

The Lesbian Space of Contemporary Greek-Cypriot Art

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Abstract

This paper traces the ways Greek-Cypriot self-confessed lesbian artist Charitini Kyriakou takes up space in her visual work. It examines the sexual and spatial orientation in Kyriakou's artistic and curatorial practices by focusing on four of her solo exhibitions from the last decade: 'Months Stay' («Μήνες Μείνε») (2010), 'My Personal Persons' («Προσωπικά μου Πρόσωπα») (2011), 'Rooms' («Δωμάτια») (2016) and 'Desire's Erebus' («Του Πόθου το Ερεβώδες») (2018). As will be shown, the lesbian space of Kyriakou agrees with lesbian assembling practices, highlights the everyday as a site of creativity, delight, and protection, privileges the inner world, assumes a lesbian habitus through deportment, disposition, and attire, as well as transgresses heteronormativity's spatial, sexual, and national boundaries.

Keywords: gender, sexuality, desire, queer, lesbian, space, orientation, visual art, heteronormativity, Cyprus

Introduction

Contemporary Greek-Cypriot art has flourished in Nicosia over the past decade.² Within this blossoming art scene, emerged also a queer subculture that has been demonstrating a tactical use of formal and informal art institutions to show queer art, resist heteronormativity, connect with others, and gain recognition.³ Current scholarship on queer identities in Cyprus is limited and although ample work has been done on gay male sexuality worldwide, work on lesbian sexuality and lesbian spaces is in turn poor.⁴ This paper seeks to map the queer use of space, specifi-

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² Regarding the urban regeneration of Nicosia in the 1980s and the subsequent flourishing of the Nicosia art scene, see M. Zackheos and N. Philippou, 'Nicosia's Queer Art Subculture: Outside and Inside Formal Institutions', in *Contemporary Art in Cyprus: Politics, Identity and Culture Across Borders*, eds. E. Tselika, E. Stylianou and G. Koureas (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2020).

³ The tactical use of formal and informal art institutions by the queer subculture of Nicosia has been explored at length in Zackheos and Philippou, 'Nicosia's Queer Art Subculture: Outside and Inside Formal Institutions'.

⁴ C. Hammers, 'Space, Agency, and the Transfiguring of Lesbian/Queer Desire', *Journal of Homosex-*

cally of a lesbian sensibility,⁵ in the artistic and curatorial practices of one prolific Greek-Cypriot artist, Charitini Kyriakou. It concentrates on how Kyriakou makes use of space in four of her solo exhibitions from the last decade:⁶ ‘Months Stay’ («Μήνες Μείνε») (2010), ‘My Personal Persons’ («Προσωπικά μου Πρόσωπα») (2011), ‘Rooms’ («Δωμάτια») (2016) and ‘Desire’s Erebus’ («Του Πόθου το Ερεβώδες») (2018).⁷ Exploring how Kyriakou orientates herself sexually but also spatially in her visual art initiates an archiving of the lesbian art scene in Cyprus and contributes to contemporary art discussions on the island and abroad concerning queer subjectivities.⁸

Locating Lesbian Sexualities: Desire, Habitus, and Space

The lesbian art scene in the Republic of Cyprus has so far been left undocumented. This is due partly to the lack of self-confessed lesbian artists on the island. Invisibility of course is one part of the equation on which the paper will expand below. A prevailing erotophobia in a small, close-knit and largely conservative society is another, though the resistance to grapple with lesbian desire in particular is also a global phenomenon.⁹ Expressions of female sexuality that challenge social norms, especially those that are expressed by women themselves have often been pushed to the wayside as incomprehensible,¹⁰ episodic aberrations, or subsumed within a heteronormative narrative as male heterosexual voyeuristic fantasy. Unquestionably, as ‘heteronormative depictions of femininity geared toward a male audience’ have steadily offered ‘a one-dimensional portrayal that permeates almost the entire media industry and society’,¹¹ desire has generally been tackled from a male or heterosexual lens.¹² Even space itself has been viewed as an ‘unequivocally male

uality, Vol. 56, No. 6 (2009), 781.

⁵ In this paper, the term ‘queer’ is used to denote a comprehensive range of sexual and gendered identities and the term ‘lesbian’ is used to refer to the specific identity category.

⁶ An examination of all of Kyriakou’s visual work is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.

⁷ All translations from Greek to English for the titles of the artworks and the quotes used are the author’s own.

⁸ The decision to focus on this particular Greek-Cypriot artist is due to a personal familiarity with Kyriakou and her work but also because she is one of the only self-confessed lesbian artists on the island.

⁹ For a discussion on this bias from the perspective of contemporary Italian culture, see C. Ross, ‘Queering the Habitus: Lesbian Identity in Stancanelli’s “Benzina”’ *Romance Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2004), 240.

¹⁰ Ross, ‘Queering the Habitus’, 241.

¹¹ Hammers, ‘Space, Agency, and the Transfiguring of Lesbian/Queer Desire’, 772.

¹² Hammers, ‘Space, Agency, and the Transfiguring of Lesbian/Queer Desire’, 773.

territory' as is evident in 'the creation of space such as technology, labor, structures, and the state itself'.¹³ Largely excluded from this male public territory, women have been primarily granted the private and domestic sphere to manage.¹⁴ Though there is a substantial amount of literature on sexuality today, scholarship on lesbian sexualities and lesbian spaces remains scant.

Documenting the sexual but also spatial orientation of lesbian subjectivities¹⁵ is crucial in better understanding, valuing, and mapping these subjectivities. Additionally, it contributes to a more comprehensive perspective of the 'sexualization of space, as well as the spatiality of sexual desire'.¹⁶ According to Judith Halberstam, people's behaviour in space is interrelated with their understandings of time. Unlike heteronormative time and space, which are familial, reproductive, and abide by 'the logics of labor and production',¹⁷ queer time and space disrupt these normative forms of belonging by questioning the privileging of property, the couple, the family unit and the nation.¹⁸ Halberstam explains that queer subjects are distinguished

in terms of the ways they live (deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity) during the hours when others sleep and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned, and in terms of the ways they might work in the domains that other people assign to privacy and family. Finally, [...] for some queer subjects, time and space are limned by risks they are willing to take: the transgender person who risks his life by passing in a small town, the subcultural musicians who risk their livelihood by immersing themselves in nonlucrative practices, the queer performers who destabilize the normative values that make everyone else feel safe and secure; but also those people who live without financial safety nets, without homes, without steady jobs, outside the organizations of time and space that have been established for the purposes of protecting the rich few from everyone else.¹⁹

¹³ Hammers, 'Space, Agency, and the Transfiguring of Lesbian/Queer Desire', 758.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ On the significance of investigating orientation's dual senses—sexual and spatial—see Zackheos and Philippou, 'Nicosia's Queer Art Subculture: Outside and Inside Formal Institutions'.

¹⁶ S. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

¹⁷ J. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 10.

¹⁸ L. Berlant and M. Warner, "Sex in Public," in *Intimacy*, ed. Lauren Berlant (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 322.

