

# The night of images

*by Apostolis Artinos*

The experience of the world is a transcendental one, a reality revealed in its poetic effusions. Indeed, the real has always been its own mirroring, its manifested surface; an objective world recognised in what is not a world and never will be, in its poetic transcription. Another world there is not, there is just this subjectification of it—a process that renders it visible and allows it to be experienced. The experience is that of an inverted mirroring, for what is seen is a negative reflection which the artistic work attempts to represent in its entirety; mainly to represent its lost image, its secret side: what is not discernible in the realm of the visible. It is a work of formalisation that illuminates the thing in an ecstatic Night. And it is the allure of these images, images of the Night, that come from elsewhere, from Outside, from the Outside of language, and leave the traces of their otherness onto the work.

The language, the representation... How is the world represented? There is a twofold condition here, that of an active-passive agent. There is the moment of what is revealed, a liminal moment, the passivity of its contemplation but also the work of its transmutation. The artwork is an apparition, a revelation of the revelation, the possibility of this impossibility of images to come to light. The images of art are thus mediated forms, revelatory occurrences, liminal points where the Night is drawn out to light—a light that softens its forms and conveys them. It is in this interim, borderline space that one finds the agonised expression of art, where the secret is uncovered, the undisclosed is disclosed and a new nature emerges in the world.

The Night, the Night of images which is also the Night of language. Night is the absence of signifiers, hence the impossibility of all representation. No matter how many horrendous figures it conjures up, as in *Faust's* Walpurgis Nights, what will always attest to its truth is its deepest silence, the deepest silence in the world, shortly before daybreak. It is at that moment of Night, at that precise moment, that something begins to be traced—a place, the revelation of a place. If the place is somehow traced within us, or on the surface of the work, it is traced in its darkness, in the darkness of its destiny, in a 'beyond' it dedicates to its Night. As Isaac Singer states, according to the Kabbalah Creation is God's condensed dark essence: "*God's light began to grow ever-dimmer, specific and increasingly accessible until it turned into matter—into earth, stone, sea, animals, humans*". The place is the shadow of this light, the light of an ultimate hour that momentarily illuminates as it withdraws it. At this uttermost point where it is viewed, the place becomes an apocalyptic field, a mystical experience, an experience of the sacrosanct.

In the exhibition "A walk along the shore" of Nikos Topalidis, successive layers of graphite on paper make up a nocturnal atmosphere. Dark horizons, with the relief of their reality derived from the carvings made by the artist on this dense, gloomy surface. This silver gloom of the graphite—"darkness is our light", the Greeks would say—is

illuminated by traces which gradually reveal to the viewer's inquisitive gaze, depending on the viewing angle and the position of the light, the resilience of a landscape. Rocky hills descending to the sea. Where else? Seferis would say. Here the gaze persistently seeks out the signs, just as the signs seek out the gaze that will discern them. The paintings of Topalidis are landscapes to explore, surfaces that invite the viewers, their active gaze. Landscapes that change the tonalities of their visibility depending on our own readiness.

Many of Topalidis's nightscapes are coastlines, that dimly-lit line left by the wave on the sand at night. By the sea, always a borderline, a communication with the beyond, with the dead. These are no idyllic landscapes of life but disquieting settings of an agitated mental state. Scenes in which pages by Shelley and Kleist can be heard to rustle. I hear them! Landscapes that stimulate the negative destiny of romantic people. Their mysterious character substantiates its fatal shadow as well. These images thus become an imagery of the tragic; yet another imagery that measures itself against its ideal forms. There is a typology here of the secret and the shadowy, of non-depiction, that redefines the view on representation. Representations do not heed a mimetic rule; they exhaust themselves at meta-linguistic transcendences. They are images that cannot be described but give substance to their impossible likenesses. Yet they are still objectifications of our world... what else could they be?

The romantic passion in the work of Topalidis is an inescapable originatory reference. The world is seen in its faint flashes: no visible source of light, only reflections of the invisible. What these works capture is not what dominates but what recedes. Signals of a world which has already retreated into its own darkness, its unexpressed essence, its dispersion. What seems to be traced out here is the place's moment of birth, its chaotic points before they were defined by light. The cryptic nature of these images is also their revelatory character, their incomprehensibility is their genre. Only the Night can shed light on the secret of these worlds and fulfil their verisimilitude. The more the darkness of the graphite thickens the more visible the relief of things becomes. So no concession against this truth.

There is something in representation that comes before representation or after it. It is what always eludes and what the artist will always try, by various means and various beliefs, to capture and depict on the surface of the artwork. The unspoken, the unseen, the secret. Another horizon, another world within the world that resists and preserves its nuclear silence. It is only the ecstatic quality of the Night, of that 'before' of the world, that can attest to something of this nucleus. So yes, somewhere within the night there is a deserted beach and the sound of its rolling wave—the first sound in the world and our deepest memory. It is this memory that all of art's attempts recall and on this memory that they create its metonymies, anxiously and futilely. Images: a grand philanthropy and a unique condemnation.

*Nikos Topalidis, "A walk along the shore"; Zoumboulakis Gallery, 14 September - 7 October 2023.*

*Translation: Tony Mozer*