



THE GOLD OF TIME

GABRIEL LEGER

Villa Kérylos

Beaulieu-sur-Mer

May 18 — Sept 21, 2025

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Gabriel Leger at the Villa Kerylos

French visual artist Gabriel Leger (1978) has been invited to exhibit his vision of ancient Greece at the villa Kerylos.

In his work, focused on the question of time, he endeavours to highlight the relics and fragments that the past has bequeathed to us.

Through forays into the fields of archaeology and religious anthropology, he seeks to bring back a dialogue with the past and the present, and to ultimately blur the distance between them. Here he has sought to explore, using a Greek filter, the incorruptible « Gold of Time ».

Ground floor

- Porch
- Hallway «Thirokeion»
- Baths «Balaneion»
- Peristyle - Tree
- Peristyle - Niche
- Library - Upper passageways
- Library - Main wall
- Dining room «Triklinos»
- Living room «Andrôn»
- Living room «Andrôn» - Altar
- Music room «Oikos»

1st floor

- Bedroom «Ornithes»
- Bathroom «Nikê»
- Bedroom «Erotes»

Ground floor - Porch

Empedocles' Sandal



A sandal hangs from a hook on the front porch. It's strange and unexpected in two ways, because there's only one of them, and it's made of metal. It belongs to the philosopher, poet and physician Empedocles of Agrigento (5th century BC), who, according to legend, threw himself into the volcano Etna, leaving behind his bronze sandal.

In ancient times, as an attribute of Hecate, the unique sandal was symbolically linked to the Underworld, to Hades, as a sign of possible access between this world and the other. Like a milestone at a road junction, it also indicates that a crossing is never trivial, and that here we are entering a symbolic space.

Brass, rivets
30 x 11 x 6 cm

Hallway «Thirokeion» Ithaka



After the greeting 'ΧΑΙΠΕ, rejoice!' on the mosaic floor, a curtain of words in the hallway acts as a second door.

Strips of polished brass, strung together, display the first stanzas, in Greek, of the poem Ithaka (1911) by Constantin Cavafy.

A Greek from Egypt (Alexandria), this major poet and champion of a certain Hellenism gives us his version of a journey whose end is less important than the road itself.

*«As you set out for Ithaka
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.*

*Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body. (...)*

*May there be many summer mornings when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you enter harbors
you're seeing for the first time. »*

[Full poem](#)

Embossed brass, rings
250 x 310 cm

Baths « Balaneion » **Mnemosyne**



Prussian blue curtains, studded with white dots, hang between the columns, partially veiling the alcove at the back.



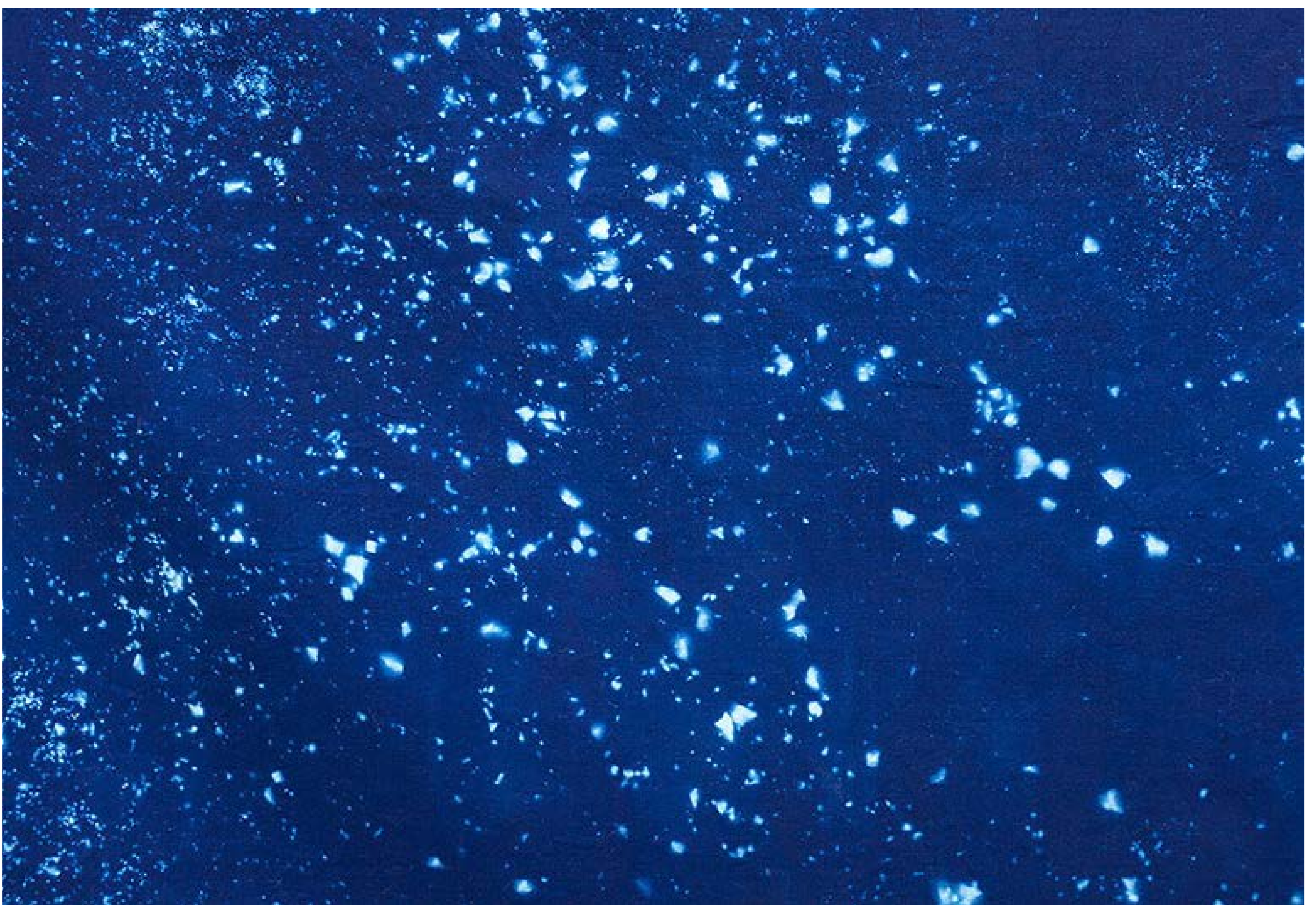
In the centre of the basin, a copper goblet sits on a modest country tripod. A chain, passing through the slit between the curtains, links the receptacle to the backside, from which the water can be heard running.

