

'Mary Magdalene', is by Kiki Smith

SALON, FAREWELL

Pauline Karpidas' house on Hydra has seen annual weekenders, where guests might find themselves up close with Tracey Emin or Damien Hirst. Now, the legendary collector and host is waving goodbye to her Greek mansion – along with sundry Lalanne sculptures, Mattia Bonetti furniture, Nan Goldin photographs, André Dubreuil lamps and Grayson Perry pots...

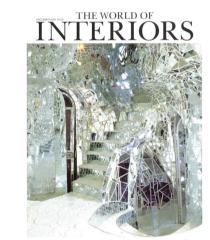
> Written by Jennifer Higgie Photography by Barney Hindle 24 October 2023

There's a cobbled footpath on the <u>Greek</u> island of Hydra that wends its way along the cliffs towards the village of Kamini. The view across the sparkling Aegean to the mainland is so breathtaking it's easy to miss a stone bench that has a plaque engraved with the words 'He came so far for beauty' – a quote adapted from a song by Leonard Cohen.

In 1960, then a 25-year-old poet, Cohen landed on the island hoping to finish his first novel. He'd heard that Hydra – 'a rock which rises out of the sea like a huge loaf of petrified bread', in the words of Henry Miller – was a magnet for writers and artists, and he hoped to stay with the painter Nikos Ghika, who had a 40 room mansion and a reputation for hospitality: John Craxton, Cyril Connolly, Lawrence Durrell, Patrick Leigh Fermor were all regulars.



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Dubreuil appliques flank the french windows in the library, above two amphora- shaped ceramics made by Grayson Perry in the 1990s. Another Lalanne 'Choupatte' – this one far smaller than its cousin on the terrace – sits on top of a Mattia Bonetti ('WoI' May 2013) coffee table. Pauline's book collection (out of shot) embraces everything from Jungian philosophy to (unsurprisingly) 20th-century art

Cohen, who had never met Ghika, was brusquely turned away by his housekeeper and ended up staying with the brilliant, tormented Australian couple Charmian Clift and George Johnston, who wrote 14 books between them in their ten years on the island. Cohen remembered that 'they drank more than other people, they wrote more, they got sick more, they got well more, they cursed more, they blessed more. [...] They were an inspiration.' Within a few months, Cohen had bought his own house for \$1,500; it had no electricity, plumbing or running water, but it was his, and it gave him space to write. It was also peaceful: there were no cars on the island – there still aren't.

Several decades later, the charismatic British-born art collector and patron Pauline Karpidas also bought a home on Hydra, above the path that winds its way to Kamini beach. It, however, is a little more luxurious than Cohen's: a mansion built by the noble Boudouris family, it has sweeping sea-view terraces, a Greek Orthodox chapel and separate guest quarters.



The walls of the Oriental salon are enlivened by a mural conceived and painted by the Brazilian artist Saint Clair Cemin

Something of a modern-day Peggy Guggenheim, Karpidas has filled every nook and cranny with art: from her portrait by Andy Warhol, which hung in her office, to paintings by Marlene Dumas, Jacqueline Humphries and Lisa Yuskavage, photographs by Nan Goldin, ceramics by Grayson Perry and sculptures by <u>Damien Hirst</u> and Kiki Smith. The collector also worked closely with the interior designer Jacques Grange and gallerist David Gill, filling the whitewashed rooms with designs by Elizabeth Garouste and Mattia Bonetti, André Dubreuil, and Claude and <u>François-Xavier Lalanne.</u>

Karpidas was introduced to the latter in 1978 by her art adviser, the flamboyant Alexander Iolas, a former dancer who staged the first US exhibitions of Max Ernst and René Magritte in the late 1940s, discovered Warhol and was famous for his pink-satin trouser suits and floor-length capes. 'Nobody wanted Lalannes at the time,' Karpidas told me; 'they were considered too decorative.' With her unerring taste (Oliver Barker, chairman of Sotheby's Europe, said she had 'by far one of the most instinctive aesthetic eyes that I think I've come across in 30 years'), Karpidas knew talent when she saw it. She invited the husband-and-wife team, who were known as Les Lalanne, to Hydra to create bespoke pieces for her home.

