

“You know that place between sleep and awake, the place where you can still remember dreaming? That’s where I’ll always love you. That’s where I’ll be waiting.”

- J.M Barrie, Peter Pan

Baert Gallery is pleased to present *nostos*, a solo exhibition of works by Sofia Nifora on view from May 18th to June 22nd, 2024.

In a series of oil paintings and drawings, the artist conjures images of a mental realm teeming with the presence of departed memories, hopes and dreams. With this new body of work, the artist’s intention is to evoke fragments of iconography from a place both tangible and illusory, drawing directly from her childhood summers spent in rural Greece.

Nifora finds resonance in the etymology of nostalgia, which intertwines the Homeric νόστος (*nóstos*), meaning homecoming, with ἄλγος (*álgos*), signifying sorrow or despair.

First used in Homer’s *Odyssey*, the word reflects the hero’s longing for his day of return, seeking strength in Ithaca, his homeland, to continue his journey. This duality underpins Nifora’s own practice, where nostalgia serves as both a beacon of comfort and a catalyst for growth. *nostos* is the channel through which she is returned to the sanctuary of lost youth, also happening to be the name of the beach bar where the artist recalls spending summers fishing with her father and sister.

Nifora drinks deep from a well of solace to fuel her wishes and intentions. Personal experiences of grief and migration find form in symbolic representations of what once was and is no more — a newly vivid exploration of how reality is manipulated within our recollections. Her paintings function as metaphors for these memories whilst possessing an autonomy independent of their original subjects. The essence of her imagery lies in the transient and peaceful qualities of nature, specifically focusing on the depiction of untamed grasses and weeds found along the rugged coastlines of her hometown in the Achaia region of Greece. Magnified in epic proportions, fronds bend and whet into an aggregate mindscape and for a moment it is though we can feel the warm dry winds that rustle the leaves and disturb the cicada, heard beyond the sound of the waves. Nifora

reaches for abstraction in this fixated figuration, summoning to the canvas a fragmented recreation of that place which exists only in memory. Her own private Ithaca.

Exhibited alongside her paintings and drawings are a collection of pebbles collected from the shores of the Ionian Sea. Though if you were to hold one in your hand, you’d soon realise that these seemingly authentic keepsakes are, in fact, perfectly formed 3D replicas, delivering a subtle yet poignant reminder of how reality and fantasy inhabit the same soft space in the corners of daydreams.

Nostalgic sentiments extend to the titling of Nifora’s works; ‘When I see those twinkling stars I feel nostalgic, because I know you are in one of them’ a translation of a song featured in Hayao Miyazaki’s 1986 film *Castle in the Sky* and ‘it’s just the way it changed, like the shoreline to the sea’ borrowed from the second verse of Leonard Cohen’s track ‘Hey, That’s No Way to Say Goodbye.’

Before commencing her studies at the Royal College of Arts, Nifora’s practice was solely focused on drawing. However, after experiencing the loss of a loved one during the pandemic, she found herself unable to work as before, prompting her first forays into painting and an evaluation of how her art could be used as a tool for navigating intense emotions. The addition of both old and new drawings in *Nostos* signifies a reckoning with an earlier existence. In refusing to see grief as an obstacle, Nifora ultimately moves closer to her intention, breathing life into memories that engender emancipatory relief. As light passes over the canvas in flame-like phosphorescence, it serves as a faithful will-o’-the-wisp, guiding us back home.

Sofia Nifora (b. 1995, Patras, Greece) currently lives and works in London. She studied Fine Art at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2013-19) and École Supérieure d’Art de Clermont Métropole (2016-17) before receiving an MA from the Royal College of Art in 2022. In 2020 and 2021 she was awarded the NEON Organisation Scholarship followed by the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant in 2021. Her work was included in the group show’s ‘*Abstraction*’ at Taymour Grahne Projects (2023), ‘*A New Sensation*’ at Galerie Marguo (2023) and ‘*Nouvelle Vague*’ at LBF Gallery (2023). Her first solo exhibition ‘*We too have been there, though we shall land no more*’ was held at the ATM Gallery, NYC also in 2023.