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# NICK MOURTZAKIS

## Drawings: ancient sculpture and architecture. Greece 2004 - 2009

15 July - 1 August 2009

Previewing from the 9 July 2009

### John Buckley Gallery

8 Albert St

Richmond VIC 3121

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Nick Mourtzakis *Dias. Olympia* 2008  
Graphite  
37 x 31 cm

## Press release

*Drawings: ancient sculpture and architecture. Greece 2004 – 2009* presents a series of works on paper which he created during four pilgrimages to his homeland. Over five years Mourtzakis studiously and thoughtfully returned to the ruins of the Acropolis and the museums of Greece to describe the monumental and the beautiful of classical Greece. The resulting images range from spare line driven architectural compositions to soft tonal figurative drawings of marble statues. Well recognised for his sensitive technique and dedication to the art of perceptual drawing Mourtzakis is one of the few artists to be twice recipient of the Dobell Prize for Drawing. A major retrospective of his work titled *Slow Burn* was mounted at RMIT in 2005. Notable group exhibitions include *This and Other Worlds: Contemporary Australian Drawing*, NGV, Melbourne, *Drawn Encounters*, Wimbledon College of Art, London, *Seventh Drawing Biennale*, Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra. Mourtzakis is represented in the collections of the AGNSW, the NGV, the National Portrait Gallery and many Regional and University collections. He currently lectures in perceptual drawing at Monash University. An avid admirer of his work; it has been over two decades since John Buckley has exhibited the pictures of Nick Mourtzakis – the last encounter being his very first solo exhibition curated by Buckley at the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane 1976. In this long- awaited homecoming we are pleased to present a thoughtful, sophisticated exhibition of drawings from the studio of this highly accomplished artist.

The exhibited drawings are a selection of works from a series made during four visits to Greece. The subjects are drawn from the collections of sculpture in archaeological museums and in the architecture of the archaeological sites themselves.

The Acropolis in Athens is the subject of the majority of the drawings of ancient architecture and the Parthenon the major motif of these drawings (No.(s) 1, 9 & 12).

The two drawings from 2004 of the formal entrance to the Acropolis, the *Propylaea* (No.(s) 13 & 15), were made from the “Pnix”, a hill immediately to the west of the Acropolis, and the “Hill of Philopappou” to the south, was the vantage point for the drawings of the Parthenon.

The drawings are purposefully minimal and spatial. The Parthenon, seen from a distance, strikes one with a subtle and penetrating force. The sense of the physical mass and presence of the monument is undiminished, but the form and entire structure of the temple is seen as a singularity, compact and complete. These drawings are motivated by an intuition, a sense of measure and form that has its origin in a sublime and austere conception of space and psyche.

The works from sculptural motifs are from the collections of a number of museums in Greece. The drawings representing the contests in battle of Amazons and Greeks (No.(s) 2 & 10), the *Amazonomachia*, are of sculptures from the pediment of the temple at the Sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros, now housed in the collection of the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

The work depicting the mythic battle of the *Gods and Giants* (No. 5) is from a section of a sculptural frieze from the Syphnian Treasury at Delphi.

The drawing of the statue of *Dionysos* (No. 4), deity of fertility, wine and intoxication is from the pediment of the Temple of Apollo, and also from the collection of the Archaeological Museum of Delphi.

The sculptures from the pediment of the Temple of Dias (Zeus) at the Archaeological Museum of Olympia depict the contestants, horses and attendants, and the presiding deity of the fateful chariot race between Oenomaos and Pelops (No.(s) 8, 11 & 14). The drawing *Columns* (No. 7), is also from Olympia and represents the columns of the Theikoleon, the official residence of the priests of the sanctuary.

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Two examples of drawings from pre-archaic sculptures (No.(s) 3 & 6) are respectively from a fragment of a Cycladic figure in the collection of the Goulandris Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens, and an enthroned ceramic figure of Mycenaean Greece from the Piraeus Archaeological Museum.

As a gesture of homage and celebration the experience of making these drawings has been intoxicating and austere. The ground of the work, its surface and depth, is the time of a now ancient aesthetic thought and poetry of form.

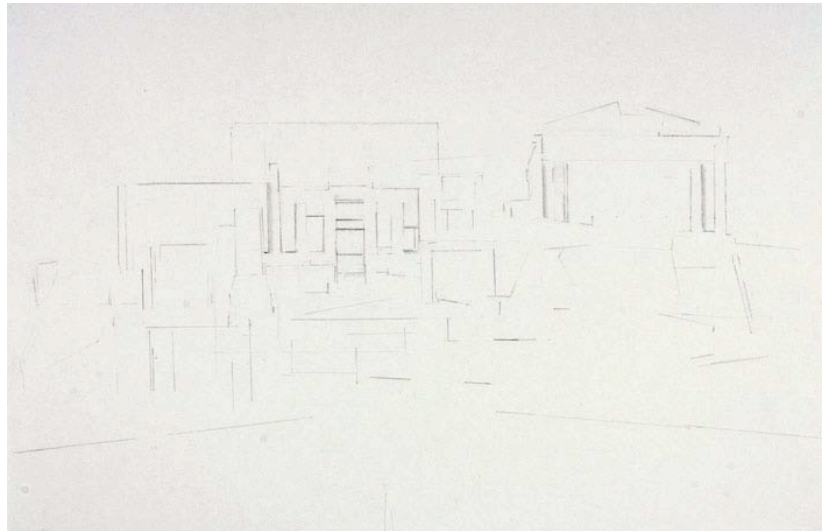
*the water of speech even is quenched<sup>1</sup>*

**Nick Mourtzakis**  
July 2009

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### **Top right:**

**Nick Mourtzakis**  
Propylaea. Athens 2004  
Pencil  
31 x 37 cm

### **Bottom right:**

**Nick Mourtzakis**  
Amazonomachy. Athens 2007  
Graphite  
31 x 37 cm



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<sup>1</sup> Fragment of an oracle from the Pythia at Delphi (4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.). Basil Petrakos, *DELPHI* (C LIO EDITION S, Attica 1977), 9.