



#OrangeVest

by

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#ORANGEVEST

**Thesis Catalogue presented to the
MFA Fine Arts Program
School of Visual Arts, New York**

**In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts**

**By GEORGIA LALE
May 18, 2016**

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Photo documentation of the performance by George Xourafas

This thesis catalog is lovingly dedicated to my paternal grandfather Konstantinos Lales and his family, who were refugees from Asia Minor, Turkey.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to Adam Meddoff, Eleni Kalogeras, Sofia Loukeri, Leonidas Chalepas, SVA President David Rhodes, Mark Tribe, Perry Bard, Miquel Luciano, Rico Gatson, Basil and Elise Goulandris Foundation, Gerondelis Foundation, SVA Alumni Society and, above all, to my family in Greece.

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Europa was the Syrian princess who inspired the love of Zeus. He approached her in the form of a white bull and kidnaped her. They flow over the Aegean Sea to Crete. Europe was named after this unfortunate girl who was forced to leave her kingdom. Today, Europe, who was named after her is showing its inhumane face to Syrian refugees by closing borders, sending asylum seekers back to Turkey and keep refugees in camps.

Since summer 2014, the Greek islands of Lesbos, Xios, Kos and Crete. All popular as great vacation destinations, are facing the brutal realities of war and terrorism in the form of a refugee crisis. United Nations Refugee Agency has stated:

“Out of a total of 1,005,504 arrivals by 21 December 2015, the vast majority – 816,752 – arrived by sea in Greece, the International Organization of Migration said. A further 150,317 arrived by sea in Italy, with much smaller figures for Spain, Malta and Cyprus. A total of 34,215 crossed by land routes, such as over the Turkish-Bulgarian border.”¹

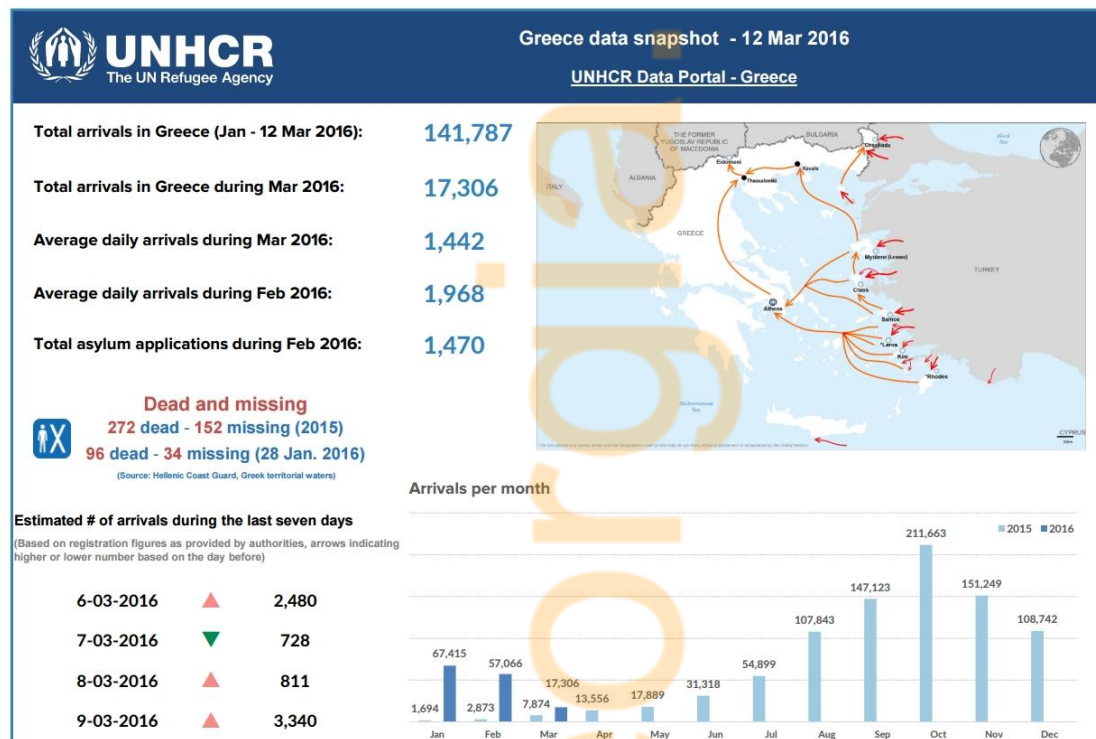


photo by Ivor Prickett

Boats overloaded with refugees arrive every day in Lesbos. The average of daily arrivals in March 2016 was 1,442. Most of them are from Syria but they also come from other Middle East countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and

¹ Patrick Kingsley, “Over a million migrants and refugees have reached Europe this year, says IOM”, The Guardian, December 22, 2015

Pakistan. Forty percent, are children. They travel from Turkey to Greece through the cold sea. The six-mile trip can last up to four hours because of weather conditions or the boat's driver unfamiliarity with the sea. The refugees have to deal with smugglers that give them fake life vests or leave them without enough gas to make it to the other side. Statistically, one family dies every day in the Aegean Sea. On January 22, 2016, forty-six people drowned, seventeen of them children.



