**CHAPTER 4**

**Who are we, Where do we come from, Where are we Going to?[[1]](#endnote-1)**

**Writing Greek Cypriot Women’s ArtHistories in Contemporary Cyprus**

**Maria Photiou**

**Introduction**

This chapter engages with material so far insufficiently examined in art history: the work of Greek Cypriot women artists. The work of these women artists has received little attention andhas frequently been marginalised from official art histories.This chapter develops a framework to explain some of the processes and conditions that affected Greek Cypriot women artists’ lives and careers. It is based on research I carried out for my doctoral thesis at Loughborough University entitled *Rethinking the History of Cypriot Art: Greek Cypriot Women Artists in Cyprus*.This chapter focuses mainly on the work of Greek Cypriot women artists, principally due the scarceavailability of material on Turkish Cypriot art in English.

In this chapter I begin with reviewing perspectives on writing Greek Cypriot women artists’ histories. I will address the socio-political conditions from which Greek Cypriot artists emerged and their problematic position, which has been associated with patriarchy and nationalism. This matter is explored by a number of contemporary Greek Cypriot feminists: patriarchal society and national politics left no space for women in Cyprus to struggle for women’s rights, to contest patriarchy or to gain public visibility.[[2]](#endnote-2)Significant to my discussion is how the socio-political conditions affected Greek Cypriot women artists’ lives and careers. Within this context I will use interview material to refine our understanding of how women artists responded to these socio-political conditions. The works of Loukia Nicolaidou *At the Fields* (c.1933) and Rhea Bailey*Memories of the Yard* (1979) will be analysed – their work underlines discourses related to gender relations and socio-political conditions in contemporary Cyprus.

***Who are We***

**Perspectives on Writing Greek Cypriot Women Artists’ Histories**

Griselda Pollock, in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories*, defines ‘canon’ as ‘a discursive formation which constitutes the objects/texts it selects as the product of artistic mastery and, thereby, contributes to the legitimation of white masculinity’s exclusive identification with creativity and with culture.’[[3]](#endnote-3) Following Pollock’s argument that there has never been a single canon in the history of art, I agree that the canon is the product of the academy and of the artists and art historians who assume a Western male historical canon. I therefore consider ‘canon’ as the establishment of the ‘fatherhood of Cypriot art’ and the systematic exclusion of women artists from the official art history. The construction of Cypriot art history appears to be formatted according to a Western European art canon. As I will discuss later, this canon formation has been a key reference since the early biographical material in relation to Cypriot art history.

In order to study art and art history, Greek Cypriots commonly migrated from Cyprus, as academic training was not accessible before 1960.[[4]](#endnote-4)They pursued art education in European countries like Greece, England and France. According to Areti Adamopoulou, the close connection with Greece allowed a cultural exchange of ideas: ‘since the 1970s Greek art historians and art critics have included twentieth-century Cypriot art in their purview and have narrated its history in similar terms’.[[5]](#endnote-5) Such terms of narration can be particularly problematic if we consider Cyprus’ complicated socio-political condition that was diverse to Greece’s. Hubert Locher argues that the canon formation has to be considered as a ‘social and political enterprise’ that represents ‘sets of values deemed to be important for society as a whole, or for groups within it’.[[6]](#endnote-6)Considering that the canon has a key issue in constructing art history, we should not assume that artists in Cyprus experienced the same conditions as others did in Greece or elsewhere.

The fact that Cypriots had to deal with long occupations, followed by the anti-colonial struggle and the inter-communal conflict,has greatly affected the art sphere in all regions of Cyprus. The marginalisation of art history resulted in a significant absence ofacademic bookpublications on art history in Cyprus. Such a limited body of literature is to be expected when we consider that Greek Cypriot women artists have not experienced the publicity or systematic attention to their work that other postcolonial artists – for example, artists originating from India and Africa – have received.[[7]](#endnote-7)

The first official account of modern and contemporary Cypriot art was complied by the Greek art professor Chrisanthos Christouin 1977 and was published in 1983 by the Cultural Services of the Ministry of Education in Cyprus. Christou, in his book *Σύντομη ιστορία της νεότερης και Σύγχρονης Κυπριακής Τέχνης* (translated as ‘A Brief History of Modern and Contemporary Cyprus Art’), attempts to record Cypriot art of the early twentieth century. Christou incorporates in his account references to a history of ‘fathers of Cypriot art’ and employs analysis in terms of an evolution of generations.Christou positions the artists (and consequently their practice) according to the generations in which they belong, assuming that they experienced the same conditions and shared the same problems. The lack of critical analysis or consideration of major European trends not only makes his account problematic, but it greatly influences other researchers’ approaches to cultural production in Cyprus.