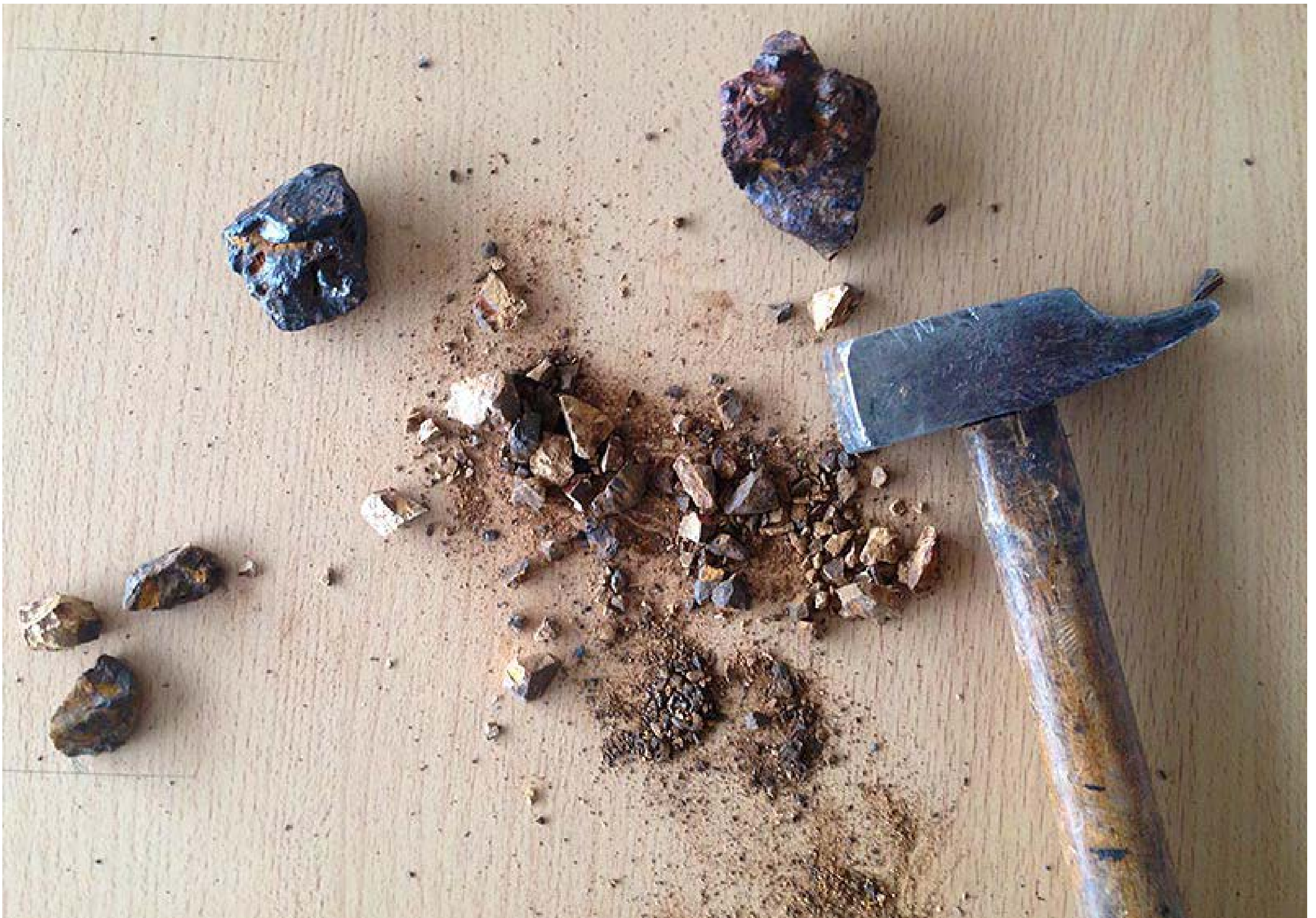
This scene is a reference to the beliefs of the Orphic mystical current (6th century BC-4th century AD), and in particular to what awaits the soul after the death of the body.