I started following the crisis in the summer of 2015 through American news media. Only a few outlets were really paying attention; most of my information was from social media platforms, like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Social media users had started to take action and were spreading the word online. I saw photos of dead children on the beach and of people kissing the earth because they had survived. I saw people of all ages that were trying to escape war, looking for a safe place to start a new life.

I was shocked about what was happening in my country, on these islands where I used to have fun during the summer. I was struggling with the fact that circumstances prevented me from joining the rescue efforts. It was then that the idea for an art piece that would raise awareness about the refugee crisis started to develop.

This is not the first time the Aegean Sea has facing such waves of migration. In 1923, after the conflict between Greece and Turkey the *Lausanne Peace Treaty*² was signed, clarifying the national borders of the region. Part of the agreement involved the exchange of minority populations between the two countries. The migrants' journeys were very similar to those of the current refugees. My family was part of the Greek population in Turkey that had to immigrate to Greece. My great grandmother, after whom I'm named, gave birth to one of her children on the boat while traveling alone with her six children. When I see photos of these families arriving on Greek shores, it is like seeing a reflection of my own family history. I identify as a refugee because I was not raised on the land of my ancestors.



Lale family photo, Thessaloniki, Greece, 1924.

My grandfather Konstantinos Lales is the boy in the middle of the photo. The baby that his mother is carrying was born on the boat, as she was crossing the Aegean Sea. Her husband had to get dressed as an old lady in order to flee

² Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Lausanne Peace Treaty VI. Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkey Populations Signed at Lausanne, January 30, 1925" www.mfa.gov.tr

Turkey, men weren't allowed to leave the country and they were forced to attend labor camps. It took him two years to find his family in Northern Greece. The two youngest kids died few months later after this photo was taken due to austerity and lack of aid.

II. “#ORANGEVEST” PERFORMANCE

1. Structure



#OrangeVest sticker

The #OrangeVest performance is a public intervention about the refugee crisis in Europe. The visual language of the piece refers to the refugees' trip from Turkey to Greece. As part of the action, a group of people wear black clothes and orange life vests. They walk around New York City in order to raise awareness about the antagonism that the refugees are facing on the other side of the world.

The performance is based on the usage of public spaces in the city and attempts to create an aesthetic balance between a protest and work of art. Despite having elements of a protest, the performers don't disturb everyday public routines. The participants are simply present and quiet. They speak to the

people around them only if they are questioned about the nature of the performance. The piece is not intended to force the viewer to interact or to take a position. Rather it is to encourage the audience to seek out information about the refugee crisis.

Among the crew are two people documenting the performance and a spokesperson who gives out the #OrangeVest stickers and provides the public with information about the performance subject matter. As of now, I plan to organize a performance every month.

2. Performers



#OrangeVest, Brooklyn Bridge, November 15, 2015

During the earliest #OrangeVest performances most of the participants were fellow artists that shared my concerns about the humanitarian crisis. As the action develops, it is attracting people from other fields and disciplines. The performers are diverse nationalities and cultural backgrounds - including Thailand, Israel, South Korea, U.S.A., Qatar, China, United Kingdom, Brazil, Argentina, Kenya, Greece and Syria – reflecting the idea that the refugee crisis is a global phenomenon. As the *United Nations High Commissioner Filippo Grandi* stated at the *London Syria Conference*:

“It’s our responsibility to help and protect these victims. This is a global responsibility and today we have the opportunity.”

3. Location

The #OrangeVest action has taken place at several New York City public landmarks and spaces that are symbolically or conceptually related to the refugee crisis. I did the first performance alone, before others became interested in joining me.



#OrangeVest, Metropolitan Museum of the Art, October 14, 2015

The first intervention took place at the Metropolitan Museum of the Art on October 4, 2015. Wearing the orange life vest, I walked from the museum's Syrian-Arab galleries to the Greek galleries. My action was both symbolic of the refugees' route and a comment on the crises facing these cultures: the financial crisis in Greece and the civil war and terrorism in Syria. My second solo *#OrangeVest* performance occurred on October 18, 2015 at Times Square. I wanted to inject the reality of the refugee crisis into this very commercial space.



