





'THEATRE OF MEMORIES'

A solo exhibition by artist Maja Djordjevic in Athens celebrates the resilience of the human spirit through the transformation of tragedy into treasure.

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WORDS Vanessa Murrell

PHOTOGRAPHY Thanassis Gatos

In "Theatre of Memories," **Maja Djordjevic's** solo exhibition at the **Dio Horia Gallery** in Athens, Greece, the artist delves into life's most fragile moments. Raw human experiences surface in the artist's paintings, where crushed dreams and broken hearts become tight memories. As the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez pointed out in his memoir, *Living to Tell the Tale* (2002): "Life is not what one lives, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it."

In this show, Djordjevic rejects the societal pressures to present a façade of perfection, instead she embraces the trials and tribulations of loss, humiliation, and heartbreak.

Describing the inspiration for her latest works, Djordjevic explains, "I've recently returned to printing photographs, mostly those from my phone that I fear may be lost to oblivion... I've come to realise that, in addition to the happy moments, photos of myself crying in a bar washroom or friends feeling down are almost equally significant. In hindsight, these fragile moments are beautiful and I am happy to have them saved. They are over, and today I/we are stronger because of them."

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unfulfilling goal, and that we can only transform our wounds into a sense of wholeness by accepting each other's flaws.

The works are displayed in self-standing units that evoke via oversized picture frames. Each showcases a diverse spectrum of styles, from the whimsical to the sophisticated, the minimal to the extravagant. The materials range from leather to velvet and the colours from gold to green. The lack of hierarchy in Djodejevic's material choices allows each viewer to find a work that speaks to them. The artist notes, "I'm constantly wondering what a painting can actually be, and where the line is between a painting and an object." The surfaces of the paintings themselves are highly glossy; the artist uses enamel paint to mimic the feeling of a digital screen.



Djordejevic's paintings are filled with unapologetic characters, depicted with quirky physical traits such as abundant pubic hair and gaping mouths. It is reminiscent of the masks in the Athenian tragedy, features that symbolise an unwavering distinct voice. The nudity of the

characters exudes strength and resilience, embodying the principles of belonging and self-



As a teenager, the artist began drawing characters with Microsoft Paint. This virtual canvas became a safe haven for her to openly express a mischievous side, depicting nudity without leaving any tangible evidence of it. Despite the discontinuation of paint, the artist's thinking remains rooted in pixels. As she progresses through life, so do her characters. In recent works, the artist uses her beloved "naked girls" to give voice to the stories and struggles of others. In many ways, Djordejevic's world seems indebted to the cultural psyche of her home-country of Serbia, where recent history of the Yugoslavian civil war casts a long shadow of repressed trauma.

As viewers approach the gallery, the air is charged with a spirit of exploration. The outside is ringed by historical mosaics that allude to the same pixelated paintings that hang inside. Peering through the glass, we gain a tantalising glimpse of the works (partially concealed by luscious red theatre curtains). Boasting vibrant colours, the pieces immediately invite passers-by to take a closer look. Initially, the paintings convey a sense of joy, but beneath their surface hide darker undertones.

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Visible through the window, a mural of a steep staircase bound by tape stamped with the word 'fragile', sets a mysterious mood point, a sense of broken, shredded anticipation. Audiences catch a glimpse of "Consolation," a painting featuring a group of women offering comfort to a central nude figure in a circular formation, reminiscent of French artist Henri Matisse's "Dance" (1910). The irony of their advice is emphasised by their own draped attire, symbolising the decaying remnants of ancient Greece.

“Theatre of Memories,” the third piece visible from the outside, draws inspiration from the architectural designs of Italian philosopher Giulio “Delmirio” Camillo (1510-1544), who sought to



proposed in an environment typically reserved for fiction. This staging of make-believe reminds me of some current therapeutic methods that have patients relegate traumatic memories as though they are characters in a play. In Djordjevic’s interpretation, two hearts are locked individually under the vaults of the theatre, and characters gather around an eternal flame, each holding a rose. The blooms symbolise the ritual of remembrance in a graveyard, reminding us that love endures, even after we’ve buried our broken hearts. The scene evokes images of mourners gathering at gravesites to pay tribute to their deceased loved ones, and alludes to love’s lasting effects on memory.

Inside the gallery, the works are divided into two levels, allowing contrasting emotional landscapes to co-exist. On the upper floor, eight paintings are displayed in a well-lit, staged setting. “Stay with me, and don’t look back,” is a standout piece that depicts two figures seated on the floor, facing away from each other, while an audience watches their unravelling romance from a balcony above.

