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## Gefso Papadaki: could we be human without art?

25/03/2015



Half past twelve. How the time has passed.

Half past twelve. How the years have passed.

Cavafy

This is a revelation, in all, perfect honesty. A recollection. Time, loneliness, love are all fleeting away to become past.

It is nine o'clock. The poet lights the lamp that projects in front of him the reflection of his young body. Shadows of the past, memories, happy moments, pleasures and sadness, losses of time would remind that everything passes more quickly than we want to believe. Is this pessimism or self-awareness? One hour will follow the other, just as years will succeed one after another, both filled with nostalgia. People perceive the world poetically, without controlling it, without controlling poetry itself. Besides, meaning cannot be defined even in art. We allow ourselves to be fascinated, as a gift, a poem, a miracle. This given to us world is nostalgic, tough, tortured, violent, unfair, happy, even a wonder. We participate in it and we are being taught by the conflicts. Broken apart in it we shape ourselves.



It is known that the interdependent relations of poetry – painting goes back to Simonides who said: (in Latin: *ut pictura poesis*) as is painting so is poetry. Seven poets, Seferis, Ritsos, Cavafy, Karyotakis, Gkanas, Leivaditis and Elytis. Through every verse we can follow the polyphony of individual cases, the multi-faceted human drama – that of human quest, denials, manifold dilemmas; the flow of conquests and losses that compose human life, sometimes a trial without an end.

Seven poets that manage to remain in the history of Modern Greek literature not only for their universal, timeless and abundant nature of their work, but also for their intense personality and contribution to the education of a historical period. These were people whose cultural background and cultivation encouraged them to take a stand on problems concerning everyone and so make people aware of what was happening around them.

**Gefso Papadaki**, inspired by Greek poetry, succeeds in her paintings to activate and transfigure her inspiration not simply into images but into psychographic compositions.



This period the artist presents on the Gallery **Genesis** her solo exhibition entitled: "*How time has passed*", curated by **Iris Kritikou**. The exhibition will last from 3rd to 28th of March.

**Seferis, Ritsos, Cavafy, Karyotakis, Gkanas, Leivaditis and Elytis, how did you finally choose these specific poets? What made you select these specific poems?**

The selection of the poets did not happen by chance. I have chosen seven because I wanted to make a statement to the symbolism of this number. I could have chosen twice as many poets, as I could also have chosen twice as many poems. I have chosen the poems because of their subject matter. I looked for poems that had to do with time and our reconciliation with its unavoidable passing, with life circles, our personal evaluations, the beginning and the end.

**What stimulates the wish or need to illustrate a poem? A feeling? An image? A verse?**

I believe that it is the verse that makes me react emotionally and then I want to express it visually. I would disagree with the term illustration though, because in my case what I am trying to do is to portray the quintessence of the verse in a symbolical way not descriptive. I hope that in most of the cases I have succeeded it.

**What do you believe makes a poem timeless?**

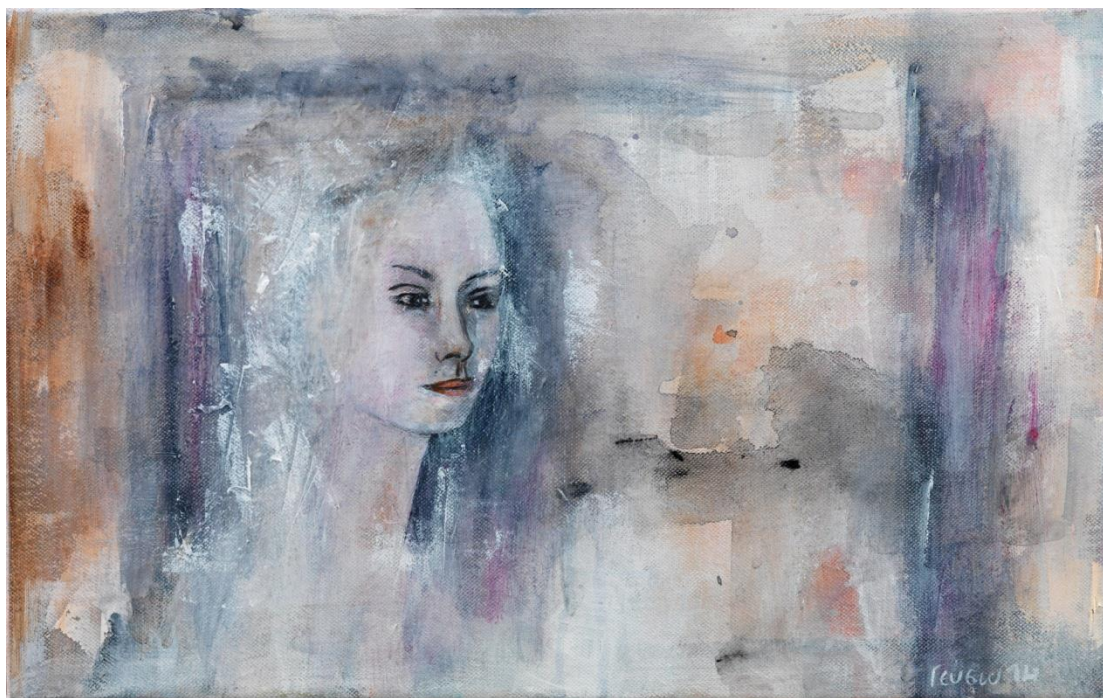
A poem, as every creation, is timeless when on the first hand possesses a quality on its own and on the second, refers to different questions humanity faces such as life, death, love or human authority.





