

# post documenta

Podcast transcript in English

## ***CURRENT Athens: an online platform for the promotion of contemporary art*** **Orestis Mavroudis and Despina Krey (CURRENT Athens)**

Orestis Mavroudis and Despina Krey present their initiative *CURRENT Athens*, an online platform for the promotion of contemporary art. Since they established the project in 2017, their main objective has been to inform users about the Athens art scene through a horizontal and inclusive approach. <https://currentathens.gr/> operates independently and remains an invaluable resource as a freely accessible online database with information on spaces, artists, and curators that have exhibited in the city from 2017 up to today.

**Despina Krey:** Hello! First of all, we would like to thank Eleni Michaelidi, Nikos Arvanitis, and the rest of the *post documenta* team for the invitation. We are Despina and Orestis, and we have been running the *CURRENT Athens* project for the last 3,5 years.

*CURRENT Athens* is a website whose very simple function is to gather contemporary art events, mainly in Athens, and occasionally in provinces and islands where the exhibition activity is transferred in the summer months. Information about exhibitions is posted dynamically, that is, each exhibition can be searched by time, venue, artist, or curator. Once the exhibition is over the information is not lost, but remains archived and accessible for possible future research. Our aim was to provide not only a useful information tool on current and upcoming events, but also an archive, an open database that allows anyone interested to gather information.

**Orestis Mavroudis:** The website was first launched in Athens, but our aim was and continues to be, after it has been tested and evolved, to become an open-source platform that could be made freely available for use by other teams in other cities - for example *CURRENT Thessaloniki*, *CURRENT Leipzig*, etc.

**DK** It all started in November 2016, when, during a random conversation, we discussed the absence of a specialized medium for contemporary art exhibitions, both for the public and organizers. We also discussed the dependency on Facebook, and the resulting constraints and problems that arise from this. So, we decided to try and fill this gap. A few months later, at the beginning of 2017, we were already online. In the beginning, we were five persons, each contributing with our respective knowledge and time. Over time, the group got smaller but the groundwork had already been laid. The other members of the team are people with whom we are close, so the collaboration takes place in a familiar atmosphere. From the start of the effort, I was mainly responsible for tasks concerning data entry and communication, while Orestis was in charge of design and technical issues.

The launch of CURRENT Athens coincided with documenta's presence in Athens. This gave us additional motivation to provide a fully-featured medium for promotion to initiatives and venues that didn't have access to other channels. We thought that the presence of a medium could have a positive effect on the domestic art scene, making it more accessible, among other things, to people that came to Athens on the occasion of documenta. Indeed, the platform quickly became rather popular and was used by art professionals, venues, artists, curators, etc.

**OM** In the design phase of CURRENT Athens, we looked at many similar websites in other countries, adopting elements that seemed fitting for us. The website's design is based on typography, favoring discourse over image, as we thought that it would be interesting to focus on the information of each event, avoiding the mere display of images. The priority given to typography inevitably creates certain aesthetic qualities and, at the same time, serves our main aim, namely the creation of a lightweight website. The absence of embedded images makes the website quite fast and user-friendly for smartphones, which was our purpose from the outset.

**DK** As one can imagine, the gathering of information was the most time-consuming and challenging part of our work. So, that's what we did: we subscribed to the newsletters of all the venues we had tracked and entered into our database, to receive news about the scheduled events. We also kept following their Facebook pages and official websites, as well as websites of broader interest that occasionally publish contemporary art events. As there was no previous source that was completely updated, this was no easy task. For anyone who attempts something similar now, it will probably be somewhat easier.

One could say that the visual arts community in Athens is rather small, so now we have a personal relationship with most of its members. They either send us their scheduled events directly, or enter them themselves in our registration form. Anyone can submit the required event data in the online registration form, and send it to us just for verification and publication – a process which is a lot easier for us.

It was important for us to give everyone the opportunity to add their own event, and it is precisely these events whose posting we prioritize. The registration form is not yet as user-friendly and functional as we would like it to be, but we try to improve it using user feedback and the experience we gain over time. Our aim is that, at some point, this registration form becomes fully functional, without the need for corrections that we have to make manually in order to avoid double entries of artists, curators, venues, etc., technical issues that are not relevant at the moment.

Time allowing, we try to cover the entire exhibition activity of the city by including all the venues that identify themselves as contemporary art venues. We avoid qualitative distinctions on what is “good” and what is “less good”, what is “contemporary”, and what is “less contemporary”.

**OM** The website is designed in such a way that all the exhibitions are equally projected. Classification is exclusively chronological and, therefore, there is no kind of hierarchy in the presentation of the events. Of course, CURRENT Athens is much more useful for small, independent initiatives, and less so for major organizations, who also have access to more popular publicity channels than ours.

Having said that, a common proposal we face is the further promotion of non-profit organizations. However, we avoid picking out, choosing, or treating favorably some against others - mainly because we believe that after all, horizontal publicity has a positive impact on the artistic community as a whole, which is our main purpose. This whole issue may seem meaningless outside of the country's context, as the deregulation of the economy in Greece has created some particular local features that might be difficult to understand outside of this context. Nevertheless, it should perhaps be noted that even if we engaged in a process of targeted promotion, our criteria wouldn't be based on the legal status and charter of each venue. This is more an issue that concerns accountants rather than publics - especially considering that the social stance and the artistic proposals of each venue are not necessarily reflected on its founding charter.

CURRENT Athens is also a non-profit itself, and has never received funding in any way. Besides, it wasn't designed according to a business plan, so there is no provision for profitability. What we aim for is for the project to gradually acquire a certain autonomy, which will allow for its maintenance costs to be covered.

**DK** The website has a constantly increasing number of visitors. This doesn't necessarily imply that we are doing something right, as there are not many alternatives for someone to be informed. But in any case, these numbers are encouraging and lead us to believe that the platform is indeed a useful tool. Some data indicative of the volume of information we have managed to gather over all these years, in numbers, are: about 3000 events, 600 art venues, 7500 artists, and 700 curators.

**OM** We believe that the gathering of this information on contemporary art events contributes to the broader effort of extroversion of the visual arts. Unlike other art forms, the visual arts often remain confined within the boundaries of a very special, familiar audience. And we find this effort important, because the introversion of the visual arts probably does not even help the very professionals that are involved, having a negative impact on the vocabulary that is developed and the typology of the organized events.

As for our future plans, in parallel to CURRENT Athens progress, we are working on a platform with similar horizontal, non-hierarchical characteristics, concentrated on contemporary art discourse production. We hope that we will have more to announce soon. That's all, thank you again!

**DK** Thank you.

This transcript is the English translation of the respective podcast at: <https://postdocumenta.net/2021/03/11/current-athens/>. Translated from Greek by Orestis Stylianidis.

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