The soul is thirsty, but must not drink from the fountain of Oblivion (Lethe) where the other souls go.

The initiate knows that he or she must drink from the Lake of Memory (Mnemosyne) in order to stop the cycle of reincarnation.

To do this, they must say the following as their viaticum: 'I am the son of the Earth and the starry sky; I'm dying of thirst and fainting; give me water to drink from the lake of Mnemosyne'.





The starry curtain is actually a photograph, or rather a photogram: the fabric has been coated with a sensitive cyanotype solution, then exposed to the sun so that it turns blue. Pieces of meteorite, crushed by the artist and scattered randomly across the surface, became the white dots that represent the stars.

The stool is a milking tripod, small enough to be at the height of the cows' and goats' udders. This direct link to milk, in parallel with the Milky Way on the curtain, echoes the sibylline phrase of the Orphics: 'Like a baby goat I ran towards the milk'.

Cyanotype on fabric, brass, copper,
wood, magnets
Variable dimensions

Peristyle

Will I Be Happy?



At the centre of the colonnade, the oleander has been used as a prayer tree, a practice common to many cultures and civilisations.

Brass ribbons of varying lengths hang from its branches. On these metal strips, words have been embossed one after the other, like the first telegrams.



Ancient words: these are all the questions that were asked in ancient times to one of the oldest oracles in Greece, that of Dodona - whose divination was linked to a tree.

But they are also timeless words, questions that take us back to an unchanged humanity, with concerns that are still relevant today: health, money, family...

‘Should I move abroad?’ ‘Do I have to go abroad to find work?’ ‘How can I recover my health?’ ‘Will I find happiness?’

Embossed brass ribbons



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Peristyle

Remember



In a niche on the gallery wall, a face has its eyes hidden by a curtain of starry night (see **Mnemosyne**).

This is the bust of Homer, who, according to legend, was blind. So the curtain does not hide his sight, but rather symbolises the inner world of the storyteller.

The starry night also suggests the possibility of dreaming, the importance of introspection, and the power of imagination.

Aren't Ulysses or Achilles still with us?

Cyanotype on cotton
100 x 80 cm

Library

Philodemus



From the library's high passageways hang long brass ribbons embossed with Greek words. This is the beginning of an essay written around the first century AD and entitled On poems.

Written by Philodemus of Gadara, an Epicurean poet and philosopher, this text has recently been deciphered in its entirety (2020), after repeated attempts since 1763: it was written on papyrus scrolls charred at Herculaneum during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

This is the first time since 79 AD that we are able to read them. The themes developed in this passage are: ‘poetry is not just a pleasant sound’, ‘bad content does not necessarily make bad verse’ and ‘is the poet’s material comparable to that of other craftsmen?’

Embossed brass ribbons
10 x 12500 cm

Library

The Gold of Time

« It is here in the company of the Greek orators, scholars and poets that I have created a peaceful retreat among immortal beauty. »

Beneath this founding phrase hangs a large brass plaque with a surface covered in Greek letters. It resembles the ancient gold strips on which the Orphics used to inscribe instructions for the journey of the deceased.



Here, on the contrary, it is a poem addressed to all the living. The result of extensive research and reading, this text is a collection, verse by verse, of Greek poems from Antiquity to the present day.

There is no chronology, because «isn't the very essence of poetry to escape time? This is how we hear the voice of the poets of yesteryear, despite the light years that may separate us from them»
(Jacques Lacarrière, Orphée, *in* Dictionnaire amoureux de la Grèce).

Antiques: Sappho, Golden Lamellae, Heraclitus, Palatine Anthology (Palladas, Glykonos, Ptolemy, anonymous), epitaph of Seikilos.

Modern: Cornaros, Elytis, Sэфэрис.

Contemporary: Rouvalis, Erinakis, Kyparissis, Poullos, Liondakis, Stravropoulos, Ganas.

(Translation on next page)

Perforated and riveted brass, steel structure
134 x 300 cm

The Gold of Time (excerpt)

I have something to say that is crystal clear
and inconceivable
words that don't make you laugh,
neither ornate nor festooned
I know that I am mortal and ephemeral
life is a theatre and a game
life is an essay transparent stone
pulsation untouched night
we are the grain that dies
we are reborn day after day from the night
keeping nothing of our previous existence
we already caress the grass
that will grow on us and our cities
we have become strangers to yesterday
and start a new existence today
and we have said let us become water
water without memory between the shadows
I'm burning and perishing with thirst
I ask a thousand years or an instant
what sparks does memory preserve
what is next and what is not
our decision to forget
who will take it into account

I say to myself what have I retained
how many times
have I found myself inside the word
that caught fire and is still burning
for me neither honey nor bees
I regret having let a wide river flow
through my fingers without drinking a drop
words know
poetry alone is what remains
poetry just essential and right
the Sibyl's voice travels
through thousands of years
and memory returns to sunken cellars
on broken bridges
where the winds blow gently
walk the unknown road
further on you will find cold water
flowing from the lake of Mnemosyne
the road that goes up and down
one and the same
this path is endless without change
but you have to calculate where you're going
...

