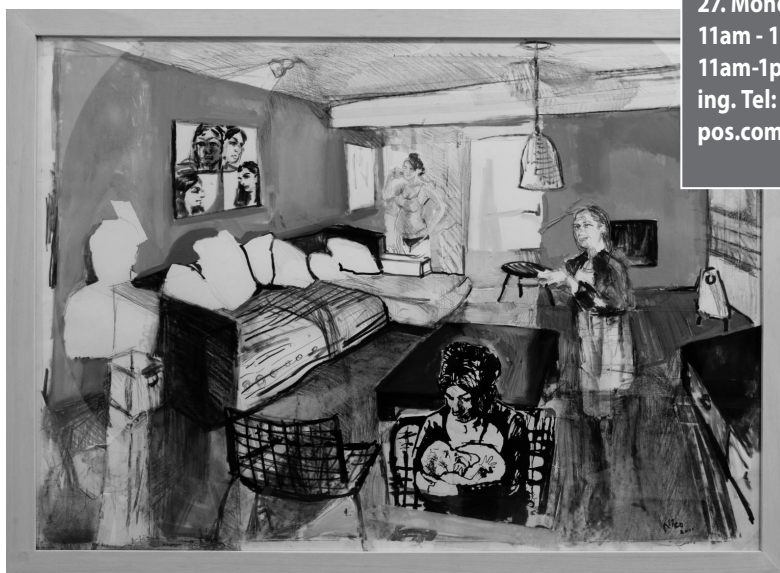


## I've Been There

Solo painting exhibition by Nicoletta Papamichael. Diatopos Centre for Contemporary Art, 11 Crete St, Nicosia. Opens October 5, 8pm, until October 27. Monday 5pm-8pm. Tuesday -Friday 11am - 1 pm and 5 pm- 8pm Saturday 11am-1pm. Closed Thursday morning. Tel: 22-766117. email: info@diatopos.com. www.diatopos.com



# A touch of positivity

Passing through changing times has made one artist look back on the places and people who are important to her. ZOE CHRISTODOULIDES meets her

**"I**'ve been there," proclaims local artist Nicoletta Papamichael. Been where exactly? The answer seems to boil down to memories that Nicoletta strives to hold on to as she paints. The images themselves look like they could have jumped straight out of a kid's story book, with bright and colourful characters going about their daily lives. But then, there are all the shades of grey in between that seem to indicate a darker side; a certain sadness that strives to be understood.

As the 34-year-old artist prepares to put her works on show at the Diatopos Centre for Contemporary Art in Nicosia at the start of October, her solo exhibition will take viewers on a journey of creation through the past four years of her life. But the tales that the pictures tell go far beyond this time line, reflecting on days when the artist was engaging in a whirlwind of inspiration in Madrid. As people, events and feelings come together, the exhibition space will fill with an entire mix and match of thoughts and memories.

"The idea for the exhibition started over four years ago when I moved back to Cyprus," she explains. "But then I fell pregnant and dropped it all for a bit until the inspiration finally came back stronger than before because my life had changed so much."

Speaking of the past, Nicoletta gives me a low down of her career so far. Born in Larnaca in 1977, she studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence. In 2002 she went to the Complutense University of Madrid, which was followed by a Masters and a PhD. Having presented exhibitions at home and abroad, her current one reflects a longing for

days gone by, mixed in with anticipation for the future.

"When I moved back to Cyprus permanently I felt a huge longing for and missed what I had left behind," she says. I felt a need to reconstruct the spaces from my past but also wanted to belong in my new environment." When the brush then hit the canvas, Nicoletta began to illustrate some of the best elements in her life both here and there, recreating simple scenes that she most associates with. "Realising that I now had to look for magic in my everyday life here, I started to mix up my realities and the people that have been coming and going," she explains. "Sometimes I wanted to imagine how it would be if I had everything I wanted in the same place or how my family today would fit in with the spaces I left behind in the past."

From dinners with family members in the kitchen, to a glass of wine with friends, the viewer is taken deep into private spaces that everyone can identify with. And why this emphasis on the indoors? "It's the spaces I felt most comfortable in; I guess for me it's all the small details that make the difference."

The pressing need to document the past came about from a strong feeling of loss of independence. "I missed that free style of life, when you don't really have any sense of responsibility and you determine what the next day will bring," Nicoletta explains. Family life in Nicosia and a three-year-old son were obviously hard to adjust to, and her somewhat untidy paintings give the impression of a certain ongoing chaos. "I wanted to give the feeling of this disorder, with plenty of messy lines, collage and masking tape on the canvas. I'm definitely not trying to be a perfec-

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tionist," she admits.

Then there's the prominence of both light and dark in the images, with grey areas punctuated by sudden bursts of colour. "The selection isn't really a conscious one," she lets on. "I always start with a black and white base and then feel the need to put in some colour. It's all a bit dark with a touch of positivity." As for the characters that are featured in this interesting mix, they are all people that have been a part of her environment in one way or another. Her son is also visible in some images - albeit in rather bizarre way as one scene shows him sipping on wine back in Madrid in days before he was even born. And at the centre of it all is the artist herself, best characterised by her long dark mane. With most of the work that she has ever done being

autobiographical, she feels it's important to be personally involved in the scenes that she recreates. "You know, I feel that I'm being honest in this way and the work feels more like it's mine."

Inspired to paint by all sorts of daily triggers, the artist confesses she usually feels a sudden urge to get down to it when she's going through a tough time physically or emotionally. But how would she like viewers to feel when they look at her creations? "I'd expect to wake something up inside them and perhaps feel the same changes that I did emotionally; to perhaps think about what's happening behind the scenes in the images and create a story." Going back to the very essence of the exhibition title, it's also about the audience feeling that they too have "been there."

