

“SU as Water”

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“Locating my painting under the water some years ago, an event that may, in fact, always have constituted my goal, led me to rediscover my security anew” observes Maria Filopoulou, distilling her artistic goals over the past years, in a recent discussion on the occasion of her solo exhibition in Istanbul.

“Above is a dome (just like the high-ceilinged rooms of worn-down neoclassical houses in Athens or the greenhouses of a previous chapter of her paintings) and below, within the sea, are the bodies of swimmers, delineated within the enclosure of the water, which was always one of my obsessions. With the help of buoyancy, I appropriate as my own, what may be a banal image. I can examine the body in an entirely different manner; I can create a new aspect of matters, which, in turn, permeated by a strong sense of freedom. I’m not interested in the national identity of this crowd. There are couples who are sexually involved, there are other people swimming alone. Within this watery field, however, what I am interested in, is that one does not disturb the other. I first saw this image that has occupied me so obsessively over the past few years in the Aegean, on the island of Milos: an encounter that was soundless, yet life-giving, on the margins of a rare liquid transparency. Which, even though I am not fond of crowding when I am swimming, did not bother me, because it showed me a new artistic path: bodies that coexist, paradoxical exercises of refracted light. Since then I continue to be fascinated by anything that is related to swimmers: Turkish baths, seas, ancient swimming pools with hovering oleanders and sunken architectural fragments – that also arose from a specific image in the ancient city of Ierapolis in Turkey, the waterfalls of Samothrace and the natural water cisterns that form there and, of course, the swimmers themselves in and out of the water: they always include human points of reference, I increasingly keep coming back to the human presence. These starting points help me; rendering the liquid element does not require the boundaries of a frame, which personally I abolish in the painting process. This is also why I work on the floor, or on a wall, on simple cloth, with successive layers of colour, putting off the process of the stretched canvas frame. I love random elements just as much. They remain organised, attempting to insinuate themselves into the innermost sensation of water, creating fragments of chaos, which will later meet. Operating on instinct, I always want my next piece to go even further, to remain a surprise”.

In choosing the eloquent title “Water” for the first solo showing of her oeuvre in Istanbul, the distinguished Greek artist introduces herself to the Turkish public by putting before it the main thematic lines of her painting over the past few years, coexisting side-by-side, but also in a productive discourse with each other; all directly or indirectly referencing the same liquid element and the potential to be drawn into it: even when the water isn’t the dominant theme

of the painting, the absolute moment of the illustrated euphoria of the painter's subject is the result of their contact with that element, which constitutes a basic catalyst for the viewer to comprehend the painting.

Maria Filopoulou's exhibition at Teşvikiye Sanat gathers together large and medium scale works, created specifically in order to present her oeuvre in Istanbul. The characteristic underwater views of swimmers, which to a great extent owe their inspiration from the ancient submerged city of Ierapolis in Turkey (Pamukkale), the coastal landscapes of the Greek coastline, the mystical waterfalls of Samothrace, as well as the recent lambent nudes placed on pebbled beaches, constitute the most recent field of study and experimentation on the part of the painter, are presented jointly, to create the chapter "Su": a second reading, but also a contemporary tour of the illustrative lines of the lambent world of water and its initiates, which absorbs the painter and influences her creativity.

Following her retrospective in 2009 at the Ermoupoleia Festival on the island of Syros, which brought together all the chapters of her work since 1989 (studio interiors, helical staircases in neoclassical buildings, abandoned greenhouses, idyllic seas and blissful swimmers), Maria Filopoulou presented a new series of works on waterfalls at the Zoumboulakis Galleries in Athens in the autumn of 2011, which in April 2013 she had yet another solo exhibition in London. As part of the chapter "SU", both the complex emblematic narrative and the recognisable style of her works are now put forth to the Turkish public as an imaginary and symbolic artistic concentration of Greekness, which viewers are called upon to discover and to travel through on its presentation in Istanbul.

The characteristic monumental dimension sought by the artist, and chosen for several of the artworks shown here, contrives to liberate the firm, often painstakingly gestural process of her style, taking pleasure in the limitless expanse freed for the gaze, the frenetic drips of colour, the apparently unorthodox choice of viewing angle on the image, which abrogates all frames and diffuses the painting into perpetuity. Filopoulou's canvases pulse with light and in them we ascertain an experienced and autobiographical continuation of her long-term relationship with life-giving water. We find again the riveting, unerring vocabulary of paradisiacal blues and organic, fluid greens of the water; blinding whites of rocks strewn haphazardly under the sun; murmuring of peach and ochre tones of the horizon, interrupted by dramatic natural volumes; an abstract admixture of transparency, shadow and light, of a timeless mythic landscape with an ideal microclimate. In the sum of her oeuvre over the past few years, Maria Filopoulou examines the potential for a drastic transposition of things through the act of painting. The element of water, pleasurable and life-giving, dotted with swimmers hovering blissfully and ancient remains, brings myth and reality together in a unique way. The sequential blue surfaces are transformed into a cistern of light, while painted matter is transposed into spirit, memory and motion, pushing the realist style to its boundaries.

Following the chapter of the “Swimmers” the mystical landscape of the viscera of Samothrace, dotted with waterfalls, ponds and natural cisterns, dissolves into its organic elements, at times seen from above and at other times penetrating the liquid sancta of a delightful universe, dappled with silent bathers, baptised in the pleasure of the water like Adam and Eve, reminding us how often the idyllic discourses with the primordial.

Parallel notes of the landscape itself, female and male bodies shaped with anatomical draughtsmanship and purity of line, volume and colour, they establish themselves on smaller pictorial surfaces, disseminating their bright traces in blinding outflows and niches of water and rock, offering up to the viewer’s gaze a novel locus of blinding sculptural existence.

Filopoulou’s works, in their entirety, champion the essential objective of their generous proportion and their complex narrative intentions – they offer unexplored, self-sufficient worlds, which demand that a viewer's gaze sink into them, and seize the viewer's emotions. And they define euphoric pictorial planes of noontime, which pulsate with their own dynamic, and establish new, exciting coordinates for realist painting.