

Theodore Manolides

*Myth
&
Meaning*

Andreas Nicolaou

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14 - 29 May 2015



UNIVERSITY OF NICOSIA
Medical School

Introduction

The University of Nicosia Medical School is proud to celebrate its first graduation of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery programme of St George's, University of London. In order to honour this achievement and to commemorate the first graduating body of doctors in Cyprus in the modern era, the School and its Art and Medicine Student Club are organising the artistic meeting of two of the most interesting and acclaimed artists of the Mediterranean world.

Art and Medicine are two disciplines that have co-existed since the beginning of time. The healing arts of Ancient Civilizations consisted of ceremonies, rites and formulas to bring about the miraculous healing power of the Gods. The science of healing took place within and in collaboration with the visual arts. In Ancient Greece, the healing temples of Asclepius were filled with sculptures, symbols, sacred objects, pattern and colour. Significantly, engagement and contemplation of Beauty as a reflective exploration into the meaning of nature and self were considered an integral part of the healing process.

And who best to explore and illuminate the intricacies of the human anatomy than artist anatomists. From Michelangelo to Rembrandt, the mysteries of the human body informed art as art revealed the human body. Undoubtedly the most significant artist anatomist of all time was Leonardo da Vinci, whose unceasing thirst for knowledge and wisdom forged the path to embryology, charting the first visual journey of the development of new life.

Both Theodoros Manolides and Andreas Nicolaou use the human body as an eloquent expressible conveyor within their world of myth and meaning.

Theodoros Manolides with his extraordinary intricate paintwork slowly builds a world into a perfect state of being. His "Motherhood" shows us the celebration of the perpetuation of the species, in its most potent form of universal feminine principles of regeneration, fertility, beauty and grace.

Andreas Nicolaou challenges the same subject by building up his image through rigorous layers of painterly application and subtraction, his deconstructed canvas leaving us with a haunting image of a "Pieta": imperfect, solitary, questioning the very nature of motherhood itself.

Both artists in their opposing and remarkably accomplished ways allow us to reflect on the power of the human body, the power of symbols and meanings, and the extraordinary power of art to express the supreme beauty and the poignant imperfections of the human experience.

Prof Andreas Charalambous
Executive Dean
University of Nicosia Medical School

Introducing the Artists

In my long experience in Greek and World art, and as an art gallery owner and an art advisor, some artists have inspired me with their work and special personalities, so that I have had a strong desire to present their art creations.

This has been the case with artists Theodore Manolides and Andreas Nicolaou, two of the few excellent artists who, in the past thirty or so years, in the whirlwind and negation of art and at a time of serious upheaval, have followed a course with consistency, inspiration and creative passion.

Theodore Manolides represents a diachronic art with works of two dimensional realism and endless inspiration, who takes elements and symbols from our tradition, our heritage and the glory of ancient Greece and the Byzantium and produces works with power, aesthetic perfection and endless beauty. In his numerous works diachronic concepts and myths constitute the sound material for his balanced creations which, in conjunction with the perfect mastery with which they are presented, are capable of transforming the original Greek myth into a universal one.

Andreas Nicolaou leads us, with his works, to a mysticism with philosophical references, where the form is transubstantiated into an idea and the physical world into a spiritual word. His paintings, which hypnotize the viewer, bring him face to face with objects immersed into a timeless void without memory, where the significance of naked realism is not the form as such, but the inconceivable nature of human existence and naked truth. As a result, this leads us to a new and personal code of aesthetic expression, which includes both the holy element as well as the sensual element.

I am very happy to have the opportunity to present in this exhibition two talented artists who, with so much inspiration in their work, represent our modern art development.

Liana Scourles

Art Consultant, Exhibition Organizer

Myth and Meaning

Manolides begins his canvas with the premise that everything is already there. An already established universal language, that he then takes and transforms into his own personal discourse. Meaning is derived from myth and the sacred arts of life.

Nicolaou begins with the premise that nothing is there. And out of this nothing, moments rise and fall away. The tragedy is less in the impermanence of things, than in the lack of meaning the nothing can describe.

They both use symbols and myth to communicate their world, though coming from opposite principles of the human condition. Their intrinsic difference can be best summed up in Joseph Campbell's applicable statement that –

“Myths are public dreams, and dreams are private myths.”

Thereza Lanitis Spanos

*Visual Artist, Practice and Theory of Art
Department of Design and Multimedia,
University of Nicosia, Global Semesters, Cyprus*



Motherhood - 130x90cm - oil on canvas

Theodore Manolides - *Meeting the Gods*

The eloquence and elegance with which Manolides manages to paint his philosophies is clearly a formidable accomplishment, given that only a remarkable orderliness of aesthetic systemization could possibly make coherent the multiplicity of life that layers his canvas.

To enter his world is to embark on a journey, an intricate, complex and encyclopedic odyssey. A destination however, will ultimately prove quite elusive. Formal, supremely referential and erudite these paintings employ a language of scholarship that exudes a powerful aura of exclusivity.

