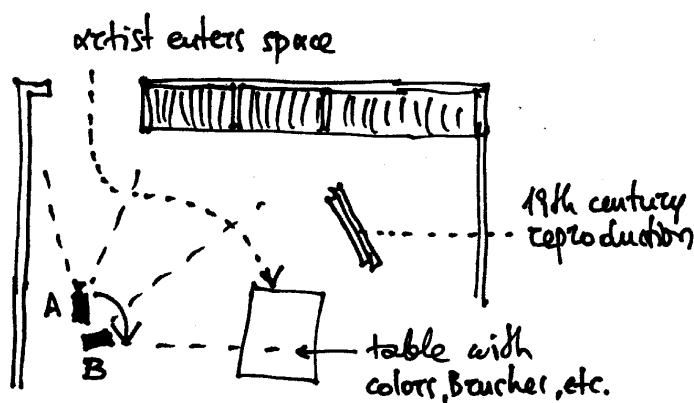


Sound: Voice-off. The artist describes his passion for the glass sphere collection. He used a glass ball, in the first place, in order to make his own portrait, achieving a natural and spherical anamorphosis.

9th Sequence: Meta-structure

We are at a second space of the artist's workshop. We see details of color tubes and painting tools as well as paintings arranged in shelves on the walls. A 19th century painting reproduction is placed on a stand in the centre of the space. The painting represents a typical "still life" (composed of a hare and several fruits, etc). Nikos enters the space and the camera follows him. He inspects his tools and colors.

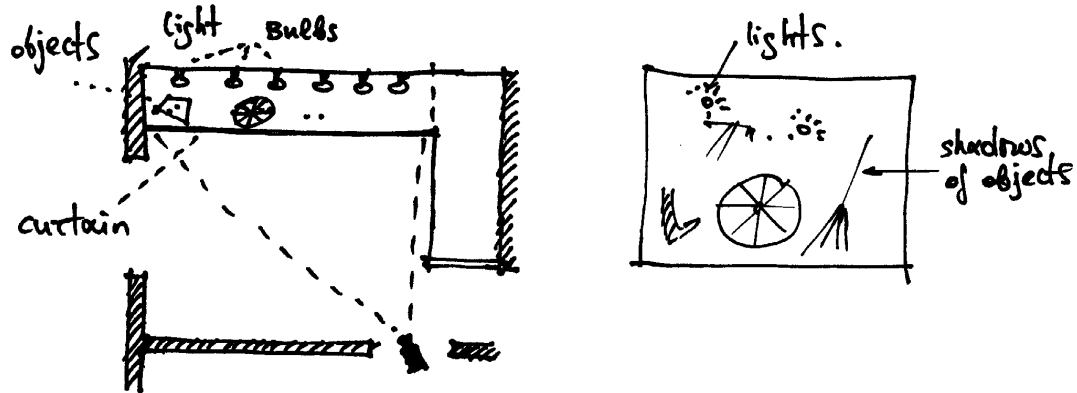
Sound: Voice-off. The artist describing his relation with the art works that he admires.



10th Sequence: The work that changes

This sequence describes a work of Nikos now owned by a private collector. The work is positioned on the wall of a room of the collector's apartment. This work, titled "The work that changes", represents the mechanism of the creation of the Phantasmagorias, which is the principle of the theater of shadows. A white curtain is positioned at a distance from the wall. Behind the curtain there are several everyday life objects, such as an umbrella, a bicycle wheel, a pair of boots, a broom, etc. On the wall a number of light bulbs are switched on and off with a random rhythm projecting the shadows of the objects on the screen creating each time a different image.

Sound: Voice off. Nikos Kessanlis describes his participation in an Audiovisual Festival in Paris, some years ago, where most of the works presented were created with new technologies (laser, neon, video, etc). The Festival director proposed Nikos to create a work in the entrance of the Festival and the artist decided to create a work similar to the "Work that changes", creating thus a primitive work - "barbarian" as he characterizes it - compared to the high-tech character of the Festival.

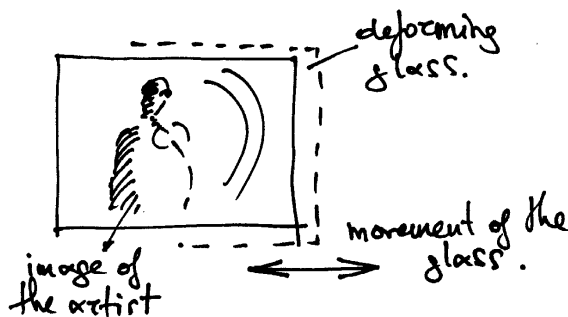


"The Work that changes"

The work is described in the beginning with plans of details and then with general plans revealing the entire work.