Although Christou’s study is lacking in several elements, we have to keep in mind that when he wrote his book there were no other books relating to modern Cypriot art or any artists’ monographs. Thus, Christou grouped the artists into three generations according to the dates on which they were born: the first generation was born between 1900 and 1922, the second was born between 1922 and 1940, and the third was born after 1940. According to Christou, the first generation was the group of the ‘fathers and teachers of modern Cypriot art’, the second generation was the group of artists who were born during the First and Second World War, and the third generation was the group of artists who were born after the start of the Second World War.

The term ‘fathers of modern Cypriot art’ is broadly used in literature material, exhibitions and curatorial discourses.[[8]](#endnote-8)The fatherhood embodies two artists: Adamantios Diamantis (1900-1994) and Telemachos Kanthos (1910-1993), who are perceived to be the founders of Cypriot art.[[9]](#endnote-9) Significantly, the establishment of such artistic affiliation allows little space for women to be associated with, particularly within these limits of constructing the canon of Cypriot art history. Active during the same period as Diamantis and Kanthos was Loukia Nicolaidou (1909-1994),who was considered the first professional[[10]](#endnote-10) Greek Cypriot woman artist.In his book, Christou did not mention Nicolaidou. It is possible that Nicolaidou was not renowned at the time; she had been absent from Cyprus for many years and thus Christou may not have been familiar with her work.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Nicolaidou produced a body of work that until recently was unknown to audiences and was excluded by the male-privileged sources of Cypriot art history; her work is only mentioned in sources published after 1992, the year that her retrospective was held in Cyprus. It is worth noting that Nicolaidou was not the only woman artist of this period to be peripheral to Cypriot art[[12]](#endnote-12); however, she was the first to receive publicity from the state’s cultural services, years after the cessation of her professional career.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Some contemporary art historians have challenged the terms ‘fathers of Cypriot art’ and use the term ‘first generation’ instead, or provide a critical examination of the works based on the influences they had.[[14]](#endnote-14) Nevertheless, the term ‘fathers of Cypriot art’ provide ‘evidence for a need to determinate the first “national” artists and establish a strong linear (patriarchal) artistic ancestry’.[[15]](#endnote-15)

To understand the absence of Greek Cypriot women artists in Cypriot art history, it is necessary to attend to the socio-political conditions from which they emerged. Considering that being an artist was, for a long time, not an acceptable career[[16]](#endnote-16) – or barely a choice – women’s approach to art as professional artists entering the public sphere (academic education, exhibiting and selling their work) rather than as amateurs within the domestic sphere (practising art as a pleasurable pastime while taking care of the children) affected women artists’ emergence in Cypriot art history.

It is also important to consider women artists’ representation in exhibitions and curatorial discourses. The State Gallery of Contemporary Cypriot art chose to include three works of Nicolaidou and positioned them alongside the work of the ‘fatherhood of Cyprus art’.Nicolaidou is the only woman to be represented in that section.Significantly, a feminist approach was adopted for the 2010 women-only exhibition *Pioneer Women Artists in Greece and Cyprus*, which was curated by Eleni Nikita and Athena Schina. The exhibition forms the best-documented Greek Cypriot women artists’ show with an illustrative catalogue of the work of these artists. Particularly interesting is Eleni Nikita’s essay titled *Pioneer Women Artists in Cyprus*, since this is the first record of establishing ‘pioneer’ women artists in Cyprus, which includes names unknown to the audience. Nikita refers to seven women artists who are no longer alive and who were born in the first three decades of the twentieth century:Persefoni T. Xenaki (1908-2000), Loukia Nikolaidou-Vassiliou (1909-1993), Thraki Rossidou Jones (1920-2007), Pavlina Pavlidou (1922-1993), Eleni Chariclidou (1926-1978), Elli Ioannou (1929-2005) and Elli Mitzi (1930-1997).

Nikita produced a reading based on shared ‘characteristics’ among the seven artists after adopting a ‘socio-historical’ approach.[[17]](#endnote-17) Nikita refers to the artists’ background as a common characteristic and explains that ‘all seven artists came from and lived in urban and cultivated backgrounds’.[[18]](#endnote-18) She also refers to their education (all of them gained education in European academies) and careers in education, (Xenaki, Chariclidou, Ioannou and Mitzi) working as art tutors. Their employment in education greatly affected their practice and their further involvement in art. In fact, Persefoni T. Xenaki and Eleni Chariclidou had shown their work only in group exhibitions, whereas Ioannou organised two solo exhibitions at a late age, toward the end of her artistic career.[[19]](#endnote-19) Elli Mitzi, however, took a different position, with frequent participation in group exhibitions and five solo exhibitions in Cyprus and abroad.[[20]](#endnote-20)

Although all these artists experienced the British colonial period in relatively different ways, they all have something in common: the fact that they were women living in a colonised, patriarchal country under Greek Cypriot nationality. In this we find common patterns in their private and professional life. Their actual choices were affected by society’s expectations of what they should be: the model role of wife-mother. It is not surprising that of the six members of the foremost generation of pioneering Greek Cypriot women artists, three never got married (Pavlidou, Chariclidou, Mitzi), one (Ioannou) divorced at a young age and one (Xenaki) married at a late age.[[21]](#endnote-21) Likewise, Nicolaidou, soon after her marriage, abandoned her promising career and was isolated in motherhood.

