



UNBOXING CALLAS

From Callas to Medea, installation in three acts.

This production is included in the Greek National Opera's tribute to the centennial of Maria Callas' birth – part of the 2023 UNESCO Maria Callas Anniversary proposed by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports.

GROUND FLOOR

Panos Profitis, Act II, 2023, aluminium and wood, dimensions variable, produced by GNO, Courtesy of the artist.

SCREENS

Panos Profitis, Act III, 2023, Single channel video looped, Full HD, colour, 4'37", produced by GNO, cinematography: Giorgos Athanasiou, dance: Vera Zouka, courtesy of the artist.

DISPLAY 01

1 . Maria Callas with Costis Bastias after the end of the performance of *Medea* in Epidaurus. Costis Bastias –Director of the Lyric Opera of the National Theatre founded in 1939– was the one who had discovered and offered to the young Maria –then still Kalogeropoulou and a student of the Athens Conservatoire– her first contract with the theatre. He was the one who invited Maria Callas to perform *Norma* (1960) and *Medea* (1961) at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus. Kleisthenes / Greek National Opera Archive.

2 . The crowded Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus. According to sources, the premiere of *Medea* on August 6, 1961, was attended by almost 20,000 spectators, while the second performance, on August 13, was attended by 17,500 spectators. At both shows about 2,000 were left without a ticket. Greek National Opera Archive.

3 . The printed programme of *Medea* at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (August 6 & 13, 1961) includes a note by Alexis Minotis in which he states that, although the performance there was based on the same concept as the performances abroad, the open space of Epidaurus required other directing manoeuvres. In the overall concept, he tried to restore the function of the myth according to the ancient standards, while he modified the finale of the performance using the "Deus ex machina", a means familiar to Euripides. Greek National Opera Archive.

4 . The spartito of *Medea* by Luigi Cherubini. In its original French version as *Médée*, the opera was presented on March 13, 1797 at the Théâtre Feydeau in Paris. In its Italian version as *Medea*

it was first performed at La Scala in Milan on December 30, 1909. Greek National Opera Archive.

5 . [ukn.] August 7, 1961

Thousands of spectators deified Maria Callas in the dreamy *Medea* of Epidaurus. From left: Alexis Minotis (stage director), Konstantinos Karamanlis (then Prime Minister of Greece), Maria Callas, Amalia Karamanli and the Director of the Greek National Opera, Costis Bastias. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

6 . *Ethnos*, August 7, 1961

The premiere of *Medea* was given in the packed Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus with 20,000 spectators and many officials, politicians and artists present. Among them were the then Prime Minister of Greece, Konstantinos Karamanlis, his wife Amalia, Greek ministers and other political figures, the Prince of Monaco, representatives of La Scala, Milan, and Royal Opera House (Covent Garden, London), as well as the famous Greek actresses Kyveli and Katina Paxinou. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

7 . *Medea* (Maria Callas) implores Creon (Giuseppe Modesti) to let her stay with her children, Act II. Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Greek National Opera Archive.

8 . Photograph after the end of the performance. Left to right: Kiki Morfoniou (Neris), Yannis Tsarouchis (set & costume designer), Costis Bastias (Director of the GNO), Maria Callas (*Medea*), Alexis Minotis (stage director), Nicola Rescigno (conductor). Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Kleisthenes / Greek National Opera Archive.

9 . Photograph after the end of the performance. From left: Jon Vickers (Jason), Maria Callas (*Medea*), Kiki Morfoniou (Neris) and *Medea's* children. Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Kleisthenes / Greek National Opera Archive.

10 . Photograph from the curtain call. From left: Maria Callas (*Medea*) and Kiki Morfoniou (Neris). Greek National Opera Archive.

11 . Stage director Alexis Minotis with Maria Callas stand at the centre. Jon Vickers (Jason) with the kids of the performance stand on the left and conductor Nicola Rescigno is on the right.

Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Greek National Opera Archive.

12. *Ethnos*, August 5, 1961

The newspaper's correspondents capture everyone's preparations and excitement after the general rehearsal at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

DISPLAY 02

1. *O tahidromos*, January 24, 1959

Yannis Tsarouchis refers to his meeting with Maria Callas in New York, in October 1958, in order to discuss Medea's costumes for the Dallas production. Maria Callas suggested the use of a cape, while they mutually agreed on her three costumes. Tsarouchis characterises her as "an artist with an amazing insight and instinct". Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

2. Handwritten financial notes by Alexis Minotis for the first production of *Medea*, Dallas Civic Opera (1958). Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

3. Photograph from the construction of the framing for the orchestra at the production of *Medea*, Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus 1961. Dimitris Pyromallis / Greek National Opera Archive.

4. Yannis Tsarouchis, sketch, ink on paper. A sketch featuring Callas and Cupid, a typical pattern in Tsarouchis' work. In the production of *Medea* at Epidaurus, at the corner of the stage we can see a sculpture depicting Cupid, as shown by the photograph no. 16200_36 of the Greek National Opera Archive. Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.