Dining room «Triklinos» **The Exile's Banquet**



On the dining room tables, loaves of bread are presented in large brass dishes. A staple food since Neolithic times, bread has been an integral part of human history, almost defining it. Didn't Ulysses describe mankind as 'bread eaters', unlike the Cyclops?

Paradoxically, bread is a marker of prosperity as well as simplicity and humility. It is a wealth that is shared, a common good.



These are special: the artist made them himself, with a sourdough he created in Athens. To be born, it needs flour, water and the bacteria in the air; each sourdough is absolutely unique, because it bears the mark of a specific time and place.



The breads on the tables are therefore authentic ‘Greek breads’.

Living room «Andrôn» **Seek and You Shall Find**



Beneath one of the chandeliers in the living room, a multitude of polished brass strips cascade over the mosaic of the labyrinth where Theseus and the Minotaur battle endlessly.

In symmetry with the ribbons of questions to the Oracle of Dodona (hanging from the tree in the peristyle), these present all the known answers of the Delphic Oracle. Active for over ten centuries, this was the most important oracle in Greece.

Its answers, as much legendary as proven, are part of its literary heritage: strange or hallucinatory poetry, filtered by the priests surrounding the Pythia, they are the counterpart of the simple, down-to-earth questions asked to the oracle of Dodona.

Between the distant light of divinity and the labyrinth of human life, the oracle offered a possible, immediate, transcendent link.

Embossed brass strips, steel structure
230 x 82 x 82 cm

Living room «Andrôn» - Altar **La Vita**



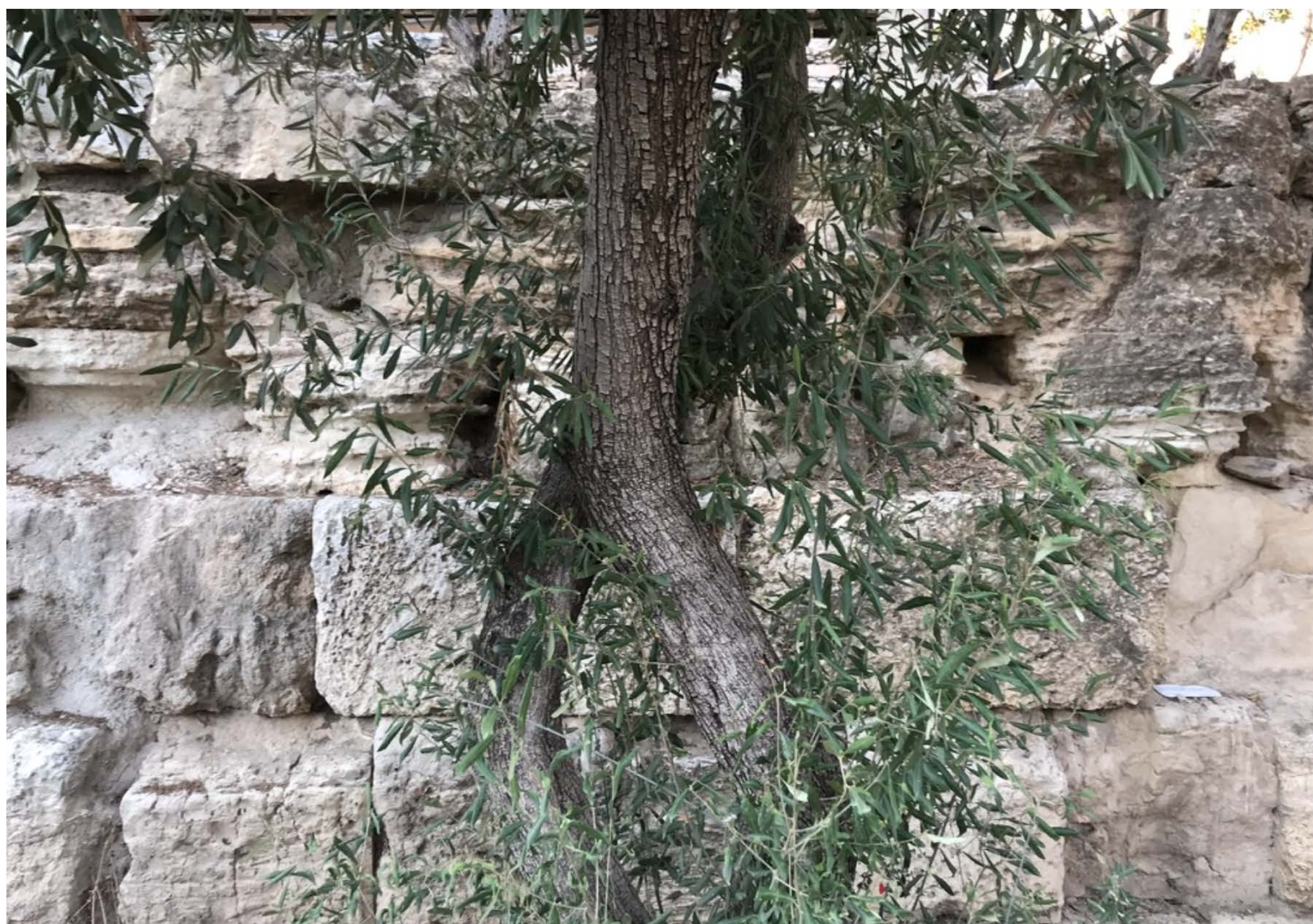
On the altar to the unknown god (a replica of equivalents from ancient Greece, erected so as not to forget any local god), wreaths of plants hang from a steel plate. Ancient and Christian sacred symbolism alternate, between that of victory (olive tree) and pain (thorns).