Drawing us in close, these images invite a somewhat ritualistic approach. They ask of us to step up to, step into and immerse ourselves into the rich elaborate world of their making. Brushstroke by brushstroke Manolides weaves his tapestries of colour, form and light into a seamless illuminated painted prayer, its shimmering surface a membrane to another world. Lustrous and luminous, these images have been painted with loving care - attentive and intense.

The surface is hypnotic. Often detail intensive yet surprisingly painterly we discern strong centers, shallow depths of field and formal symmetries - space is both described and sometimes defied. We process thematic consistencies of venerated and personal lore, in still life, Mediterranean landscape and human form. We witness colour - rich opulent tones of liturgy and heraldry - meeting colour - honeyed hues of burnished deep earths - in pure hedonistic juxtaposition. And then an unexpected brilliance of contemporary hue will startle the painted palette.

Surprisingly we discover that it is colour, not line that gives rise to the plasticity, volume and dimensionality of objects. Line, it turns out, etches out and animates the backdrop of ancient stories, gods, heroes and mortals. Up close this improbable surface is tactile and textural.

It is as easy to linger, as it is to roam, delighting in the skill of a hand, exploring, savouring, and discovering. But soon enough wander turns into wonder and observation gives way to enquiry, when it becomes apparent that an immersion into these images is an initiation into the infinite space of their stories. These we realize can be read on many levels and there is a level here for everyone.

All encompassing and as part of an astonishingly grand scheme of things, they are first and foremost a visual feast of pure sensory delight. A visual voyage of ancient visions. On another level however, they transport us into the enigmatic world of hermeneutics, challenging, teasing and testing, encouraging intimate interactive engagement. As the laden brush encodes and our eyes decode, each and every object we discover, has a story (and sometimes more than one) to tell.

One can stay on the surface or delve in deep. The choice is ours.

Highly personal and utterly universal these images reveal a complex cosmology. We sense the elaborate and interrelating layers of relationships, beginning with that of painter (and arranger) to his objects. Then of objects to each other, and of object to narrative, of narrative to narratives, of worlds within worlds, of dialogues and dialectics and ultimately with viewer to all of these things, for no matter how insular some of the connections might be, they are always a point of departure that beckon and guide the onlooker and made precisely in order to be deciphered and seen.

Manolides invites us to venerate his altars with him, to celebrate the ceremonial, to meditate the mystical, the sign and the symbol, to walk away satiated, and then to come back for more. For more there always is.

And although we can never grasp fully the all-inclusive nature of his work, the consistency of the visual language and the steadfastness of his world provide us with enough clues, for us to navigate at least in part, the transcendent reality they afford.

Take the still lives of the classical world, for example, they command a monumentality of presence that takes on the significance of an event. These urns and artifacts assume the personal presence of a sitter. These are we realize the portraits, the ambassadors of our narratives, our mythologies and our ancestral legacies. As such they sit poised, assured, exemplary, elegant, eternally present, schematic and conceptual. Emblems of civilizations, of cultural creations, of civilizing endeavours, these objects are not only invested with allegory and metaphor but also seem to be imbued with that 'anima mundi,' the life force that resides in all living things.

These objects are clearly not for us to touch. In fact they keep us at a respectable arm's length, rather, their breathtaking plenitude is our access – visual portal to their gods.

It is a powerful and personal Hymn to Demeter that celebrates the reunification of mother and daughter, the reunion of which sets in motion the earth's 'first spring.' Bestowing divine abundance upon a barren earth, in full visible splendor and embraced in gold, their appearance reassures the return of conditions of plenty. And reminiscent of an Illuminated Book of Hours, daily eidyllions chart this first month of renewal with pastoral evocations of Arcadian memories.