Isn't it difficult for a modern artist to work in the shadow of famous predecessors, for example of Engonopoulos – who had all spent much time in visually expressing important Greek poets?

It is certainly a difficult burden to carry when faced with great painters who have visually translated important Greek poets, but it is also great obligation towards the poets themselves. I have spent and I am still spending quite some time reflecting on that. I believe that the best someone can do is to try his or her best bearing in mind the heavy responsibility of such task



**You have graduated from the Department of Political Science of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, you started then from a very different discipline. What led you to choose art as a new career path? When did you start seen yourself as an artist?**

I started and completed the Department of Political Science.....by mistake. When I found myself there, I soon realised that I did not belong to that particular area. However, I finished my studies as I do not like leaving things unfinished. In parallel though I had already started my fine art studies. I can then say that I have always seen myself as an artist.

**Do you read any foreign poetry except Greek? Would you also consider prose to be a source of your inspiration?**

I don't read foreign poetry from the original as I believe that one, in order to do so, should know the mother language of the poet very well. Concerning prose writing I am sure that I could be also inspired and I might do so in the near future.

**Do you think that poetry and art in general needs love?**

Sure love is needed, either love as we know it or love towards life. It could be said that art embraces love when it is absent and I mean the destitute we feel because of its absence.

**You have been an artist and a reader for years. Do time and maturity change your relation with poetry?**

Although we start reading and studying poetry from an early age its understanding needs some maturity. Even if I look into the poems I used in the exhibition I can surely say that in five years I may interpret them differently, read them differently and thus have a different artistic reaction.

**You are a woman artist that has focused on poetry. "Poetry" and "painting" are of a feminine gender. Is there a "feminine" writing?**

The truth is that I haven't looked into this matter enough in order to give you a definite answer. In all probability there might be a different sensitivity in the female gender. They have also asked me why I haven't used any women poets in my work. I can't say that I won't use any in the future.



**Your birthplace is Constantinople. Does this place have an impact on your art and choices?**

I guess so, as what eventually comes out on the canvas is everything that has influenced us, everything we have experienced. A characteristic example of that is one of my older work sequences, that of the abandoned doors. If we look into it in retrospect we can also associate it with the abandoned homelands.

**“Painting is silent poetry, while poetry is painting that speaks”. Simonides of Ceos (556 – 468 BC). Simonides was the first in the ancient world to mention the relation between painting and poetry. Poetry has always been a haven for artists to express themselves visually. I would like you to tell us something for this explicit relation between the two art forms. Can the effort to move from the written language, the text, to the visual representation function differently than just illustrate a text? What is the creator’s stance and what the spectator’s? In both cases we are exposed to images. Sometimes it seems as if we can read a painting and see a poem.**

Simeonidis was absolutely right. We shouldn't forget, after having mentioned these Greek poets, that Elytis has depicted his poetry on collages, Engonopoulos served both art forms and it is obvious that there are many more examples. When we see a painting we mentally listen to poetry, and when we listen to poetry our brain creates images.