Nikita does not refer to specific gendered economies, assuming that women in Cyprus experienced the same conditions as other women did internationally.According to Maria Hadjipavlou a feminist movement ‘never emerged in Cyprus as it did in other Western societies in 1960s. In fact, […] the struggle was against British colonialism, and […] [was] shaped and led by mainly right-wing Greek Cypriot men and the Greek Orthodox Church’.[[22]](#endnote-22)During the 1950s, the roles of Greek Cypriot women as wives, mothers and caretakers of the home were changed by the active participation of women who fought in the anticolonial struggle. This period saw widespread societal changes, first to social interactions and then to domestic regulations. Women’s relationship with the patriarchal order of domesticity was in flux, and the ‘moral code of honour’ was significantly destabilised. While before the 1950s the majority of Greek Cypriot women were ‘legitimately’ allowed in the public sphere only for specific duties during the years of struggle, women gained independence and the ability to act individually without needing to seek male permission.

The exhibition’s *Pioneer Women Artists in Greece and Cyprus* approach of considering ‘another parameter’ – that of gender – provides a stage for introducing to the audience women who were, until recently, invisible from official histories of art. In addition, this ‘women only’ show is an instance of disruption in the canon of fatherhood, as it employs the term ‘pioneer’ that has historically been associated with an entirely male production. The emergence of the women’s-only show and its catalogue manifests a feminist perspective into the development and documentation of Cypriot art history.

**Where do we come from?**

The British colonial period is a core moment in Greek Cypriot women’s art history,as we see for the first time the documented appearance of Greek Cypriot women artists. Before and during British Colonial rule in Cyprus, it was rare to meet a ‘professional’ Greek Cypriot woman and even more rare to meet a professional woman artist. The lack of art schools in Cyprus had the effect of isolating Cypriots from the radical European movements, and artists had to immigrate to other European countries to receive education. Loukia Nicolaidou is a paradigmatic artist of the period whose persistent practice, with solo exhibitions in the 1930s, paved the way to a profession previously unavailable to women: that of the artist. After her training in Paris, Nicolaidou returned to Cyprus in 1933 and embarked on a period of rich artistic production which resulted in three solo exhibitions in 1934, 1935, and 1936.

In becoming artists, women in Cyprus challenged the socio-political and cultural codes of Cyprus’s patriarchal society. Emphasising gendered discourses within socio-political histories offers a mechanism to explore how women artists negotiated their positions as makers of culture in Cyprus. I therefore argue that women artists became increasingly associated with politicised accounts of femininity – as a strategy of women’s transition from tradition to modernity – as opposed to male representations of femininity performed within the socially ordained domestic and reproductive roles. Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker state that by the nineteenth century femininity ‘was to be realised exclusively in child-bearing and child-raising’.[[23]](#endnote-23) Women artists were ‘not only subjected to the institutional restraints of the developing nuclear family but also to the assumption that [...] the natural form their art would take was the reflection of their domestic femininity’.[[24]](#endnote-24)

Nicolaidou introduced a radical art practice in the 1930s, that was very different from the artworks created by the ‘fathers’ of Cypriot art. While in the majority of the men’s depictions women are represented as mother-wife, Nicolaidou presented a rather undomesticated side of women in Cyprus.Countryside scenes, such as that represented in *At the Fields*(c.1933),are an interesting setting for representing encounters between cultural transition for tradition and modernity.

IMAGE 1 Loukia Nicolaidou, *At the Fields* (c.1933), oil, measurements not known. Artist’s Family Collection. Image courtesy of En Tipis Publications

The image is structured with a very clear background and foreground. In the background five women, dressed in traditional Cypriot outfits (their bodies fully covered by long faded dresses, and a scarf around their heads), are walking away after working long hours in the fields. While the women in the background are represented with abstract facial characteristics, shown as tired from carrying the daily harvest, the foreground and central scene is focused on the presence of two girls.

The central scene is in opposition to the background one; the two girls are posing in light modern dresses, seemingly in a completely different world – a world of their own, far away from the other women in the painting. While one of the girls sits on a small stool eating watermelon, the other one lies on the ground in a sensual pose. Her pose recalls Jean Ingres’s lounging odalisques in his Orientalist work. Here the Cypriot girl, while engaging the viewer with her gaze, is relaxing with one hand on her head while the other hand touches the girl next to her.