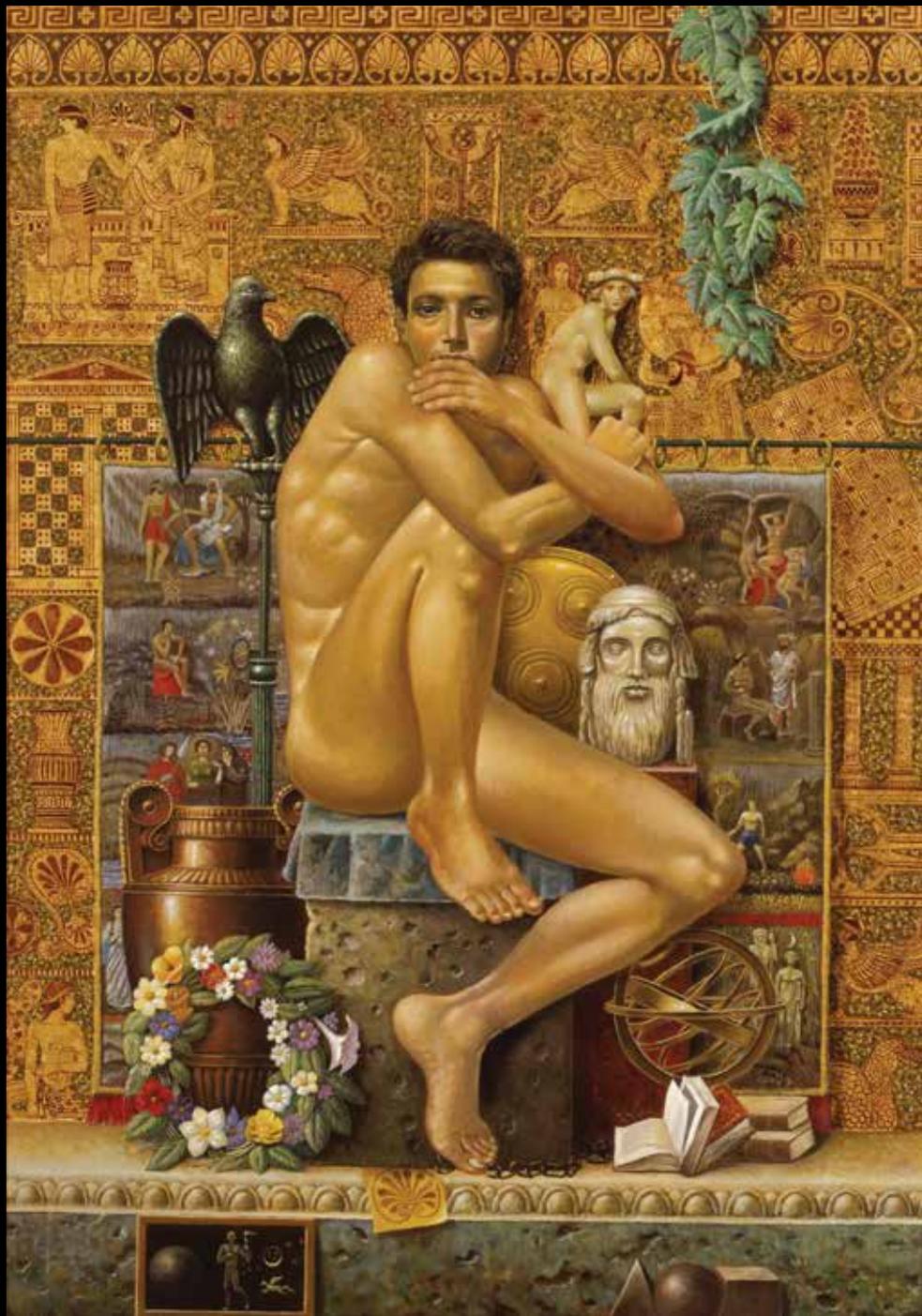
Demeter, mother of Eleusinian Mysteries, goddess of harvest, sacred law, and cycles of life and death, along with her daughter Persephone, goddess of nature's fertility and abundance, have an abiding presence in many of these paintings.

Not only as personifications of principles, but also as manifestations of earth, as lover, as fruit, as flower. Their bounty ever eulogized.

We notice it in the scattered jeweled seeds of the burst pomegranate, symbol of deep passions, dark underworlds and erotic impulses.

We notice it in the nectar of ripe perfect fruit and full-blossomed flowers, a paradise of plenty. We notice it in the olive, tree of the ancients, lord of the naive landscape.

And we observe it in the seasons, stations of domestic ritual that orchestrate our activities, track our time and measure our age. We arrange and weave our spring blossoms, cut the fruits of our labour, present them on a carpet of our weaving, harvest what we sow and kindle our winter hearth. Simple sacred practices of skill, attentiveness and of creativity - Indeed, the very qualities with which Manolides approaches his canvas.



Youth among meanings and symbols - 130x90cm - oil on canvas



Four seasons - 103x37cm (each panel) - oil on canvas

These must surely be the practices, expressed in Plato's "Τέχνες του βίου," the craft of life. For are these not the aesthetics of existence? That poetic mindfulness that ensures the gentle nurture and care of the soul? Moreover Nature's way is to live a connected life. She sustains and nourishes providing a collective conception of wholeness and unity through the contemplation of her cycles and our stages.

It comes to mind that the earth provides not only the raw materials for the vessels man makes, to contain her very produce, but that it is a short metaphorical step away to appreciating that ritualistic communion with food and that taking in nourishment has always been considered a way of absorbing the divine into oneself. We can consider ourselves as those vessels then, filled, overflowing with the spirit of the gods. Replenished. Restored.

It is a potent theme, Nature's gifts and our offerings in reciprocal collaborative rites of giving and receiving. Logos and Eros, the Sacred and the Secular, forever in painted symbiotic dance.

And Manolides keeps reminding us that evoking, and invoking is a co-creative process, for it is after all man himself that has created the language of invocation and awe. One gets the feeling that he is in full collaboration with the gods themselves and indeed as his paintings testify, graced with their blessings.