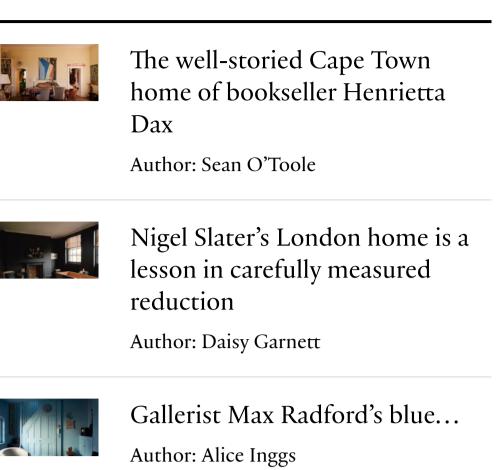


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A one-off Mattia Bonetti bed with what look like gondola posts at each corner is berthed in Pauline's bedroom, overlooked by three Barbara Kruger photographic prints (not included in the auction) entitled, from left, 'Hate', 'Good' and 'Evil'. The chair, upholstered in an embroidered yellow linen, is another Bonetti piece for Bonacina

They more than rose to the occasion, creating sculptures and furniture of great whimsy and wit: a large patinated bronze cabbage with bird's feet that has guarded the front door; a serpent balustrade; a monkey shower in the gardens; a drinks cabinet in the body of a bronze ram; silver bird rocking chairs; faded blue garden furniture that looks as if it were spun from spider webs and peacock feathers. Karpidas described Les Lalanne as 'fairyland people' who 'created this magical kingdom and almost didn't belong on earth somehow'.

In 1996, a few years before Karpidas bought the Boudouris Mansion, she acquired a former shipbuilder's yard in the port. She transformed it into a small gallery that she called the Hydra Workshop and slept on the mezzanine. In consultation with a friend, the London art dealer Sadie Coles, she decided to host an annual exhibition and invite artists, curators, collectors and writers to the island for a frequently riotous three days of art and festivities. Guests arrived on Friday and (reluctantly) left on Monday.

Also excluded from the auction, an Andy Warhol portrait of the shipping magnate Constantine Karpidas, the owner's late husband, hangs above an André Dubreuil writing desk with flap

The inaugural show in 1997, *Package Holiday*, featured 15 artists, including Peter Doig, Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Sarah Lucas and Chris Ofili. Over the ensuing years, there were solo exhibitions by Cecily Brown, Anne Collier, Carroll Dunham and others. In 2002, John Currin and Rachel Feinstein (*WoI* Dec 2010), newly wed, staged a joint exhibition, *The Honeymooners*; in 2005, Urs Fischer borrowed a settee and a table from the nearby Tassos Café for his installation *Mr Watson – Come Here – I Want to See You*.

I was lucky enough to receive an invitation to the Hydra Workshop in 2016: it promised that 'little is required from you other than an engagement with art and guests, sunbathe, gossip and swim'. The show of Nicole Eisenman's work was wonderful, as was the lunchtime dancing at the Taverna Marina in Vlichos, endless conversations over too many carafes of wine and swimming in the warm sea at midnight with a group of museum directors and art critics in their underpants. But what I particularly remember is Karpidas's warmth, great style, sense of humour and understated generosity. Reader's Choice

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A flock of birds by François-Xavier Lalanne – 'Oiseau d'Argent', c1990 – has come to land on the mansion's upper terrace. The Peloponnese can be seen in the distance beyond a narrow strip of the Saronic Gulf

The final Hydra Workshop took place in 2017 and comprised six paintings and a publication by the American painter Jamian Juliano-Villani. Guests included Tate director Maria Balshaw, who ran early-morning yoga sessions, National Portrait Gallery director Nicholas Cullinan, the Royal Academy's Tim Marlow and Beatrix Ruf, then of the Stedelijk Museum. Writing in *The Art Newspaper*, Louisa Buck reported that 'the pleasure of the weekend was tinged with acute sadness with the announcement by [Karpidas's son] Panos that this was to be the last one'.

In recent years, Karpidas has been feeling the responsibility of running a home on a Greek island and has taken the hard decision to sell Boudouris Mansion and part of her collection. I asked her how she felt about it. She looked philosophical. 'Those pieces were loved and now they have to go to somebody who will also love them. That's all I can say.' She smiled. 'Hydra was part of my life. Now it's time for new adventures'.

Sotheby's Paris is to offer works from Pauline Karpidas's Hydra home on 30 Oct (evening) and 31 Oct (day). Visit <u>sothebys.com</u>

A version of this article originally featured in the November 2023 issue of *The World of Interiors*. Learn about our <u>subscription offers</u>



Jennifer Higgie

It was after moving from Melbourne to London in the late 1990s that Jennifer first picked up her pen. 'My paintings stopped working,' she explains drily, 'and writing was more appealing than waitressing.' Though she's now got six books under her belt, the itinerant author never lost her love for... <u>Read more</u>

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