¹⁹ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 10.

It follows that the 'sexualization of space, as well as the spatiality of sexual desire' conflict between heterosexual and queer subjects.²⁰

But is there something distinct about the ways lesbian subjects in particular orientate themselves? Alison Rooke theorises that 'a lesbian body embodying a lesbian habitus is a site of lesbian distinction where lesbian cultural practices are incorporated and rendered seemingly inherent'.²¹ Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus that views culture as 'habitually inscribed on the body'²² and henceforth forming orientation dispositions, Rooke argues that the lesbian habitus is itself an embodied and performative expression of lesbian sexuality. In other words, 'the ways that lesbian identity is made visible, performed, and expressed can [be] understood as a matter of practices and a practical belief or mastery'.²³ Under this schema, lesbian identity is not a given; it is achieved. As Cheryl A. Parks explains, a woman's familial, social and historical circumstances will affect the timing, progression and result of her coming out and her 'identity developmental process'.²⁴ It follows that achieved lesbian identity can be expressed in a myriad ways: for instance, through deportment, that is, the way one carries oneself, through disposition such as displaying a confident sense of sexuality, or through non-normative attire.²⁵ At times the lesbian habitus is embodied on an 'intangible' level, more like Bourdieu's 'le sens pratique' or the 'feel for the game'.²⁶ Going against the dominant heterosexual habitus, the lesbian habitus is recognisable as being distinct for lesbian sexuality. That is not to say that there is a singular or static lesbian habitus. As in the case of butch and femme lesbians, there is variety in embodied expressions of lesbian sexuality.²⁷ Nonetheless, these expressions are recognisably lesbian and constitute a common language or lexicon of lesbian belonging.

Charting the spatial orientation of lesbian sexualities is no easy matter however,

²⁰ That is not to say that all queer subjects adopt queer lives nor that all heterosexual subjects live strictly straight lives. See Zackheos and Philippou, 'Nicosia's Queer Art Subculture.'

²¹ A. Rooke, 'Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space: Toward a Lesbian Habitus', *Space and Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2007), 239.

²² Rooke, 'Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space', 232.

²³ Rooke, 'Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space', 239.

²⁴ K. Fobear, 'Beyond A Lesbian Space? An Investigation on The Intergenerational Discourse Surrounding Lesbian Public Social Places in Amsterdam', *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 59, No. 5 (2012), 721-747, DOI: 10.1080/00918369.2012.673942.

²⁵ Rooke, 'Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space', 232.

²⁶ Rooke, 'Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space', 239.

²⁷ Ibid.

especially as many choose to remain invisible. Beverley Skeggs notes that ‘most lesbians and gay men learn that most space is heterosexual and they have to develop strategies and tactics for negotiating this unremitting normalization when moving through and occupying space’.²⁸ Many avoid ‘spatializ[ing] their own recognition’ for fear of homophobic violence.²⁹ Petra Doan and Harrison Higgins point out that queer subjects remain extremely alert to their surroundings, scanning for signs of rejection in their milieu in case they need to conceal their identities.³⁰ Having said that, it is women in particular, both heterosexual and queer, who feel that they need to police and protect themselves the most, having learned that ‘they do not belong in many public spaces, that many spaces are not for them’.³¹ Skeggs adds that some choose to dwell in invisibility for ‘invisibility holds the delights of desire and power’.³² Others prefer not to be defined as persons by their sexual orientation and do not publicly claim their queerness. Still other queer subjects seek recognition and belonging in safe, identifiably gay spaces like gay bars and clubs.³³

Be that as it may, sociologist Manuel Castells has observed that the way lesbians concentrate in space is generally different than the way gay men assemble in bars, clubs, and gay residential communities. Unlike men,

Women have rarely had these territorial aspirations: their world attaches more importance to relationships and their networks are ones of solidarity and affection. [...] So when gay men try to liberate themselves from cultural and sexual oppression, they need a physical space from which to strike out. Lesbians on the other hand tend to create their own rich, inner world and political relationship with higher, societal levels. They are ‘placeless’ and much more radical in their struggle.³⁴

Even existing lesbian neighbourhoods like Park Slope in New York and the

²⁸ B. Skeggs, ‘Matter out of place: visibility and sexualities in leisure spaces’, *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1999), 214.

²⁹ Skeggs, ‘Matter out of place: visibility and sexualities in leisure spaces’, 220.

³⁰ P. Doan and H. Higgins, ‘Cognitive Dimensions of Way-Finding: The Implications of Habitus, Safety, and Gender Dissonance among Gay and Lesbian Populations’, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, Vol. 41, No. 7 (2009), 1747.

³¹ Skeggs, ‘Matter out of place: visibility and sexualities in leisure spaces’, 222.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Skeggs, ‘Matter out of place: visibility and sexualities in leisure spaces’, 221.

³⁴ A. Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), 175.

Mission in San Francisco ‘lack the outward appearance that makes them cohere as visible spaces in areas dominated by men.’³⁵ Instead, they are marked more by their strong social networking without repeating gay men’s ‘ghettolike isolation’.³⁶ Similarly, lesbian hangouts are often not bars but, as Rooke points out, ‘temporary “women’s nights” at different venues on different nights of the week or month’.³⁷ Sara Ahmed also notes that lesbians ‘exten[d] differently into space through tending toward “other women”’, which makes ““becoming lesbian” a very social experience, redefining desire as a form of action that shapes bodies and worlds’.³⁸

Related to this more ‘undetected’ and ‘unterritorial’ tendency for women to extend toward their social connections rather than toward the visible and material expression of queer cultures through gay bar and gay club institutions³⁹ is another most significant space which queer subjects inhabit and in which they orientate themselves: the space of the everyday. The everyday is a ‘lived practice, found in routine movement through space’.⁴⁰ According to Henri Lefebvre, the everyday refers to what is left over after significant or spectacular occasions. The everyday is the hidden facet of life.⁴¹ For Michel De Certeau, the everyday is significant for its ‘fleeting moments of resistance, inventiveness, and agency within a commodified culture’.⁴² In turn, Rooke postulates regarding lesbian and bisexual women’s everydayness that ‘The space of the everyday tells us of the micro politics of simply getting by, getting on with it, and finding our own pleasures amid the difficulties of living in the city’.⁴³

As will be shown in the analysis below of Kyriakou’s work,⁴⁴ the everyday is certainly a vital lesbian space that offers safety, delight, and creativity. In addition to this expression of everyday lesbianism, the lesbian space for Kyriakou favours the reinforcement of social connections and the exploration of one’s inner world. It assumes a lesbian habitus through characteristics like deportment, disposition and

³⁵ Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*, 176.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rooke, ‘Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space’, 241.

³⁸ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 102.

³⁹ Altogether, queer spaces whether these are private or public can be seen ‘as sites for claims for visibility and invisibility, for legitimacy, for avoidance of pathology. See Skeggs, ‘Matter out of place: visibility and sexualities in leisure spaces’, 220.

⁴⁰ Rooke, ‘Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space’, 233.