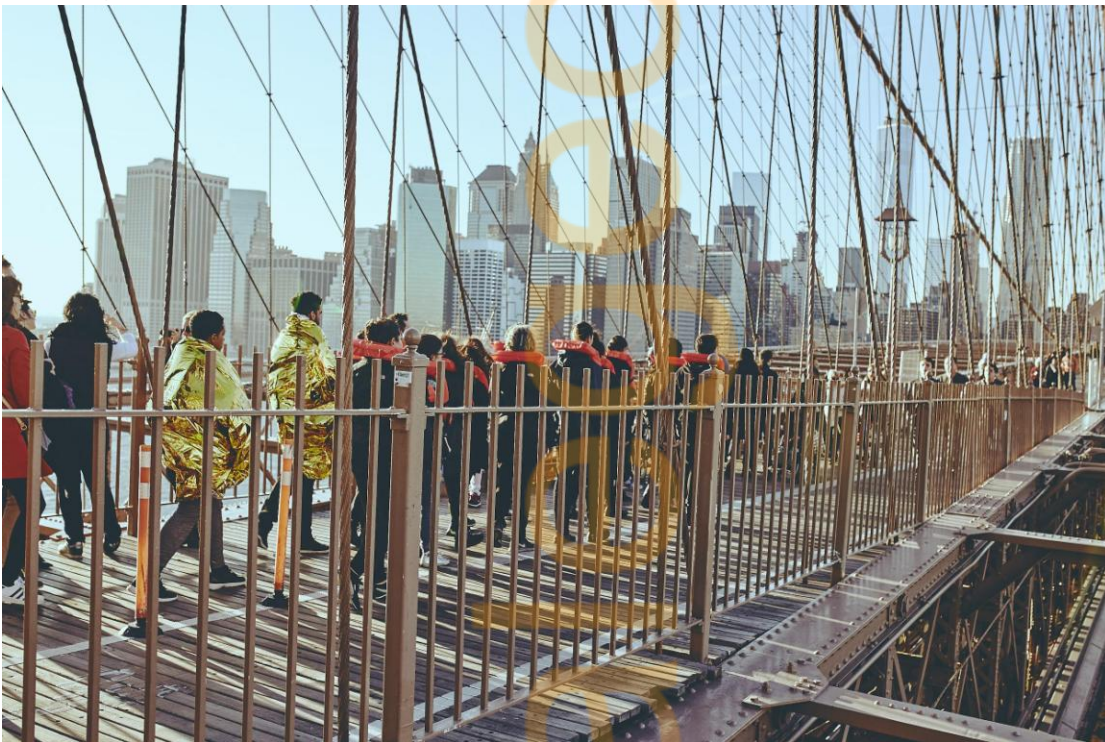
#OrangeVest, Times Square, October 18, 2015

For the third action, a group of five performers walked the High Line Park in Chelsea. The 1.5-mile walk along the former railroad tracks referred to the paths taken by refugees during their journey across Europe which often follows the old and abandoned train track



#OrangeVest, High Line Park, October 29, 2015

#OrangeVest found itself on the Brooklyn Bridge on November 15, 2015. The subsequent, fifth performance took place outside the United Nations Secretariat Building on Human Rights Day, December 10, 2015.



#OrangeVest, Brooklyn Bridge, November 15, 2015



#OrangeVest, United Nations Secretariat Building, December 10, 2015

On Friday, January 22, 2015, #OrangeVest performed on the subway during afternoon rush hour with the purpose of meeting New Yorkers as they were leaving their jobs for the day.



#OrangeVest, MTA Subway, January 22, 2015



#OrangeVest, Central Park, February 27, 2015

The “#SafePassage” protest on behalf of refugee rights took place in one hundred cities around the world on February 27, 2016. The #OrangeVest performance in Central Park was the only #SafePassage action in the United States. The majority of the performers were returned volunteers from Turkey, Europe and Greece. Our performers included a Syrian refugee whose family was still stranded in Lebanon and two members of the local Greek community. In this performance I was working with people that I had just met and yet the sense of trust, the power of their experience working with refugees, and our mutual will to inform the American public inspired us, and we quickly evolved into a very strong group.