***Artists and in general the so-called “intellectual” people are often portrayed as confined, bitter, misunderstood and lonely people who are suffocated within the constraints of a dreary bourgeois life, social compromises and hostile attitudes towards diversity.***

**In the poems you are expressing visually, art is presented as a shelter and functions in an alleviating and redemptive manner for the artist. I would like to discuss a little the nature of the artist.**

It is for sure that artists are different, whether they are active or for different reasons they haven't expressed their artistic nature. The people who manage to express themselves artistically are lucky because through this they can be redemptive and alleviating for their own shake.



Sometimes poetry conveys a political stance and critique. Cavafy, Ritsos, Leivaditis deride and denounce the decadence of a world that whatever it does, as much as it tries, is condemned, except if the conscience of the people abiding in it changes. What are revealed in their poetry are an amalgamation of habits and obligations and the effort of the individual to live in accordance to others' norms. A society that entraps its members in a predestined way, which often alienates people and distances them from everything they wish for their lives. Is there today an analogous tendency from contemporary poets and artists?

It is certain that committed art does not exist today and I believe that to be a positive factor. In general, societies are more tolerant and there is more freedom than in the past. Nowadays, I must say that through art, of course, many things are denounced, most of the times though this happens indirectly.

*Cavafy differs because of the universal and prolific character of his work. All the elements contribute to perceive the poet as a social being. Cavafy's poetry, experiential and at the same time punctuated with universal values, is dressed with historical names and facts functioning as masks, behind which the drama of a sensitive and concerned person is hidden, a man whose personal experiences made the prudish society of his times to refuse and slander him. Cavafy though was an introvert not because he did not like people but because he wanted to protect himself and his ideas from "the much affinity of the world" (As much as you can). Seferis, for his part, had a negative attitude towards the journalists of his time.*

How easy is it today to keep one's distance and stay focused on one's work considering that we live in a period where socialisation and networking of artists, academics and intellectuals is something unavoidably pursued through the information and communication media? In addition, nowadays, regarding the visual arts, we can often see that art is presented in the framework of art meetings and exhibition openings.





Indeed we nowadays live in the society of spectacle and communication. Certainly many times, in our effort to promote ourselves, we edge on excessive behaviour. Yet, we cannot deny that artists after satisfying the need to express themselves either visually or through a play, or in any other art form, they still want to communicate what they want to convey. It is because art is communication. Of course how this is done is a crucial matter. We should mention that it can be rather saddening to know that there are artists that we would never get to know and they stay unnoticed because of their character, the historical conditions or even luck.

*Cavafy, being quite didactic in many of his poems, sounds prophetic, as if he were foreshadowing our lives. Warnings, awakenings of our consciences, and rising people before the fall so as to be smoother and more creative. He would talk about vanity and isolation, the sourness of futile efforts, the feeling of absolute isolation, the despair of the restrainer, the lost chances, the lack of understanding and tolerance for the specificities of different people, the restriction of freedom from social and moral perceptions and the fear that nests inside human self-absorption. His poetic discourse will express the existing dead ends and place the moral responsibility on the individual to embark on a radical inner personal change, the only way someone can differentiate the future and avoid the past.*

Cavafy was one of the most important examples of worldwide literature where with every poem he managed to instruct people about their mistakes and prepare them for their future. Today we experience a profound political and social crisis. In these fragmented times we need cores of spiritual elevation.

Is it possible that nowadays the artist is asked more than ever to dynamically face his relation with the others, and shoulder the responsibility to promote the departure from the degradation of human existence?

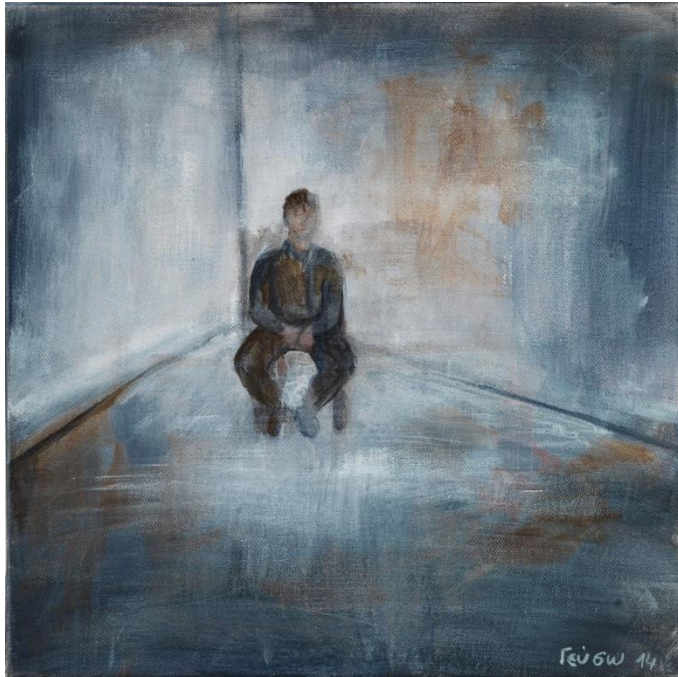
Yes, perhaps the role of the artist today must be more dynamic. The small stone every artist will contribute is important. An artist, regardless of the technique used, can accomplish to pass ideas, produce thoughts and open new ways.





