

EFTIHIS PATSOURAKIS

NOS OMBRES

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To capture the shadow of flowers, an idea like a poem that brings to mind incertitude and indecision-the wind's trembling in the petals, transience and a shivering surface.

The two series of works presented by Eftihis Patsourakis at the Quai play with this shadowy idea-from the yellowed shadow cast by time passing to our own shadow that threatens. Through a series of new paintings created especially for the exhibition during a residency at the Moulin des Ribes in Grasse, the artist uncovers the melancholic traces of a world on fire, of everyday life that goes up in smoke and, exhaling, sketches cosmic and ghostly worlds.

A Story of Debris

Eftihis Patsourakis' practice always begins by a collecting process, a stroll on the outskirts of town during which the artist gathers abandoned and forgotten objects. A child's shoe, a broken guitar, a tree bark, a glove, a bird's feather, all of them references to an everyday reality that passes and accumulates during the course of our lives. These fragments become the material of his works, a material that he burns and transforms. Metamorphosed-a powdered alchemy of particles, ash and dust-the smoke blackens the canvas, burns and marks its surface. It archives the object's destruction, its absence and transformation.

What our society rejects, dumps by the roadside, relegates to flea markets, are the ghosts of our time, the discarded objects that then come to haunt the surface of Eftihis Patsourakis' works and recount to us the accumulation and chance of memory.

«The profusion of things concealed the scarcity of ideas and the erosion of beliefs.»¹

This attachment to transformed fragments can be found in the artist's first series-cigarette butts that have been picked up and unrolled, referring back to this same smoke, or anonymous photos collected at random.

*Will Come the Time of Fire*²

To summon fire is to practice destruction, but it is also a ritual of something still to come, an ancestral ritual of purification.

«Everything changes with fire.»³

¹ Annie Ernaux, *The Years* (2008), trans. Alison L. Strayer (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2023), 86.

² Title borrowed from Wendy Delorme's *Viendra le temps du feu* [*Will come the time of fire*] (Paris: Editions Cambourakis, 2021), an incandescent dystopia that reflects the crises we are currently living through

³ Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (1938), trans. Alan C.M. Ross (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

We then think of burning as one of the first techniques to obtain pigments, as well as of cave painting.

The smoke obtained by the artist by burning the collected residue varies depending on the object and its texture, on the wind passing through the studio at that moment, or the angle at which he places the canvas above the fireplace.

«Fire is simultaneously the sign of the devil the flames of hell and a symbol of purification»⁴

«It purifies everything as it dispels nauseating odors. In agriculture, it destroys useless weed and enriches the soil.»⁵

Smoke as the archive of our time, a strange archive of the shadows.

Fire symbolizes transformation, begets the world anew and engenders new cosmogonies.

The Moons and the Cosmos

The artist works on a freshly coated canvas, and the surface plays with the smoke of burned objects that draw galactic shapes. Nebulae. We can see cosmic worlds, stardust, magnetic explosions, or crumbling clouds, an entire everyday life that is going up in smoke, poetically collected and preserved in these canvases. I can see moons, the two moons of Murakami's world in *IQ84*, where between the year 1984 and the hypnotic world of *IQ84* the shadows reflect each other and merge.⁶

However, these cosmoses are also cosmologies. We think this is abstract, but it is all about a second life, like another moon, that the canvas confers on to the burned materials. The trace of these vanished worlds, a vault which is nothing more than the shadow of a world that is extinguished.

Cast Shadow

In the *Still Lives* series, it is also about what remains, the archive of a life behind the frame. The cast shadow cut out creates a photogram. Like a wilting flower.

In the 1970s, cross-stitch embroidery kits were sold as a practical means to create paintings at home following a stitch-by-numbers color code. They were met with huge success; once the embroidery was finished, it was hung up on the wall. Some of us may remember them with a distant, hazy memory that emerges from the (river)banks of childhood. The motifs printed on those canvases were often floral.

These somewhat sad still lives, with their organized creativity set in a demarked space, already evoke the Modernist grid. They were collected by the artist across different flea markets. In the process of unframing them once the embroidered canvas is removed from the cardboard backing, what appears is the cast shadow of the pattern that each stitch had protected from sunlight. What remains is the shadow-the trace of a life that the painting saw as it hung on a wall in the kitchen or bedroom, the shadow cast by fleeting time.

Dissolution, like a breath.

Before becoming a technique developed by Nicéphore Niépce and Louis Daguerre, William Henry Fox Talbot's drawings made with light constitute the first steps in the history of photography and raise the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ «*La Psychanalyse du feu*,» Wikipedia, fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Psychanalyse_du_feu. -

⁶ Haruki Murakami, *IQ84* (2009-2010) (London: Random House, 2012).

question of how to preserve the outline of a shadow or the trace of light. The photogram is a photographic image obtained without the use of a camera, and where the object on paper is exposed directly to light. Does it show us the petrification of a subject, the capture of light or a reproduction of what we could have seen with our own eyes?

Is it the dark part of that which escapes, or the luminous part that deposits its brilliance?

Both series of the artist are based on photographic processes: sunlight or smoke fix the image of an object.

Still Lives

During our early conversations Eftihis spoke to me about Giorgio Morandi while I, for my part, thought immediately of Cy Twombly. I'm not sure where the association stems from, but the two artists get mixed up. Several weeks later, I'm walking in Tivoli, outside Rome, and visit the sumptuous Villa d'Este, known for the spectacle of its fountains and water garden. In the noble apartments, an exhibition that brings together the two painters-the few lines, like the shadow of a landscape, and the fleeting Polaroids of a rediscovered time, that of the studio, of immortalized flowers⁷.

Eftihis Patsourakis' works combine these two lines-the outline and the grain.

Still life became a pictorial genre in the seventeenth century». Inanimate nature» was the first translation given to a still life, before the term arose in French, because banality, capturing objects that perish, was not, first of all, one of the great, noble subjects of art, «because that is what a still life is, [...] especially common things.⁸» Eftihis Patsourakis continues this tradition of capturing a little of our poor everyday reality, the anonymous traces of our breath on earth, these sad and perishable objects, and the days that go up in smoke». My shadow which [is] devouring with insatiable appetite each word I write.⁹»

The Shadow Side

There is something very humbling and poignant when looking at these relics. Eftihis Patsourakis, an archaeologist of the common place, listens to their stories-the banality of a life, made up of few things, a social class whose leisure is controlled, and which maintains, in the shadows, the order of the world. To repair, to build, to maintain the garden, to patch up, everything that is counter to innovation. At the core of his practice, he places those who carry out the maintenance of society, its shadow side.¹⁰

«Near Grasse

The valley of flowers

How many hands

How many workers

Vanished

for the industry of perfume?»

To capture the vortex of the moment, fragility and its absence, and like the shadow of a flower, an instant in the roaring.

⁷ *D'après nature: Giorgio Morandi/Cy Twombly*, exhibition, Villa d'Este - Tivoli (7 December 2023 - 5 May 2024), curated by Andrea Bruciati.

⁸ Etienne Joliet, «Nature Morte,» in *Les choses. Une histoire de la nature morte*, catalogue of the exhibition by Laurence Bertrand Dorleac.

⁹ Sadegh Hedayat, *The Blind Owl* (1937), trans. D.P. Costello (New York: Grove Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁰ Jerome Denis and David Pontille, *Le soin des choses. Politiques de la maintenance* (Paris: La Decouverte, 2023).