

Jewelry in Mykonos Bridging Museum Culture and Tourist Economics

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Abstract

Think “Mykonos” today and you think party island, picture postcard whitewashed buildings, and cruise ship-fueled tourism.

Vanity, a 2016-2017 exhibition at the Mykonos Archaeological Museum, “creates a bridging narrative,” as one reviewer puts it, between archaeological past and touristic present, and also implicitly links public museum and private business through Stories of Jewelry in the Cyclades. One in the string of Cyclades islands in the south Aegean, history in Mykonos spans 7,000 years. Jewelry has been used historically as offerings at sanctuaries and magical talismans; to attract, charm, stand out, and ward off evil. Vanity is a self-conscious effort to attract primarily tourists who have not been visiting the museum’s permanent collection in large numbers. Tourism had already transformed Mykonos decades before the current Greek economic crisis. The exhibition consists of 230 pieces of jewelry from throughout the Cyclades from the 6th century BCE to the 1970s. In addition, the museum commissioned 12 contemporary pieces to explicitly connect past and present.

For the show, the museum has been transformed into a jewelry box using state of the art museological display techniques. The “story” of Stories of Jewelry in the Cyclades is vanity. It plays on what it means to see and be seen, to mirror, and to be on display. The point is made by the copious use of glass and mirrors: jewelry in glass cases, floor-to-ceiling mirrors, plus a giant circular mirror recalling a hand mirror.

What has not been examined is the bridging effects, if not merging, between the public and private sectors. Mykonos abounds in high-end jewelry shops from Cartier and Franck Muller to Tsangarakis and Minsonis. In short, I read the exhibition poster, “Vanity in Mykonos,” to refer to what is on display outside the museum as well as inside.