

New York

Vlassis Caniaris

TEAM

47 Wooster Street

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Though nearly four decades old, the six sculptural assemblages by the late Vlassis Caniaris on view in this exhibition feel unexpectedly timely. Cobbled together from the modest detritus of everyday life, these decidedly “unmonumental” tableaux, made in 1973 and 1974, are filled with images and objects that suggest mobility and travel, but the liberatory promise of departure to elsewhere is always tempered by the knowledge of the real hardships often faced upon arrival. Caniaris fled a dictatorship in his native Greece in 1956 and moved between various European capitals before returning to Athens in 1976. His thoughtfully restrained work quietly emits the pathos and precariousness of an unanchored existence, a lived reality for millions of migrants and refugees worldwide.

Aufenthalt/Stop, 1974, is a masterful object study in drab and rust: A twisted bicycle and some dented metal cans lie across a rectangle of dusty gray rubber. The scene is watched over by a stoic headless figure outfitted in shabby men’s clothes. In *Bicycle*, 1974, the titular vehicle is missing its front wheel and perches atop a painted panel as if disappearing into sky-blue oblivion. The piece seems to materialize Bas Jan Ader’s famous *Fall II*, 1970, in which the artist dove into an Amsterdam canal on his bike. The playful melancholy that characterizes much of Ader’s oeuvre courses through Caniaris’s sculptures.

Caniaris’s playfulness also recalls the wonder and resourcefulness of a child. While the ad hoc abode of *Interior*, 1974—three plywood walls covered with fading wallpaper and repurposed newspaper—is stacked full of dingy carpet remnants and weathered suitcases and beat-up bird cages, it also includes such whimsies as a jauntily naive painting of a sailboat and a toy truck that has lost its wheels but acquired some cardboard wings. And in the endearing *Without Words*, 1973, a diminutive figure, wearing a red dress and roller skates, drags along a small wooden crate, an improvised toy that also impedes motion. Regardless, with shoes neatly tucked under her arms, she is prepared, once the time is right, to stop merely rolling along and purposefully stride into her new home.



Vlassis Caniaris, *Without Words*, 1973,
mixed media, 30 x 41 x 53”.

— Murtaza Vali