

ABSTRACT

By analyzing selected Cypriot works of art, from 1950 to the present, I question what it might mean to “write trauma,” or to give voice to a wound that seems to defy representation. The artists discussed do not only confront the aesthetic potential of visual practice, but also address the theoretical and ethical impossibilities of such a practice. They enact a conception of another set of relations between representation and the unrepresentable, where no aesthetic object will ever be right or appropriate to the historic trauma that it takes as its grounding subject. As the ‘unrepresentable’ is not located in narrative representation, following a Deleuzian line, I locate it in how the material passes into sensation and in how this sensation affects the audience. I open up the question of what art itself might tell us about the lived experience and memory of trauma, and what the specific works studied trigger in the viewer.

Cypriot artists’ works can be viewed as yet-to-be-completed, as resisting the intention for wholeness, conclusion and resolution, and instead sustaining it as desire. Art is therefore a realm that opens up the world, unfolding it towards that which we are unable to represent. The cause of the violence, the fractured sensory experience and the unpredictable and persistent temporality of trauma and memory in Contemporary Cypriot art are invisible but present – they constitute a force which makes its presence known. Suffering from a burden of historical belatedness, Cypriot artists attempt the impossible in striving to bear witness to the loss and suffering experienced not only through a past loss, but rather to something at once more general and more devastating: namely to the loss inscribed in the movement of temporality itself. Thus, melancholy, which is located in contemporary Cypriot art and analyzed in this research, not only implies an intense awareness of a traumatic past, but also an expectant openness, a void waiting to be filled by worlds yet to be born, worlds that could be equally doubtful, painful, insecure and uncertain.