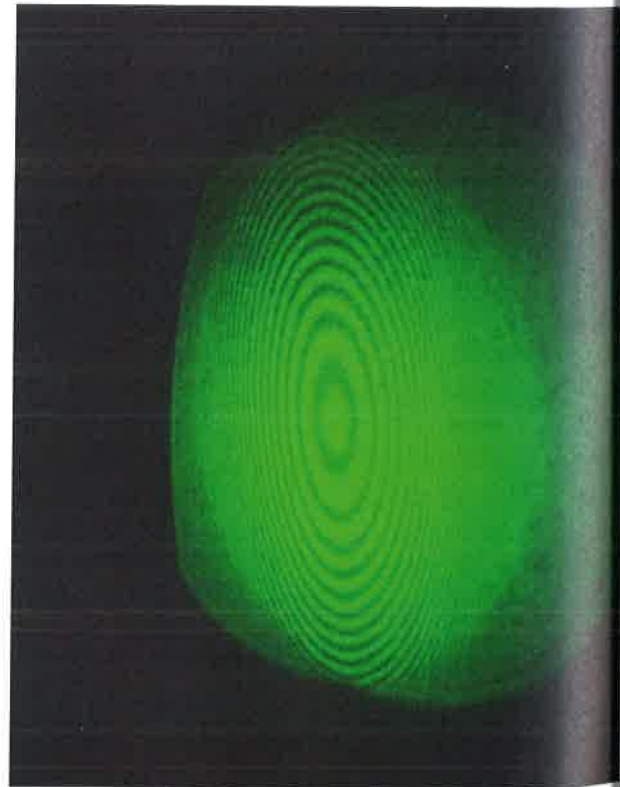


ABUNDANCE — and — INTERFERENCE

By *Emily Watlington*

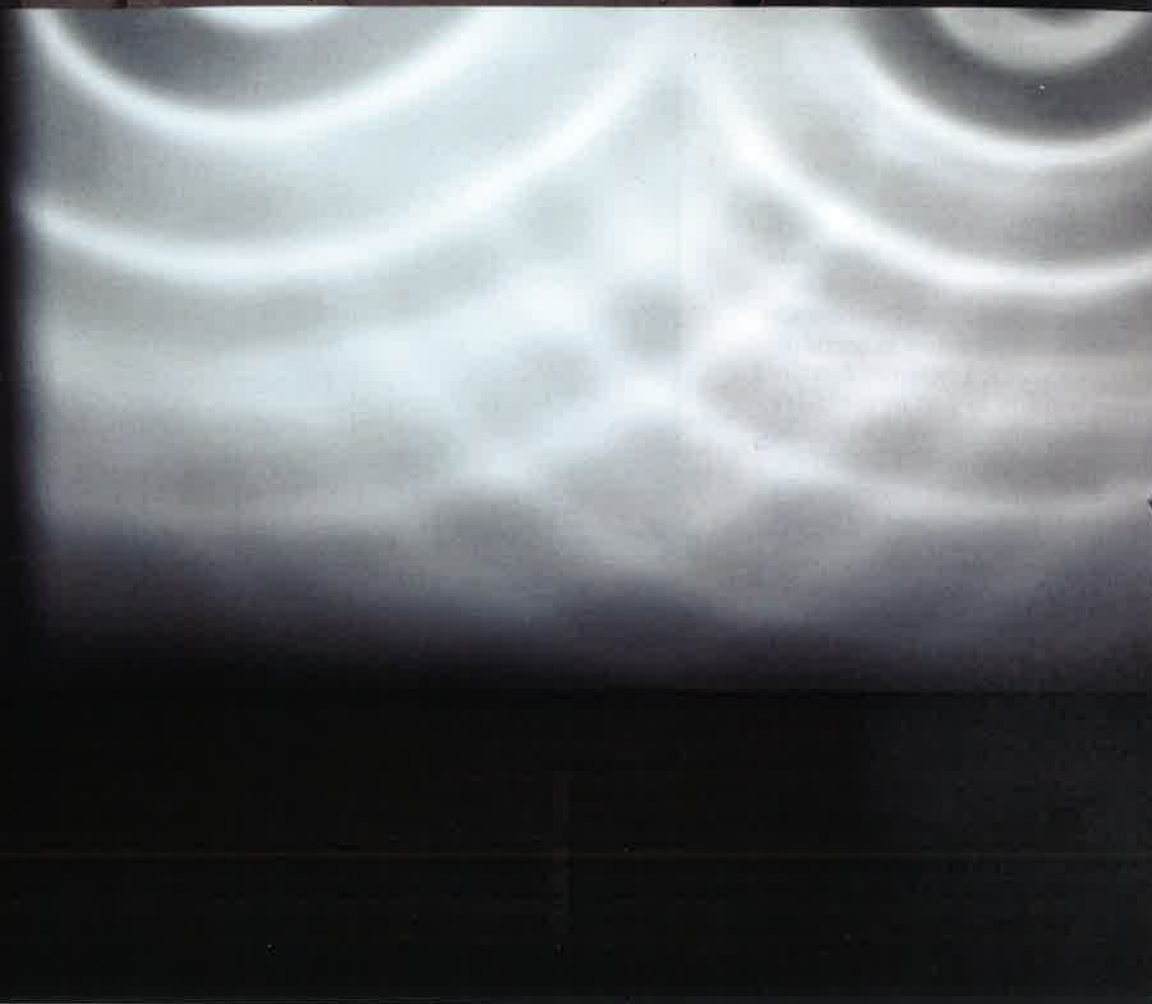
When Constantina Zavitsanos received a portion of the \$18-million settlement that New York City paid to hundreds of activists illegally arrested at a 2004 protest of the Iraq War during the Republican National Convention, the artist gave the money away. Every day for ninety-nine days in the summer of 2015, Zavitsanos left Visa cards at the New Museum, loaded