The foreground scene is depicted with neutral colours of tan and dark brown that balance with the white dress of the seated girl. Here, Nicolaidou emphasises the girl’s femininity with loose corporeal outlines while drawing particularly expressive details on the girls’ faces. Her method changes for the depiction of the women in the background, with the looseness of the brushwork reducing the figures to anonymous faceless objects. This technique is similar to Nicolaidou’s earlier Post-Impressionist work (e.g. *Lucien Simon’s Atelier* and *Milliners*) where she constructs a visual reference to her subject matter, providing details of action (that is, working on the fields) rather than of the figures themselves.

This image reveals Nicolaidou’s strategy in representing the social-political change that occurred during British rule. In this visual, Nicolaidou integrates the customary Cypriot everyday life of the working class with certain modern attitudes adopted by Cypriots during the colonial period. The background scene represents the older generation of women, the ones who lived in rural areas and followed the traditional customs according to the patriarchy. This is the generation that is greatly associated with the domestic sphere, with public appearances related only to religious functions or working in the family’s fields. However, at the same time, Cypriot customs were undergoing gradual changes and a new lifestyle was being adopted by a number of Cypriot women. The two girls presented indicate this change – they represent the generation of women who will embark on education and employment in the public sphere. This image is a remarkable illustration of Greek Cypriot women’s status, representing both the tradition and the modernity of Cypriot culture.

Nicolaidou renders not only the differences between the generations of Cypriot women, but also women’s sexual liberation and their awakening in becoming more feminine alongside to their transition to the public domain. The engagement of the viewer through the gaze of the sensual girl locates the spectator as an eyewitness to women’s disjunction from patriarchal stereotypes. Elena Stylianou and Nicos Phillippou write that

Nicolaidou’s negotiations of female sexuality, either in an aggressively direct confrontation with the viewer or in an indirect defiance that reclaims a monumental integrity and presence, speak of a society that is increasingly progressive, changing, open, and searching for a new self-image, as well as for its place in an international and cosmopolitan milieu.[[25]](#endnote-25)

Nicolaidou’s work offers testimony to the social-economic changes occurring in Cyprus during British rule, and in particular women’s attitudes to the foreign influence. Nicolaidou recognised and delivered through her work the indication that Cyprus was facing a period of change due to colonialism, something that her male contemporaries and travelling British artists[[26]](#endnote-26) avoided representing in their work. A considerable amount of Greek Cypriot women adopted the latest European fashions – particularly the young girls and women. Mrs Esme Scott-Stevenson testified in 1879 that ‘shops full of European goods have taken the place of the old bazaars; and one sees more people in English than Greek costume’.[[27]](#endnote-27)

While the majority of men’s representations repeatedly present Cyprus and its people as traditional, Nicolaidou combines both tradition and modernity in one composition. Her role as an ‘insider’ – a young Greek Cypriot woman – but also an ‘outsider’ – an artist who returned to Cyprus after experiencing European trends and life – is obvious in her representations of Cyprus. Nicolaidou’s practice is influenced by European trends, such as Post-Impressionism, but is employed in the representation of localised themes.

Unlike other women artists who participated exclusively in group exhibitions, Nicolaidou aspired to establish her professional status as an independent artist. The experience of a Cypriot woman actually seeking to make a living through painting and exhibiting her work was somewhat difficult in patriarchal Cyprus, particularly since her shows happened during a period where no exhibiting facilities were available and the support of collectors and dealers was significantly scarce. Not surprisingly, the public remained indifferent towards Nicolaidou’s one-woman show. Nonetheless, the first ever one-woman show in Cyprus’ history, held in 1934 at Papadopoulos Hall (Nicosia), attracted the attention of intellectual reviewers, among them journalists Proinos and Pan.

Proinos referred to Nicolaidou as a ‘genuine artist of a genuine artistic talent’[[28]](#endnote-28) who overcame the socio-cultural prejudices of the time in negotiating her status as professional artist. According to the 1934 reviews, the exhibition included a large number of portraits, landscapes,and two female nudes. The public remained apathetic about the originality of Nicolaidou’s technique and her ability to represent a range of subjects through the use of bright colours and bold brushwork. Journalist Pan attempted to explain the originality of her work whilst writing about the public’s apathy:

The artist is disappointed. Seated all day long at a small sofa she observes the few visitors who come to see the exhibition and leave without showing any kind of appreciation to her. [...] Why the wealthy people, our elite class – the word has lost its meaning – are so ignorant, so unaware and so uncultured? [...] Who, of the wealthy ones, went to the exhibition to buy an outstanding and valuable work to decorate his lounge and replace his wife’s pictures of actors? [...] No, sirs,it is our mistake. We are unable to understand things that are superior to the ephemeral emotions of the cinema and football.[[29]](#endnote-29)

Pan’s article offers significant information about Nicolaidou’s position as a woman artist in the colonial period and the art milieu of the time. According to Pan, the public (he is addressing wealthy people, who could actually afford to purchase art) remained apathetic towards a modernistic outlook that contrasted with what they preferred and were familiar with, such as landscapes and realistic portraits. The fact that Nicolaidou’s practice did not follow the mainstream genres of the time was perceived as the artist’s inadequacy with regard to mastering the academic canon. However, Nicolaidou was aware of the public’s attitude and countered it by including in the 1934 exhibition two nudes of her early works, created during her study years. The two nudes were not part of the exhibition and so were displayed, unframed, to demonstrate to the public that her practice was a product of academic training incorporated with individual modernism, positioning herself as a woman artist in a patriarchal society.

