



The Presence of Absence, or the Catastrophe Theory
Curated by Cathryn Drake

NiMAC [Nicosia Municipal Art Centre, In Association with the Pierides Foundation] presents the exhibition ***The Presence of Absence or the Catastrophe Theory*** curated by **Cathryn Drake**.

Artists: Adonis Archontides, Savvas Christodoulides, Petros Efstathiadis, Mustafa Hulusi, Ali Kazma, Vicky Pericleous, Eleni Phyla, Leonard Qylafi, Efi Savvides, Stefanos Tsivopoulos

Opening reception: **16 February 2018, 20:00 at NiMAC**

17 February – 14 April 2018, Tuesday-Saturday 10am-9pm

In *The Presence of Absence, or the Catastrophe Theory* artists from Albania, Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus, along with a British artist of Turkish Cypriot origins, present videos, photographs, and installations that convey the poetic power of the particular in our understanding of the universal. The works of these ten artists coalesce in a collective examination of landscape and memory, amnesia and nationalism, identity and resistance, fragmentation and displacement, alienation and longing for places that may not really exist.

All of these artists are associated with modern states formerly united by the Ottoman Empire that have since taken vastly different directions guided by the vagaries of realpolitik and ethnic strife. The complex history of this region—straddling diverse areas defined as Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East—reflects enduring cultural threads and ruptures that transcend national borders. The current context of Cyprus embodies a state fractured not by cultural differences among its population, but by the myth of nationalism engendered by external forces in the interest of exploitation and control of a territory. Thus it begs the question: Does conflict cause the formation of borders, or the other way around?

The alchemy of place is a potent mixture of history and conquest, cultural memory and mythology, landscape and geopolitics, with the narratives of victors inscribed onto any topography in the form of physical and ephemeral remains. Colonialists, empires, democracies, and despots, as well as sudden catastrophes—including those designed precisely to induce panic and disorder—impose new orders and trigger transformations that mark a terrain, leaving a cultural residue whose origins are often forgotten in the mist of collective amnesia. Absence is also present in the people torn from their homes, as evoked by Mahmoud Darwish's poetic meditation *In the Presence of Absence*.

The memory of a generation is as short as the roots of history are deep. Thus erasure and sentimentality go hand in hand, as do ideology and ruins, in the formation of tendentious historical narratives in the interest of the powers that be. Yet the traces of our tumultuous past creep up through the cracks of collective unconscious just as displacement stirs nostalgia, and the flow of language and culture is a river that cannot be halted. We know that history holds the key to what is to come. So these artists turn our gaze to the ephemeral things that have become part of our identity, the things we take with us wherever we go, and the things that return to their origins like moths to the light.

NiMAC

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