⁴¹ Rooke, ‘Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space’, 234.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Rooke, ‘Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space’, 233.

⁴⁴ Kyriakou’s work is available for viewing at <http://www.xaritini.com/>.

attire. Finally, it challenges heteronormative notions of time and space that value reproduction, blood ties, affluence, and belonging through nationhood.

The Artist

Born in Nicosia in 1979, Kyriakou is an exceptionally talented, productive and prominent artist in the contemporary Cyprus art scene. To date, she has had six solo art exhibitions, all held within the walls of Old Nicosia. In 2001, Kyriakou presented her first exhibition titled 'Femininus' («Θήλυ») at offbeat café-bar 'Kaf-eodio' («Καφεωδείο») on Onasagorou Street (now defunct). In 2009, she showed her self-titled work 'Charitini' («Χαριτίνη») at Gallery 2 on Aeschylou Street (now also defunct). In 2010, 13 pencil drawings, created for a 2011 daily agenda titled 'Months Stay' («Μήνες Μείνε»), were featured in Kyriakou's third solo art exhibition at Temporary Space also on Aeschylou Street (again defunct). In 2011, Kyriakou's fourth exhibition 'My Personal Persons' («Προσωπικά μου Πρόσωπα») was shown at Is Not Gallery on Odysseos Street. Kyriakou's fifth exhibition 'Rooms' («Δωμάτια») was set up at the multipurpose arts and culture venue The Garage in 2016. Lastly, her sixth exhibition 'Desire's Erebus' («Του Πόθου το Ερεβώδες») was shown again at Is Not Gallery.⁴⁵

Aside from a painter, Kyriakou is a musician, poet, and clay artist. Kyriakou sings, plays percussion, the guitar and tzouras, composing and recording her songs often in her home studio. Her first poetic collection 'Because I Ero' («Αφού Ερώ»)⁴⁶ was self-published in 2016 featuring both verses and pencil drawings. In 2017, she created a series of miniature clay figurines, primarily female (often accompanied by a dog or cat), engaged in various activities such as reading in an armchair, playing the piano or staring at an open refrigerator (naming these pieces in Cypriot Greek «Τα Πηλά»⁴⁷ meaning 'The Muddies'). These were successfully sold at the artist collective shop Phaneromenis 70 and also at Prozac Café.

Especially worth noting is that Kyriakou is one of very few self-confessed lesbian artists currently active in Cyprus.⁴⁸ Regardless of the artistic medium, Kyriak-

⁴⁵ More recently, in 2019, she showed and sold drawings in pencil, ink and acrylic on paper at Nicosia's artist hang-out coffee-bar Prozac Café in a solo casual event titled 'Artist's Workshop' («Ατελιέ»).

⁴⁶ Meaning 'Because I Lust', Kyriakou here plays with the word 'Eros' («Ερωτας»), in other words sexual love or lust, making up the verb 'to ero'.

⁴⁷ Kyriakou chooses not to capitalize most of the titles of her works but for the purposes of this paper, the standard grammatical rule is followed.

⁴⁸ Greek-Cypriot Athina Antoniadou (b. 1962) is another self-confessed prolific lesbian artist who has

ou's oeuvre exhibits a distinct lesbian sensibility. Her musical compositions often incorporate sensual Latin music elements and rhythms like bossa nova and tango. Lyrics such as 'Do not ask for me to stay here and wait, it is not right. Let time judge the both of us [women] little one' («Μη θες να μείνω εδώ να περιμένω, μη θες, μη θες, δεν είν' αυτό σωστό. Άσε το χρόνο μικρό μου να κρίνει και τις δυό») in the song 'Take Your Time Little One' («Πάρε το Χρόνο σου Μικρό μου») and 'I have no worldly words to tell you, my singular is insignificant as you stand before me' («Δεν έχω να σου πω λόγια του κόσμου, δεν ειν' σημαντικός ο ενικός μου όταν σ' έχω εδώ μπρός μου») in 'Mistress of Mine' («Μαιτρέσσα μου»)⁴⁹ openly express homoerotic themes, especially as they are sung by the female voices of Kyriakou herself and/or lead vocalist Efthymia Alphas of her band Sandy Brouer. Her poetry is similarly explicit regarding same-sex desire. The title alone of her latest poetry collection 'Diary of a Lesbian' («Ημερολόγιο Μιας Λεσβίας») makes Kyriakou's sexuality clear.

Kyriakou's lifestyle largely follows queer time and space. Though she lives primarily through earnings from her books, performances, and works of art, she is also fortunate enough to live in a family-owned rent-free apartment. Overall, she lives outside institutionalised work structures, leading a bohemian lifestyle in which she prioritises the creation of her art and day-to-day freedom at the expense of a nine-to-five job.

The Exhibitions

'Months Stay' («Μήνες Μείνε») at Temporary Space in 2010

In 2010, local publisher A Bookworm Publication commissioned Kyriakou to create drawings for their first publication. The result was a 2011 Agenda titled 'Months

presented artwork all over Europe and even represented Cyprus at the 21st Biennale of Alexandria in 2001. Illustrator and text-based visual artist Lefki Savvidou (b. 1990) is also producing interesting work on the island and exhibiting work in Cyprus and abroad—belonging to a younger generation. Several other female artists choose not to make public their lesbian identities and though there are various self-confessed queer female artists who are especially bold in their art like Despina Michaelidou and Krista Papista (the latter lives in London and is half Greek-Cypriot and half-Australian), nonetheless, they are not lesbian.

⁴⁹ In the song 'Take Your Time Little One', 'the both of us' is expressed using the feminine plural in Greek. Noteworthy is Kyriakou's use of grammar throughout her work. Note for instance in the song 'Mistress of Mine' where she turns herself into a 'singular'. According to Alison Rooke, 'The lesbian habitus is a matter of practices, embodied acts, drives, and desires, an underlying embodied *grammar*' (emphasis added). See Rooke, 'Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space: Toward a Lesbian Habitus', 246.

Stay' («Μήνες Μείνε») that featured 12 pencil drawings, one for each month of the year, including an additional artwork for the cover. Subsequently, along with copies of the agenda, the original drawings created on white A4 paper were shown and sold at local photographer Elia Eliades' studio called Temporary Space on Aeschylou Street in Old Nicosia.⁵⁰

In this third solo exhibition, Kyriakou captures the everyday delights of her protagonists. A little boy licks his ice-cream cone in front of an ice-cream truck in 'June'. Another child carries its bag of beach toys, goggles, watermelon and caught crab on its shoulder by the seashore in 'September'. A woman drinks wine in front of a window overlooking the streets of Old Nicosia in 'November'. A figure places a log of wood in the fireplace in 'December'.

In certain drawings, the everyday takes an unexpected form. In 'February', a dog's image sleeping on a plush cushion is reflected in a teabag. In 'April', a pair of feet in bunny slippers peek out underneath a kitchen table. A traditional Greek Easter bread, a drinking glass, and a lit candle rest on the table, while a spoon balancing an egg hovers above alongside two butterflies. The drawings are whimsical, creating games and new possibilities with their surroundings: packaging a sleeping pet into a tea bag to drink; turning two simple household objects, that of an egg and a spoon into an egg-spoon race. This space is that of a thirsty and hungry self for life.