Constantina
Zavitsanos:
Interferometer
(*Quantum Eraser*),
detail, 2018, laser,
lens, beamsplitters,
mirrors, polarizers,
and breadboard,
dimensions variable.



OPENING THIS MONTH

"Constantina Zavitsanos: L&D Motel," at Participant Inc.,
New York, Sept. 15–Oct. 20.



Above, *Interferometer (Quantum Eraser)*, 2018.

Top, *Interferometer, A Composition of Waters (Adjusted to Fit)*, 2018, video projection, 3 minutes, 45 seconds.

with \$25, \$50, \$100, or \$500. On Thursdays, when guards and maintenance staff were invited to use the card, Zavitsanos loaded money twice in amounts up to \$1,000. The card was left on a retractable tray inserted into the museum's admission desk. The desktop is a few inches too high for wheelchair users, according to Americans with Disabilities Act regulations, so the tray was added by the New Museum's designers to make it compliant. Because the tray was typically retracted but extended for the duration of the intervention, its purpose was not obvious to most visitors. A text that Zavitsanos placed next to the card identified it as an artwork titled *Sweepstakes*, and invited visitors to spend the money as they pleased.

The transaction records Zavitsanos received showed that visitors frequently used the cards to purchase museum admission tickets. Some people bought a coffee or meal before returning the card, though they were also allowed to keep them forever, and spend until them ran out. Several visitors used the money to fill up their car's gas tank. Zavitsanos's gesture, then, not only allowed people to enter the museum at no cost but also provided for material needs like food and fuel – making no assumptions or judgments

about what those needs or desires might be. Providing access to the museum and other resources by utilizing the ADA-compliant desk addition, *Sweepstakes* invited expanded reflections on accessibility.

The work was part of Zavitsanos's New Museum residency project "This Could Be Us," which included a number of public programs centered around care, disability, debt, and dependency: overarching themes of the artist's practice. On the museum's fifth floor, the Pennsylvania-born, New York-based artist displayed paperwork documenting their family's debt over 273 years. A column of white paper encased in a metal frame extended from floor to ceiling. Titled *1737/1921/2010 (It was what I wanted now)*, the work contained documents ranging from an ancestor's contract describing his penal sentence to work in the colonies (1737), to receipts for the artist's student loan payment (2010). Zavitsanos, a graduate of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the Whitney Independent Study Program, displayed their mountain of debt while still giving the lawsuit settlement away, prompting reflection on what it means to settle a score or make something right. We often call large amounts of debt "crippling," an ableist figure of speech that equates

the inability to walk with confinement or deficiency. Zavitsanos instead gestured toward a “cripping” of debt, wherein “to cripp,” as used in the disability community, means to articulate disabled pride. The work celebrates dependency: to cripp debt is to cast dependency not as a pit or a lack, but as a column, a support.

