

CASA IOLAS

Citofonare Vezzoli

Homage to Alexander Iolas

OPENING

Thursday, 24.09.2020, 10 am – 7 pm

DATES

25.09.2020 – 16.01.2021

"I have art and my life is full"

Alexander Iolas

Galleria Tommaso Calabro is pleased to present **Casa Iolas. Citofonare Vezzoli** (*Villa Iolas. Please Dial Vezzoli*), an exhibition dedicated to the Greek art gallerist **Alexander Iolas (1908–1987)** and curated by **Francesco Vezzoli (b. 1971)**, with a setup designed by Filippo Bisagni. The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue, including interviews to Iolas, archival material and an essay by Luca Massimo Barbero.

Alexander Iolas was one of the **most important art dealers of the second half of the twentieth century**. One of the first gallerists to create an international network of galleries, he introduced Surrealism to the United States and gave Andy Warhol his first solo show. Although he had been a friend and loyal supporter of some of the most important artists of his time, Iolas was soon forgotten after his death in 1987. His Athens house, **Villa Iolas**, was doomed to the same fate, its invaluable art collection being stolen and dispersed.

Drawing on the artists exhibited at Iolas' galleries and represented in his collection, *Casa Iolas. Citofonare Vezzoli* will **reimagine the now lost rooms of his legendary villa. Through the eyes of Francesco Vezzoli** – an artist who has for long investigated the psychological complexities of fame – the exhibition fosters the rediscovery of a key-figure in the post-war art world. With this project, the Galleria Tommaso Calabro continues to shed light on some of the most relevant yet often partially forgotten gallerists of the twentieth century. *Casa Iolas. Citofonare Vezzoli* is the second chapter of an exhibition program inaugurated by the gallery in 2018 with its opening show dedicated to the Italian gallerist Carlo Cardazzo (1908–1963).

Born Costantino Koutsoudis in 1907 into a family of Greek cotton dealers living in Alexandria, Egypt, Alexander Iolas – as he will later rename himself – was drawn towards music and dancing at a very young age. Breaking free from his family's expectations, aged seventeen, he set off to Paris and soon moved to Berlin, where he worked as a professional dancer. With the outburst of Nazism, he returned to Paris, where he encountered art for the first time. In the city, he bought his first artwork, a small painting by Giorgio de Chirico glimpsed in a gallery's window in Montparnasse. During his Paris years, Iolas became acquainted with Surrealism and befriended some of the most important artists of his era, such as Georges Braque, Man Ray, Pablo Picasso, and de Chirico himself. In the late 1930s, he moved to New York, where he danced at the Metropolitan Opera. Following a foot injury, in 1945, he

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started off a new career in the arts, working as Gallery Manager at the Hugo Gallery, which he directed for the following ten years. There, he devoted exhibitions to the Surrealists befriended in Paris, namely Max Ernst (1946), René Magritte (1947) and Victor Brauner (1947). In 1952, he gave Andy Warhol his first solo show, *Fifteen Drawings Based on the Writings of Truman Capote*. Through his histrionic personality and acute business acumen, Iolas rapidly made his way into the New York art scene, opening his own space in 1955 with former dancer Brooks Jackson, the Jackson-Iolas Gallery. In the following years, Iolas opened an international network of galleries (Paris, Geneva, Milan, Madrid, Rome and Athens), where exhibitions by Brauner, Copley, Fontana, Yves Klein, Kounellis, Magritte, Raysse, Matta, Niki De Saint Phalle, Harold Stevenson and many others incessantly followed one another. In 1976, following the death of Max Ernst, Iolas closed all of his European galleries, keeping a promise he had made to his artist friend.

In the 1970s, Iolas fulfilled his dream of creating a house in Athens where to stage his vast art collection. Across the numerous rooms of Villa Iolas – a large mansion entirely covered in white marble, built in the working-class neighbourhood of Aghia Paraskevi over 700 square meters – ancient Greek, Egyptian, Roman, Byzantine and Oriental antiquities were displayed alongside paintings and sculptures by the most important Modern masters. Following the gallerist's death in 1987, the lack of a will, the discord between heirs and the unfulfilled intention to turn the house into a cultural centre condemned Villa Iolas to vandalism and oblivion. Except for a few artworks Iolas donated to the Centre Georges Pompidou and forty-four works donated to the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, the rest of his collection was sold or went dispersed.

Able to enchant any cultural salon in five different languages with a unique savoir faire, Alexander Iolas was one of the most propulsive forces in the post-war art market. Galleria Tommaso Calabro evokes his life and multifaceted personality by exhibiting works by numerous artists that Iolas supported: **Victor Brauner, William N. Copley, Giorgio de Chirico, Niki de Saint Phalle, Max Ernst, Leonor Fini, Lucio Fontana, Edward Kienholz, Paul Klee, Yves Klein, Les Lalannes, René Magritte, Georges Mathieu, Roberto Matta, Eliseo Mattiacci, Pino Pascali, Man Ray, Martial Raysse, Ed Rusha, Fausta Squatriti, Takis, Dorothea Tanning, and Jean Tinguely.** Turning the gallery rooms into those of Villa Iolas, Francesco Vezzoli weaves a dialogue with Iolas' universe by placing in the exhibition path some of his own sculptures – two of which exhibited for the first time – and three new embroideries created for the occasion. According to Vezzoli, *"Casa Iolas does not only pay homage to a great gallerist that has almost been forgotten, but also to a gallery culture based on relationships of friendship, trust, and mutual esteem, which seem to have disappeared from the contemporary art world. For this reason, I wanted to honor Iolas in all his facets, as a gallerist and as a collector, as a dandy of the art market and as an aesthete."*

Casa Iolas is ideally evoked through a **theatrical setup** operating on three levels: works by artists exhibited at Iolas' galleries are displayed alongside Vezzoli's works and antique pieces of furniture reminiscent of those of the villa. Installations merging these three levels create focal visual points in each room. The gallery's windows are shut to convey the idea of being inside Iolas' house, just before its inevitable destruction.

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OPENING TIMES

Tuesday – Saturday / 11 am – 7 pm
Monday / by appointment

PRESS REQUESTS

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INSTAGRAM

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