

The poetic entropy of time

When the barricades in Cyprus were lifted in 2003 and Toula Liasi was able to visit her parents in the occupied northern part of the island, she had the most momentous experience of her life. Since then, and every time she visits her enclaved parents, she captures the very highly charged atmosphere of an out of the ordinary spatio-temporal environment, where nature seems to have remained untouched, while everything else around has changed. These intense experiences fuelled the artworks of the series “Rusted evidence”.

The video recording the route from the checkpoint to her house is most interesting. The crossing through the plain of Mesaoria with a perspective to the horizon, and, in the last part of the journey towards the Karpas District, the absence of road signs and of any kind of information that could help the viewer to identify the area, give the impression that “the landscape has not changed since 1974, that time has stopped somewhere”. This journey is in the form of a performance and taking the symbolic connotation of a “pilgrimage” marks a course through a sacred place. Principally, it is the artist’s inner desire that nothing has changed and that time would have - stopped its destructive path. Nevertheless, in this journey of cleansing, she painfully realises that not only has time not stopped but that it has followed a relentless course of decay.

The consequences of time are particularly evident on the faces of aging people –whom she has photographed for an earlier series entitled “Achaean Coast”, exhibited in Nicosia, in 2004– but especially on utilitarian household objects, even on barrels lying rusting in backyards, which people do not want or are reluctant to part with. She monitors their deterioration through time. With a special poetic “transfer” from the items to the people, Liasi “pays particular attention to the life which is silently narrated by these objects that are charged with history”, that function as footprints of memory, as evidence of a life that goes on despite all the difficulties of being enclaved and the uncertain outcome of the political issue regarding the occupation of the island. Photographing them recurrently during her visits to the occupied village of her parents makes manifest the concept of “entropy” and the irrevocability of time.

Allusions to Arte Povera are apparent, particularly regarding the concept of a “poor”, in a sense, but symbolically “rich” object. Barrels, crockery, buckets, watering cans, hives “all have a history that makes them valuable”. However, despite the intense emotional charge with wounded memories, the artist avoids easy sentimentality. In fact, whilst avoiding direct references, she uses an artistic background-décor for the presentation of the objects by introducing

no funeral speeches, combined with familiar images of the enclaved house in the northern part of Cyprus, comes to conjure up the tragedy of the story, the fate of her missing brother. Although art has the power to transform traumatic personal memories, images and objects into a new aesthetic reality, these come back to heavily remind us that time never returns back. The vivid colours, which the artist has already used for objects belonging to enclaved people, like those in her work *Landrovers*, the colours not only of the objects themselves –mostly plastics– but also those used for the background of the photographs to which she intervenes by painting on them, bright pink or red for example, come in direct contrast to the reality she sketches.

Changing the colour of reality, choosing to eliminate the spatio- temporal scale, avoiding to mention anything regarding the actual reality of the objects, are the visual solutions adopted by Toula Liasi in order to define anew the boundaries between art and life. If life and its tragicality, time and memory are components of this series of artworks, what they ultimately exude is nothing more than an aesthetic transcendence. Furthermore, with - the belief that ultimately only through art can reality be surpassed and the ⁷ fragmented memories healed, we could say that eventually the issue in this

series is not so much the objects and their history, as art itself and its purgative nature. Although the works are by no means conceptual, what we have here is the triggering of the concept of self-reference, in such a way that the artworks on their own become a comment on the very power of art. By paying tribute to memory through the purifying function of art, the artist makes a truly soul-searching confession.

Andri Michael

Art Historian and an Associate Professor
in the Faculty of Arts (UPJV), Amiens, France