4. Interactions

Surprisingly, we are practically invisible in our bright orange life vests. Each time we have done this performance, almost everyone has ignored us. It is normal to ignore what makes you uncomfortable. Making people uncomfortable is the point here, because the sensation gets their attention when little else can. Even if they do not acknowledge our presence, they might later ask themselves why they felt uncomfortable. In this way, art may be more effective at conveying a message than a news report given we have become desensitized to images and statistics of tragedy.



#OrangeVest, Times Square, October 18, 2015

When #OrangeVest does elicit reactions, they vary. A lot of people take photos of us or with us. Some post their images online. Others thank us for our efforts or bless us. A mother, seeing our performance told her six-year-old daughter what a refugee is and; how children her age have to leave their home and risk their lives in order to find a safer place to live.

III. SOCIAL MEDIA

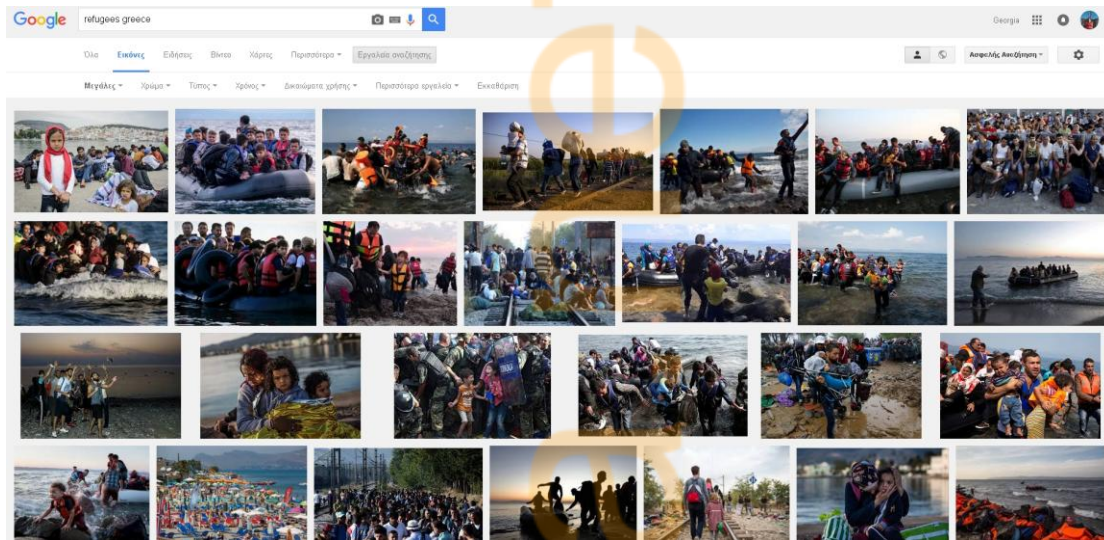


#OrangeVest, Central Park, February 27, 2016

Live performances are only one component of the project; the social media aspect is equally important. As my Facebook followers share my posts about the project, I gain more and more followers and people. Frequently people engage me in conversation like the Greek-American women from Boston who encouraged me to bring the performance there. On social media, the subject is easier to understand because I share news reports in conjunction with my photos. People have been inspired to recreate the performance. A group of reporters and actors performed it at the Golden Globe Awards.