Especially noteworthy is the congregation of solitary young children in Kyriakou's work. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman puts forward that the image of the child, the hope for the future, perpetuates reproductive futurism. Edelman describes reproductive futurism as a 'teleological determination,' a fantasy that temporalises the desire for completeness in the future.⁵¹ He argues that the repetitive conjuring of the child image depicts 'the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity.'⁵² Heteronormativity, being the futuristic identity of 'the social order,'⁵³ resists any disturbance to its goal of achieving fullness, unlike queerness which disturbs heteronormative identity⁵⁴ by 'nam[ing] the side of those not "fighting for the children"'.⁵⁵ He most famously and controversially has written:

⁵⁰ Eliades often rented out his studio space to other artists.

⁵¹ Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 9.

⁵² Edelman, *No Future*, 21.

⁵³ Edelman, *No Future*, 25.

⁵⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, 17.

⁵⁵ Edelman, *No Future*, 3.

Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital Ls and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.⁵⁶

One might argue that Kyriakou upholds a heteronormative understanding of the optimism symbolised by the child but in contrast to Edelman's Child that is symbolic of reproductive futurism, Kyriakou's images seem to question the privileging of the family unit. Like the majority of Kyriakou's adult figures, Kyriakou's children are unaccompanied and self-governing with no clear connection to a family unit. They are masters of themselves and of their own futures.

For example, 'March' features a child in a cape sitting on a branch of a blossoming tree and looking forward, with its back facing the viewer in a hilly landscape (Figure 1). There are stitches outlining the tree, flower and hills of the scene, making it look like the space is in the process of being sewn together with a needle and thread. This is a space of becoming. It is a space of creation or reparation. It appears as a productive rather than reproductive space. It is also a space of regeneration born out of domestic creativity and well-being. Admittedly, it is unclear who is doing the stitching; the child itself, a parental figure, a higher power or the artist. However, this ambiguity may suggest that they are all one and the same in this scene. Despite the landscape being an outdoors space, this is also a safe space as seen by the silky thread encasing the scene in a protective cocoon on the top left of the drawing. But perhaps it is because this is an outdoors space that the protective cocoon features as necessary for the safety of the child. Unlike heteronormativity's focus on family protection, the drawing of 'March' queers this protection, creating a protective social fabric for the child out of the domestic but apart from the family unit. Hence, the heteronormative space of family and domesticity are queered. One may go as far as to argue that the child itself is queer. There is also no clear indication of the child's gender. Though unclear if the scene is a memory or a dream for the future, what is certainly clear is that the child gazes out solo toward new horizons, turning its back to any social order outside of itself as well as to the present and past. In its superperson cape, the child can do anything, such as climbing the tallest tree, all on its own.

The sole drawing that features a couple in this exhibition is 'August'. It depicts

⁵⁶ Edelman, *No Future*, 29.



Figure 1. Kyriakou, 'March' («Μάρτιος»), pencil on paper 21 x 29.7 cm, 2010 [with permission].

an embrace between a long-haired and short-haired individual. Behind and above the two lovers, a paper boat floats on a sea of curved spaghetti-like lines, which in turn flow into the short-haired individual's back. The paper boat also carries an open parachute from which stars are released and fall behind this individual. The couple form is here expressed, nonetheless, it is unclear if the figures are heterosexual. It is important to note too that the perspective of the drawing is not that of the couple but of an individual. The stars fall and the paper boat floats directly into one of the two individuals, signaling the erotic significance for this one of the two persons. That is, this is a love dreamscape of one person. The emphasis is on the experience of the short-haired individual burrowing his/her face and desire into his/her lover.

Moreover, Kyriakou's figures in 'Months Stay' («Μήνες Μείνε») express their own whimsies, pleasurable activities, and restful idleness, in what appears a contradictory state of solitary melancholy and promise. In 'January', a man, having entered in from the rain with a wet umbrella on the floor, lowers his head on his crossed arms at a coffee table and sleeps. The steam from his warm cup of tea or coffee permeates his ear, gently calling upon the man to wake up and enjoy his warm libation.⁵⁷ In 'May', a somber standing woman closes her eyes while a bird pulls a thread from her sweater's sleeve, undoing it. The bird at once destroys her sweater and ushers in a new season. In 'July', a man reclines with one foot over the other, sips a drink from a glass, with eyes closed, while taking a short break from his writing. He is in a posture of repose but also shows intellectual activity.

This contradictory air of melancholy filled with promise may perhaps best be understood as the interrelationship between lack and desire. Following Jacques Lacan's definition of constitutive lack, Mari Ruti notes that lack is what causes desire and what 'induces us to turn outward in pursuit of things that might add multidimensionality to our lives'.⁵⁸ She further explains: 'it is precisely the fact that we are lacking—that we are creatures of desire—that allows us to approach the world as a space of possibility'.⁵⁹ Ruti goes on to assert that there is 'a direct link between

⁵⁷ Musician Maria Panosian later acquired permission to use 'January' as the cover of her 2011 album 'Wet Floors' («Πατώματα Βρεγμένα»).

⁵⁸ M. Ruti, 'Why there is always a future in the future', *Angelaki*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2008), 113-126, DOI: 10.1080/09697250802156109.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

lack and creativity, between the subject's self-alienation on the one hand and its capacity to generate imaginative ways of coping with this alienation on the other'.⁶⁰

Unlike Edelman's unconstructive, antisocial, and negative queerness, which rejects futurity, queerness in Kyriakou's work does see a future not necessarily connected with heteronormativity but championing the self. Kyriakou's space is one governed by the singular self's lack and desire, inactivity and possibility, collapse and rejuvenation. The pieces in 'Months Stay' («Μήνες Μείνε») pay tribute to 'an everyday filled with invention, creativity, humor, memory, and hope'.⁶¹ They attest to a 'rich, inner world'. Their protagonists cope, persist, dream, play and savour life in the here and now of their everyday despite difficulties. Held at a semi-circular, corner building with large glass windows in Old Nicosia, A Bookworm Publication's first official publication launch and Kyriakou's exhibition were a huge success. On opening night, journalists, writers and artists filled the inside and even spread outside mingling for hours under the street lamps. For the duration of the exhibition, the publishers made Temporary Space their working space (personal communication), lending the venue an air of the much-later-to-come trend in Nicosia: the pop-up shop. With the social but fleeting features of lesbian assembling, this space came to life for a brief period to honour the artist's seemingly simple but rich innermost world and to support her through the purchase of personal agendas.

