

To let yourself be guided in between worlds

Some art projects are born out of deep wounds. Sometimes beauty is born from a deep wound. Some births create wounds and leave scars. Sometimes wounds allow us to learn about art and beauty.

Vasiliki Sifostratoudaki has spent the last few years learning to pay attention to what hurts, to observe what moves her and why. She has paid attention to the different qualities of the silences around her, to the stories hidden in the untold and to the memories waiting to be unearthed. In doing so, she has allowed herself to ask what constitutes a family, a land, a country. And perhaps more importantly, to ask what constitutes a woman and her knowledge in the midst of rules and laws imposed from above, from the bureaucratic offices that certify the mandates of power over bodies and territories.

More than a hundred years ago, her family, like many others with them, was deeply wounded. They were uprooted from the soil, the sky, the mountains and the water they called home, forcibly brought to new languages and costumes, to a different air to breathe, a different sunrise to wake up to. Now Vasiliki is the first of her family to dare to visit Cappadocia, to search for the houses where her grandparents grew up, to find the villages that taught them what the world, love and pain can be. The path was illuminated by the discreet but powerful remains of the memory of her great aunt Despoina in the family stories. The midwife great-aunt. And so Vasiliki has confirmed that she not only belongs to a genealogy of strong women who rebuilt their lives and communities after the so-called "population exchange," but also to a tradition of women who accompanied and mediated the most important events of life. And of death.

When Vasiliki decided to research the midwives from the borders separating what is now Greece and Turkey, she encountered deep questions about belonging, possible manifestations of intergenerational trauma, and the grief carried by communities displaced and sacrificed in the name of the nation-state. Like a healer approaching an open wound, she carefully observes it and tries to understand its origin, to gather the necessary elements to treat it, first by cleaning it, making it visible and noticing how it might affect what surrounds it. Then she gives it care and appreciation, for as healers have always known, no healing can begin without love and respect. Sensibly, she explores the words and images with which to address worlds of knowledge and feeling that transcend and transcend her, connecting her story to so many - too many - stories of displaced people, of dispossessed collectives, of lands that have lost those who knew how to truly care for them.

As an archaeologist of affects, she collects domestic objects, assembling pieces of elusive memories, subtle hints of other possible lives. If staying had been an option. She has learned how to make a new home by unfolding a colorful carpet, how to read letters written in a language she doesn't speak - just by touching them. She has learned how to start an endless conversation just by offering a cup of tea, how to transform the foreign into the familiar by carrying seeds that defy tyrannical cartographies. And how to read the depth of sorrow in the eyes of someone who has dedicated her life to restoring a lost sense of home.

In this way, Sifostratoudaki has learned that being a midwife means weaving the delicate threads that hold a community together, even if sometimes secretly. That midwives passed on the secrets of plants and kept those of women in danger. And so she, too, ponders what to share and what to keep between herself and her new friends: be they flowers, ghosts, or inhabitants of a neighboring country that nationalist fictions portray as alien and enemy.

She reveals some of her insights and intuitions in a multilayered and poetic video in which her voice claims its place in this genealogy of women who maintain and reestablish bonds, in her case through

art. She speaks her words softly, as carefully and hesitantly as she writes them. With each statement, she acknowledges the power of words to reopen and close wounds. She offers us certain objects, like a friend who gives you access to her treasured box of treasures. Or like a grandmother who lets you imagine her life by touching her handkerchiefs and smelling her old dresses. Her works create a space of delicate textures, as if we are surrounded by protective fabrics that allow for slow, restorative processes. And so she shares with us her newly evolved relationship with the passage of time, which cannot look to the future without looking to the past.

With *Perátis* (Περάτης) : Exploring the exchanged practices of midwives between Cappadocia and Nea Ionia we are invited to dwell in a present stitched by tender gestures that try to redeem the broken links between peoples and places, women and their knowledge, bodies and their most vital needs and impulses. The exhibition testifies to the possibilities of art to transform subjectivities, starting from that of the artist herself. By opening up this sensitive process, Vasilikí invites us to take care of the wounds that make us who we are and shape the communities we belong to.

But there is no rush to do something about them. As healers know, the first step is to acknowledge their existence. As midwives knew and know, the capacities to mediate between the individual and the collective, the human and the more than human, are within us. Perhaps we just need to allow nature and time to teach us which specific seeds, which particular words, which needed practices are the ones we can offer to our communities to accompany our wounds in their processes of regenerative becoming.