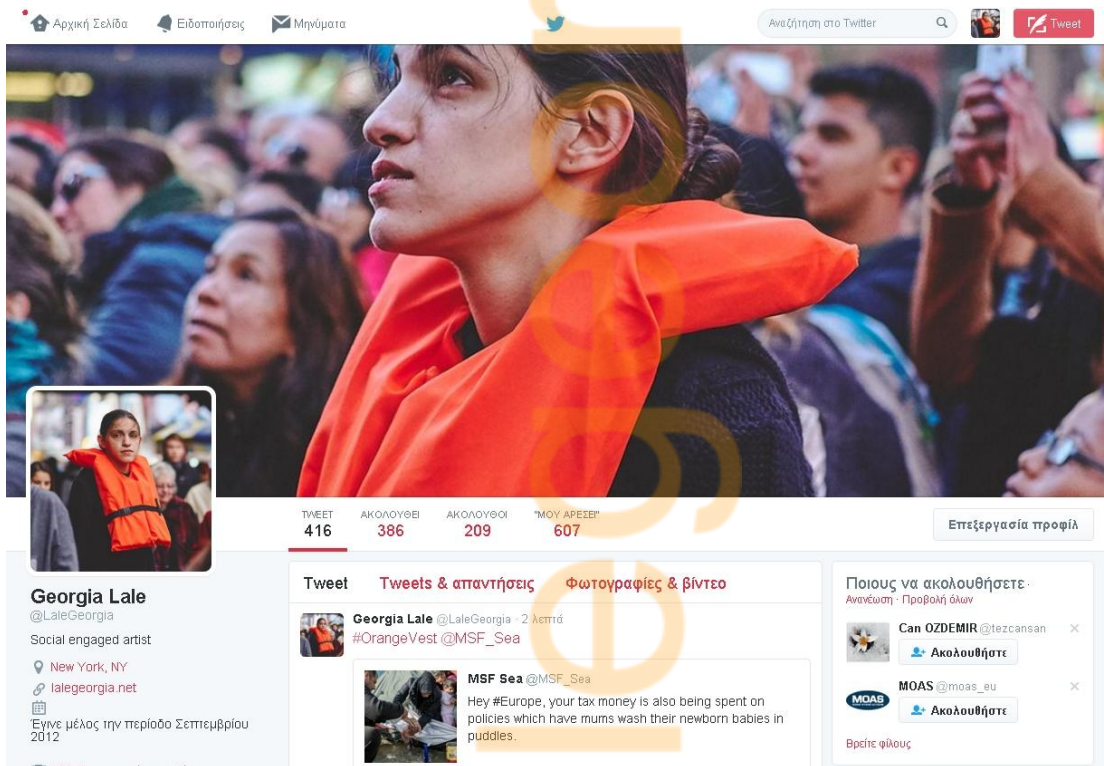
1. Research

Social media, like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and search engines play a crucial role in *the #OrangeVest* project. First, they are my research tools. I keep track of the latest news on the refugee crisis through social media resources and data. Articles and photos posted by reporters and by ordinary residents of Lesbos gave me a sense of the crisis without my having witnessed it in person. This refugee crisis has such an extensive online presence. Social media allows for freedom of speech, letting users share posts that express their ideas, beliefs.



Google images search "refugees Greece"

Social media also connects me to other users with similar interests and concerns, including many artists, activists, journalists, news reporters and United Nation human rights correspondents. Our exchanges of information were and are crucial, helping us learn more about the issue, and allowing us to support each other's work through sharing, commenting and collaborating.



official Twitter account

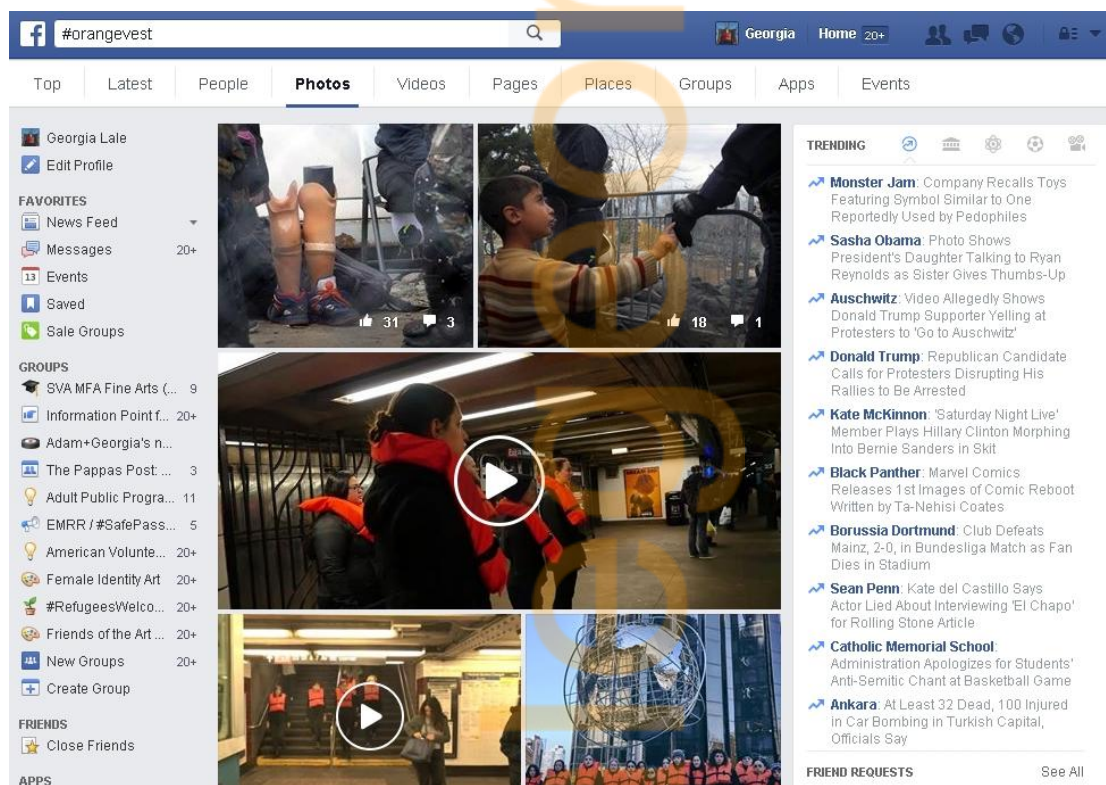
My

I understand that Likes and Shares on social media posts don't save lives or rescue the drowning. But preference to a post makes it more visible, meaning that more people will be informed about the issue and conversation will be started that might provide support and relief to the people who need it.

