

## Till Human Voices Wake Us

Pelagia Kyriazi 's recent work, an ongoing, evocative series of colored pastels that she began in 2003 called "Tales of Paradox," continues to probe the human condition and its longings and anxieties, its hopes and fears, its complex, compromised relationships between self and others. Her themes, as usual, are existential, obsessed with destiny, solitude, and the communal. Her palette runs the gamut, the colors rich, dense, subtly modulated, and atmospheric, shifting from warm to cool. The surfaces vary, textured in some areas, even mottled, catching the light. In other sections, other drawings, the topography is smoother, the direction inward. Kyriazi sometimes outlines the shapes clearly, other times she blurs them so that they merge, feathering the marks, layering the colors, the deftly executed, painterly passages compelling for their purely pictorial value as well as for their elusive, portentous narratives. She said that her process is slow and even though the present series is modest in size, each drawing took from three months to two years to complete.

Figure and ground, usually closely, even claustrophobically intertwined, are difficult to unravel as forms emerge from the surface and retreat into it. Kyriazi's world appears apparitional, a dream space that is submerged, enclosed, the figures often crowded together, held fast, although some seem to struggle to extricate themselves, attempting to gain more breathing room, to connect to others, to fight them off, to come into being. Their various postures suggest a kind of struggle for release, for individuality, shrugging off the familiar.

The images delineated are both complete figures and sections of bodies such as heads, torsos, arms and legs jumbled together, the scale of the personae shifting radically within the painting from large to small, sometimes nesting within each other, emblematic of an endless chain of being. Surrealistically drawn, many of the forms are clustered within curved shapes that resemble wombs or shrouds, underscoring Kyriazi's meditations on birth and death.

One pastel depicts a vessel of sorts, but a makeshift one, containing a cargo of passengers and shapes that are difficult to identify. The color scheme at first belies a sense of doom, with its festive reds, oranges and yellows—but soon the blues and greens of the sea seep into the picture, the hues darkening, making the scene more ominous. The content, too, signals peril, the boat overloaded, not a reliable ark, with strange creatures and objects in the murky water in the foreground. Another work is more concise but just as mysterious, a green reclining, odalisque shape that seems a bundle of forms wrapped in a translucent membrane that could be an amniotic sac, a disembodied head hovering nearby. A cool, mostly greenish-blue, grey-white architectonic composition of what seems to be columns or bare tree trunks differs from the others in its rectilinearity, its few figures—a family?—standing upright in a clearing between the pillars, accompanied by shadows or auras. Another picture simply depicts a hand, its fingers so preternaturally long, especially the thumb, that they seem more like arms or legs, the distortion strangely dissonant, disquieting. Mordant, at times wistful, liminal, these are images that will haunt your sleep; you won't soon forget them.

Lilly Wei