For «life is, always and everywhere, escape and liberation; escape from prison, release, explosion and blossoming. All lives, all the moments of all lives». (Giovanni Papini, 1912)



These plants (except for the brambles) were carefully collected by the artist from major sites in ancient Athens: the Acropolis, Plato’s Academy, Socrates’ Rock, Eleusis...





He then passed them through the hand of Midas, using the electroplating technique (see 1st floor - [Bedroom «Ornithes»](#)). From fragile and perishable, they thus became eternal, fixed by the metal.

Electroplated organic elements, steel plate
Plate: 95 x 48 cm

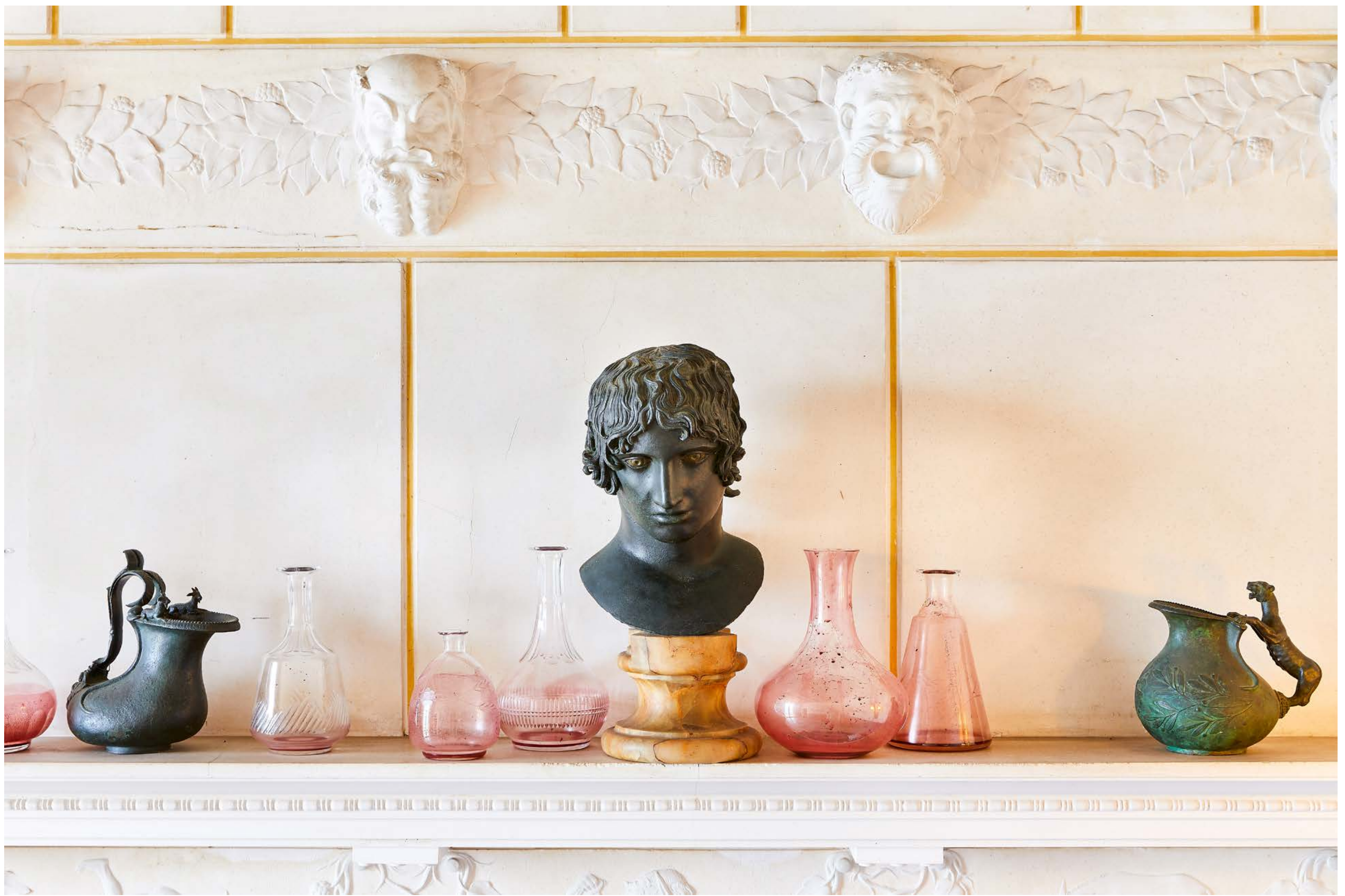
Music room «Oikos»