'My Personal Persons' («Προσωπικά μου Πρόσωπα») at Is Not Gallery in 2011 and 2012

For her fourth exhibition 'My Personal Persons' («Προσωπικά μου Πρόσωπα»), Kyriakou expanded on her exploration of identity by turning her attention to portraits of friends, family, but also strangers in her milieu. Combining paper napkin and newspaper collages with acrylic, gouache, pencil and ink use on paper, Kyriakou created 18 portraits. The paintings were shown in December 2011 and January 2012 at Is Not Gallery, a spacious artist-run space within the walls of Old Nicosia that features Cypriot and European work. The pieces were placed in sequence, based on chromatic similarities, across the gallery's white walls.

The press release for the exhibition stated that 'Many small stories are recorded on the face, which either reveal or hide experiences from the everyday and beyond' («Στο πρόσωπο υπάρχουν καταγεγραμμένες πολλές μικρές ιστορίες, οι

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Rooke, 'Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space', 234.

οποίες φανερώνουν ή κρύβουν εμπειρίες και βιώματα από την καθημερινότητα και μη».⁶² Kyriakou expounded that 'The lines on our faces are not random. While painting a portrait, I feel that I am painting that person's soul' («Οι γραμμές στο πρόσωπο του καθενός μας, δεν είναι τυχαίες. Όταν ζωγραφίζω ένα πορτρέτο, νιώθω πως ζωγραφίζω την ψυχή ενός ανθρώπου»). Kyriakou appears to be interested in honouring the essence of individuals, in exploring what is hidden from view and also what is faithful to the inner world of the individual.

For one, she tackles what she views as the essence of people close to her. For instance, in 'Virginia Vulpes', Kyriakou creates the portrait of her friend and music collaborator Elena Papaleontiou, adding a collage of a fox behind her,⁶³ thus drawing a parallel between the two. In 'If So' («Αν Είναι»), she portrays close friend Annie Damianou,⁶⁴ while in 'She Still Is...' («Ακόμα Είναι...»), Kyriakou presents singer Eftychia Alphas who she has been referring to as her 'muse' both privately and publicly for years.⁶⁵ In turn, in 'The Invisible Man Everywhere' («Ο Αόρατος Παντού»), Kyriakou depicts another friend, Christos Kyriakides.

Secondly, in terms of family, Kyriakou creates, only one portrait, that of her father. Titled 'Before Kyriakos' («Πριν τον Κυριάκο»), the portrait depicts the father young, before having had her and her older brother Kyriakos (personal communication). He faces the viewer with a hopeful determination in his eyes. A miniature collage of a man with a backpack and water bottle setting out on a voyage sits on her father's left brow. A miniature flag is raised at the corner of his left eye. Another miniature person walks along the edge of her father's collar. A pinwheel hangs from the opening of his shirt suggesting play but also a reliance on heading where the wind blows. Lastly, a cityscape with apartment buildings and high-rises is set in the background behind her father's head but also snippets of this cityscape appear in his ears, sternum and chest. All these elements contribute to the hidden narra-

⁶² Is Not Gallery, 'Charitini Kyriakou' [Press Release], available at <http://www.isnotgallery.com/?p=934> (2011, December).

⁶³ In many of these works, like 'Virginia Vulpes', the background collages stick out from the rest of the piece signifying an excess, a surplus, or a remainder left over that is significant, visible and there to be accounted.

⁶⁴ Kyriakou makes a play on Annie Damianou's first name with the title «Αν Είναι» (pronounced 'Annie-neh').

⁶⁵ Kyriakou has said that Alphas has been the inspiration behind many of her artworks and songs (personal communication).

tive, as told by Kyriakou (personal communication), of her father leaving his village Palaichori in order to move to the big city of Nicosia for work.

Thirdly, there are portraits of strangers to Kyriakou; some are famous and various are unknown. In 'There Once Was a Pianist with Big Ears' («Ήταν Ένας Πιανίστας με Μεγάλα Αυτιά»), Kyriakou displays French artist, writer, director, singer, and composer Serge Gainsbourg. In 'Death in Venice', Kyriakou takes inspiration from the same-titled 1971 Italian-French film and portrays the young boy Tadzio who is the love interest of the much older protagonist Gustav. Then, in 'A Case of You', Kyriakou presents Canadian folk singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell (Figure 2) who also happens to be viewed as an icon in the LGBTQI community. Perhaps Kyriakou identifies with the same-titled song sung by Mitchell, which includes the lyrics: 'Oh, I am a lonely painter/ I live in a box of paints/ I'm frightened by the devil/ And I'm drawn to those ones that ain't afraid'. A hat-wearing Mitchell faces the viewer with a somber, thoughtful look, while resting her head on the heel of her palm. The background is made of collaged paper napkins showing multi-coloured daisies in a green field. Part boredom, part daydream, part contemplation, Mitchell's demeanour suggests a melancholic or withdrawn artist but one existing in a landscape full of vitality, promise and creativity.

Other portraits include people whose faces Kyriakou admitted she was simply drawn to from old newspapers and films (personal communication). One such portrait based on a photograph from an old newspaper is titled 'Don't Travel in Other Lands' («Μην Πας Ταξίδι Σ'άλλους Τόπους»). The title for this portrait refers to a lyric from Manos Chatzidakis's song 'Come to Me' («Έλα σε Μένα»). The portrait shows a central female figure, a miniature suitcase on the bottom left corner, a miniature figure in an apron standing on the woman's right brow, a miniature headless figure with an umbrella peeking out from the collar of the woman's blouse, and a miniature bottom half of a woman dressed in a skirt and boots entering the woman's left ear. Kyriakou here clearly identifies with Chatzidakis' lyric 'don't travel in other lands' by including the miniature woman's body queerly penetrating the ear of the beloved as if to convince her to leave her suitcase and stay.

Moreover, on the one hand, Kyriakou's exhibition 'My Personal Persons' («Προσωπικά μου Πρόσωπα») creates a social network of family members, friends and strangers which is not unified by blood or national ties. The drawings bring together Cypriots and non-Cypriots, known and unknown persons. Queer individuals and icons, friends and strangers abound without making explicit hetero-



Figure 2. Kyriakou, 'A Case of You', paper napkin collage with acrylic, gouache, pencil and ink on paper, 75 x3 5cm, 2011 [with permission].

sexual figures in the work. Kyriakou's father is even shown apart from the heteronormative realm, as Kyriakou imagines him at a time before becoming a father, in this way undermining the weightiness of heteronormative reproduction. Like lesbian space which is a 'traveling party' of social connections, 'My Personal Persons' («Προσωπικά μου Πρόσωπα») is a constellation⁶⁶ of people. In other words, lesbian space appears as par excellence a pliable social space. As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue 'The queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies'.⁶⁷

On the other hand, according to Kyriakou, these persons meant something to her at the time, insofar as they made her feel something strongly. She has confessed that now she does not recall exactly where she first saw some of these faces (personal communication). Some, she found in newspapers whose countenance simply drew her attention and effected an emotional response in her. She has admitted that 'It is more that my personal issues emerged from their faces' («Πιο πολλά εφκαίναν τα δικά μου προσωπικά μέσα που τα πρόσωπα τους») (personal communication). That is, the personal in 'My Personal Persons' refers more to her personal matters that she uncovers in these other people. All in all, she suggests that for her, lesbian space is a safe space of exploration of self through meaningful, even if transient, others.