In the poem "The city" the poet looks for a new place to live, a new city. This change symbolizes the new beginning, however, it can happen only if the person, not the place, changes within. The poet stresses the vanity of continuing to live in the same way in another "city" and asks the individual to take his or her own responsibility. Today, we see more and more people to seek for a better "city" and move to another country. This happens to many artists as well. Is it then escaping the search for a solution or should everyone search for introspection?

Nowadays the reasons behind looking for another city are mainly practical. People leave in search of better opportunities and I believe that the majority of them find what they are looking for. In Cavafy's city we are facing something much different. The city symbolises everything you know, love and long for. If you don't want to change your life then it won't wherever you go, if you don't change yourself then you won't whomever you befriends with. Escaping is not and has never been a solution however easy it might look. On the other hand, internal change is something difficult and sometimes painstaking. It certainly demands hard work. It is though the only solution.



Is the crisis in art and the detachment of modern-day people from it a serious matter connected with our entrapment inside the stereotypes of the organised system of a modern hypercivilised world?

I believe that people's interest in the arts has increased a lot. In the visual arts, the theatre and other forms of art when the audience is informed that something interesting is on, then we can observe that the turnout increases. People have more need for art as nourishment and I hope this is not something because of the financial crisis or the lack of material goods – something more apparent than ever in our days.

In the light of the World Poetry Day, a particularly interesting night for reading was organised at Genesis gallery. Did many people attend? Do you believe there is enough response to poetry?

Quite a lot of people attended and the atmosphere of the event was really moving. Of course more people could have come but we shouldn't forget that in those days there were many events on poetry and so the people were dispersed to other venues.

Can, in a “cynic” era, poetic discourse touch people as a way of expression?

Because our times are cynic indeed, we have the need for poetic discourse in all its forms. People can't stand being without art. Yet there are some people completely indifferent to poetry, but even they, although they usually keep their distance from poetry they might just be a little emotionally touched.

*What is the use of poets in petty minded times? I thought it proper to mention at the end the famous rhetorical question posed by Holderlin in the poem “Bread and wine”, translated into Greek by Takis Papatsonis. The answer to the poem comes from the poet himself, a bit further down.*

*Yet they (the poets) are, you say, like the holy priests of the wine-god,*

*Moving from land to land, on through the holy night.*

*All historical periods have their dark moments. Today not only values have declined and the people's horizon has become shorter, but also our attitude has never been so utilitarian or contemptuous towards everything that surrounds us. The question then today could be rephrased as such: which is the usefulness of poets, and broadly speaking of the artists, in times of financial and ideological crises, when the values, identities and the orientation of the human existence are questioned?*

Is it possible that a contemporary painter-artist is a compromised professional who only cares to express his or her condition or even the prevailing condition in a personal manner?



Today artists should not be compromising. Times demand that however solitary artists might be they shouldn't stop being active members of a society. Thus, through their painting or any other artwork, even if they do not make a direct reference to the existing social problems, on a second level, most of the times, their introspection would become apparent. I believe though that to a great extent and in the majority of the cases we see in many artists a personal expression and touch. It is more in the domain of contemporary art that we see art committed to "denouncement". Throughout the history of art and painting even the most celebrated artists have made some compromises. This of course did not lessen the value of their work. On the contrary, today when the art market is in decline I believe the artists are now more than ever freer to express themselves. It is not only the times that impose something like that, there is also an inner need for such expression. It goes without saying that this happens also in other areas of the arts, not only in the visual arts. We see small theatre, dance or music groups to emerge and work regardless of whether they would be able to formally present or put up their work.