11th Sequence: Anamorphoses

Nikos describes a period of his artistic career, when he searched for other techniques for distorting and dismantling the surface of an object or the form of a human figure. In front of the camera lense is positioned a glass deforming the image of the artist.



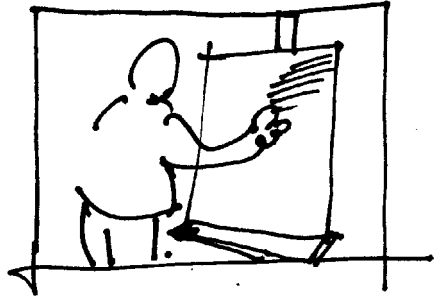
12th Sequence: 2d intervention of Pierre Restany: Anamorphoses

The French critic Pierre Restany comments the three-dimensional works of Nikos that used what he calls "Anamorphoses". These works offer the spectator a restructuring of an image when they are observed from a certain point of view.

The image of Pierre Restany will have the same treatment in the editing phase as his 1st intervention.

13th Sequence: Painting over a 19th century work

In this sequence we find again the secondary space of Nikos workshop and the 19th century still life painting. What the artist calls a "Meta-structure" is an intervention on a finished work created by another artist. The intervention consists in painting over the work, thus "destroying a work of art in the purpose to create a new one".

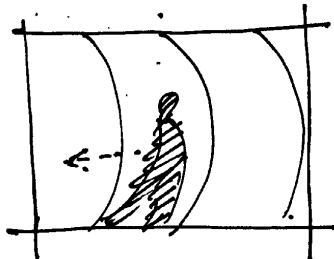


14th Sequence: Art is pleasure

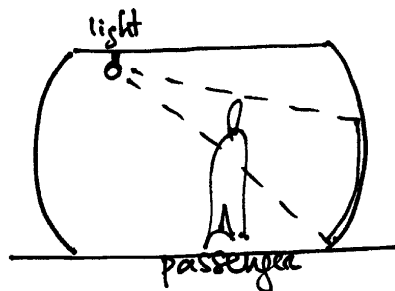
First scene: Shadows of the passengers projected on the surface of a corridor in the Omonia Station.

Second scene: We see for the first time the work "The Queue" that is deformed by a glass ball situated in front of the camera lens.

Sound: trains arriving, footsteps, etc.



1st scene

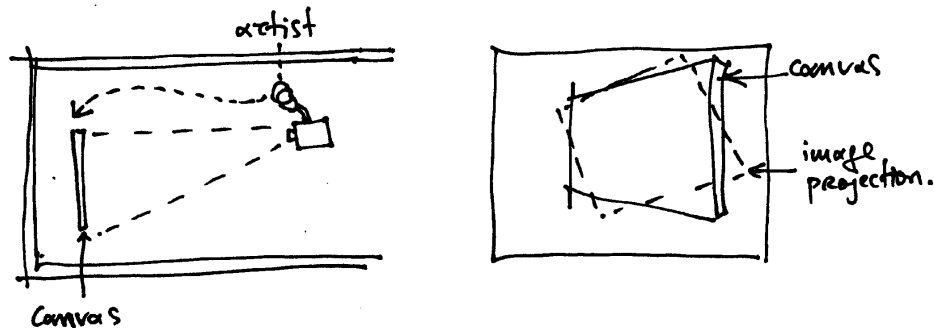


2d scene: The Queue through the glass ball

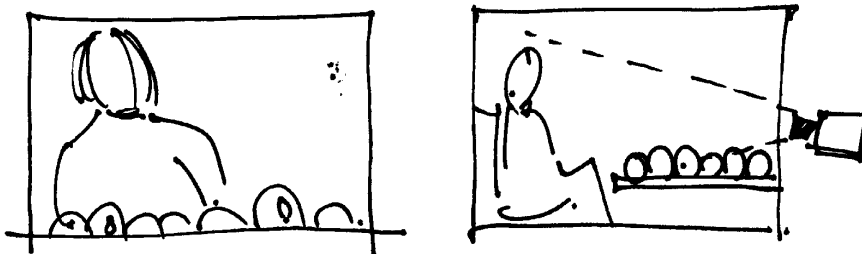
15th Sequence: Image projection

We are at the same secondary space of Nikos' workshop (the same as in the 13th sequence) this time serving as a projection room. Nikos uses a slide projector to project an image on the surface of a "prepared" canvas, i.e. a canvas with a surface covered with a photo-sensitive emulsion. The artist changes the distance of the canvas from the projector and the projection angle in order to deform the image.

Sound: the artist describes his method



16th Sequence: Chryssa Romanos, first intervention



Chryssa Romanos, a well-known painter herself, is Nikos' companion since the late 50s and she has shared with him his artistic preoccupations. She is filmed seated having in the foreground a part of the glass ball collection.