2. Hashtag (#)

The title of this project is prefaced by hashtag (#). The hashtag transforms any word or group of words that directly follow it into a searchable link, allowing users to organize content and track discussion topics based on keywords. Hashtag use and functionality varies around different social media. Twitter hashtags are mainly used to denote specific topics of conversation, while clicking on Facebook hashtags will take you to a list of posts containing the same hashtag. The results are not limited to people you know. They can also be used to complement photos shared on Instagram and help you discover new accounts and pick up followers. This code technology allows me to manipulate my social media and spread the word about the performance and its meaning more quickly.

The *OrangeVest* hashtag is an invented term, combining the word life vest - worn by refugees as they try to cross the Aegean Sea – and its color, which is referred to as “safety orange”. The color is said to increase visibility because it is not found in nature; its purpose is to attract attention. Conceptually the life vest symbolizes the human's strongest instinct, to survive. It represents hope.



Orangevest hash tag Facebook results



Photo by Santi Palacios, January 7, 2016, Lesbos, Greece

IV. FEEDBACK

1. Performer Responses

The most vital part of #OrangeVest is its participants, who shape the action and convey its meaning and importance. I lead the performances and set up the structure but the performers create the intervention by being present with compassion. Their feedback on how they experienced the performance is very important to developing my practice.

The most prevalent comment among the project's participants is that the performance affects them more than it affects the public that witnesses it. They feel that they are putting themselves in the refugees' position. They face public ignorance and rudeness, standing in the icy winter air. They compare their boredom with that of the refugees, the boredom of waiting motionless and silent. They speak about the refugees waiting for EU migrant registration paperwork, waiting for busses to take them to the borders, then waiting for the border to open. Waiting for people to care on the streets of New York.

Eddie, a participant in the subway performance, told me:

"The black outfits and orange vests [we wore] while performing set us apart and othered us within the everyday space of New York City subways."

The Syrian refugees are seen as the “other” because of their different culture and religion. I believe that is this idea of “the other” that facilitates the emotional and material complacency most people feel when it comes to the refugee crisis, not to mention its role in racist and xenophobic behavior.



B. Rogers, #OrangeVest, Brooklyn Bridge, November 15, 2015

B. Rogers, a performer in the Brooklyn Bridge action wrote me:

“The walk down the Brooklyn Bridge made me feel the importance of acting on the world’s unfairness. One can’t simply know things are unfair, it is important to act to change the events occurring. I couldn’t stop imagining the conditions of the refugees as I stared out into the water below us. The guilt in my heart grew knowing my warm, dry, livable trip across the Brooklyn bridge was nothing compared to the deathly trip across the body of water in nothing but lifesaving (barely) vests. I thought of the potential children refugees that are crossing possibly dying at the same time and felt proud to act and speak/share the tragedies with the people in NYC walking down the bridge after work living their everyday lives who may not be aware of the misfortunes occurring at the same exact time. Almost felt like it was my responsibility to share the cry outs for those who cannot at the moment.”

2. Online Responses

The online and media exposure of #OrangeVest and public interest in general, provoked a variety of online comments and feedback on the performance. The internet creates the opportunity for people to express themselves freely, but its anonymity can also lead to violent and prejudiced behavior. I apologize to reader for the offensive nature of the following statement. I have included the real names of the commenters, because of the posts are public.

Facebook user named Christos Kakouros commended under an #OrangeVest photo of the Brooklyn Bridge performance posted by Papas Post:

Because of papas post and useful idiots like Georgia Iale 4 Europeans are being raped every minute by Muslims who were allowed in by propaganda spreading traitor disarming Europe's age old defences.

140 dead in France... soon papas post executives and Georgia Iale will be chased thru the streets like Mussolini

The Instagram user mohammad_ayrout88 commented under an #OrangeVest performance photo:

Thank you all free people around the world who are supporting my people situation and aware the others about our suffer but I hope the video about the Greek coast guards who was trying to destroy a Syrian refugees boat in the middle of the sea would arrive to the government and the Greek people.

