CARYATID

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FOUR INSTALLATIONS

1
Mylos Gallery, Thessaloniki
February 1995

I was invited to exhibit the Caryatids for the first time as part of the 'Photosynkyria '95' International Festival of Photography in Thessaloniki, Greece. I decided just to show three images of figures printed 'life size', mounted on canvas and hung like banners across the space.

The caryatid from the Erechtheum, now in the British Museum, hung in the centre, flanked by two other figures from the time when the original figure came to London. On the left was one of the sturdy, formidable figures from St Pancras Church and on the right a sinuous, elegant figure from the Bank of England, designed by Sir John Soane.

The Mylos Gallery in Thessaloniki is a converted mill, with much of its industrial machinery intact, and there was evidently a tension between the figures and this setting. But even in the blunt arrangement of the beams across the space, there is still an echo of a figure, arms stretched out, carrying the weight.

2
Oriel, Cardiff
January-February 1998

The former Arts Council gallery in Cardiff was housed in a modernist block, a square space centred on a stripped concrete column. The floor was paved with polished metal, in which the figures were dimly reflected. One wall of the gallery was taken up with a frosted window, through which passers-by in the street now became ghosts.

The space encouraged a more sculptural, three dimensional placement of the three figures at right angles to each other, around the concrete column, which became, as it were, a fourth figure. Moving round and through the figures, one thus saw many different combinations of front and back, and the presence of the work changed as the winter light fell outside.

Meanwhile in a small back room, a slide show played on a loop, images of a host of caryatid figures from many other contexts, both historical and contemporary, actual and imagined, created by artists as various as Robert Adam, Auguste Rodin and Walt Disney.

3
Pitzhanger Manor, Ealing
December 1998

In the Autumn of the same year, *Caryatid* was installed at Pitzhanger Manor, the country home of Sir John Soane. For much of the twentieth century, this had served as Ealing Public Library, but in the 1980s, it was restored to Soane's original design.

This was a very different hanging of the pictures, with elements of the exhibition placed all around the house. The large figure from Athens hung on the top landing while the other two were placed on either side of an archway in the drawing room. The slide show of caryatids was playing in the basement, individual images and 'friezes' were placed on various tables and mantelpieces, and in one room, an actual caryatid figure was simply spotlit to become an ambiguous intermediary between house and exhibition.

Thus, a dialogue in three-dimensions was set up between past and present, the flat silence of the images and the extraordinary sequence of spaces designed by Soane some two centuries before.

4
St Pancras New Church, London
June-July 1999

The final installation of *Caryatid* was in one of the buildings where the original figures had been photographed. St Pancras New Church was designed by the young Henry William Inwood in 1819, as an amalgam of different temples he had studied on a visit to Greece, Now the four massive caryatid figures on the north porch stand, incongruous but impassive, above the traffic on the Euston Road.

Inside the church, the three hanging Caryatids were placed along one side of the nave, where, uncannily, they exactly fitted between the architrave and the top of the pew. Opposite, on the other side of the nave, other photographs were hung, showing each of the three figures in their original context.

On the exterior of the church, over the doorway beneath the Caryatid porch itself, was a 270 cm high photograph, a blow-up of the face of the caryatid who stands above to the right. Both more and less physically present than the sculptural reality of the figure itself, she gazed blindly at the busy world passing by.