**Where are we going to?**

Despite the fact that society has remained fairly constant in terms of certain patriarchal structures, post-independent Cyprus provided certain outlets for women to negotiate their status in society. Possibly the most significant factor was public education,[[30]](#endnote-30) which functioned as a fundamental mechanism for future generations to generate an awareness of women’s issues while embarking on full-time employment. Within this period a significant number of women artists emerged in Cyprus who, in order to become artists, had to negotiate certain issues, such as their choice to practice art professionally, their relationship with their partners and the ongoing politics of the time. In the next discussion I examine some common working patterns negotiated by women artists in order to support themselves, their families and their art. I will refer to the working pattern as the status of the ‘Sunday artist’ in Cyprus.[[31]](#endnote-31)

IMAGE 2 Rhea Baily, *Memories of the Yard* (1976), oil on canvas, 66cm x 66cm, State Gallery of Contemporary Art, Nicosia. Image courtesy of the artist.

Rhea Athanassiades Bailey (b. 1946), a Greek Cypriot artist trained in the United Kingdom, has produced a politically motivated work exposing social, political and cultural issues in post-independent Cyprus. I am using Bailey’s work as example to explore gender relations and socio-political conditions in post-independent Cyprus.In *Memories of the Yard*(1979), Bailey structures a house’s yard and four figures within its space. The image is composed of a young couple, a man and a girl, found along with various plants in the yard. High whiteandpurple walls define the space while the elongated path leads to a black door. The image seems almost surreal if we compare the height of the house to its door and the represented figures. The composition offers a contradiction in the image as we see a construction of large walls, which represent the house, and the corridor that leads to the yard where four figures are positioned. Interestingly, the figures are presented in shaded white and greyish colours, almost invisible in the image. The figures – a married couple shown on their wedding day, a seated man and a young girl – are all facing the viewer.All the figures are taken from Bailey’s family album: the bride and groom are her parents, the seated man is her grandfather and the young girl is her mother’s sister.[[32]](#endnote-32)Interestingly, the scene takes place in the secluded garden of Bailey’s ancestral home in Ayios Kassianos in old Nicosia.

In referencing images taken from the family album, Bailey indicates a past that is still breathing in some ways.As Bailey explains: ‘their energies [...] are left in the garden and the house although they have all left.’[[33]](#endnote-33)The couple is shown in wedding outfits, most probably from a photo taken on their wedding day, both standing and looking down upon the viewer. I propose that in presenting an image of a wedding and, in particular, the image of a wedding dress, Bailey uses this strategy to portray a women’s transition into her new role as wife and mother.

The reference to the wedding is of particular importance if we consider the way in which partnership in Mediterranean cultures follows patriarchal conventions and traditional practices such as the ‘culture of gossip’.[[34]](#endnote-34) The ‘culture of gossip’ is a product of the patriarchal structure, representing women’s domination by men in public and in private. Myria Vassiliadou argues that ‘the “culture of gossip” concentrates on sexual morality, chastity, virginity, dowry, home cleanliness, upbringing of children, church going, dress code, weight, make-up, extra-marital affairs, and pre-marital affairs’.[[35]](#endnote-35)Like other women in Cyprus, women artists had to negotiate their role as autonomous individuals simultaneously with the social expectations of their domestic roles.

I wish to examine Bailey’s representation of the yard as a transitional space between the house and the public life:

Usually opening off the kitchen, it is more public in nature, for it is attached to the house yet outside it. Whether it fronts onto the street or faces other porches to the rear of the house, it serves as a means of connecting the house to public life.[[36]](#endnote-36)

Post-independent Cyprus endorsed full-time employment for women. This was a massive challenge for the patriarchal society since it formulated an open channel for women to enter the public sphere. While full-time employment set women in the public domain, at the same time it exposed them to the ‘threat of the dirty house’.[[37]](#endnote-37)As Myria Vassiliadou notes:

Dilemmas are posed in these women’s lives since they need to work in order both to contribute to the household income (and to be ‘modern’ and ‘Western’), whereas at the same time the family needs to be looked after (by women) and the house to be kept clean.[[38]](#endnote-38)

While entering the public domain and seeking a career-oriented future, women found themselves in a double role between the privacy of the house and the exposure of the street. Bailey’s representation of the ‘house’ and the ‘yard’ acts as a transition between the domestic and the public. Significantly, the seated man’s posture recalls photography taken in 1960s studios. Such photographs were usually taken by professional photographers in town, to be kept as memories in the family album. In referencing an image taken from the family album, Bailey indicates a past that is still breathing in some ways –for example, in Bailey’s memory.