5. Rome, September 2, 1958

Letter from the conductor Nicola Rescigno to the stage director Alexis Minotis while preparing *Medea* for the Dallas Civic Opera (1958). Among others, Rescigno notes that Maria Callas would like a long cape along with her costume and that she liked the idea of the chariot and "Deus ex machina" at the finale. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

6. Maria Callas standing on the chariot, an idea by the stage director Alexis Minotis for the finale of the opera, which he borrows from the ancient drama, as depicted in his directing notes for the first production of *Medea* (Dallas Civic Opera, 1958). Maria Callas endorses this idea in the archival record 56.4:1. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

7. Notes, jots and scribbles. In these rough notes, Alexis Minotis captures his first directorial thoughts on Yannis Tsarouchis' scenographic designs. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

8. Vienna, May 12, 1961

Letter from the stage director of the Greek National Opera, Frixos Theologidis, to Alexis Minotis regarding the production of *Medea* in Epidaurus. Frixos Theologidis asks Alexis Minotis questions about the difficult technical effects of the performance at the Ancient Theatre of

Epidaurus and especially about the fire they were considering for the finale. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

DISPLAY 03

1. Alexis Minotis' notes on the movement of the performers for the production of *Medea* at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). We can see Jason, Glauce, Creon, Argonauts, dancers and soldiers. The photograph no. 013 of the Greek National Opera Archive proves the implementation of this design. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

2. Glauce (Soula Glantzi) and Jason (Jon Vickers) in the centre, Creon (Giuseppe Modesti) on the left, Act I. Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Greek National Opera Archive.

3. December 10, 1961

Congratulatory telegram from Konstantinos Karamanlis, then Prime Minister of Greece, to stage director Alexis Minotis. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

4. Notes, jots and scribbles. In these rough notes, Alexis Minotis captures his first directorial thoughts on Yannis Tsarouchis' scenographic designs. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

5. Handwritten movement notes by Alexis Minotis for Glauce's prayer, Act I, with the corresponding libretto. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

6. Notes, jots and scribbles. In these rough notes, Alexis Minotis captures his first directorial thoughts on Yannis Tsarouchis' scenographic designs. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

7. Set design from Act III, Teatro alla Scala, Milan (1962). Greek National Opera Archive.

8. *Medea* (Maria Callas) and Creon (Giuseppe Modesti), Act I. Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Greek National Opera Archive.

9. Milan, October 20, 1961

In the only letter of Maria Callas to Alexis Minotis found in his archive, she mentions that the role of Jason in La Scala, Milan, will be performed again by Jon Vickers, with whom they had collaborated with great success in Dallas (1958), London (1959) and Epidaurus (1961). Moreover, she hopes to find good performers for the roles of Creon and Glauce. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

10. Milan, July 13, 1961

Letter from Luigi Oldani, General Secretary of La Scala in Milan, to Alexis Minotis asking him, among other things, to inform them about the concept of the production and the preparations required for the planned video recording. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

11. Athens, July 17, 1961

Letter-reply of Alexis Minotis to Luigi Oldani, General Secretary of La Scala in Milan, in which

he notes that the performance has elements of the Hellenistic era (3rd century BC) and that, due to the limited time, instead of sewing new costumes, they could borrow them from the Greek National Opera, something which was eventually done. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

DISPLAY 04

1. Athens, April 21, 1961
Letter from Ioannis Christoyannopoulos, Director of Administrative Services of the Greek National Opera, to Alexis Minotis and attached copy of a letter from Yannis Tsarouchis to Ioannis Christoyannopoulos (Athens, April 18, 1961). Scenographic construction details for the production of *Medea* at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus are mentioned. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.
2. Yannis Tsarouchis, set design.
Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.
3. Yannis Tsarouchis, sketch, pencil on paper.
Set design from *Medea* for the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.
4. *Medea* (Maria Callas) implores Jason (Jon Vickers) to return to her, Act I, Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Greek National Opera Archive.
5. *Medea* (Maria Callas) and Jason (Jon Vickers), Act I. Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Greek National Opera Archive.

DISPLAY 05

1. Athens, May 8, 1961
Letter from Yannis Tsarouchis to Alexis Minotis, in which scenographic construction details are mentioned. In the last page a progressive view of the stage is designed. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.
2. Photograph from the construction of the framing for the orchestra at the production of *Medea*, Epidaurus 1961. Dimitris Pyromallis / Greek National Opera Archive.
3. Architectural view of scenography for Dallas Civic Opera, copy. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.
4. Yannis Tsarouchis, set design for the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.
5. Yannis Tsarouchis, set design for Act III. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.
6. Yannis Tsarouchis, set design for Act III. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.
7. Yannis Tsarouchis, set design for Act III. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

8. Yannis Tsarouchis, drawing, pencil on paper. Set design for the production of *Medea*. Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.