17th Sequence: Archive material of the 60s: Piturificio Italiano

Archive material from the exhibition "Piturificio Italiano" in an art gallery in Milan in the early 60s. The specific character of this exhibition lies in the fact that the works were made with the contribution of the visitors. The day of the inauguration the space of the gallery was empty and the visitors went around finding nothing. A number of projectors threw the visitors' shadows on a big curtain. Behind the curtain a cinematographer shot around 14 000 frames. The very same night a number of selected frames were enlarged and projected on prepared canvases. These were the works that were finally exhibited the following day.

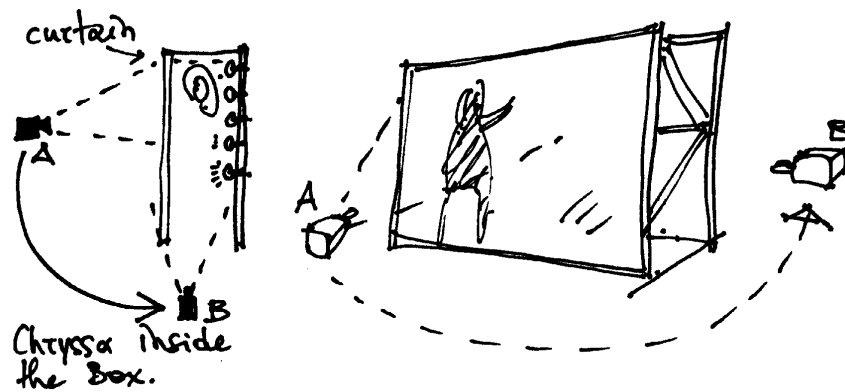
First part of: We see Nikos Kessanlis, Chryssa Romanos, Pierre Restany and a group of friends (the film has no sound).

Second part: we see the images of the shadows formed on the curtain. We can guess the silhouettes of the artist and his wife. We hear the voice of Nikos describing the concept of the exhibition.

18th Sequence: Chryssa behind the curtain

Nikos Kessanlis has made a lot of portraits of his friends and especially of his wife Chryssa. Forty years after the exhibition Piturificio Italiano we see again Chryssas' silhouette behind a curtain, this time in the Nikos workshop.

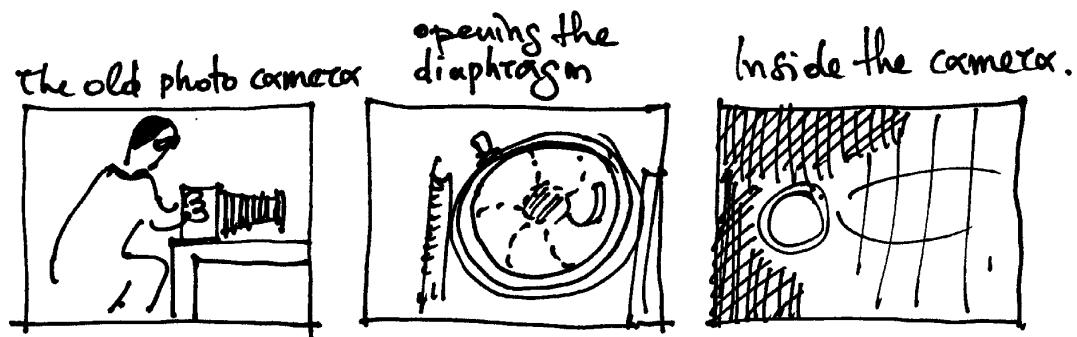
The first scene starts with the shadow of Chryssa on the curtain changing forms according the switching on and off of the lights. The camera moves to the side of the curtain to reveal Chryssa and the interior space of the construction.



19th Sequence: Progress and change. The old photo camera

Nikos is cleaning and operating an old photo camera. General plans and details of the camera.

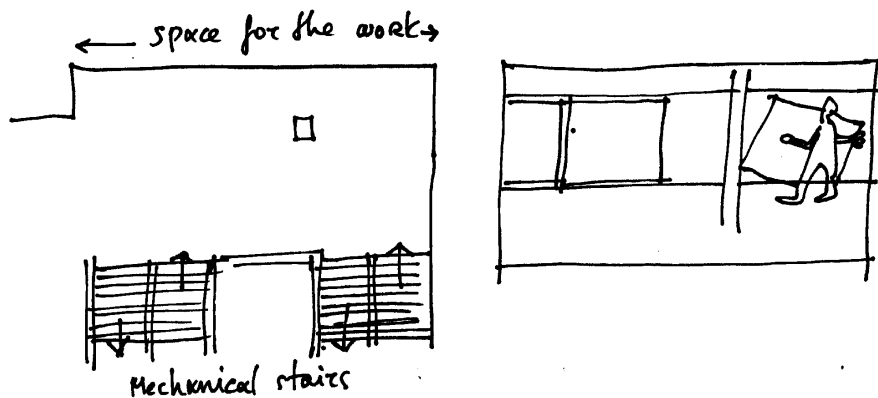
Sound: Nikos comments the notions of progress and change in an artist's career.