Son of the Earth and of the Starry Sky



A starry blue hanging runs along the walls (see **Mnemosyne**). Above it, decanters containing leftover wine are arranged on shelves.

The link between the two is Dionysus, to whom this room is dedicated. We know the importance of wine as a source of mystical drunkenness in the Dionysian myths, as in the Bacchanalia.



Dionysus, who had been saved from death, was also considered the principal god of the dead. He secretly inspired ‘mystery cults’ such as Orphism and the cult of Demeter at Eleusis.

‘I am the son of the Earth and of the starry Sky’ is the cryptic formula that the Orphics had to pronounce in Hades to gain eternal life.

Cyanotype on cotton, glass decanters
Variable dimensions

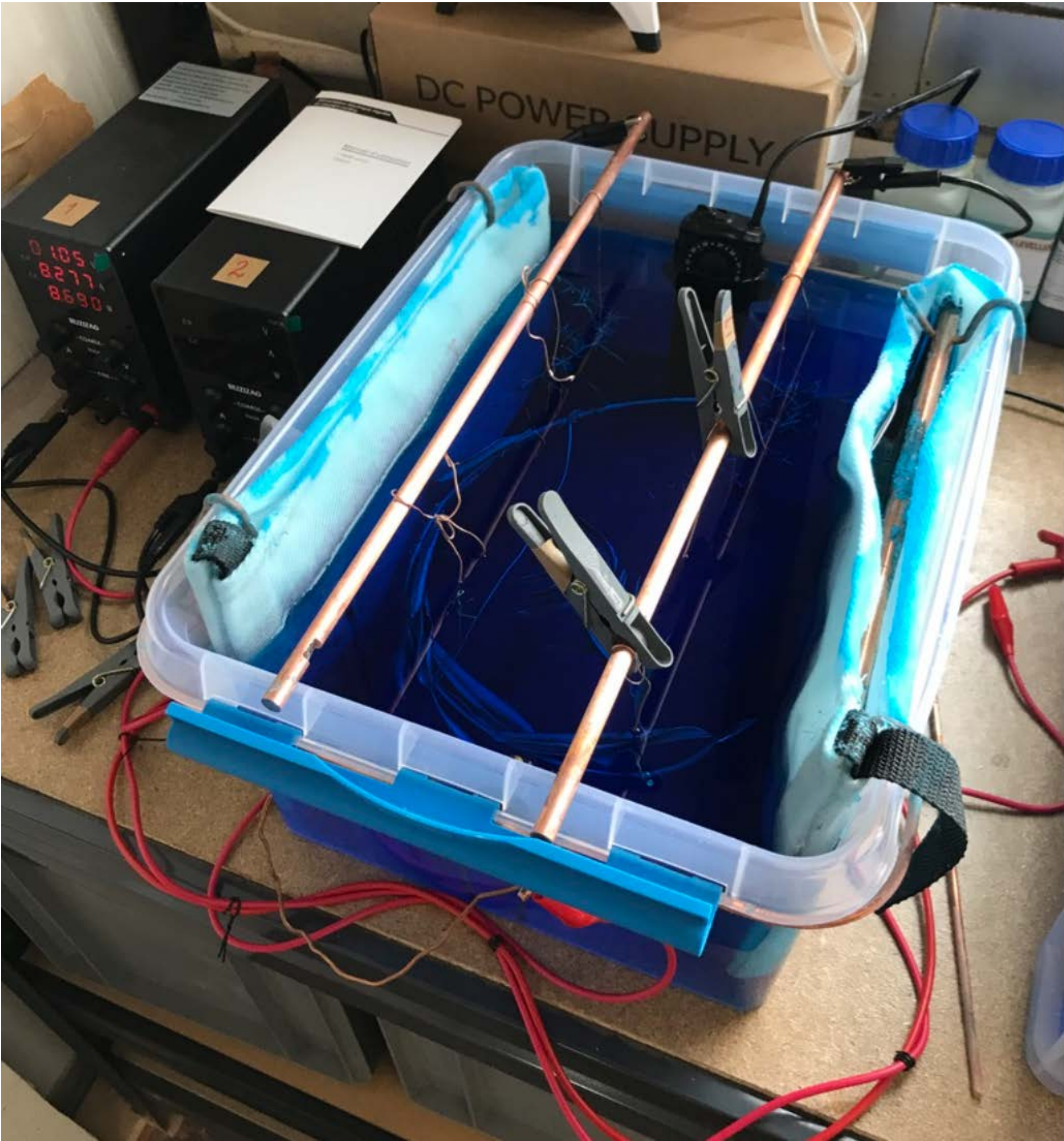
1st floor – Bedroom «Ornithes» **To the Same Gardens You Will Return**



Numerous branches, leaves and flowers float above the bed. They have been selected and gathered from prominent sites of ancient Athens (see [La Vita](#)).