The massive hearts they wear are symbolically shattered by a broken arrow piercing through them, emphasising the relationship’s delicate nature. The message is reinforced by the work’s placement on a glass floor, exposing the buried Roman ruins that lie below. The painting’s subjects find themselves set against a theatrical background; an allusion to the pressures of maintaining a curated veneer in today’s social media-driven world. This work invites us to reflect on the human desire for genuine connection in a world that often prioritises image over substance.

The theme of love is also explored in “Fragile together, always and forever.” In contrast to the previous work, this painting features a couple wrapped in ‘fragile’ warning tape, tied and stuck in bed, but they hold hands and gaze at each other, reinforcing the strength of their relationship. They cannot see their destination against a vast sea at night, but a glorious sunrise awaits them. The piece conveys a message of hope, indicating that love is resilient, even in uncertain times.



"Theatre of Memories" and "I've spent more time missing you than time spent with you".

"I've spent more time missing you than time spent with you," depicts the sorrow of unrequited love. The forlorn individual lies on the edge of a pool, pouring her emotions into letters to a loved one. The crumpled and discarded notes, cast into the water, raise questions about the true expression of emotions and the fate of unspoken desires. The backdrop of a vast ocean, signifying the limitless possibilities beyond her reach, contrasts with the confined space of the pool, conveying the character's emotional turmoil. This piece, nodding to artist David Hockney's depictions of swimming pools, captures the human struggle with love and loss through the fluidity and tension of water.

In "We have no more desires, and now we are sailing to infinity," the protagonist finds solace in reflection as she sits on a sofa wrapped in tape while smoking. The scene's birds and the waves move in a direction opposite to the subject's, a metaphor for the unforeseen path ahead. Despite the unknown, the protagonist sets sail, guided only by the winds and currents of the vast ocean, towards a destination as infinite as her anxieties. Symbols from the interior world (a bed, curtains) and the exterior world (the sea, mountains, stars) cohabit Djordjejevic's paintings, symbolising the way our personal interior world bleeds out into the physical space around us.

In "To reach our dream together, alone at the crossroads of the world," six characters are surrounded by melting ice creams decorated with glace cherries and sprouting mushrooms. The

expression 'cherry on top' comes to mind, embodying the potential for something unexpected to arise in the midst of setbacks. The work carries a specific symbolic meaning with the ice



growth and renewal. As these two elements sit side by side, we are reminded of the importance of embracing nature's forces rather than attempting to suppress them.

“ In the rising symphony of these deeply personal memories, Djordjevic captures the often complex, difficult reality of being alive. She asks us to recognize and confront the more difficult experiences too, urging us to honour the pain that we often wish to avoid in order to truly savour the pleasure.

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As we descend to the lower level, a sense of entering the artist's subconscious emerges. The dimly-lit room contains six NFT videos displayed on a single white canvas within a sleek frame. Ecstatic cheers from an implied audience echo throughout the film, underscoring the fact that we are watching a spectacle. The artist explains that these pieces originated as drafts for paintings that never materialised – despite the video format, the artist shows a dedication to painting as an art form that endures.

The films' looped stop-motion animation and digital, pixelated forms seem to pulsate. Fragile memories play out, in keeping with the paintings in the room above; we watch vignettes of characters gripping melting candles, being disembodied, embracing a rose tree in lieu of another body, perching on the edge of the earth and falling off its convex surface, sprouting fungi from their heads.

As I walked through the space, I found myself recognising my own personal experiences in Djordjevic's fantastical world. The surfaces of works that appear innocent or naive actually conceal hidden depths, and the meanings they convey are layered. A piece that may first seem to talk about love might also refer to anxiety, censorship, ecology, control, the body as spectacle, forces beyond our control, and powerlessness. In the rising symphony of these

deeply personal memories, Djordjevic captures the often complex, difficult reality of being alive.

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Maja Djordjevic's "Theatre of Memories" at Dio Horia Gallery, Athens is open from 4 February – 14 March 2023.



Vanessa Murrell

Vanessa is a socially-engaged curator, educator, writer, and activist from Spain, currently based in London. She has a particular interest in non-formal, participatory, communal and collective initiatives by emerging artists. In 2017, Vanessa co-founded the art platform DATEAGLE ART, where she has interviewed over 200 emerging artists. Her work at DATEAGLE ART has expanded to include curating exhibitions, commissions, and educational initiatives. In 2022, she co-founded the curatorial collective YE Collective, where she co-creates cultural actions amplifying solidarity against any abuse of power in the postdigital age.

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