The space itself of Is Not Gallery attracted a similar multitude of loved ones, acquaintances, and strangers. In addition, showing portraits of a mixture of known and unknown figures seemed most appropriate for an established venue hosting the work of local and foreign artists and for Kyriakou to reveal the hidden in a more inclusive social network and to a larger public.

'Rooms' («Δωμάτια») at The Garage in 2016

Housed in a renovated building in the Old City, The Garage showed Kyriakou's fifth exhibition 'Rooms' («Δωμάτια»). The exhibition opened on 6 December 2016 and was attended by an intimate crowd of Kyriakou's friends and acquaintances including fellow artists. The exhibition focused on the themes of intimacy and mental

⁶⁶ I borrow the terms 'traveling party' and 'constellation' from Jen Jack Gieseke to talk about lesbian space that is fleeting but based on social connections. See Urban Omnibus, 'Constellating Queer Spaces', available at <https://urbanomnibus.net/2018/02/constellating-queer-spaces/> (2018, February 7).

⁶⁷ Berlant and Warner, 'Sex in Public,' 322.

well-being. The press release penned by Kyriakou's friend and curator Christos Kyriakides stated:

[...] Kyriakou, locks her self away from any earthly temptation, using isolation as a means of turning intensity into serenity. That's the space she creates in order to draw the ones she loves, the ones she falls in love with, when they are bored and when they lose sanity. Pieces of an old relationship or pieces of a new promise. Pieces that compose her. All together a puzzle of her won self. These are the forces driving her back home. In her drawing room she registers, archives and finally redefines her self.

Kyriakides draws attention to domestic space as a place of refuge, contemplation, memory, and personal transformation. Kyriakou locks herself up 'away from any earthly temptation' presumably found in the public sphere, she composes her erotic relations in private spaces, nonetheless, she makes these public, or rather, counterpublic, in her exhibition.

One might argue that Kyriakou here too seems to reproduce heteronormative logic by remaining 'in the closet' without making explicit homoeroticism and without orientating herself away from the home. Indeed, queers are generally more closeted in the small, close-knit and conservative community of the island. Still, domesticity for Kyriakou in this exhibition is once again not clearly defined by the heterosexual couple form but by her own personhood which is made and remade in 'pieces that compose her' including her same-sex affections and even her close connection with her pet Laki or her 'companion dog' as she has referred to him.⁶⁸

Arguably, there appears no radical sense of anti-normativity in Kyriakou's 'Rooms' («Δωμάτια»). Nonetheless, "radical anti-normativity" can undermine our experiences as "the average people that we also are".⁶⁹ Instead, Kyriakou paints portraits of herself dozing off in the living room armchair, resting on her bedroom floor with her dog companion (Figure 3), performing a handstand in her kitchen, sitting naked on the toilet. In her pencil drawings, Kyriakou's female figures for instance comb their hair, take a bath, or twirl in circles. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner remind that 'To be against heteronormativity is not to be against norms. To be against the processes of normalization is not to be afraid of ordinariness'.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Kyriakou makes reference to her 'companion dog' in her biography included in M. Zackheos and K. Kattashis (eds), *From Cyprus With Love*, (Nicosia: Phaneromenis 70, 2016), 41.

⁶⁹ Berlant and Warner, 'Sex in Public', 321.

⁷⁰ Ibid.



Figure 3. Kyriakou, 'Noon in the Bedroom' («Μεσημέρι στο Δωμάτιο»), acrylic on wood gesso panel 60 x30 cm, 2016 [with permission].

In fact, the mundane of the everyday in Kyriakou's work strangely here features as exceptional. In her paintings, seemingly random white brushstrokes pirouette all over domestic scenes lending these a dreamy quality. Splashes of vibrant colours in the furnishings and in Kyriakou's attire break the monotony of the earthy tones on the walls, wooden flooring, bathroom tiles, and furniture. Though the drawings are seemingly simple in subject matter and there is a modest use of pencil on parchment paper, the female limbs curl in unusual and exaggerated positions yielding a soul-stirring effect.

Furthermore, Kyriakou's posing in the paintings is anything but ladylike. In 'Noon in the Bedroom' («Μεσημέρι στο Δωμάτιο»), she lies on the bedroom rug next to her dog with her forearms covering her face while her legs are crossed and rest on an unmade bed. In 'Douche', she sits on the toilet seat naked crouched over with elbows on her knees. In 'Evening in the Living Room' («Βράδυ στο Σαλόνι»), she slouches down in an armchair with her legs apart and her hair covering her face. Kyriakou's body thus assumes a lesbian habitus that rejects 'conventional "ladylike" demeanor'.⁷¹

While the women in the drawings from 'Rooms' («Δωμάτια») exhibit more of a

⁷¹ Rooke, 'Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space', 239.

feminine comportment, they often don transparent tops and are braless resisting norms of accepted public femininity but also present peculiar twists in their movement and curves of their limbs suggesting an otherworldly sensuality. In 'The First Meeting' («Η Γνωριμία») for instance, a woman sits on a barstool holding a flower between her fingertips in one hand, clasping a glass in the other, while bending her neck to the side as if in a day-dream with her eyes closed. The woman's tight bottoms bring attention to her genital area. Her long necklace rests on her see-through blouse emphasising her breasts. Her neck bends exceptionally far, with her ears almost coming parallel to the ground, exaggerating thus the length of her neck and consequently spotlighting this as an erogenous zone. The female figure's neck bends similarly in 'Day's Recurrence / Diary' («Η Επανάληψη της Μέρας / Ημερολόγιο»). This figure sits on a mat with a warm libation in front of her, arms across her chest and palms curved upwards with a pencil in one hand (Figure 4). Presumably, a self-portrait of the artist drawing her everyday reality in pencil, her upwards curved palms give the sense of holding it all together, that is, providing this female figure confidence, protection and comfort in her own home. She wears underpants and a long-sleeved shirt through which one of her breasts is shown. The steam from her warm cup travels upwards toward and past her genitals, drawing attention to these but perhaps also subtly suggesting a parallel between the vagina and this warm vessel of feel-good liquid. Moreover, Kyriakou accentuates feminine curves through her curved lines in her female figures' necks, knees and wrists showing that a woman's curves are not limited to the heterosexual realm's emphasis on breasts and buttocks. Specifically, lesbian eroticism attends to the micro.⁷²

Overall, the intimate, the small, and the local were highlighted in a gallery that is equally modest to the artwork. Arbitrary paint brushstrokes covering one of the main exhibition walls acted as the canvas on which Kyriakou's paintings were positioned, insinuating seamlessness between the exhibition content and the exhibition space. The exhibition space itself, with a façade reflecting that of other craftsman workshops and shops in the area, seamlessly blended into the rest of the Taktakalas neighbourhood in Old Nicosia.

