

CAPTURING THE CITY

Dear friends,

It is a pleasure for me to present to you the exhibition «Capturing the city». This project is the result of the artistic pairing of two young yet very mature artists, Katerina Attalidou and Stefanos Karababas. Katerina was born just a few months after the Turkish invasion. Her mother, Niki Marangou, had very strong ties to Famagusta and disseminated the love she had for the city, raising Katerina to feel that her roots were there. This rooting was deepened through the active contribution of another significant keeper of memories, Ms Anna Marangou, who happens to be Katerina's aunt. Stefanos, on the other hand, born and raised in mainland Greece, married his art to all that his beloved wife holds dear. What we have here then is this incredible phenomenon, whereby Katerina owns the city via her mother's references and all sorts of recounted tales, photographs, postcards, plus of course personal research and, recently, on-site visits, whilst Stefanos identifies with it all, conceiving it through indirect regurgitations matching his own experiences and ways of weighing. The result is of course extremely interesting, as it introduces a new perspective, a new angle of capturing the city of Famagusta, through the eyes of two artists who were prevented from physically experiencing it, yet somehow energetically filtering through, transforming it «through contemplation and dreaming». Indeed, this is the reality we know to have been living: our occupied land is so far away and yet so near, we can reach out and touch it, yet we long for it. This chasm, this contradiction of lived sorrow, gives a deeper substance to the realistic and yet dreamlike depiction of the subject matter. The city is there, we can see its outline, and yet, to capture it, we must become travelers in our own virtual paradise and resurrect its idol within us.

Katerina's and Stefanos's notes and recently published interviews, help us understand that their art (or at least the work that we are now looking at) is based on a

combination of historical and visual data in cultured reflection, and hence, re-reflection. Their artistic sense expands their artistic eye, transforming the recorded evidence. The end result is a new concept, a new birth, a re-emergence of the city, which may, ultimately, fit in with the artists' own existential reconstruction.

Let's not fool ourselves: "art does not reproduce what we see; rather, it makes us see" (Paul Klee). Form is determined by our own eyes. The object of art, ultimately, is not the things themselves, rather the way which we view them; the way in which, dare I say, we *touch* them with our eyes. The entire operation is focused on touch rather than sight: it is an act of reconstructing within us and architecting the parts of Famagusta, to capture its look in a rational manner, which "remedies" the pathos, thus tempering the range of our emotions; not to insist on adjectives, but rather to rearrange the city within us, wherein lie the soul and the tone of suggestion. And this, to be done within a context of transmutation, which releases nuclei of capturing the city and provides compassionate consolation to offset, to an extent at least, the actual occupation.

Often the role of the artist, in our part of the world at least, is to save himself/herself through drips of memory. It is this vindication, essentially this reading, which Katerina and Stefanos seek: for us to understand what they both felt about Famagusta and how they approached it; what they are saying with their work and how they filter their feelings on the canvas in an advanced form and technique, which at times relates to Greek masters Mytaras and Tsoklis, while remaining creatively original.

For us here in Cyprus, overwhelmed as we are with excessive amounts of history, art is a breath of fresh air, away from rhetorical recipes. It is therefore important to see how the archetypal images of an idyllic time and the subsequent turmoil are redefined by the freshness and thrill of two young and talented artists. On a personal note, I am touched by their sensitivity to accompany their paintings with verses from my poetry collection "Ammochostos Vasilevousa", which testifies to their research but also to the nature of their project, which remains poetic. Leonardo da Vinci's classic observation that, "painting is visible poetry, poetry is painting felt", is verified once again.

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I could close this foreword here. Yet, I request to be allowed to add the inevitable precept: We are a nation that has, over the years, forgotten its ancient epic roots, mounted on the “wrath” of the injustice suffered; a nation that has lost the way to rebel and rage about the tragic events that have taken place here. Let us at least adhere to Socrates’ “love of wisdom”. I am talking about the virtue and wisdom with which we will have to arm our minds to remain forever lovers of the distant horizon of Famagusta – a city which Katerina and Stefanos venture to capture, and deliver to us, alive and vibrant.

Kyriakos Charalambides

Argo Gallery, 9 March 2011