“Some things, when they’re divided, they double,” Zavitsanos told me in their studio this past July, talking not about money but the holograms of dice and other gambling accoutrements they were making for their show “L&D Motel,” opening this month at Participant Inc. in New York. If you cut a holographic image in half, you get two full images. “L&D Motel” encourages visitors to perceive abundance: this time in terms of light and sound. When we spoke, Zavitsanos described how the holograms are being lit in part by red lasers that bounce off mirrors, creating the effect of ambient red lighting in the space. The laser light is a fraction of the electromagnetic spectrum, which encompasses (among other things) white light and rainbow colors. But the spectrum also includes frequencies we can’t

“Some things, when they’re divided, they double,’ Zavitsanos told me.”

see. Isolating one less commonly utilized but still visible frequency serves as a reminder of that rich range. The lurid glow also echoes red light districts, evoking the venue’s history as a former sex club.

Underscoring this nightclub feel, the exhibition includes an installation of powerful custom subwoofers that can play sounds pitched too low to be heard by humans. To demonstrate this when I visited the studio, Zavitsanos played Beyoncé’s “Partition” – a bass-heavy song often used to test a speaker’s lower range – on regular subwoofers. The bass shook the room. “Partition” sometimes hits forty, maybe thirty hertz; the sound Zavitsanos composed is five. The artist generated the sound wearing a SubPac – a vest that plays frequencies from five to 125 hertz and allows users to feel vibrations. There’s a whole range of frequencies that we don’t typically utilize. Abundance surrounds us, it’s just a matter of which senses we value.

Zavitsanos’s sound can be felt but not heard. For this reason, it’s accessible to all audiences regardless of hearing ability. There is not one version of this sound for hearing people, and another version mediated by captions for deaf/Deaf people. Likewise, the subwoofer installation takes the form of a ramp. Unlike many art spaces in the city, Participant Inc. is wheelchair accessible. But Zavitsanos would have needed to build a raised floor to house the subwoofers. Rather than construct an elevated floor that had to be ramped, the artist decided to make the work itself into a ramp situated in



Above, a hologram test in Zavitsanos’s studio, 2019.

Left, Sweepstakes, 2015, Visa card and ADA access desk at the New Museum, New York.

the back of the space, ascending toward a wall. Using “access as a primary material,” as Zavitsanos put it in an interview with Mara Mills and Rebecca Sanchez, is crucial to their practice, as well as that of their peers and collaborators like Carolyn Lazard, Park McArthur, and Jordan Lord.¹

Access is conceived of as the fabric of, rather than an addendum to, Zavitsanos’s video *Scores for Carolyn* (2019), made with McArthur and on view in “Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall” at the Brooklyn Museum through December 8. The piece features a monologue that concerns care networks and what disability justice activist Mia Mingus calls “access intimacy,” which she describes as “that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else ‘gets’ your access needs.”² The video prioritizes the needs of those encountering the work via closed captions rather than audio. The audio

is slowed, though still decipherable; caption reading is primary. There are never characters onscreen with whom to match dialogue.

ZAVITSANOS'S WORK IS A MATERIALIST

celebration of dependency that emphasizes the omnipresence of entanglement at the level of particles. A science-turned-art major, the artist uses scientific instruments to render quantum entanglement visible. In so doing, they demonstrate that entanglement and dependency are not anomalies or signs of weakness, but are actually the basis of the physical world. The famous 1927 Double Slit Experiment, for example, is illustrated in *A Composition of Waters* (2018), a video that Zavitsanos made with Amalle Dublon. This experiment – which became the basis for the field of quantum physics, or the study of nature at the scale of atoms and subatomic particles – radically complicated what we thought we knew about the autonomy of individual particles. “Quantum entanglement refers to pairs or groups of particles for which the properties of each cannot be described independently of the others,” write Zavitsanos and Dublon in an essay that accompanied their work at Artists Space in spring 2018. “Even when they are really far away from one another, these particles must be apprehended as a system.”³ Efforts by scientists to investigate how this quantum entanglement works have proven extremely difficult, because particles behave differently when being watched. Observation itself is entangled. *A Composition of Waters* (2018) simulates an interference pattern created by the Double Slit Experiment, wherein a single particle, or a beam of light, is sent through a barrier punctured with two slits. The particle divides and becomes a wave, then interferes with itself to create a rather beautiful pattern. (“Some things, when they’re divided, they double.”)

