



Balkan Art Scene  5 min read

Kyriaki Goni – Examining Complex Relation of Technology and Society

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Kyriaki Goni is Greek artist born and based in Athens, working across media and focusing on the interaction between technology and society. She is bringing in dialogue in local and global perspective. Through expanded installations and narration, Kyriaki Goni investigate subjects such

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She holds a BA in Visual Arts and an MA in Digital Arts from the Athens School of Fine Arts (2015), where she also obtained a teacher education. Prior to that, she obtained graduate and postgraduate degrees on Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology in Athens and in Leiden, Netherlands. Her artistic research gets published (Leonardo MIT; 49:4, Neural #65 etc.), while Goni frequently designs and implements workshops as part of her practice.

She presents work internationally in solo (Aksioma, Drugo More, Onassis Foundation) and group exhibitions (13th Shanghai Biennale, Modern Love, 5th Istanbul Design Biennale, Transmediale, 13,700,000 km[^], The Glass Room etc). She is a Delfina Foundation alumna (2019) and a Niarchos Artworks fellow (2018).

Her latest work Data Garden (Onassis Stegi, Ars Electronica) received the state prize INSPIRE2020 from the MOMus Experimental Center of the Arts in Greece.



Kyriaki Goni (Photo by Andreas Simopoulos)

As stated at ONASSIS, in the age of climate crisis, the constant production, accumulation, and storage of data raise important questions regarding their impact on the natural environment. Almost every query, movement or activity within digital networks requires the mediation of machine learning algorithms and energy consumption. The storage of data in "clouds" demands heavy technological infrastructures, emitting carbon dioxide than can hardly be reduced. In turn, the function of data centers creates the necessity for new ecologies, whose exclusive goal is the proper maintenance of these infrastructures, depleting or tainting this planet's natural resources. So what happens when nature is understood as "cheap", disposable, and usable for the needs of technology? Can habits and practices change in a reality that is already mediated by technology? What role can the natural environment and the 'more-than-human' worlds play in provoking this change?

The artwork "Data Garden," by Kyriaki Goni, investigates this set of questions through a fictitious narrative, which is partly based on true facts. The project's starting point is recent scientific research on the use of the DNA of living beings for the purposes of data storage. According to the premise, a community of users who are sensitized in issues of connectivity, privacy, and the natural environment, resorts to the use of the DNA of a tiny endemic plant that grows on the foothills of the Acropolis, several years after the plant's extinction. Referring to active oblivion, the community

aspire to build a new relationship with technology and nature alike, studying and learning from the latter. Community members keep their personal data in the plants – as organisms that memorize information about the process of photosynthesis, and thus ensure life. As the storage space changes from the “cloud” to the earth, and as control passes from the companies to the users, the life circle of data follows that of a plant, fostering a relation of interdependence and care. In a peculiar garden, users become the plants’ gardeners, whereas plants respectively become the gardeners of the stored information. Under this new condition, the thoughtless accumulation of data is no longer desired, or even possible. The users not only take decisions over the disposal of their data, but they also bear responsibility of what is worth to be stored and what can or should be deleted.



Data Garden (Video still, 2020)

The story of a secret data garden that grows in the Acropolis hill, unravels in the exhibition space through the installation’s different elements. The video is narrated by the artist herself in a personal tone, as if she is addressing someone that she knows and trusts. This rock garden’s network of roots is illustrated in a drawing. The intense and thick rootstock depicted alludes to forms of communication and intelligence that are found in nature, but also in horizontal distributed systems of electronic communication. The position of this rhizome on the rock, where the Parthenon can barely be distinguished in the background, seems to challenge the worldview of Western-dominated thought, which approached plants as passive, idle receptors that are found on the bottom of the world pyramid. This kind of approach is represented in Diego de Valadés’s “Great Chain of Being” (Didacus Valades’s “Rhetorica Christiana”), which the artist comments with a ‘gesture’ suggesting a dislocation. The plant of the story, *Micromeria Acropolitana*, is revealed through an augmented reality app, reminding us of the role of human agency in species extinction. A ritual sound piece highlights the kinship between humans and plants, and points to cultures where these relationships are understood as uninterrupted. A DNA sequence where data codification is embedded, blown up into a large print, informs about a new hybrid language, one that is currently under development and where the languages of science, daily reality, and nature all meet. The project draws a full circle with a series of interviews with scientists from the fields of biotechnology, genetics, and environmental studies, bringing to the foreground the scientific research that became the basis for the development of the work.

In her piece “Data Garden,” Kyriaki Goni purposefully interweaves fictitious elements and facts. The use of a hypothetical scenario and the appropriation of elements drawn from a scientific discipline that is currently under development, invite the audience to reflect upon the possible changes triggered by the leverage of DNA as a storage space. For example, the creation of these new, transgenic organisms is by no means detached from questions of ethics. A new condition under which plants become at the same time perceivable as infrastructures holds the danger of

a new kind of instrumentalization of nature. The appearance of a new category of "living" infrastructures can possibly become an apple of discord in what concerns the control and ownership over them. However, the story of the piece does not aim at naming possible issues or scaremongering. On the contrary, emphasis seems to be given to the reminder of the indissoluble relation between culture and nature, and to the activation of a dialogue on the character and the boundaries of human intervention and activity. Correlating the architectures of technical networks with networks of nature, next to correlating the intelligence and strategies of a community of users with those of a population of tiny plants, the artwork opens up a discussion on heterarchies, multilingualisms, and symbiopolitics. Revealing the connections between digital memory and climate crisis, "Data Garden" refers to changes that are feasible before the further engineering of nature, while learning from it.

A virtual exhibition tour with artist Kyriaki Goni of her multimedia installation "Data Garden", followed by a live discussion between artist Kyriaki Goni (GR), Prodromos Tsiavos (GR) Head of Digital & Innovation at Onassis Foundation, and collaborators of the project. Would it be possible for our digital data to be hosted in a garden, in a secret network in the center of the city? Small, invisible plants (known under the scientific name *micromeria acropolitana*) are planted exclusively on the Acropolis rock and accommodate digital memory in their DNA. The artist creates her own data garden by combining fiction and science.

Data Garden | Exhibition Tour & Talk



Through drawings, prints, videos, sound pieces, and interviews with scientists from respective fields, the immersive installation Data Garden reveals the connections between digital memory and the climate crisis. Follow the virtual tour in the "garden" of Onassis Stegi Exhibition Hall and reflect on the limits of human intervention and activity in the environment. The exhibition is part of Ars Electronica 2020 "In Kepler's Gardens".

You can follow Kyriaki's work on her [website](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) account.

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