The contradiction between these two comments showed me that on one hand we have people that are seeking to have a voice and spread out to the world the suffering that they are going through as they are seeking a free life far away from war. On the other hand, we are having a great example of a person who is expressing hate based on religion, who is making generalized statements that cannot be supported and he is threatening the press and myself.

As a result of these comments, I realized that my work is affective, that it is giving voice to the refugees' struggle during a period that racism and xenophobia is raising against people that need the international community's support.

V. CONCLUSION

This past March, I was invited by the High School of Economics and Finances on Wall Street to present my work and talk about art as part of their Career Day. I was given the opportunity to teach two classes of tenth graders (whose average age was about seventeen). I was amazed to see that the students were familiar with conceptual ideas and ways of thinking about art history: when I asked them “What is art?” we came to agree that any object can have visual qualities and that artists can apply conceptual ideas onto them to express their experiences of life as well as others’ socio-economic, political, and cultural realities.

I then introduced them to the #OrangeVest performance and spoke about how human body and the life vest can be used as a commentary on the current humanitarian crises. In the first class, only one of the forty students knew about the refugee crisis.

In the second class, when I showed a picture of a group of people in orange life vests being rescued on the Greek island of Lesbos, the students could not identify what was happening in the picture, and couldn’t even tell if it was real or a movie.



Photo by Akis Konstantinidis, September 13, 2015, Lesbos, Greece

When I explained what the image showed and told them about what is happening in Europe, they were shocked. They understood the *#Orangevest* performance and its necessity, since they had found themselves uninformed about the refugee crisis.

Speaking to these high school students confirmed my sense that even if my peers are aware of and invested in these issues, there are many people who are not. Their ignorance is not because they don't care, but because they are not exposed to this reality through mass media. The artist must find out what is missing from the world and put it back where it has to be.

VI. APPENDIX

1. Online Comments

INSTAGRAM



95 likes 10w

thepappaspost Greek artist @lalegeorgia brings awareness to the #refugees arriving in Greece to the streets of NYC with #orangevest (photo by @gxsight)

mikebuonaiuto Yes yes yes

lalegeorgia #orangevest at #Astoria #seashore.

mohammad_ayrout88 Thanks for all free people around the world who are supporting my people situation and aware the others about our suffer but I hope the video about the Greek coast guards who was trying to destroy a Syrian refugees boat in the middle of the sea would arrive to the government and the Greek people It was very shocking and horrible and the screams of children and women didn't make their hearts get soft @thepappaspost please watch it

globalgreekworld Terrible but please

❤ Add a comment... ○○○



95 likes 10w

greek coast guard who was trying to destroy a Syrian refugees boat in the middle of the sea would arrive to the government and the Greek people It was very shocking and horrible and the screams of children and women didn't make their hearts get soft @thepappaspost please watch it

globalgreekworld Terrible but please remember that the Greek coastguard and the Greek people have saved thousands of lives of Syrian refugees in the last months despite the risks and the problems involved. These people have been thrown on boats sometimes in terrible weather conditions by traffickers who made money from their misfortune. With the #ParisAttacks it turns out that some of those responsible may have posed as refugees to get to Europe through Greece and this unfortunately may have ruined things for many.

❤ Add a comment... ○○○

FACEBOOK



The Pappas Post

20 Νοεμβρίου 2015 · 🌐

Photo of the Day:

Greek artist Georgia Lale is bringing awareness of the European refugee crisis to the streets of New York City with a campaign called #orangevest. Here, she and her supporters cross the Brooklyn Bridge wearing bright orange life vests and thermal blankets, similar to those worn by refugees arriving by the thousands on Greece's islands. Here, life vests are displayed in a symbolic place, on the shore of Astoria, NY. (Photo by George Xourafas)



Αρέσει σε 184 · 14 σχόλια · 51 κοινοποιήσεις

👍 Μου αρέσει!

💬 Σχολιάστε

➦ Κοινοποιήστε

Αρέσει σε εσάς, καθώς και στους Lales Charis, Jeff Tan, Angeliki Chaido Tsoli και σε 180 ακόμη.

Κορυφαία σχόλια ▾

51 κοινοποιήσεις



Γράψτε ένα σχόλιο...

😊 GIF



Toulia Charalambous The point in this, in my opinion, is to bring awareness to the refugee crisis where millions of people are in movement to a safer place to live. Greece along a few other countries have been forced to assist in this crisis as thousands of refugees come there first in their efforts to go to other countries. Greece has had to incur everything that this entails. The bottom line what goes around the world, no matter how far away it may be/seem, it eventually affects all of us and some day we find ourselves in their shoes. Thats just how life works.