A similar principle is illustrated by Zavitsanos and Dublon’s *Interferometer (Quantum Eraser)*, 2018, wherein lasers, lenses, beamsplitters, mirrors, and polarizers are precisely arranged to produce interference patterns that look something like a green thumbprint projected on the wall. By using right angles and mirrors, the artists show the physics of complementarity and superposition. You don’t have to fully grasp the technicalities of these concepts to understand that, when the light beams interfere, they are split and produce a new shape. Interference patterns are also responsible for holographic effects. We often think of interference and splitting in the negative: as a cacophony, an occlusion, a downright wreck. Zavitsanos invites us to view this phenomenon as full of latent possibility.

This turn to particles and waves is not an esoteric gesture distant from political reality. Instead, Zavitsanos’s installations of scientific instruments are metonyms for the abundance of resources that surround us. Re-creating experiments in the gallery, the artist undermines the notion that anything is autonomous, highlighting the impossibility of an even exchange. “People think we don’t have enough to go around, but their solution is: ‘let’s give rich white people everything,’” Zavitsanos exclaimed to me in the studio. “That should be all-out war!” Maybe so: after all, in the United

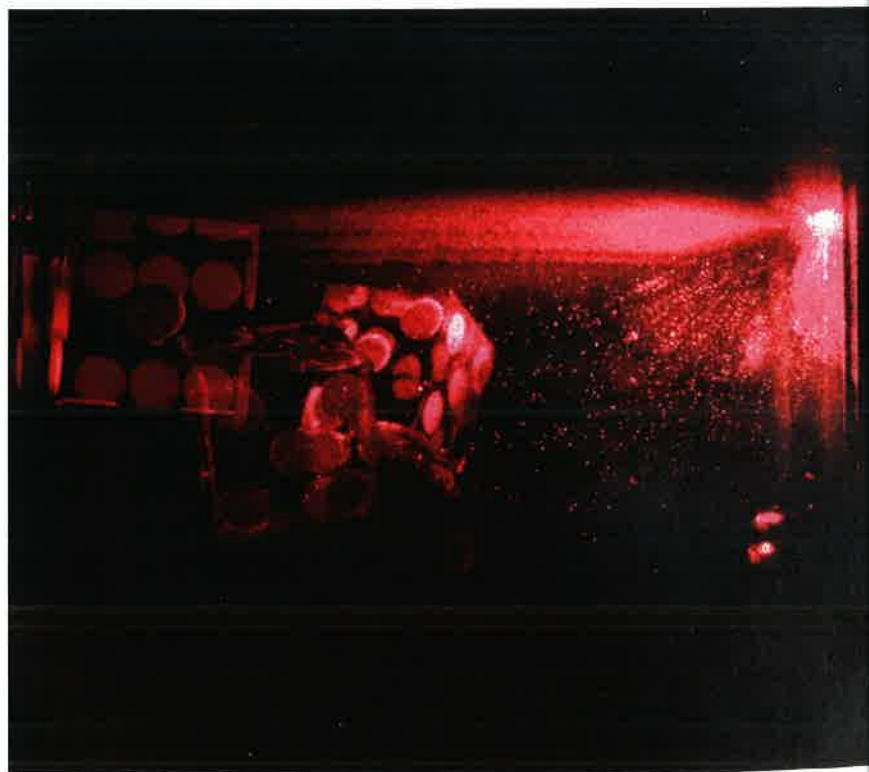


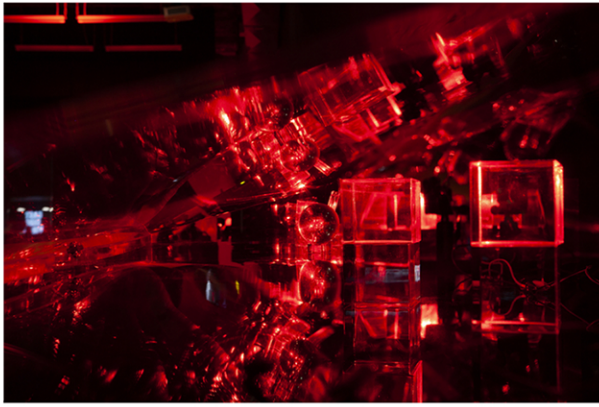
Above, sketch of an infrasonic ramp for Zavitsanos’s exhibition “I&D Motel.”