By reanimating and honouring the aesthetic of a Classical world and with it our civilization, these images have the curiously dualistic nature of simultaneously existing as and referring to another world. On the one hand they feel recovered, as though lost and newly found, and on the other, act as reminders, enablers, or re-birthers to a better world. It is intriguing to think of them as having been created today, through yesterday for a tomorrow.

Time here is undoubtedly one of the protagonists and is inferred in both object and allusion, depicted and implied, but above all it is enduring. And though these images make us aware of a collective immortality, they also simultaneously heighten our sense of mortality for we in their world, it suddenly dawns, we are the transient, fleeting expression of time.

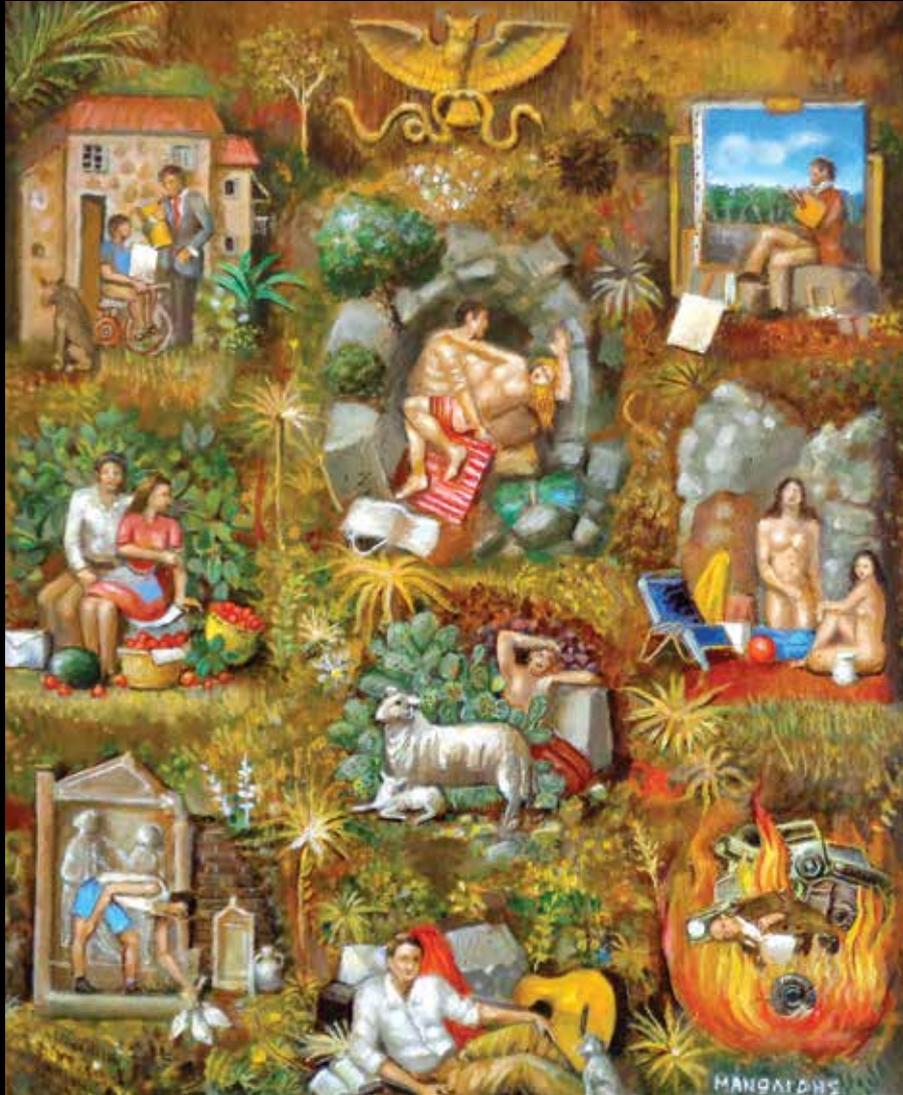
Myth of course stands in a place and time outside history. Consequently it has the power to inform our past, present and future psychologies. And connect to the dimensions of our deepest mysteries both within and without. These images take us back to our possible future, for in part they point out and remind, that for us to survive meaningfully we need perhaps a re-orientation, an articulated enduring world view, of values, of imagination, and a universal sense of belonging. Illuminating the past to bring light to the future so to speak. It is a poignant contemplation that these can perhaps stand as invocations for hope, a new spring in our present winter of moral and economic drought. On a profound level these paintings are about the making of humanity through humanities makings. We shape the world and thereafter it shapes us.

As nostalgic as it is full of promise this journey guides us back to the altar of our making, back to the possibility and potential for renewal and filled with the promise of an eternal spring. Just as Pegasus aspires to the greatest height of accomplishment, harnessing magic on the material plane, so Manolides paints his world, and just as the universe uses the material world as a platform to express itself, so he uses his canvas as a platform to express the universe.

