

Petzel

Jurriaan Benschop, "Are We All Greeks?" *Frieze*, June/July/August 2025, pp. 18-19.



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One Take: A look at Charline von Heyl's collage work
Athens (2024), ahead of her exhibition at the George Economou
Collection by Jurriaan Benschop

Are We All Greeks?

WHILE THE WORK of Charline von Heyl usually triggers thoughts about the painterly gesture and the potential of the medium, *Athens* (2024) puts forth a different and more concrete question: What is the city of Athens, with its famous background of antiquity, actually like? Here, two distinct layers of history, far removed from each other, merge – or clash – on the same flat surface.

One of the 18 collages making up the work, for instance, shows a graffitied storefront with iron bars, furniture strewn in front – a familiar scene in many of the city's neighbourhoods. Scooters are parked at the entrance, some of their parts taped together – we are not in rich quarters here. Collaged atop the bikes is a photo of a classical statue – an archer, its head missing, a partial, elegant presence from the past.

Visitors to Athens are often first attracted to the Acropolis and the diverse collections of antique sculptures, from Cycladic to Mycenaean. The city comes across as an evocation of a grand age, at least in the imagination, inviting reflections on the roots of Western art, law and literature, much like the romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley did when he observed in *Hellas* (1821–22), 'We are all Greeks.'

Are we really? For that to be true, we would have to forget about the classical era, like most Athenians do, and see what life is like now, around the corner. Athens is beautiful and loud, exciting and neurotic, lively and poor, demanding. Walking its streets requires looking at the ground to avoid stepping in holes, which might prevent you from reaching the next ancient site displayed on your phone screen.

Charline von Heyl, *Athens*, 2024.
Courtesy: © Charline von Heyl and Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne; photograph: Mareike Tocha

And driving a car up Kifisias Avenue to visit Von Heyl's exhibition at the George Economou Collection requires calm, staying in your lane to avoid clashing, verbally or physically, with one of the scooters passing on either side. The possibility of an accident affects one's state of mind; the present is tense.

If *Athens* tells us something about the city, it is through a visitor's eyes. In singling out the old and incomplete, the faded and the fragmented, Von Heyl seems to have found a lost thread. The collages glue together images from separate eras, united by an unfinished quality, which appears in the rough street-views of the present just as vividly as it does in statues that have eroded over time ●

Jurriaan Benschop is a writer and curator.

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