

MEGAN MACNAUGHTON

Once Removed

Originally printed as part of 'Communication Breakdown', published by Soup Gallery x Foolsap Editions to accompany Kyvèli Zou's solo exhibition.

In 1969 Led Zeppelin released the trailblazing song 'Communication Breakdown' on their debut album, an energising and frantic cry of romantic frustration considered by many as the foundation blueprint for heavy metal and stadium rock. Over five decades later, Kyvèli Zoi borrows the title for her first London solo show at Soup, where she presents a new body of paintings that explore the chronic, universal and unresolvably human issue of miscommunication.

Frames within frames, scenes within scenes: Kyvèli Zoi's works are constructed around a central subject matter set against the backdrop of a domestic interior, flattened perspectives often featuring speech balloons, fishbowls or a picture overhanging a bed. This layering acts as a theatrical peephole or cinematographic mood board, inviting us to perceive various angles and atmospheres of one same room. Sparse elements are intentionally left hanging in space, as the containers of unfulfilled dreams or fantasised projections mix with romanticised memories.

Moments experienced through a medium – telephone, television, screen of any sort – are always once removed in some way, their alteration giving way to a possible warping of reality. Kyvèli Zoi paints, with a hint of dark humour, the irony of how challenging sincere communication has become in a supposedly hyperconnected world, how the omnipresent tools meant to facilitate communication have become their own obstacles. Her works capture the lingering and sometimes apathetic effect of distance, and reveal how the gaps left by the lack of embodied – as opposed to digital – experience are often filled with idealised sublimation.

The recurring presence of a selection of everyday objects make up Kyvèli Zoi's idiosyncratic iconography, used to represent language's impossibility to contain the depth and range of emotions felt in the face of loss. Grief can provoke the unsettling sensation of feeling like a stranger in those spaces we once knew as a second skin. Intimate places, whether tangible or metaphysical, that used to feel secure become hostile as the result of separation: where one would previously go for shelter and warmth becomes yet another anodyne spot on the map.

The fishbowl, therefore, appears as a metaphor for this estrangement, highlighting the removal of a being from its natural environment. The television that broadcasts a peak of electric, collective synergy – is the scene being filmed a rave or a riot? – functions as evidence of the detachment through which we live vicariously. The pockets of lovers, outlined in a floating frame like a locket portrait, are rendered in a smeared blur or fading mist, echoing the uneasy crackling sound that chops through a phone call with a bad signal. The recognisable, almost-touching hands of Michelangelo's Creation of Adam are reproduced as the miniature screensaver of a Nokia brick phone – the quintessential accessory of anyone claiming to be remotely cool in the early 2000s – a frustrating representation of the nearly perfect connection we all desperately seek to obtain.

Kyvèli Zoi's bedheads are a nod to Domenico Gnoli: whether empty or occupied, they contain the daunting memory of the lovers who once slept there. Beyond the subject matter, the almost fetishistic level of detail rendered across the textured surface of the wooden bedframes, floorboards or tables also reference the Italian painter's hyper-magnified formal language.

The tight framing of Kyvèli Zoi's compositions create a confined, somewhat claustrophobic environment. This latent ambiance could define the obsessive nature of a relationship that takes centre-stage over our own mental landscape, as two individuals grow virtually so close to one another that there is no possibility of seeking a wider perspective. It could also be the visualisation of grief as an intermediary lobby, a transitional state to process what no longer is. Reminiscent of Giorgio de Chirico's signature arcades and conflicting vanishing points, Kyvèli Zoi cautiously leaves a doorway in the background, an opening beyond the painting – possible escape from the mental rut of a communication breakdown, or the promise, once removed, of a brighter day.