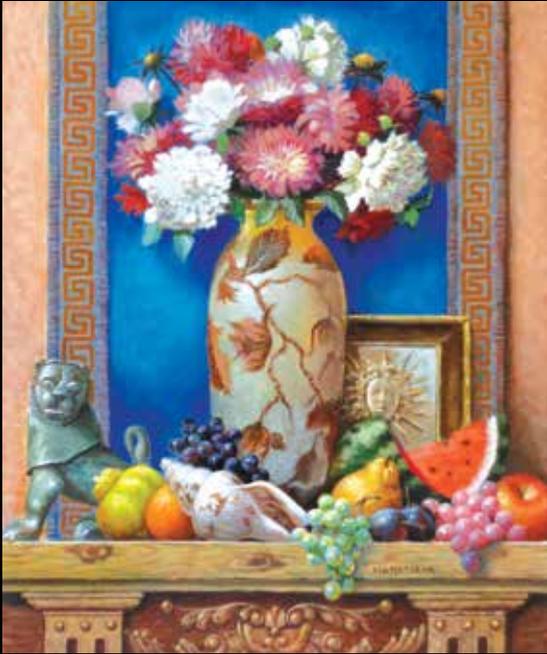
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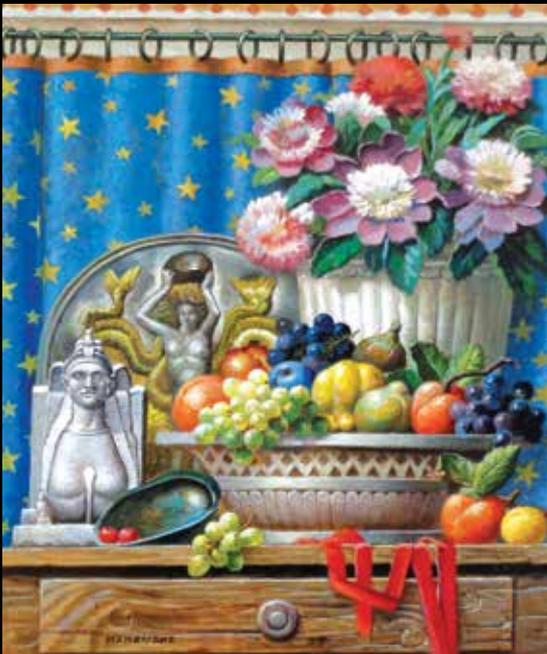
Morning awakening - 74x52cm - oil on canvas



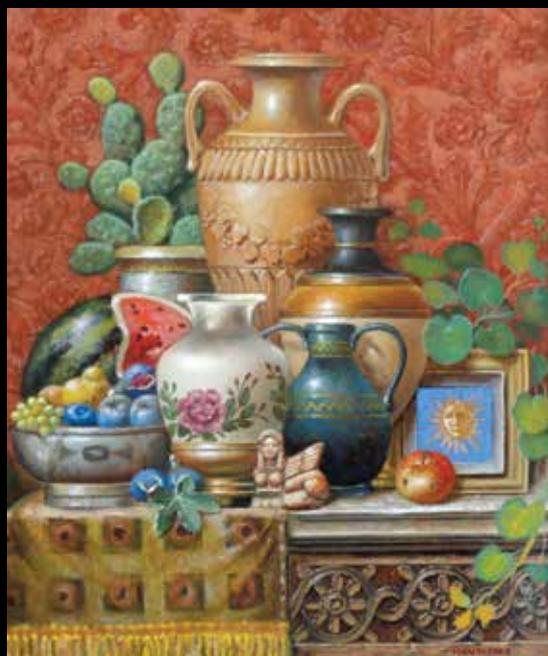
Memories of Lesvos - 55x45cm - oil on canvas



Myth and nature - 55x45cm - oil on canvas



Myth and nature II - 55x45cm - oil on canvas



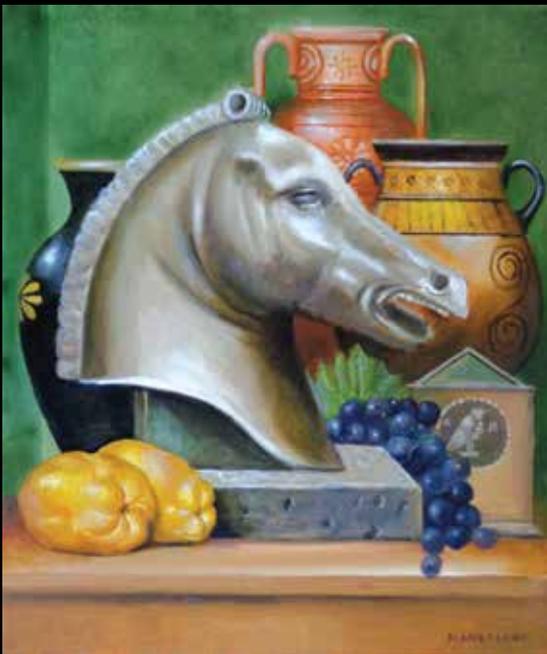
Whispering through the ages - 55x45cm - oil on canvas



