*Between the nostalgia of a lost past and the indecisiveness of an uncertain future*

The core of human existence is defined by two milestones: birth and death. Between these two, biological advancement, the ability to feel and think, to be able to plan for the future through the organisation of goals and the cultivation of desires lead humans to their completion. The philosophical questioning of the definition of human existence, both from the ontological standpoint as well as the methods by which the completion of human existence can be achieved, have been of perennial concern to the humanities. Multiple answers have been found depending on the historical and socio-political circumstances of the period.

Vassia A. Vanezi attempts visually to approach the issue of human existence and how that is being shaped in Greece during the financial crisis, which has brought many social illnesses to the surface; in Europe, which has come face to face with a refugee issue and has proved to be unprepared to deal with it; and on the planet, which is witnessing an unprecedented wave of mass migration, where millions of people are being displaced from their homes daily, due to war, persecution, poverty and climate change. The stimulus for this work, which is captured through installations, photographs, video, textiles and more, came from daily walks in downtown Athens, in the Pedio Tou Areos (her local park), and a collection of artefacts which are linked by the notion of home and function for the artist as “testimony to the fragmentation of the human condition”.

The motif of the home and the references to it appear over and over again. Small paper houses, the family home lost in the invasion, a nest, a Red Cross blanket, an improvised shelter in the park; the home as reality and as metaphor, the private, the permanent, the inviolable, the human need to belong, but also the metaphysical quest for home, the hub. The desire to connect and the search for home, moreover, is not only a primitive urge, it is also a philosophical notion. Novalis proclaimed in the 18th Century that: “philosophy is in reality homesickness; it is the urge to want to be everywhere at home,” and it is this urge which impels us to miss our home, the place where we feel safe and fulfilled.

The “homes” in the exhibition, however, undermine all ideas of stability and they remind us that these days everything can be turned upside down. Each and every person’s security is threatened by foreboding history and of uncertain present. The period of the long narratives has been wiped out by the scourge of globalisation, which has reduced millions of citizens to refugees, to “strangers”. However, we have all been strangers somewhere or for someone. Recreating personal and collective uprooting and displacement, Vanezi exhibits the universality of displacement as an experience shared by many, and examines the way in which people and their memories circulate and then “inhabit” a country, its culture, its identity, its structures and even its language.

In her essay, *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt describes the work of art as something which is of no practical use, but which does offer people a sense of stability, without which they could not advance. Through its durability, it gives people the hope of immortality, “immortality not of the soul or of life, but the immortality of some thing realised by the hands of mortals.” To that effect, the work of art as an expression of the higher and the eternal can offer an alternative, more optimistic approach and interpretation of the human condition. Because, the human condition is dark, tedious and incomprehensible, however, art has the power to make it bearable. As long as the artist creates, the world will exist and we will relish it.

Vanezi achieves that; mindful of the rumblings of this historic moment, and she reminds us just how fleeting human existence is and of the need to focus on the hidden beauty of everyday life. Space and time converge and the “now” becomes a place of violation, a turning point, a leap to the hope of tomorrow, the end, the beginning. Against the unattainability of a paradise that is not here, she responds with her work, presenting us with a microcosm within the world that threatens us. In a world where a price is placed on everything, she confirms the uniqueness, the power of the human condition as a victory against decay and the powers which are out of our control.

Anna Mykoniati

Curator of the exhibition