Δεν μου αρέσει · Απάντηση · 👍 9 · 20 Νοεμβρίου 2015 στις 3:06 μ.μ.



Angellos Ioannis Malefakis What is her point? What is the logic? I don't support these terrorists who come to my country Greece at all. My dad did not run away like they do. He stayed put during WWII and fought the Germans in Crete. He did not come to the US or go anywhere else. He stood his ground! He fought for his home, his land, his country, his Greece. These people that come to Greece and Europe, and the USA are terrorists. Even if it is one terrorist, it is one too many! Furthermore, I don't want sharia law in Europe and the USA and anywhere else. Another reason to keep these people home! They don't acclimate at all! They don't want to change or learn the language. My dad did. My mom did. I did. Why can't they? Solution is to support those that stay behind and fight, fight, fight for their country Syria. Not those cowards that leave. This so called artist Georgia Lale seeks her 15 min of fame.

Μου αρέσει! · Απάντηση · 17 Δεκεμβρίου 2015 στις 4:59 μ.μ.



Alice Alveraz Every Greek person I have met on Lesbos has a warm and caring heart for the "poor people" coming over from Turkey. Some cannot help due to their own financial challenges..but all care. It is beautiful.

Δεν μου αρέσει · Απάντηση · 6 · 20 Νοεμβρίου 2015 στις 4:32 μ.μ.



Christos Kakouros Because of papas post and useful idiots like Georgia lale 4 Europeans are being raped every minute by Muslims who were allowed in by propaganda spreading traitors disarming Europe's age old defences .

140 dead in Francesoon papas post executives and Georgia lale will be chased thru the streets like Mussolini .

Μου αρέσει! · Απάντηση · 1 · 21 Νοεμβρίου 2015 στις 10:19 μ.μ.



Christina Giotis Sarantopoulos Could you please properly cite these "facts" you are spewing? Information is only as good as its source, and you my friend seem quite zealous and thus not very credible.

Μου αρέσει! · Απάντηση · 21 Νοεμβρίου 2015 στις 11:25 μ.μ.



Christos Kakouros 1600 raped in Sweden every year . 1400 yrs of Islamic mass murder ,genocide rape and destruction on Christians , Buddhists and Hindus . Pontian genocide ,Armenian genocide , Asia Minor genocide .

400 years of mass enslavement my Muslims on orthodox Christian nations . Hios holocaust 200 000 exterminated .

These are fact my " friend" which prove that Muslims and Christians cannot co exist in the same country .

You cannot blind the educated with feel good touchy freely " filotimo fairy crap the children are drowning rubbish .

Open the door to your home and let the homeless in you hypocrite. I bet you will lock your door tonight .

Μου αρέσει! · Απάντηση · 22 Νοεμβρίου 2015 στις 12:18 π.μ.



Christos Kakouros And another thing Christina , Greece was freed from Islamic domination by generations of people way better than yourself . They suffered so Greeks can have a home of their own and many real Greeks today will never let the ignorant islamize Greece again .



U.S. EMBASSY ATHENS ✓

February 17 at 8:23am · Athens, Greece · 🌐

Thousands of people are scheduled to protest throughout European cities on February 27 to raise awareness over the plight of refugees fleeing war zones, and one Greek visual artist is bringing this protest — in her own creative way— across the Atlantic to New York City.

Georgia Lale, who together with a team of supporters and fellow protestors, has been walking around the streets, museums and tourist sites of New York City wearing orange vests as part of her [#OrangeVest](#) campaign, will gather with a group of supporters in Central Park on February 27.

<http://www.pappaspost.com/artist-bringing-european-refugee.../>



👍❤️ You, Lales Charis, Adam Meddoff and 134 others

36 Shares

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

TWITTER



Alana Chloe Esposito

@AlanaChloeEspo



Following

bit.ly/1Q2XQLI Georgia Lale's performance art project [#OrangeVests](#) reminds us of the ongoing struggles facing [#refugees](#) in Europe

RETWEETS

2

LIKES

3



9:06 AM - 12 Jan 2016



\TeTw



Ambasada Grčke

@GreeceInSerbia



Following

([#OrangeVest](#)) [#Grčka](#) umetnica izvodi performans lutajući Njujorkom u cilju podrške sirijskim izbeglicama [@Art_Sheep](#):
bit.ly/1HViIN8

RETWEET

1

LIKES

2



5:04 AM - 24 Nov 2015