While entering the public domain as art teachers and seeking a professional career, women artists found themselves in a double role between making a living and looking after their family and household. Rhea Bailey’s words are especially revealing in relation to her working position as a woman artist in post-colonial Cyprus:

When I came back to Cyprus in 1970 I had to work in order to have an income. The only available work was to teach art. Once I graduated I was supposed to be a professional artist but being just that is not easy. Only if you are a really well known artist you can make a living, otherwise it is hard to survive exclusively from your art.[[39]](#endnote-39)

While artists studied in different counties, their return to Cyprus followed the same pattern: financial necessities forced them to seek employment in education, as – particularly given the increase in school numbers – there was a significant demand for art teachers. Artist Katy Stephanides (1925–2012) recalls:

There was large demand for art teachers [...] The years that followed were creative but also tiring. I had to balance work at school with raising two children and painting [...] But they were not easy years. Working filled my need to earn a living; painting filled a need deep inside me. And there was also my family.[[40]](#endnote-40)

Women’s employment in education had a lasting effect on their art, particularly since there was limited time for them to dedicate to their practice. Their roles as full-time art teachers which outside office hours, was replaced by their occupations as full-time mothers and wives had effects on their artistic careers, since they could not practice methodically:

I used to travel around Cyprus for my teaching position and I detested it. I became a Sunday painter; the only day I could dedicate to my art. I used to sketch during days and then work on it on Sundays or holidays. My work was no longer a spontaneous one, my paintings were made in stages and I was always adding elements on it. I remember one work was equivalent to one month. Within a year I had an average of twelve paintings. I used to feel odd about this [...] Then, I was dealing with students and had to travel long distances that made me feel exhausted. I was not able to continue at the same pace as before. Teaching deterred my focus in art.[[41]](#endnote-41)

The practical problem of making a living became a major factor for the limitation of artistic production in Cyprus. This was common for both men and women artists, who had to take art teaching jobs in order to surpass their precarious economic situation. Additionally, post-Independent Cyprus, while fostering women’s education and employment, failed to develop gender equality and harmony in partnerships with regards to domestic chores and the taking care of children. Was there a possibility that the husband could take care of the children or do the chores so that the wife could have some time for art? Maybe, but within a patriarchal culture working women had to struggle, particularly within their problematic transitions between the private and public spheres.

British-born artist Pauline Phedonos (b.1934), who married a Cypriot man, emphasises the necessity of one’s need for tranquillity in order to produce art:

I wanted very much to paint [...] I just didn’t have the time to do it. That was the problem,when you have your mind all to the children and the house or you have to buy the shopping. This is one of the reasons why women have not produced so much in Cyprus [...] I think it’s very difficult when you are doing all these other things to produce. You need energy. You need mental and physical energy to create. If you don’t have it you can’t create. That’s the problem. Men do it. Men don’t bother at all about anything. We have to put up with all these things in Cyprus.[[42]](#endnote-42)

Domestic relationships have a significant role on how women operate as maternal artists. For some women, the family is one of the major factors on how they establish themselves as professional artists. Significantly, if there is support within the domestic network, it is easier for women artists to produce art:

After getting married, I was lucky to have a mother-in-law willing to take care of the house, so that I could dedicate time to pottery. […] My mother-in-law used to take care of the children and to prepare meals for us. I used to play with the children and ‘my clay’. She was young and she was enjoying taking care of the house, so I had the opportunity to work as a professional artist.[[43]](#endnote-43)

On the other hand, if there is only limited support from the family, women artists must deal with some intriguing tensions between motherhood and creativity. While certain social patterns did change and women gained access to art education, the full status of the artist was not granted to them easily. Women’s long association with the domestic sphere left little time for women artists to dedicate time to making art or establishing a career. This was, of course, a tension experienced by women artists around the world. For example, French artist Sonia Delaunay’s (1885-1979) words reveal this tension: ‘I have had three lives: one for Robert, one for my son and grandsons, and a shorter one for myself. I have no regrets for not having been more concerned with myself. I really didn’t have the time.’[[44]](#endnote-44) The lack of support for women has been stated by a number of authors; art historian Linda Nochlin refers to her own experience:

I was exhausted so often, I believed, because I wasn’t well-organised enough to juggle housework […], childcare, husband, teaching, and graduate studies, while also commuting […]. I didn't consider the fact that organised childcare arrangements were nonexistent and women were supposed to run the household singlehanded even if they were professionals. […] There was no system or moral or practical support for women like me […] just unbounded personal energy and a will to persist under different circumstances.[[45]](#endnote-45)