The Garage is an open-plan, cement-built space but the subtlety, intimacy and domesticity in this particular body of work may be said to have transformed it into a more private and warm environment. The work is certainly subtle but still queer

⁷² Another case in point are Kyriakou's miniature clay figurines of 2017.



Figure 4. Kyriakou, 'Day's Recurrence / Diary' («Η Επανάληψη της Μέρας / Ημερολόγιο»), pencil on paper, 31 x 44 cm, 2016 [with permission].

in its exaltation of physicality and repose as well as its explicit tackling of domestic space as a place of collectedness in the absence of the family and the heterosexual couple form.

'Desire's Erebus' («Του Πόθου το Ερεβώδες») at Is Not Gallery in 2018

In November 2018, Kyriakou returned at Is Not Gallery for her sixth exhibition. The selection of the venue was made due to its esteemed reputation but also due to its spaciousness and ability to accommodate all 19 paintings of this exhibition on the walls with ease (personal communication). The dark paintings against the gallery's stark white walls were striking to say the least. This is certainly the darkest, in terms of colour, set of works by Kyriakou, and unexpected from her previous playful use of cool and warm tones. The bold content matter was even more striking.

Kyriakou has explained that the title of her sixth exhibition 'Desire's Erebus' («Του Πόθου το Ερεβώδες») alludes to the dark in which desire resides. Identifying with and adopting Greek poet Kiki Dimoula's idea that '[desire] lives in the dark', («ζει στα σκοτεινά, έτσι είπε η Κική Δημουλά σε μια συνέντευξη και το έκλεψα γιατί ταυτίστηκα»), Kyriakou further explicated her intentions in the following poem: 'dangerously beautiful/ always mutual/ and immature / in the dark, Eros/ walks' («επίφοβα ωραίος/ πάντοτε αμοιβαίος/ κι ανώριμος/ στα σκοτεινά ο έρωσ/ περπατεί»).

The Erebus of the exhibition title refers to the ancient Greek god of darkness, shadows, caves and caverns who is the offspring of Chaos. Through Erebus's queer union with his sister Nyx/Night, it is said that Aether and Day were brought forth. Accordingly, Kyriakou's 19 paintings in this exhibition play with the intermingling of light and dark. She has explained that her process consisted of first painting the canvases dark and then moving on to add light colours.

Activities such as lying on the bed reading a book, drying one's hair in a towel after a shower, shaving one's legs in the bathtub, cooking in the kitchen, doing a handstand against a wall, and dozing off naked in an armchair may be considered unremarkable subjects but they are certainly erotically-charged in the sense that they convey an ode to the female body and female subjectivity. They also reveal a glimpse into the everyday realities of a lesbian sensibility that remains hidden from public view.

The moment of dressing on the bed—crouched over topless, underwear raised above the ankles—features in 'Preparation / Getting Dressed' («Ετοιμασία / Έν-

δυση»). Here attention is drawn to the white sheets of the bed, the light seeping in through the blinds and the contours of the female body, which stand in stark contrast to the dark room. The same bedroom setting features in ‘Nude Starlight / Stripping’ («Γυμνοστέριασμα / Έκδυση») with a bottomless seated female figure raising a blouse over her head. The spotlight here is on the breasts, ribs, abdomen, pubic hair, thighs and knees.

Overall, Kyriakou’s paintings in ‘Desire’s Erebus’ («Του Πόθου το Ερεβώδες») defy heterosexual porn’s emphasis on the anus and vagina⁷³ and privilege instead the erogenous zones of the breasts, nipples, and vulva including the labia—and presumably the unseen G-spot and clitoris. The painting ‘Glass Glare’ («Αντικαθρέφτισμα») features a woman from the chin down donning a necklace, squatting on a dark tile floor, with hands holding her knees open, elbows kept high at a 90 degree angle, while her breasts rest on a glass table upon which an African mask is also placed (Figure 5). The woman’s shadowy silhouette contrasts with the white stucco wall behind her. The breasts and upper torso are reflected in the glass glare.

Perhaps the most graphic of Kyriakou’s paintings is ‘Day-Sun-Amber / Fossilised Image’ («Μέρα-Ήλιος-Κεχριμπάρι / Απολιθωμένη Μορφή»). A naked woman casually squats on a tile floor with her knees open exposing her labia. The woman is painted from the neck down. One elbow is placed on one knee while the other rests on the other knee with the palm facing down. The breasts feature on the top centre of the canvas with one obscured by a shadow while the other is revealed clearly in the light. The open knees span the full length of the 70 x 29 cm painting displaying the female genitals below. The reflection on the tile floor shows the bottoms of the feet and buttocks. Thin pencil-like lines of contrasting light and dark colours encircle and cover the female silhouette lending this bubble image a fossilised tree resin appearance,⁷⁴ as the title of the piece suggests, that preserves the female body, uncensored, through time.

The rear view of the female figure kneeling on all fours in ‘Backwards Per-version / Blindness / Calling’ («Δια-στροφή Προς τα Πίσω / Τύφλωση / Κάλεσμα») spotlights not the anus, as in heterosexual porn, but instead reveals a striking red vulva. Against a blue wall is the shadow of the female figure’s breasts and nipples. There hangs a camera too signaling the significance of the gaze, in this instance that

⁷³ Hammers, ‘Space, Agency, and the Transfiguring of Lesbian/Queer Desire’, 767.

⁷⁴ For more on amber, see K. Gammon, ‘The Human Cost of Amber’, *The Atlantic* (online) (2019, August 2).

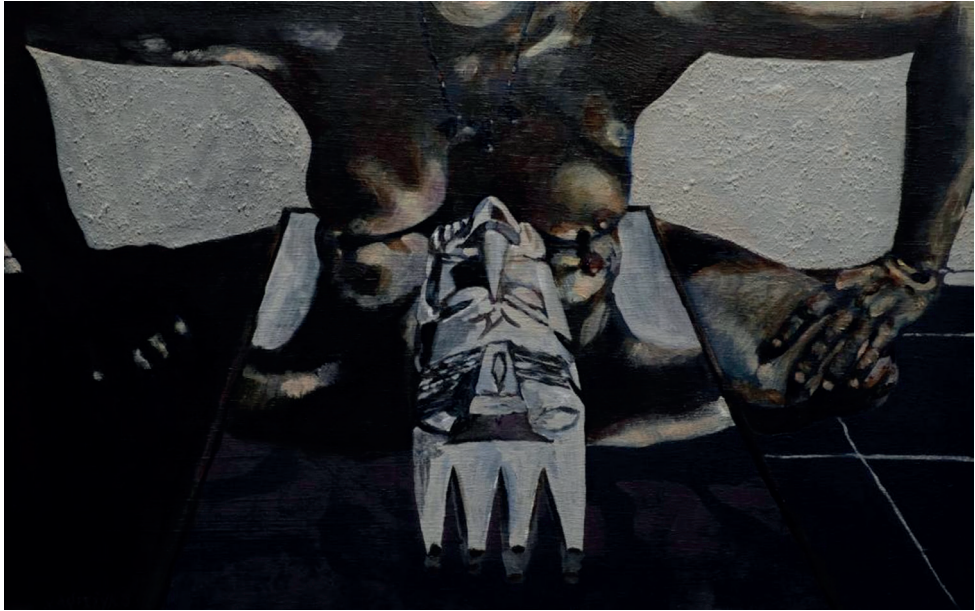


Figure 5. Kyriakou, 'Glass Glare' («Αντικαθρέφτισμα»), acrylic on wood gesso panel 47 x32 cm, 2018 [with permission].

of the lesbian. The tile floor is bare except for the presence of a single open book. On the one hand, this literally signals the casual everyday reality. On the other, the open book may metaphorically signify the freedom from concealment.

