

Introduction

For the last two decades, my artwork has dealt with the difficult aspects of the recent history of Cyprus. My main source of inspiration comes from personal experiences and events related to the issues of the missing persons and the enclaved in Karpasia. Issues that, although they are very personal, are at the same time public.

My aim is to create an artistic monument in which personal and collective memories will not only coexist, but will also be transformed into independent evidence of the Cypriot reality. An artistic monument where painful and agonizing issues of the past placed in the present bring us face to face with forgotten circumstances or situations which tend to be lost in the oblivion of time.

Situations that I do not want to go unnoticed, such as that of the enclaved in Karpasia; of this small group of people who, for decades, have been left to fade in time and space. People who were and still are a source of inspiration and creation for me. My aim is to draw everyone's attention to their difficult and troubled lives, honouring at the same time their brave and exemplary choice to live secluded and isolated under particularly adverse conditions.

To date, I have used my artistic capacity to create the *Achaean Coast* (2004) and *Rusted Evidence* (2013), both of which are dedicated to the enclaved Cypriots – the lighthouse keepers of the modern history of Cyprus. In the first project, I aimed through their expressive photographic portraits to rediscover their lost values and to capture their loneliness, their hope, their silent resistance. In the latter project, I sought through a series of photo collages, with photos of rusty, damaged objects of their everyday lives to show the inevitable wear and tear of time and its indirect effect on the lives of the enclaved people. Objects that tell their own story and convey their own reality, loaded with their own experiences and ordeals, taken from a life ruined by war and forgotten over the years. In my postgraduate project *Home and Identity* (2015) and the publication that followed, I sought to give answers to the question of how these two themes may be integrated in art education in areas of conflict, where home and identity are constantly transformed, redefined and renegotiated. The project dealt with the enclaved students of two high schools in Cyprus: the Rizokarpaso High School and the *Peace and Freedom* High school in Deryneia.

The project *Where Have You Been?* (2018) –also dedicated to the missing persons of Cyprus– was inspired by the story of my missing brother, Yiannakis Liasis, who was found murdered in a mass grave and was identified through DNA analysis in 2014. A story that while it can seemingly be considered personal, in reality is associated with the recent tragic history of Cyprus. I wanted to address the issue through art, thus raising people's awareness of this particularly striking humanitarian issue in an alternative way. Through the project, I sought not only to embrace aesthetic ways of looking at tragic events and painful situations, but also to illustrate how art has the power to deal with painful human emotions and at the same time negotiate issues of politics, history and memory.

Synchronising History

My recent project entitled *Synchronising History* is an anticipated, consistent development of my previous artworks, which once again deals with my personal history and memories. More specifically, it focuses on my home and its objects.

My paternal home in Ayia Triada in Karpasia played an exceptional and very important role in the lives of the enclaved people of Cyprus. During all the years that both my parents lived in the occupied territories, they tried in every way to contribute to the peaceful coexistence of the Greek Cypriot enclaved persons with the Turkish Cypriots and the Turkish settlers. My father, in

particular, managed with his diplomacy, humour and kindness to earn everyone's trust and respect. All these decades, thousands of people –known and unknown– passed by our house to ask for some service or just to chat or have a coffee. Over time, our home became an unconventional meeting place, a safe and popular place where members of both communities could meet, socialize, get informed, discuss and exchange views on everything under the sun. Undoubtedly, it was a historic place, a safe haven for all fellow villagers, regardless of political, cultural or religious beliefs. A home –in every sense of the word– that lived step by step the island's history or, for that matter, all the drama of the enclaved people.

All the time my parents lived enclaved in their village, they remained firmly attached to their space and possessions. Constantly living in fear and uncertainty, they made sure that they were always ready to go if need be. They had all the furniture and objects packed in wooden boxes, so that they could easily carry them away and save them. Items not only of some monetary or emotional value, but also things that they did not want to part with. All kinds of linen, household utensils, construction and agricultural tools and hundreds of odds and ends. Generally, anything found inside or outside the house from the time it was built by my grandfather in the 1930s.

The stacked boxes remained sealed for decades, which helped the objects to maintain their original condition and quality. As a result, these objects became intact evidence documenting an era where time had stopped.

This close relationship that my parents had had with their belongings inevitably became a compelling and binding issue for me. In turn, I continue to treat these objects with the same love and reverence. I classify them, categorize them, catalogue them, archive them, process them and at the same time, as an artist now, reconstruct them and distance them from the specific space and time, and place them in an artistic context, where their useful properties are marginalized in order to highlight their aesthetic values.

I dealt with the same aesthetic values in my previous project *Rusty Evidence*, where the wear and tear of time was an irreversible element of motion. In this work, however, I select and exhibit the objects almost as they are, to the immobility and uselessness that have been imposed on them all these years. In the new visual reality, I seek to keep the objects' memory alive, no matter how painful, so that they remind us that art is always intertwined with life.

My ultimate goal is to rescue, through my art, these indisputably historical objects, which should not remain private, and to transform them into artistic evidence of memory and identity, resistance and survival, of a small number of people, in their silent but heroic struggle. A titanic struggle of self-denial and self-sacrifice, which unfortunately to date has not brought about a victorious outcome.