Below, a hologram test in Zavitsanos’s studio, 2019.

States there are more empty homes than homeless people and thirty to forty percent of the food we produce goes to waste while people go hungry. The country’s total collective debt hit \$4 trillion in 2018, while that same year, the richest 10% owned 70% of America’s assets at nearly twenty times that deficit: \$79.8 trillion. There’s an excess of money, of time, of food, but it’s distributed all wrong, so we think there’s a shortage, that we have to protect what’s ours. The need to perceive abundance couldn’t be more urgent. Zavitsanos invites us to change our framework and see that there’s plenty to go around, casting dependence, debt, and entanglement as natural, omnipresent, and rich. ●

¹ Constantina Zavitsanos, “Giving It Away: Constantina Zavitsanos on Disability, Debt, Dependency,” interview by Mara Mills and Rebecca Sanchez, *Art Papers*, Jan. 9, 2019, artpapers.org. ² Mia Mingus, “Access Intimacy: The Missing Link,” *Leaving Evidence*, May 5, 2011, leavingevidence.wordpress.com. ³ Constantina Zavitsanos and Amalle Dublon, “Nothing, Something, Everything, Anything,” exhib. brochure for Coop Fund, Amalle Dublon and Constantina Zavitsanos, Devin Kenny, John Neff: Artists Space Exhibitions, constantinazavitsanos.com.





Constantina Zavitsanos, *Boxed Bet* (detail), 2019, transmission holograms, acrylic mounts, 5mW red laser,

NEW YORK

Constantina Zavitsanos

PARTICIPANT INC

253 East Houston Street Ground Floor

September 15–October 27, 2019

A plywood ramp, titled *Call to Post* (all works 2019), emerges from the floor, extending across the back length of this long, rectilinear gallery. At the far end of the space, it curves upward, turning into a wall. Visitors that gather atop the ramp are bathed in a red light that seems to hover above the darkened room. To the right of this work is a cantilevered vitrine that holds *Boxed Bet*, a suite of hologram works depicting dice in mid-throw. To the ramp's left is *All the time*, a video made up of two overlapping projections, which come from the floor and the ceiling. These three pieces comprise Constantina Zavitsanos's first solo show, "L&D Motel," which obliquely returns us to debates regarding architecture and sculpture that animated artistic discourse in New York during the 1960s and '70s.

This presentation seems to play on Vito Acconci's *Seedbed*, 1972. But, unlike Acconci, the artist refuses to make the exhibition a kind of nonconsensual sexual encounter. Zavitsanos instead offers us a sensual space where words (and waves) pass between (and through) all who visit. The video's open-caption texts—which are only visible when your body blocks one of the projectors—feature phrases such as “all the degrees of freedom necessary to define it” (this particular wording is nested beneath another line reading “that love's holographic, that touch is impossible”). This triangulated relation is echoed in the transmission holograms. For instance, if one were to cut the hologram's substrate, it would not halve but double—alluding to a world full of abundance instead of lack.

Every so often, a series of vibrations moves through the space—and everyone in it. Even if you're not seated on the inclined ground, the infrasonic, low-frequency waves are still palpable. Unlike Acconci's performance in which he was hidden from view with his voice electronically amplified, Zavitsanos's show considers perception through multiple, overlapping sensory valences—if you aren't seeing or hearing it, you can still feel it.

— Sadia Shirazi

READ—CULTURE

MULTI-SENSORY “L&D MOTEL” AT PARTICIPANT INC

HOLOGRAMS, AN INFRASONIC INSTALL,
PERMEATING LIGHT AND PROJECTED TEXT
FILL THIS FORMER SEX CLUB

Thomas High 2 October 2019

L&D Motel by [Constantina Zavitsanos](#), organized by Alex Fleming and Andrew Kachel at [Participant INC](#), is the artist’s first-ever solo show in NYC. The new works presented by the artist combine and play with our reception of senses. Zavitsanos also reference’s the gallery’s past. When entering into the blackened space of the gallery, visitors are illuminated by red light —calling to attention the venue’s former existence as a sex club.