Noteworthy is Kyriakou's process in 'Desire's Erebus' («Του Πόθου το Ερεβώδες») of first photographing poses and scenes before painting them (personal communication). The staging of the photographs agrees also with a purposeful emphasis on performativity in these works. For instance, seated on a traditional Cypriot wooden chair with legs open, the female nude figure in 'Inwards Per-version / Friction / Role Liquefaction' («Δια-στροφή Προς τα Μέσα / Τριβή / Υγροποίηση Ρόλου») conceals her face holding an African mask with one hand and masturbating with the other as the toes tense upwards in a state of arousal. In the painting 'Libra / Weighing' («Ζυγός / Ζύγισμα»), two facing traditional Cypriot wooden chairs are stacked with books upon which a naked female figure balances her weight. The woman pulls her knees up to her chest while still revealing large parts of her breasts and her vulva. These are depictions of a performative existence. The mask seductively hides the face but allows the wearer to assume an alternate identity for the purpose of performance. Similarly, the 'embodied expression[s] of lesbian identi-

ty⁷⁵ in these paintings are pleasurable ‘performative acts’⁷⁶ themselves, in Judith Butler’s sense of performative gender, constructed to appear distinct regarding a lesbian sensibility. Ultimately, it is ‘these appearances [that] produc[e] the space as lesbian’.⁷⁷ As Rooke explains, the queer body ‘is a site of an incorporated understanding, an aesthetic display of this knowledgeable corporeality, and as such it is a way in which identity is constituted as it sediments on the body’.⁷⁸

It would not be an exaggeration to argue that showing such uncensored—for Kyriakou—erotic content at an established place like Is Not Gallery may be Kyriakou’s official ‘coming out’ as a visual artist. The darkness of the paintings, almost irreverent, against the gallery’s white walls attest to a wild desire finally unmasked. The characteristic emphasis on the everyday domestic sphere in Kyriakou’s work is still there, though this time it is under bright lights.

Conclusion

Studying how queer subjects inhabit space both sexually and spatially can lead to a better understanding of both queer desire and use of space but additionally, examining how queer subjects reside in space on the local level can further contribute to conversations concerning globalisation and metronormativity. Referring to the cherishing of queers living more carefree lives in metropolitan areas like London or Vancouver, metronormativity holds an underestimation of queers living a ‘sad and lonely’ existence in small towns.⁷⁹

Though not a metropolis, Nicosia is the capital and island’s cultural hub. Geographically and historically, the city has in turn been a cultural hybrid. Today, with people from all over the world calling Nicosia ‘home’, it is extraordinarily multicultural. It is also a post/colonial city, half under Turkish occupation. Both cosmopolitan and small, Nicosia can be said to occupy the in-between position of a non/metropolis,⁸⁰ complicating binary understandings of the local/global and urban/rural sexual logics.

Surely, by virtue of inhabiting a small and highly conservative place, radically

⁷⁵ Rooke, ‘Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space: Toward a Lesbian Habitus’, 239.

⁷⁶ Rooke, ‘Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space: Toward a Lesbian Habitus’, 244.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 36.

⁸⁰ For an extended discussion on Nicosia’s non/metropolitan position, see Zackheos and Philippou, ‘Nicosia’s Queer Art Subculture: Outside and Inside Formal Institutions’.



Figure 6. Kyriakou, 'Backwards Per-version / Blindness / Calling'
(«Δια-στροφή Προς τα Πίσω / Τύφλωση / Κάλεσμα»),
acrylic on wood gesso panel 31.7 x 45.7 cm, 2018 [with permission].

explicit or 'out' work may not be an option for queer artists in Cyprus, like it is in the metropolis of New York City, given that Cypriot artists must preserve their own safety. Nonetheless, as seen through the case of Kyriakou, the impetus to produce queer work that challenges normative notions is very much alive, even when expressed on a more subtle or micro level.

Local spatial elements are very much preserved in Kyriakou's work such as her inclusion of traditional Cypriot chairs and the characteristic architecture of Old Nicosia. Nonetheless, she does not hesitate to cross national boundaries by including portraits of key figures from abroad and embracing foreign artefacts like African ceremonial masks.

Lastly, Kyriakou's choice to show her work in low-key places like Temporary Space and The Garage can be said to be non/metropolitan by virtue of being small but also by virtue of having the features of lesbian assembling abroad too. In other words, 'a global gay model is always interacting with other, often non-metropoli-

tan sexual economies'.⁸¹ Kyriakou's 'Months Stay' («Μήνες Μείνε») and 'Rooms' («Δωμάτια») are private but also of the (queer) world. They rid the everyday and the domestic from a strictly heteronormative association, exalting delight, creativity, safety and inner peace. As for the exhibitions held at Is Not Gallery, 'My Personal Persons' («Προσωπικά μου Πρόσωπα») and 'Desire's Erebus' («Του Πόθου το Ερεβώδες»), the former brings together a local and global social network, while the latter can be said to place localised lesbian sensuality within a global framework of lesbian desire.

To conclude, Kyriakou inhabits a lesbian space that is non/metropolitan, follows queer understandings of time, gathers intimate social relations, as well as safeguards the private, the domestic, the everyday and her inner world. Here she comes to terms with her own identity, worldview, and desires. Just 'as queer theories suggest, subjectivity is a process of ongoing personal construction rather than a point of arrival', in each exhibition Kyriakou makes and remakes subjectivity through a 'located engagement'⁸² in which the performative work of the body plays a central role in working toward stabilising a lesbian identity. After all, the body itself is a home for subjectivity.⁸³ It is 'a surface of social and cultural inscription'; it is 'a site of pleasure and pain'; it is 'public and private'; it 'has a permeable boundary', and it is 'material, discursive, and psychical'.⁸⁴ As such, it is as feminist poet Adrienne Rich has described: 'the geography closest in'.⁸⁵ For Kyriakou, lesbian space is a safe but subversive space where the boundaries of heteronormativity and its expected performative acts can be transgressed, precisely through the body, ultimately showing that bodies shape space as much as our surroundings shape our selves.

⁸¹ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 38.

⁸² Rooke, 'Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space', 236.

⁸³ L. Johnston and R. Longhurst, *Space, Place, and Sex: Geographies of Sexualities*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (Why of Where), 2010), 11.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Johnston and Longhurst, *Space, Place, and Sex*, 21.

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