Certain social and private attitudes that say ‘women’s primary place’ is the domestic sphere act as obstacles to women’s production and establishment of careers. Critical to this argument is the fact that, as Maria Hadjipavlou points out:

[...] the social and psychological obstacles to women’s participation in high professional positions, in politics and at the decision-making level, include a social attitude that ‘women’s place is primarily in the home’, inadequate education and training, few positions allocated for women, lack of support from other women and the family and a fear of handling power.[[46]](#endnote-46)

As Virginia Woolf wrote in her 1929 *A Room of One’s Own*,it is a necessity for a woman to have financial autonomy and a personal working space where she can work without distractions related to domestic chores. Phedonos describes the necessity of having a room of her own without family interventions:

I built the house in Pafos, which I did myself; I didn’t show it to my husband until I had finished it, even if he is an architect. Otherwise it would have been ‘no, we do not need three bathrooms, no we do not need this or that’. I did it because I wanted to have a space somewhere that was mine [...] The only thing was to build a place where I could feel that it was mine and I never let [my husband] use that room.[[47]](#endnote-47)

Women artists’ negotiations in reconciling gender roles were imperative in order to successfully tread the fine line between their social conditions and their identity as women artists throughout the years of the Cyprus Republic.

**Conclusion**

The histories and images examined here provide an approach from which to look at women’s conditions and negotiations as artists in Cyprus. In this, I do not wish to contrast art historians who privileged the generation of ‘fatherhood’ of Cypriot art, but to offer a radical reflection and to understand specific histories of women artists and their artistic interventions in relation to their experiences and gendered encounters that affected their personal life and professional career. Such conditions are those that have engendered women artists to claim professional status and to produce art against all odds while living in a patriarchal, nationalist and military country.

I began this chapter by having British Colonial rule as the key historical period, where we see for the first time the documented appearance of Greek Cypriot artists Equally important is Cyprus’ 2004 accession to the European Union that offered artists the opportunity to become involved in European activities and to shift tight domestic networks and cultivate exchanges with the international community. The younger contemporary generation of Greek Cypriot women artists are actively involved with the international milieu. Among this generation are artists such as Marianna Christofides and Haris Epaminonda, both based in Germany and both having represented Cyprus in the Venice Biennale.[[48]](#endnote-48)In the 21st century, we find women artists operating not only individually but also in collective groups – for example, the *Washing-Up Ladies*. Greek Cypriot women artists Lia Lapithi and Marianna Kafaridou, after years of individual practice, grouped together in 2007 to form a feminist artisticact that exposes gender discrimination and the undervalued feminist issues in Cyprus.

A new art history is in the making: one that offers the possibility to articulate women’s’ conditions and negotiations as artists in Cyprus. I hope this research will contribute to further publications on women artists. I also hope that future publications will include women artists from Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriotcommunities. This will allow us to review an interactive process of women’s art history in Cyprus.

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1. Title is taken from Rhea Bailey’s 1974 painting. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. I particularly refer to the work produced by Maria Hadjipavlou and Myria Vassiliadou. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.9. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The Cyprus College of Art, one of the first art institutions in Cyprus was founded in 1969. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Areti Adamopoulou, ‘Born of a Peripheral Modernism. Art History in Greece and Cyprus’ in M. Rampley, T. Lenain, H. Locker and A. Pinotti (eds), *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe* (Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 389. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Hubert Locher, ‘The Idea of the Canon and Canon Formation in Art History’, in M. Rampley, T. Lenain, H. Locker and A. Pinotti (eds), *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe* (Boston: Brill, 2012), p. 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Tina Sherwell accounts for such comparison in relation to Arab women artists in F. Lloyd (ed), *Contemporary Arab Women’s Art: Dialogues of the Present* (London: Women’s Art Library, 1999), p. 58. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Referring to the State Gallery of Contemporary Cypriot Art, Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert and Alexandra Bounia write that when visiting the gallery one ‘cannot help but notice that the history of Cypriot art is synonymous with the work of male Greek Cypriot artists’ in *The Political Museum: Power, Conflict, and Identity in Cyprus* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 192. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Chrisanthos Christou, *Σύντομη ιστορία της νεότερης και Σύγχρονης Κυπριακής Τέχνης* (translated as ‘A Brief History of Modern and Contemporary Cyprus Art’),