DISPLAY 06

1. Yannis Tsarouchis, costume designs.
Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis, MIET-ELIA.
2. Yannis Tsarouchis, part of the costume of an Argonaut from the production of *Medea* at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Costume Department of the Greek National Opera.
3. Yannis Tsarouchis, sketch, fountain pen (black) on paper. Costume details. First ideas on the decorative themes that will compose the patterns of the costumes of *Medea*'s protagonists. Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.
4. Yannis Tsarouchis, sketch, pencil on paper. Costume details for the production of *Medea*. Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.
5. Yannis Tsarouchis, Part of Jason's costume from the production of *Medea* at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Costume Department of the Greek National Opera.
6. *Medea* (Maria Callas) implores Jason (Jon Vickers) to return to her, Act I. Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Greek National Opera Archive.
7. Photograph from the curtain call. From left: Giuseppe Modesti (Creon), Kiki Morfoniou (Neris), Maria Callas (*Medea*) and Jon Vickers (Jason). Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Kleisthenes / Greek National Opera Archive.
8. Photograph from the curtain call. From left: Soula Glantzis (Glauce), Maria Callas (*Medea*) and Jon Vickers (Jason). Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Greek National Opera Archive.

DISPLAY 07

1. Yannis Tsarouchis, sketch, ink and marker on transparent paper. Border for male costumes for *Medea* (1958 or 1962) appears on the decorative band print on Creon's costume, no. El 1-3 at the Costume Department of the Greek National Opera. Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.
2. Yannis Tsarouchis, ornamental tape (fragment) from Creon's cape from the production of *Medea* at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). A cut-out section of ornamental tape found on a later costume of a different production in the Costume Department of the Greek National Opera. The tape was removed with the care of a textile conservator and is presented freestanding. Costume Department of the Greek National Opera.
3. Yannis Tsarouchis, part of Creon's costume from the production of *Medea* at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Ornamental tape printed at the hem of Creon's costume. Costume Department of the Greek National Opera.

DISPLAY 08

1. Yannis Tsarouchis, part of Creon's costume for the production of *Medea* at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Costume Department of the Greek National Opera.

2. Sketch of dance movements of Medea's attendants, unsigned. They record the movement of Medea's silent twelve female dancers, presumably for the Civic Dallas Opera performance, with the logic of the geometric movement of ancient drama dances of the time. The use of the dancers as living sculptures (as indicated by the repeated use of the term *bas relief*) is notable. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

DISPLAY 09

1. *The Observer*, June 21, 1959
Maria Callas retrieves great lyrical works from oblivion, such as Luigi Cherubini's *Medea*, and with her unique interpretation leaves an indelible mark in the world of opera. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

2. *Sunday Times*, June 21, 1959
After Dallas Opera, *Medea* is staged with great success at the Royal Opera House (Covent Garden, London). Along with Maria Callas –the opera's "raison d'être" as stated in the newspaper– the great bass Nicola Zaccaria is also participating as Creon. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

3. Maria Callas as Medea. Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1961). Kleisthenes / Greek National Opera Archive.

4. *Dallas Times Herald*, November 7, 1958
Luigi Cherubini's *Medea* is heard for the first time in America and the Dallas Civic Opera. However, this is not the first collaboration of Maria Callas with this theatre. She had sung at the opening gala of the Dallas Civic Opera on November 21, 1957, and also played the role of Violetta in Franco Zeffirelli's *La traviata* just a few days before *Medea*. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

5. *Eleftheria*, August 6, 1961
Many artists were present at the performance of *Medea*, including Katina Paxinou, Alexis Minotis' wife, and emblematic interpreter of Medea in the ancient theatre. In the photo, the two famous Medeas, Maria Callas and Katina Paxinou, are together. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

6. November 10, 1958
Telegram from Maria Callas to Katina Paxinou. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

7. *The Dallas Morning News*, November 7, 1958
Maria Callas triumphs as Medea at the Dallas Civic Opera just a while after the termination of her collaboration with the Metropolitan Opera of New York. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

8. *The Times*, June 18, 1959
After the great success of *Medea* at Dallas, the production was staged in June 1959 at the Royal Opera House (Covent Garden, London) under Nicola Rescigno. Maria Callas (*Medea*), Jon Vickers (*Jason*) and the famous Greek bass Nicola Zaccaria (*Creon*) sang the leading roles. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

9. Recording of *Medea*, Dallas Civic Opera, November 8, 1958, set of two.
Dimitris Pyromallis / Greek National Opera Archive.

10. *Dallas Times Herald*, November 1958
Maria Callas is leaving Dallas Civic Opera, having turned the world's attention to this newly founded lyric theatre. As written in the newspaper, she wishes to return. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

11. *Eleftheria*, November 23, 1958
Medea of Dallas has been an absolute Greek triumph. As referred in the press, for one night, the Dallas Civic Opera became the greatest opera house of the world. Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis Archive, MIET-ELIA.

DISPLAY 10 & 11

Panos Profitis, Notes, outlines, moulds & cast aluminum from the production of the work *From Callas to Medea, installation in three acts*, courtesy of the artist.

On behalf of the Greek National Opera warm thanks are due to the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive of the National Bank Cultural Foundation, and the Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation for kindly providing part of the archival records of the exhibition.



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