The exhibition revolves around three pieces: “Boxed Bet,” “Call to Post” and “All the time.” Centered on a ramp, “Call to Post” extends from the gallery’s floor to the ceiling. The installation is more than visual, visitors can stand or sit on the ramp, while sound plays through custom subwoofers. The sound is projected at five hertz (15Hz below the range in which humans can hear) which results in the viewer feeling it, rather than hearing it.

For “All the time” (a series of projected texts layered on top of one another while a recording of the artist’s voice plays) Zavitsanos uses light and sound as a primary material. The words can only be read when a shadow from the viewer obstructs one of the overlapping projections, while the voice can only be heard when the viewers are silent. Placed right next to “Call to Post,” this piece is disrupted often as people move on the ramp.

The red light filling the gallery comes from “Boxed Bet,” which is a series of transmission holograms of dice captured mid-toss, lit in part by red lasers that bounce off mirrors. The laser light concentrates the first visible frequency of light on the spectrum, and the lowest color frequency humans can see: red. This work plays with the idea of sight and image as a seemingly definite thing. When a transmission hologram is cut in half the image is not split, it doubles creating two intact images. Zavitsanos has much to say about the exhibition and the entities within.

Can you talk more about your “All the time” piece? Can you explain your process in using light as a material?

The large majority of the sound-waves in “Call to Post” are infrasonic, but for those parts that are at or above 20Hz, I captioned my voice. The text projections in “All the time” are those captions. Just as the ramp is two channels that often overlap and interfere with one another infra/sonically, the captions are two channels that overlap and interfere with one another visually. At most times, one voice or text is dominant and covers the other less legible one. While captioning has for some time aimed for clarity and legibility of content above affect or feel and material concept—this piece challenged me to do both and favor neither.

It’s a piece that’s both accessible and inaccessible to everyone—it doesn’t segregate audiences in terms of dis/ability. You can think the captions as a material emulation of what they transcribe. In one way they are exactly what’s there and in another, they are not at all what is there. But they are how what’s there is there. Two sonic voiced texts are overlapped, oscillating and coming in and out of phase or phrase in the ramp—and two texts are overlapped, occluded and revealed in the captions. The ramp is comprised of two channels of sound waves or vibrations reverberating the materials of the wooden structure; the caption’s two channels of projected light. Just as the ramp sounds or actually feels different with more or less viewer engagement, so too the captions change with viewer interaction. When someone blocks the first projector, the second projector reveals more legible text in their cast shadow. Shadows in the visible light spectrum are kinda everything, but that’s a whole other story I guess.

Did you imagine how “Call to Post” would be used other than being a work of art? It functions as a gathering place at the same time.

I wanted it to be a space that many people could inhabit in various ways simultaneously for sure... And the piece was literally made by feel and it’s intended to be used, touched, felt. Several friends came through during the process of making the sound on the ramp so that vibe was already there—there’s a soft insistence or tender encouragement to lay around and feel things through, specifically with others.

Today a person came through wanting to skate on it too—and I obliged. But the reason I made it a ramp was primarily for people using wheelchairs and walkers and whatnot to be able to access it and use it as desired. I straight up fantasized it. But, of course, I had no idea it’d turn out quite like this.

Were the gallery windows blacked out so that the holograms project outward, onto the people looking at them?

I blacked out the windows primarily because the holograms are best seen that way, but also the film is a 90% tint so some light comes through from the street in the day, and in the night when the lights are on inside the opposite occurs where the light inside shines out. The construction in front of the gallery already gives this feeling of closure and pushing that a bit more by blacking out the windows I thought may be intriguing. A lot of the show sonically and visually has to do with occlusion so it seemed only right to start with the doors.

How did you settle on the dice as your subject for “Boxed Bet” (2019)?

I mean, truthfully—I’m still unsettled on and by the dice. [This excerpt from Stéphane Mallarmé’s poem [Throw of the Dice](#) provided some inspiration:]

“in these latitudes

of indeterminate

waves

in which all reality dissolves”

*Open through 20 October L&D Motel coincides with new work from the artist being presented at [EFA Projects](#) in their group exhibition *Soft and Wet*, open through 16 November.*

Images courtesy of Constantina Zavitsanos

THOMAS HIGH