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Painting In The Present Past

MAGAZINE

Editorial Preview - REVIEWED

“In Greece, the past is not silent; it is raucous and alive.”



Vangelis Rinas, *The Cloud's Brother*, 2011-2012. Oil on canvas, 3.2 x 3.2 ft. Courtesy of the artist.

Painting In The Present Past

By *Mary Hrbacek*

Vangelis Rinas' exhibition, "Passages: Loss, Search, Ascent," curated by Thalia Vrachopoulos, investigates the dualistic reality of present-day Greece in metaphysical paintings of ancient ruins set amidst the vestiges of abandoned industrial detritus. The distant past and the present moment are fused in hybrid images of the remnants of several faded eras that still influence the Greek culture and mentality. This double vision of life creates a unique, personal view of a complex phenomenon. The so-called past is neither lost nor forgotten; its effect on every aspect of Greek life is profound. Simultaneously, Rinas delves into mythology by personifying goddesses amidst the scattered architectural reminders of past glory days. Eras leave traces; passages are painful. The Golden Age of Greece marks a pivotal point in almost all human activities, leaving its imprint, by way of the Roman Empire, throughout the Western world.

Rinas's work triggers memories of traditions and rituals that are instilled in Greek citizens since childhood. These paintings depict abandoned industrial edifices co-existing with the fragments of ancient architecture. Within these tableaux loom imaginative symbolic structures in which a musical, stringed instrument becomes a chariot with rusty smokestacks. The strips of paint that intersect and overlay these forms transport the paintings out of the realm of vague memories into a contemporary time and place. This is the artist's method of resolving his urgent desire to understand and integrate his current experiences and worldview, in order to control their pull toward the past. In Greece, the past is not silent; it is raucous and alive. There is no real past, only a burgeoning present that wrestles with another passage in the technological domination of life in the 21st Century.

Rinas' struggle to clarify the layers of his world involves the visualization of Zeus' daughter Persephone, goddess of Spring, lying dead, entrapped in a brick wall. Hades has abducted her to the underworld, but her spirit -- seen in the painting in the form of a confused naked girl -- escapes temporarily to the world of the living. Her mother Demeter, goddess of corn, created such havoc that Persephone was released, but she is compelled to return to Hades for a

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- Arts in Bushwick
- Asia Triennial Manchester 2011
- Broadway Gallery NYC
- Contemporary Istanbul November 24-27
- Docks Art Fair 2011
- Fine Art Asia
- Frieze Art Fair
- HanseArt, Bremen Germany November 11-13
- Momenta Art
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third of each year. Persephone is the perfect symbol for eternal transition. This image gives us the underpinnings for three layers of existence: the spiritual, the world of ancient ruins, and the modern era of industrialization, waste, abandoned factories and pollution. In the painting *Wetlands*, the goddess seems to be scavenging for meaning in the scene around her, grieving for the beauty and perfection of what once was. The waning moon signals another cycle approaching.

In the painting *The Cloud's Brother*, Rinas guides the viewer into the complex strata of his entwined passages by incorporating a trompe l'oeil pencil to his dimly wrought horizon. He seems to assert that memory is the mind's province, while a pencil is a tool of the artist's trade, to be used to render visions of yet more memories. The realistically painted pensive girl in *Clinging Rock* casts a shadow as she leans on a painting of a painting, providing another stratum in the artist's construct. Her volumetric naturalistic appearance contrasts with the faint remnants of buildings and landscape behind her. The girl seen in *Angelic Voice* appears to be fading into the spirit realm, as she peers through a narrow opening at a distant terrain. She seems half mortal, half spirit, with her fading, partially painted forms. The artist seems in step with Macbeth's sentiment that "Life's but a walking shadow ... signifying nothing."

The artist toys with the viewer by deconstructing his motifs with slashes of colorful paint laid on the surfaces of these innovative metaphysical landscapes; this intervention constitutes yet another meaningful stratum of reality. In these personal paintings, he affirms that everything in existence is subject to alteration and its attendant loss. Rinas seems to question his own role in life's drama, as he asserts the courage to continue his search for meaning through his art.

Vangelis Rinas "Passages: Loss, Search and Ascent" was on view at Elga Wimmer PCC until June 15.

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