The first fruits offering - 55x54cm - oil on canvas



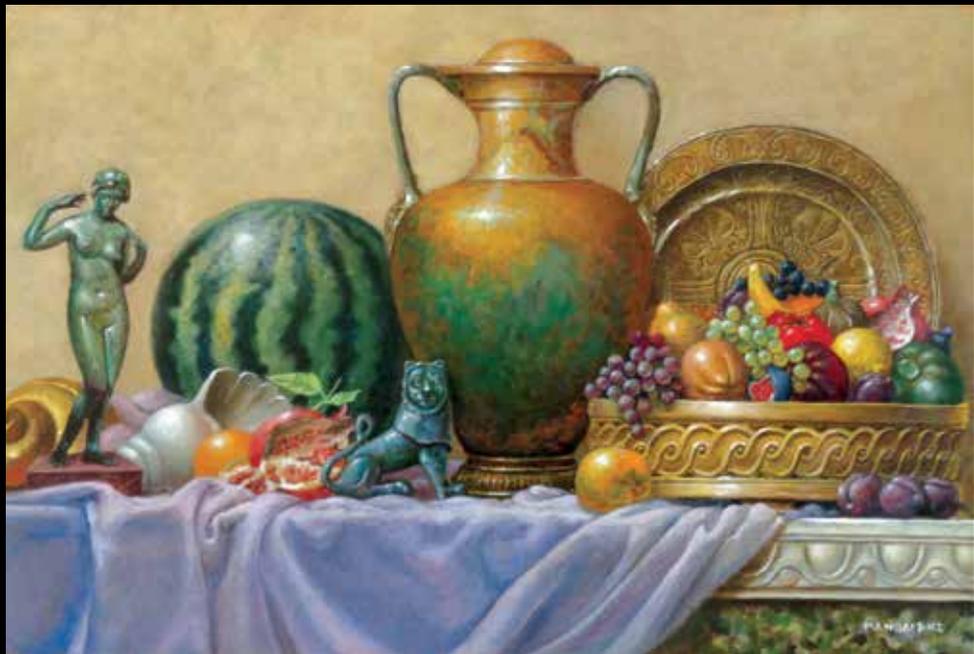
The riddle of the Sphinx - 55x45cm - oil on canvas



Pegasus - 55x45cm - oil on canvas



Fruit of the earth and sea - 35x45cm - oil on canvas



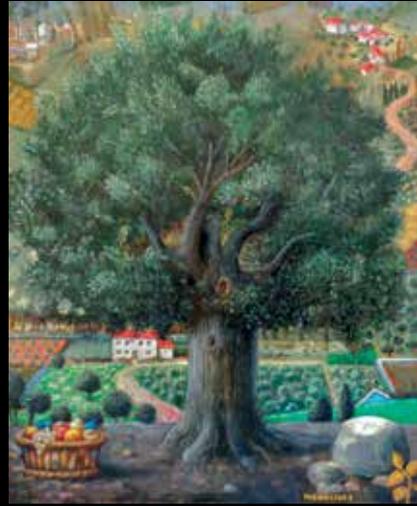
The lost and found - 47x70cm - oil on canvas



Still life with double-headed eagle in the garden - 45x35cm - oil on canvas



Composition with sea angel - 51x45cm - oil on canvas



Olive tree - 55x45cm - oil on canvas



House under the olive tree - 70x70cm - oil on canvas



Thinking of you - 71x56cm - mixed media



Morning awakening - 71x56cm - mixed media



Cat in the dining room - 96x130cm - mixed media

Theodore Manolides

He was born in Athens in 1948.

He studied painting at the School of Fine Arts in Athens and attended the Ecole Supérieure Des Beaux Arts in Paris.

After his graduation in 1974, he produced and directed films for television in Paris and London.

He painted and lived in Europe from 1981 to 1998, travelling frequently to the United States to exhibit his works of art. He currently lives and works in Athens, Paris and Monaco.

His work has been shown in solo exhibitions in Greece, France, Germany, England, USA, China, Japan and Russia, among others.

He cooperated with important galleries such as the Paul Facchetti Gallery (Paris-Zurich) and the Frumkin Gallery, the Marlborough Gallery and the Tatischeff Gallery (New York).

He has participated in numerous group exhibitions in Europe and the USA.

His paintings can be viewed in museums and private collections in Europe, North America and Asia.



The picnic - 45x72cm - mixed media



Pieta-Medea - 180x150cm - oil on canvas

Andreas Nicolaou - *Dreaming of Meaning*

It begins with a study of the human form.

A classical enquiry into the aesthetic canons of our anatomy.

The way it will evolve through Nicolaou's brush however, will transform it into a dialogue on the very physicality and nature of our existence.

