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Artist Gina Kalabishis' new exhibition, Memento – Pictures of You

At the core of Gina Kalabishis' art is her relationship with the land and its inhabitants, her love for the Australian bush, which once again takes centre stage, with an aura of nostalgia, in her upcoming exhibition at Shoalhaven Regional Gallery, at Nowra in New South Wales

Exhibition: Shoalhaven Regional Gallery, at Nowra in New South Wales from Saturday 1 October until 26 November.



Gina Kalabishis with her latest work, which turned into mementos of the beautiful Shoalhaven region and its inhabitants, since she couldn't go back to for two years, due to the pandemic restrictions.
Photo: Supplied

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28 September 2022

At the core of Gina Kalabishis' art is her relationship with the land, its flora and fauna. In her upcoming exhibition at Shoalhaven Regional Gallery, Nowra in New South Wales, Kalabishis' love of the Australian bush is bathed in an aura of nostalgia.

"This body of work actually started in 2018, when I had my last show titled Bundanon Floor to Sky at Flinders Lane," Kalabishis told *Neos Kosmos*. It was a series of works completed during her residency at Arthur Boyd's property outside of Nowra, in the south-east coast region of NSW.

Bundanon means 'deep valley' in the language of the Wodi Wodi peoples of the Yuin nations, who as traditional custodians, share a deep spiritual connection with the fertile valley shaped by the Shoalhaven River.

"I had never taken the work back to the Shoalhaven. I wanted to have a show at the place where they were created. I was going to do half the exhibition with the existing paintings, because they'd only

been seen for two weeks. And then new works would follow the Shoalhaven River to the sea – Bundanon Floor to Sea,” Kalabishis says.

Everywhere (after Fleetwood Mac) 2022, oil on linen, 198 x 137cm, by Gina Kalabishis. Photo: Supplied

Due to Covid lockdowns she couldn't go back for two years and that changed the work completely as she was forced to draw from her memories of the place.

“I decided right towards the end, that I would make something like postcards, sort of mementos, nostalgic of things that I had memories of, when I was there during my residencies.”

The detailed 'portrait' of beautiful native wildlife are set in hazy romantic landscapes. They are combined with floral bundles, as a homage to the classical art of Japanese flower arrangements, that she loves.

Once finished Kalabishis noticed there was another level of subconscious nostalgia in her paintings. Her last five big paintings are similar to the family and wedding portraits captured in photographic rooms in Melbourne in the 60s and 70s, which used painted background.



Love in the depths of you 2022, oil on linen, 122 x 91cm, by Gina Kalabishis. Photo: Supplied

“If my parents wanted to take photos of the family or weddings, they used to go to these photographic rooms, where they would stand on the stage, and then in the background, there were these made-up landscapes. I used to look at these black and white and coloured photo albums of my parents' wedding, my uncle's wedding, of these nostalgic times of when they first came to Australia,” Kalabishis said.

“Subconsciously, and symbolically [in my latest work] I am reminiscing my parents, in the landscape, but they're not there. I realised after I finished them how similar they were, in the way they were set.”

Her parents, Paraskevi and Elias, passed away years ago. “Unfortunately, both of them didn't, have longer lives, which is quite sad,” Gina

reflected on her childhood and her parents who travelled separately in the 1960s from Rhodes to settle in Australia where they met and fell in love.



“My parents knew that I loved drawing, when I was a child I used to sit at the table and draw till 11-12 o'clock at night. When I used to go to Greek school, they would ask me to draw the saints, and they were very proud of me.”

“I was lucky because they integrated into Australian life. My mum was very pro education for women and doing the best that you can. My dad put us through a private girls' school to make sure we had a good education, and I'm really grateful for that.

We were never pressured into getting married or anything like that.”

Her mother sang in the Greek choirs and performed across Greek community halls in her forties.

“She was a mezzo soprano... a beautiful voice. I never knew she had a great voice until the end, when she started singing, and she enjoyed that. I don't think even my dad knew that she sang so well.”

Growing up, her parents would take them crabbing, fishing, and hunting for rabbits, which connected them to the land, as they continued to do in Australia what they did back in Greece.

Gina is also a runner, which she believes adds clarity to the way she perceives nature, and the landscape. “I find it exhilarating to run through the bush. I fill up with endorphins, so I see the landscape so much clearer. Exercise is part of my practice as it feeds my energy.” Her parents, Elias and Paraskevi Kalabishis, on their wedding day, captured with a painted romantic background and floral bundles, a combination that subconsciously comes out in Kalabishis' latest work. Photo: Supplied

The Greek poet Callimachus' poignant poem describes Kalabishis' own unique visual language of the Australian landscape and her respect for the natural environment: 'Leave open ways and trodden tracks alone and go the way that's narrow but your own'.



Isn't she lovely 2022, oil on linen, 198 x 137cm, by Gina Kalabishis. Photo: Supplied