   (Nicosia: Cultural Services of the Ministry of Education in Cyprus, 1983). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. I use the term ‘professional’ to define artists who chose to market and exhibit their work on a regular basis. Throughout the chapter, I refer to ‘professional women artists’ to emphasise women’s position and approach in producing art against all odds. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Christou refers a small number of women of the second and third generations. There is a distinct difference in Christou’s account of women and men artists: he refers to women artists only briefly, providing details such as their names and where they studied; the male artists, meanwhile, are discussed in much greater detail. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Other women artists active during the same period are Persefoni T. Xenaki, Thraki Rossidou Jones, Pavlina Pavlidou, Eleni Chariclidou, Elli Ioannou and Elli Mitzi. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Loukia Nicolaidou’s work was revealed by art historian Eleni Nikita in 1992 – the year when The State Gallery of Contemporary Art organised a retrospective exhibition of Nicolaidou’s work. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. See especially, Antonis Danos, ‘Twentieth-Century Greek Cypriot art: An “Other” Modernism of the Periphery’, in *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 32, 2, October 2014; Eleni Nikita, ‘Pioneer Women Artists in Cyprus’, in *Pioneer Women Artists in Greece and* Cyprus (Nicosia: Alpha Art Publications, 2010); and Elena Stylianou and Nicos Philippou, ‘Greek-Cypriot Locality: (Re) Defining our Understanding of European Modernity’ in Pam Meecham (ed) *A Companion to Modern Art* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2018). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert and Alexandra Bounia, *The Political Museum: Power, Conflict, and Identity in Cyprus* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp.183-184. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Artist Stass Paraskos writes on the artists’ struggles within social practices: ‘A few years back art was not considered a respectable profession. You couldn’t persuade a bank manager to give you a loan if you were a painter or a sculptor. The late Mr Kanthos, as a young man in Famagusta, was embarrassed to say he was an artist and Diamantis, in early days, used to describe himself as a teacher’. Preface from the exhibition invitation *Family Circle*, 2005. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Nikita writes: ‘My approach of the subject of a woman’s creativity in Cyprus will be done through a socio-historical outlook, remaining closer to Rozsika Parker’s saying “Art has no gender, artists do”’, in Eleni Nikita, ‘Pioneer Women Artists in Cyprus’, in *Pioneer Women Artists in Greece and* Cyprus (Nicosia: Alpha Art Publications, 2010), p. 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid., p. 32. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., p. 34. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Maria Hatzipavlou, *Women and Change in Cyprus* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p.27. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistress: Women, Art and Ideology*, (New York: Patheon Books, 1981), p. 99. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Elena Stylianou and Nicos Philippou, ‘Greek-Cypriot Locality: (Re) Defining our Understanding of European Modernity’ in Pam Meecham (ed) *A Companion to Modern Art* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), p.353. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. I refer to the work of William Hawkins, Keith Henderson and Glady Peto. For more information see Rita C. Severis, *Travelling Artists in Cyprus 1700-*1960 (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Quoted in Rita C. Severis, *Travelling Artists in Cyprus 1700-*1960 (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2000), p. 177. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Proinos, ‘A Genuine Artist’, *Proini*, 22 April (1934) [Original text in Greek, translation mine]. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Pan, ‘Painting’, *Proini* , 26 April (1934) [Original text in Greek, translation mine]. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Considering that elementary education became compulsory only in 1962, and the first three years in secondary education became free of charge ten years later, it is remarkable that in 1974 Cyprus ranked amongst the countries with the highest rates of literacy. Cyprus Social Research Centre. *Cypriot Woman Rise and Downfall.* (Nicosia: Printing Office of the Republic of Cyprus, 1975), p. 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. This is a term I borrow from my interview of artist Rhea Bailey., Nicosia, 21 September 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Communication with Rhea Bailey, 23 January 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. I borrow this term from Myria Vassiliadou. *A Struggle for Independence: Attitudes and Practices of the women of Cyprus*, (University of Kent at Canterbury, Unpublished Ph.D thesis, 1999), p. 168. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., p.170. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Jill Dubisch, *Gender and Power in Rural Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 201. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. I borrow this title from Myria Vassiliadou, ‘Women’s Construction of Women: On Entering the Front Door, in *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Vol.5, 3, May 2004. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Myria, Vassiliadou, ‘Women's Construction of Women: On Entering the Front Door’, in *Journal of International Women’s Studies* (Vol.5, 3, May 2004), p 56. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Interview with Rhea Bailey. Nicosia, 21 September 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Marina Stephanides, *Katy Phasouliotis Stephanides.* (Nicosia: En Tipis Publications, 2009), p. 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Interview with Rhea Bailey. Nicosia, 21 September 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Interview with Pauline Phedonos. Nicosia, 30 December 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Interview with Nina Iacovou. Nicosia, 14 December 2009. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Quoted in Uta Grosenick, *Women Artists in the 20th and 21st Century* (London: Taschen, 2001), p.98 [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Linda Nochlin, ‘Starting from Scratch: The Beginnings of Feminist Art History’ in M. Reilly (ed), *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015), pp. 191-192. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Maria Hadjipavlou, *Women and Change in Cyprus: Feminisms and Gender in Conflict* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010), p. 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Interview with Pauline Phedonos. Nicosia, 30 December 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Marianna Christofides represented Cyprus in 2011 and Haris Epaminonda in 2007. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)