But to begin at the very beginning - the empty canvas. Nicolaou starts off his work with a foundation of acrylics, which are water based. Over this, resolution will take place in oils. Water and oil, two seemingly irreconcilable mediums. An irresistible metaphor for what is to come.

His human form is focused in the center of the canvas. It is given absolute emphasis, while the space around it remains empty. The composition consequently has a clearly defined positive and negative layout, the positive of course being the human form, and on occasion something that relates directly to it. Conversely the negative space is almost always a colour field, mostly of light, but sometimes of dark, and on occasion a barely discernible location. In one, but rather crucial sense, the canvas will retain an essence of "emptiness" even after its completion as painting.

In truth the uninhabited space is anything but empty, it is actually very full, full of movement, layers of constructed and deconstructed light, blankets of pure pigment always highlighting, backlighting, enveloping or estranging the subject that resides or even emanates from it. The nature of its rendition is such that it seems to play a non, or at most, supporting role to the protagonists but in actuality, as it takes on a life of its own, it is utterly critical to the narrative of their existence, whether it be philosophically, emotionally or physically.

Out of a soft yet brilliant light the figures emerge blood-warm, palpable and profoundly figurative. Life registered and referenced by the human body in moments of - well, - just moments. They are present in self, a singular universe, in pose, state or expression. Shadow might ground or anchor them in a plausible plane but more likely light, abstract or sourced, will suspend them in a dimensionless one. Supremely painterly they reveal an extraordinary sensitivity to the sensual physicality of painting. They are gestural, expressionistic yet always respectful and born out of the conventions of classical renditions of form and flesh. The body never loses itself in gesture - on the contrary it evolves through it.

The images as images are straightforward enough, a child or couple sleeping, a young man reading, a t-shirt hanging. Their intimations however are anything but. Take the overtly disquieting contemporary pieta, the impaled hand or foot for example. Even the slightly uncanny, unconventional portraits of the young girl in emotively raw reaction to something beyond the picture plane, takes us off guard. The painting may be small and the child might be young, but the intensity of life force that emanates from that pre-reflective moment of sharp white faced anger or fear, audible gasp or disdainful flicker has powerful presence. The scream reverberates across space. And more engaging yet, the momentary expression caught by a momentary light, the flick of the head, the creamy-white light-layered dark, the wisps of gold-red lit hair, a fire and ice child with deep rose cheeks, eyes of mercurial-green quick-silver, transparent and opaque, her personality caught in the charm around her neck.

The psychologies of the human condition start young. Might these be the moments of the loss of innocence?

If they are, there is no better place to regain it than sleep.

And Nicolaou takes us into another realm of existence, into the enigmatic world of being and non-being.

Watching a child sleeping, or anyone for that matter, feels at best like a sacred act and at worst an indiscretion, if not an invasion of privacy, for sleep leaves us at our most vulnerable, unknown and paradoxically mortal state. For the free restless spirit of the sleeping child however, it is a return to a pure land of enchantment and magic. The shimmering radiance of her gossamer dress, threshold to her fairy place, transporting and dissolving all shadows of reality and paint.

As active as the child appears in her sleep, the sleeping couple is suspended in a soft and infinite place. As we watch over them, in this place of uncertainty, the male and female are lost in their dream state, unaware, surrendered, oblivious, in a world of their own, yet intimately and tenderly connected, trusting and cherishing a completion of self. Perfectly physical and physically perfect, expanded beyond boundaries of flesh, together and apart, they dream in a place between us and somewhere else. Did they ascend or did their world fall away?

Sleep, as death, as spiritual body, as void, as dreams is a laden phenomenon and lends itself easily to metaphor and myth. Nicolaou's floating world is a poetic one. It is gentle and poignant. It is easy to read into its ambiguous nature - perhaps dreaming of meaning, or escape from absolute freedom and therefore responsibility, as allusion, illusion, or as endless imagination - which is a relationship with something that doesn't physically exist. Points of departure are as endless as the empty space of nothing or other itself. This other we find in the washes of translucent hues, in the soft lavender ripples of the tossed-in sheets, in the ebb and flow of impressionistic reflections and in the ethereal glow that backlights, highlights and haloes them.

But there is a third space.

It is one, which mediates between the two worlds and informs both. It is a portal space where imagination takes flight and stories form. Found in the dress of the sleeping child, the heart on the t-shirt, the key to the hand... here it is the pale full moon and the spring lilies that invite us to decipher their story. Of course and in keeping with the space they reside in, their narratives are only as interpretive as we wish them to be. In a mythological world, the lily belonging to Hera stands for both male and female principles of fertility, eroticism and passion. Paradoxically it stands for humility, devotion and purity as well. It heralds transitions and renewals (is this not the state of sleep?) and more compellingly said to restore innocence after death.

The yin moon is a luminary and wields her force through subtlety for she illumines from reflected light. So it is from reflection, from esoteric means that we find clarity, softly shedding light on our psyche...

