

Objects talk. Some even sing. The song of the thing: Do you hear it? Could you play along? Some notes ring out clearly. Like when you hit the skin of a drum. Others sound more like the *ghost notes* you get when you mute a string and then plug it. The pop of the string hints at the tone you're currently not hearing. Such notes are like the dot in *dot dot dot*. We jot them down to make space for imagining what quietly remains unspoken in things we loudly say. You could call it the silent poetry of things, if that wasn't such a big word, and if it wasn't for the fact that at times poets too must bring the noise, and beauty then is not their first concern.

The initial idea came from Valentinos Charalambous: He speaks of the visual *prosodia* we find in how the Arab language is written. Its calligraphy sings you the song of how looping, swooping lines rhyme and short sharp dots and dashes give them rhythm. Valentinos answers the call of calligraphy in the language of clay. He gives you ceramics that speak of the alchemy of their own making, and the earths of the island that gives them their colour. At the same time his pieces intone songs of memory and experience: poems by Cavafy adorn them, and the patterns his reliefs form betray the learned touch of someone who forms shapes like musician tunes strings. Listening to Valentinos, looking at his work is to be touched by a love of art, an attention to material and the depth of an intellectual horizon that easily transcends national borders and spans centuries.

Soft stone documents is, therefore, as much a continuation of the exhibition by Polys Peslikas and guests composed for the Cyprus Pavilion at the 2017 Venice biennial, as it is a tribute to the inspiration Valentinos Charalambous' work has been to the assembled artists.

In his paintings, Polys Peslikas makes colour resonate with the particular light daily lives and landscapes are flooded with in certain climates, from here to the East. In his new body of works created for Venice, and now recast in a fresh constellation in Limassol, he embarked on the experiment of making oil on canvass speak of sunlight caught in the texture of fabrics. Colours are bleached, hot and dry. Rather than emerging from the dark, the colours vibrate in the light, they remember the sun like skin does when it tans, or linen when it absorbs the heat of the day. Memory images flicker up in Polys' painting, while outlines of bodies and landscapes appear and dissolve, like translucent ghosts, materializing in broad daylight.

To let material speak freely may indeed take but the lightest touch. Maria Toumazou has a good hand in doing precisely this: She will give mundane construction materials the lyrical twist that makes them testify to the lasting labour of life: the art of building spaces for relations to grow between colours and things, friends and artists, like her collaborators in artist group Neoterismoï Toumazou, Marina Xenofotos and Orestis Lazouras.

Marina reads the writing on the wall and changes its script to fit her style: The material world of urban life is brimful of signs and signatures, each a riddle in its own right. Marina seizes and recasts them in the light of her own symbolic lore, chiselling hieroglyphics into the surfaces of commodity culture, traces left on the skin of pop by an artist who keeps on moving.

"Sell me the ugliest thing in your shop, I want it", says Orestis, and when he finds it, that thing will give the rhythm and rhyme to his assemblages, sculptures and textile paintings. He is on to things that are 'off'. This is the definition of funky. It's the world turned downside up, transposed to the key of desire.

Make reality tremble, make it shake, forth and back between real and surreal, close and far away, what was then and may as well be now: This is what Mirene Arsanios does in her story *Emergency Kids*. Written on the occasion of the Venice exhibition, her text traces the recollections

of a child, away on an island, with her mother, while war shook their city, Beirut, back home. It was her in Cyprus back then. It could be a different kid today. The house of memory knows many exits.

In this manner, *soft stone documents* continues the conversation started among Polys Peslikas and special guests Charalambous, Arsanios and the Neoterismoï Toumazou group in *The Future of Colour* at the Cyprus Pavilion in Venice. Reassembled around the eloquent ceramic art of Valentinos Charalambous, the works of the artists in the show intone the song of matter, memory and desire unbound, well-versed in the many voices material speaks with when you get it to talk.

Jan Verwoert

soft stone documents

Polys Peslikas

Valentinos Charalambous

Neoterismoï Toumazou: Maria Toumazou, Marina Xenofontos, Orestis Lazouras

Mirene Arsanios

Curator: Jan Verwoert

Organisation: Ministry of Education and Culture – Cultural Services, Municipality of Limassol

Coordination: Andry Panayiotou

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