General plan and details of the old camera

20th Sequence: Going down to Omonia Station

The artist visits the space where the work will be positioned. He has to choose 10 out of 15 images that will finally compose the work as well as to decide the order of the images from left to right along the wall. Nikos with the help of Chryssa changes the selection and the order of the images.



The artist at the space of the work in the Omonia Station.

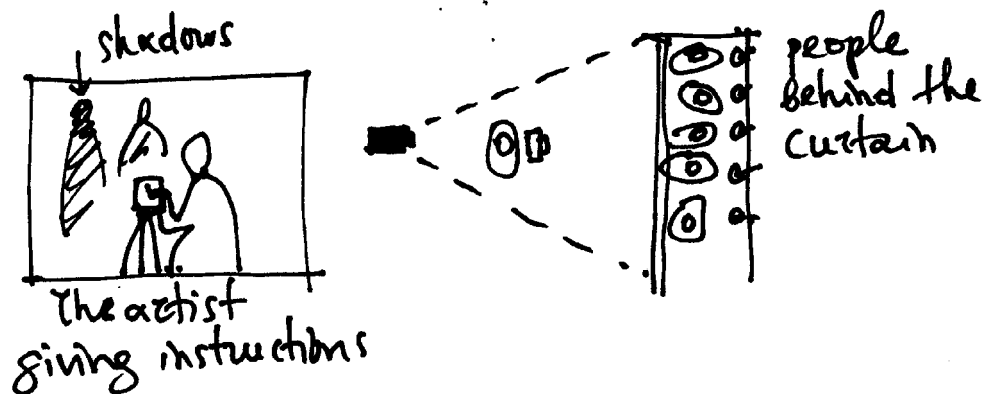
21st Sequence: Past and Present

Nikos comments the similarities and differences in technique and texture of works belonging to several periods of his career.

22nd Sequence: The making of "The Queue"

Material shot during the preparation of the work "The Queue" will be inserted in the documentary. We see a number of Nikos Kessanlis friends entering the space behind the curtain and changing positions following the artist's instruction.

Sound: fragments of phrases, laughs, the artist giving instructions. All these sounds create an atmosphere of celebration that is characteristic of the gatherings organized by Nikos and his friends.



23d Sequence: Chryssa. 2nd intervention

Chryssa speaks about the relation of the model, the person behind the curtain, and its shadow. How the shadow changes form and finally becomes something independent that has nothing to do with physical appearance.

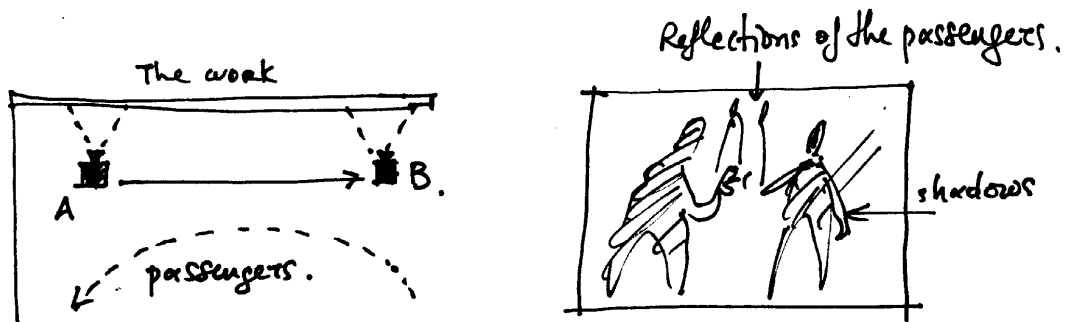
24th Sequence: Revealing the work

First Scene: Nikos Kessanlis goes down the mechanical stairs leading to the space of exhibition of "The Queue". The camera follows him. The artist arrives at the exhibition level looks around to see his work and the camera following him makes a panoramic movement in order to reveal for the first time the entire work

Second scene: The camera starts at the beginning of the work and moves parallel to it until it stops at its last part. During the movement we see the reflections of the passengers that move towards the opposite direction.



The camera held in the hand follows the artist down the stairs to the exhibition space.



Final sequence (traveling movement of the camera) revealing the work

25th Sequence: The end is the beginning



The scene presents details and the entire last part of “The Queue” which is the only one that does not represent silhouettes formed on the curtain. It is a photo of the artist lying on the ground with his dog Bella beside him, the old photo camera and several works of previous periods.

Sound: Nikos Kessanlis comments his work in the Omonia Station. He draws our attention to this last part which he considers as a report to past work as well as a starting point for a new creative period.

26th Sequence: End titles

End