Later in his studio, the artist has immersed them in an electroplating bath in order to coat them in copper.





Thus maintained by the metal in this durable state, humble plants become precious relics, remnants from a glorious past.

Electroplated leaves, branches and flowers,
copper, steel
± 200 x 120 x 172 cm



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Bathroom « Nikê » **Friday of Eternal Rain**



Inside the marble bathtub, which appears to have been filled with mercury, a bronze plaque presents its silvery, moon-like surface. It is the immutable witness of a fleeting moment: rain falling on Athens on Friday 6th December, 2024.

That morning, Gabriel Leger took the mould of the impacts of the drops on the earth, and then had it cast in bronze.

‘In what past does this rain fall?’ asks Borges in one of his poems. Thanks to the recording made by the artist, this rain from the past, in a time bubble, never stops falling.

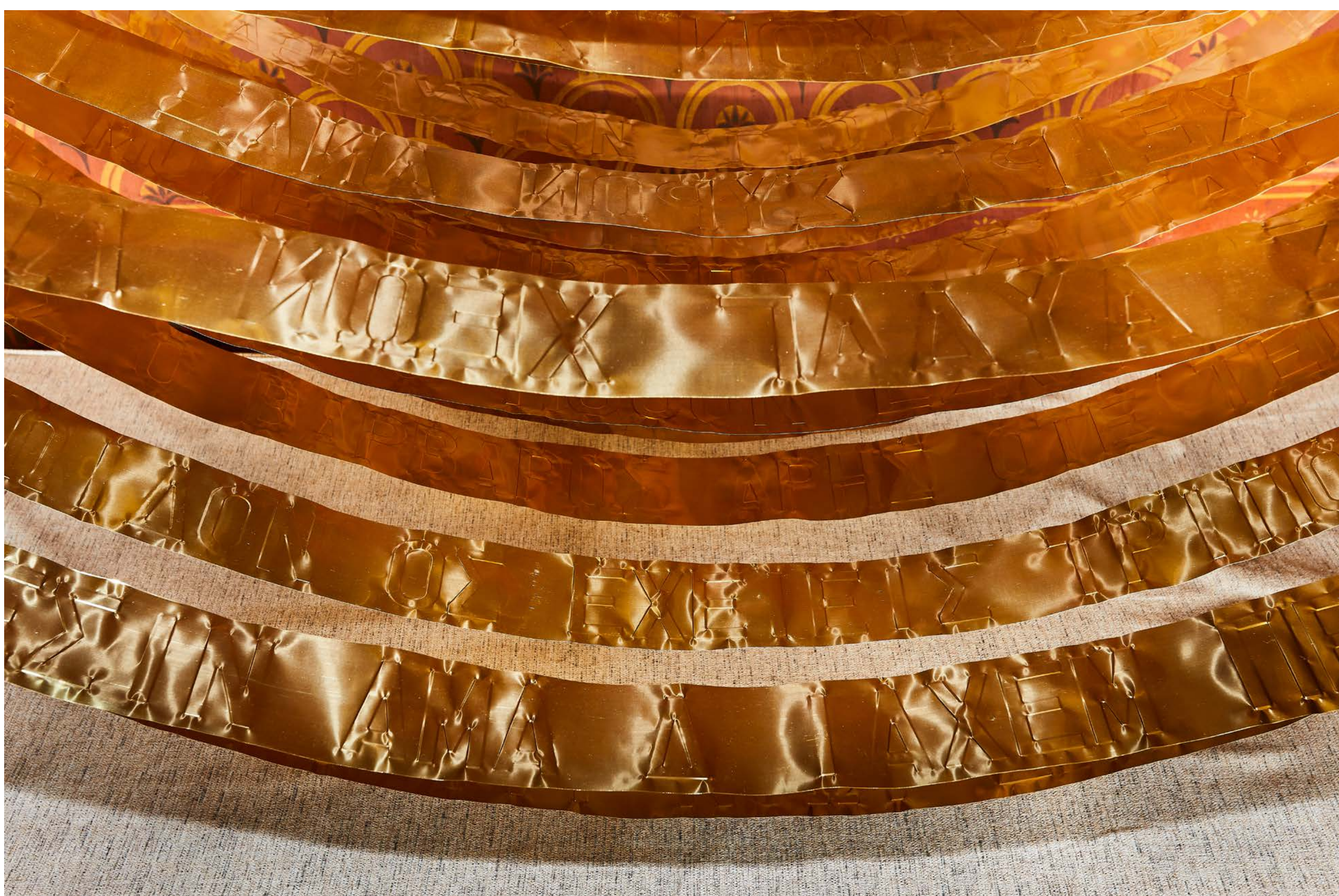
Bronze, silver plating
154,5 x 56,5 cm

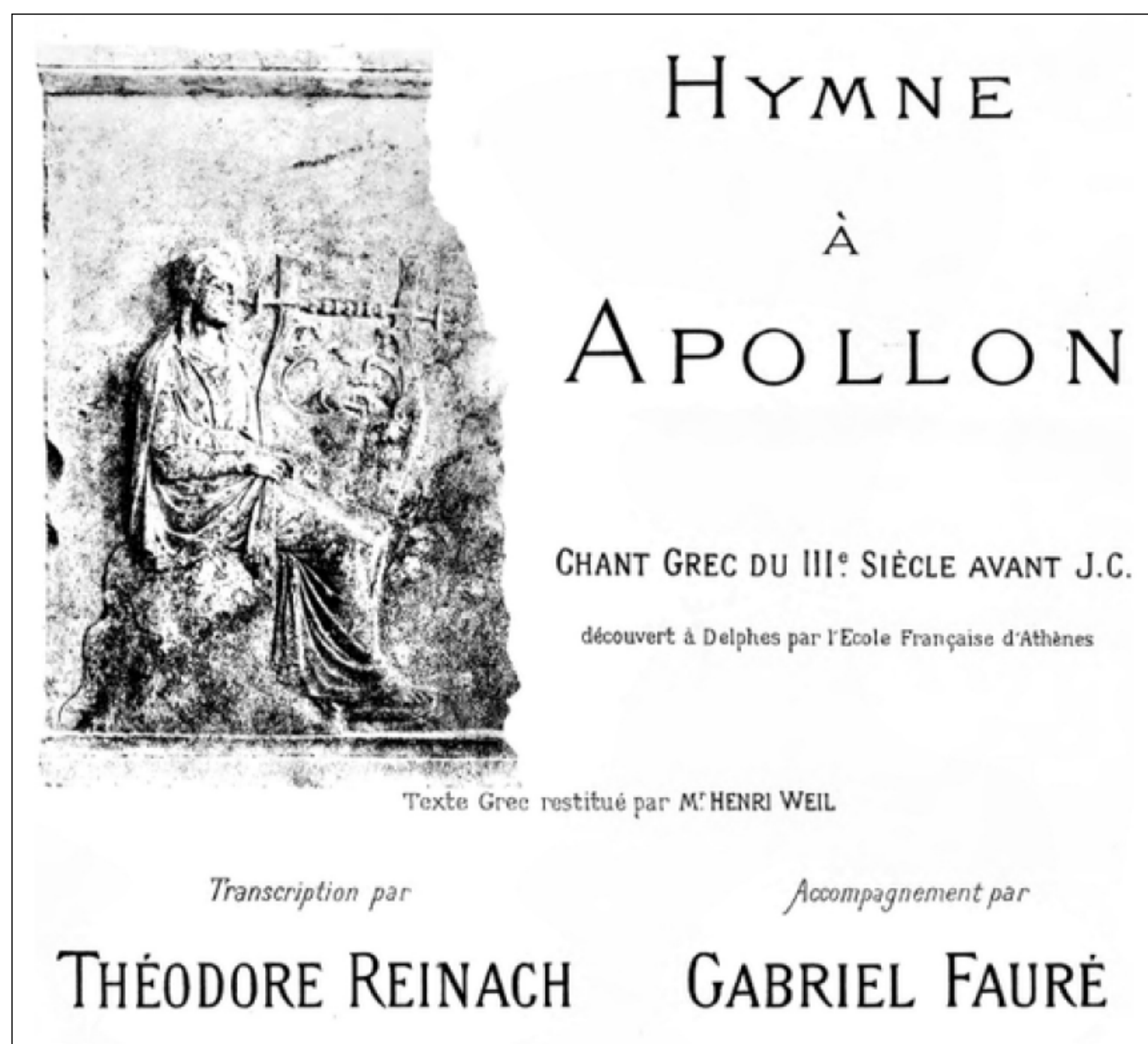
Bedroom « Erotes »

Listen



Long brass ribbons, like a canopy, overhang Théodore Reinach's bed. They are embossed with a long musical score that is deeply linked to his personal history: the Delphic hymns.





These verses were discovered during the excavations at Delphi in 1893, engraved on a marble wall. Reinach transcribed them, giving the modern listener access for the first time to the sounds of ancient Greek music.

The musical notation, faithfully reproduced by the artist, was done by means of small letters inscribed above the chant to be sung.

«The ancient world never existed, but, undoubtedly, we dreamt it», once said Fellini about his movie The Satyricon. We could propose the opposite here: the ancient world existed, because we heard it.

And read it.

And picked it.

Embossed brass strips, steel structure
strips: 15 300 cm

Structure ± 284 x 100 cm

For further information

villakerylos.fr

gabrielleger.com

 [gabriel_leger](https://www.instagram.com/gabriel_leger)

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Photos

Exhibition photos
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Work in process photos
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