In the same way that cognizance is absent from the sleeping body, the body is absent from the t-shirt and the shoes. These are timeworn items that lie in evidence of the wearer they belong to - whoever and wherever they might be. The meaning of their existence only relative to their use, they are deeply imprinted with the physical and energetic imprints of their human. Aware of their transience they emanate a delicate sensibility; solitary, worn out, saturated. The t-shirt's bloodied heart, soul substance of the absent body.



Lost paradise I - 35x31cm - mixed media
Lost paradise II, III - 31x25cm - mixed media



Medusa I, II, III - 36x27cm - mixed media

No less solitary and grievous, are the three images of impalement with the rather heart rending titles of "Together For Ever." These, hands and feet are our size and so do not speak of a historic event, rather they use a potent iconography deeply ingrained in our visual culture to tell our emotional story. These are the images that belong to childhood memories, to a world of faith, to a narrative that is encoded in our genes and etched in our subconscious. It is undoubtedly the most readily available story to define the human predicament. At the heart of its graphic emphasis is the notion of suffering and ordeal. These are the images that want us to feel bad before we can feel good. How can we be resurrected if we haven't been crucified? So pain, passion, and the - just out of reach - key to unlocking happiness, find a template in the enduring orthodox expressions of spiritual yearning.

Secularizing the pieta is no easy task. It can potentially carry the weight of irreverence and thus overshadow its message. But it is a powerful way to make a statement, of creating a metaphor. It is a cold and somber light that alienates and objectifies this scene - of a murder. And what makes it so unsettling is not the horror of the young man's death, because however disturbing that might be; it is after all in keeping with the theme. It lies in the mother. Is this the Madonna or Medea who coolly appraises her tragic son? She is strangely disengaged, provocatively inscrutable, her expression a chameleon of our apprehensive thoughts. Or maybe it is in the way she sits, or the unbuttoned shirt, or obviously dyed hair. There is something about her that begs the uneasy question - who has done the crucifying here? Should she not be the expression of all that we hold most sacred in the world? The cross behind her stands witness to something we can only guess at. And in keeping with the quality of "emptiness" or void that emanates from all of Nicolaou's canvases, this one is due to the most tragic and soul-destroying absence of them all - the absence of love.

From blank pure slate of mind of youth to a mind enfolded in anxiety or enraptured in sleep, is akin to the artist's taking of a pure white canvas and bringing the angst of emptiness to the forefront. The act of painting itself mirroring the idea it is trying to communicate.

Nicolaou uses the human body to both describe and question existence and our relationship to it. It is after all the one sure thing we have. His paintings visually attest to Sartre's idea that meaning is decided through existing itself, or more famously quoted as "existence precedes essence." There is no evidence in his paintings that there is something beyond an emptiness that constitutes an essence or value that places the human within a larger whole. Kierkegaard's comment that "You are your life, and nothing else," amount to Nicolaou's moments of reading, of sleeping, of hurting, of hoping.

If this be a basic premise then, it follows that meaning and fulfillment, comes from the act of painting these paintings itself. From the fullness of the constructive and deconstructive gesture to the celebration of the beauty of the physical form, Nicolaou, by painting that singular gap that lies between the human and his world, unknowingly, essentially, closes it.

Thereza Lanitis Spanos
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Love me - 100x100cm - oil on canvas



Used I - 50x50cm - mixed media



Used II - 50x50cm - mixed media



Boy and moon - 50x100cm - mixed media



The other life - 100x150cm - mixed media



Girl in white dress IV - 40x60cm - mixed media



Girl in white dress II - 30x70cm - mixed media



Girl in white dress I - 50x70cm - mixed media



Girl in white dress III - 50x67cm - mixed media



Under the moon - 50x50cm - mixed media



Together for ever II - 70x70cm - mixed media



Together for ever I - 180x150cm - mixed media

Andreas Nicolaou

He was born in Cyprus in 1966.

He studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and he continued at the School of Fine Arts in Athens with state scholarship. He graduated with distinction in 1992.

His work has been shown in 38 solo exhibitions in museums and private galleries in Greece, Cyprus, Germany, England, Holland, Italy and Switzerland.

A retrospective of his work was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in Rome in 2003.

He participated in many group exhibitions such as the Biennale of Torino, Biennale of Helsinki, Biennale of Barcelona, Art Maastricht, Pan-Amsterdam, Realisme'05-Amsterdam, Art Karlsruhe '05, Macedonian Museum-Thessaloniki, National Gallery-Athens.

His work can be viewed in museums and private collections in Greece, Cyprus and abroad.



Girl in the moonlight I, II, III, IV - 48x38cm - mixed media

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This exhibition has been organized to celebrate
the first MBBS graduating class of the St. George's,
University of London programme at
the University of Nicosia Medical School

The exhibition was Curated by **Liana Scourles**,
Art Consultant, Exhibition Organizer

Design by Yianna Nicolaou
Printed by Kailas Printers



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