



## **SOFIA STEVI**

*When We Start to Understand the World*

23 March -19 April 2023

The Breeder, Athens

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There is a house built by desire itself. It is a house that envelops a fabled story, as those you would find on the walls of a dreamy Renaissance villa furnished with enchanting frescoes and mellow tapestries, a dwelling vivified by lavish banquets and elegant inhabitants, enclosed by gardens sprouting balsamic aromas. Please step forward and smile: today you are invited to enter Sofia Stevi's *When We Start to Understand the World*, an exhibition that pivots around a monumental trilogy of fabric paintings, casting its guests in an intimate adventure of introspection and discovery.

The journey is exuberant and pensive: expect a relentless palette of reds and greens, pinks and yellows, blues and oranges, all convened in an incessant and tumultuous festival moving fast and steady in the shape of bulging clouds, hazy vapours, watery streams, and mineral edges. The sincere colours springing from Stevi's inventive brush embrace and cuddle the viewer's eyes with joyfulness and charisma, as the accomplishment of a skilful director.

The subjects assembled in the paintings populate a utopian environment in which plants, animals, humans, artefacts, and fantastic forms all find their right place. It is a matter of justice and composure. Sometimes, the written word springs out, either reviving the central theme of the piece or adding a drifting and enigmatic layer. If a local contrast or tension between any of the features exists, the dialectic is always positively resolved into a bigger picture by Stevi's serene mastery of the pictorial space.

In fact, one of the most striking features of the artist's technique is the construction of manifold pictorial planes that defy the common rules of perception and representation. A constant sense of surprise arises from the superimposition of objects whose specific scale and pertinence to a given reality stratum are never resolved in their entirety but rather become part of a choreographic interplay. This complex orchestration of different elements always creates a balanced rhythm at the will of the painter.

In accordance with Stevi's poetics, the title of this show is a wilful challenge directed at the crude materialism sought by the tenebrous protagonists of *When We Cease to Understand the World*, a recent book by Chilean writer Benjamin Labatut. In this anthology of quasi fictional biographies, a cast of important XXth century scientists such as the physicists Karl Schwarzschild and Werner Heisenberg – respectively the author of a mathematical proof about black holes and one of the initiators of quantum mechanics – spirals downward in emotional crescendos as their quest for ultimate

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truths progressively undermines their faith in humanity's possibility of developing scientific theories capable of explaining the totality of the world. Contrarily to their expectations (as well as those of the West...), their research for rational and unmovable grounds just makes the mystery of reality grow.

It is this never-ending encounter with the unknown that Stevi's *When We Start to Understand the World* intends to celebrate rather than to sorrow, for as much as we try to trace reality back to its origin – be it via mathematics or physics, chemistry or biology, economics or sociology, history or geography, psychology or philosophy – the contemporary world seems to offer to its subjects nothing but an expanding jumble of cryptic and obscure experiences tied together by rare and precarious threads.

Twisting Labatut's dim flair in front of the burning entropic clutter we are seemingly immersed in, Stevi asks us to elevate the *encounter* and the *beginning* as the true goals of any possible research, because only if we recognise something as an uncharted, the process of comprehension can begin. This is the humble and heroic standpoint of art in comparison to other forms of knowledge.

One might gaze towards the most distant and silent stars of the universe or towards the infinite and absurd space that separates the tiniest particles of nature; yet there are realities to disclose, multiverses infinitely vast and boundless, even in those moments that make up the factual or fictional everyday that only art has the power to select and upraise as an offering to contemplation. The enigma of touch and smell, the wonder of sight and taste, the revelation of hearing, and our capabilities to imagine all of them: these minor epiphanies of sensation are the real subject matter of this exhibition.

To reach her images, Stevi gathers forms and themes that either come from her previous practice, or originate from her meanderings in between the accomplishments of the Old Masters, the camera roll of her smartphone and the inexhaustible gold mine of the internet feed. The artist states: «Many times I use pictures in the process of my painting. Very often these pictures find me, they are either images I screenshot or save, or photos I take from instances that I find interesting in the moment. I am always looking for something beautiful or extraordinary or simply puzzling, a piece that connects the dots, a gift from the mundane».

Notwithstanding a certain degree of groundwork, her technique also implies improvisation and confident experimentation: «When you start a painting you have to encounter so many things that you haven't anticipated. In fact, painting takes over and it is difficult at times, you have to follow the brush and the materials and at the same time think of your idea and how it can change under the rule of the brush».

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The excitement of revelation, or, better, the emotional adventure of running through an athletic track at times private and intimate, at times shared and common, is at the centre of *When We Start to Understand the World*. The unthinkable awaits and calls us with a potent voice. Impersonating a lyrical demiurge, a deity with a gentle attire, with her paintings, Stevi reminds us that every day is a beginning because the world, if we look at it under the right perspective, never ceases to begin.

Giacomo Mercuriali, Athens 2023

**Sofia Stevi** (born in Athens 1982), a graduate of Central Saint Martin's School of Art & Design in London, lives and works in Athens. Her paintings are interpretations of materiality through fluid narratives. Time and space are conflating, in a universe where dream is a basic construct of the everyday experience, bodies are in flux and chance acquires a permanent substance.

Selected exhibitions include: *The Sky above the roof*, group show at Tabula Rasa, Beijing; *Song without an ending*, solo show at Le Quai Monte Carlo; *The Wave*, public mural in Athens, produced by Onassis Foundation (2022); *Touch*, 16:9 billboard, Kingsgate Project Space, London (2022), *Meeting House*, duo show with Rachel Howard at Galeria Pelaires, Palma (2021), *the somnambulists*, solo show at Alma Zevi Gallery, Venice (2021), *we don't have to learn something new*, solo show at Pippy Houldsworth, London (2019), *turning forty winks into a new decade*, solo show at the BALTIC museum, Gateshead, UK, (2018), *lizzie & laura*, solo show at The Breeder gallery, Athens (2017), *The Equilibrists*– Benaki Museum, Athens, co-organised with the New Museum in New York and DESTE Foundation, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Gary Carrion-Murayari and Helga Christoffersen (2016). She has been awarded the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Artist Fellowship by ARTWORKS (2022).



**Sofia Stevi**

*When we start to understand the world trilogy, The Journey (side A), 2023*

Acrylic on cotton fabric

256 x 370cm



**Sofia Stevi**

*When we start to understand the world trilogy, The Journey (side B), 2023*

Acrylic on cotton fabric

256 x 370cm



**Sofia Stevi**

*When we start to understand the world trilogy, The Journey (side A), 2023*

Acrylic on cotton fabric

256 x 370cm



**Sofia Stevi**

*When we start to understand the world trilogy, The Letter (side A), 2023*

Acrylic on cotton fabric

256 x 370cm



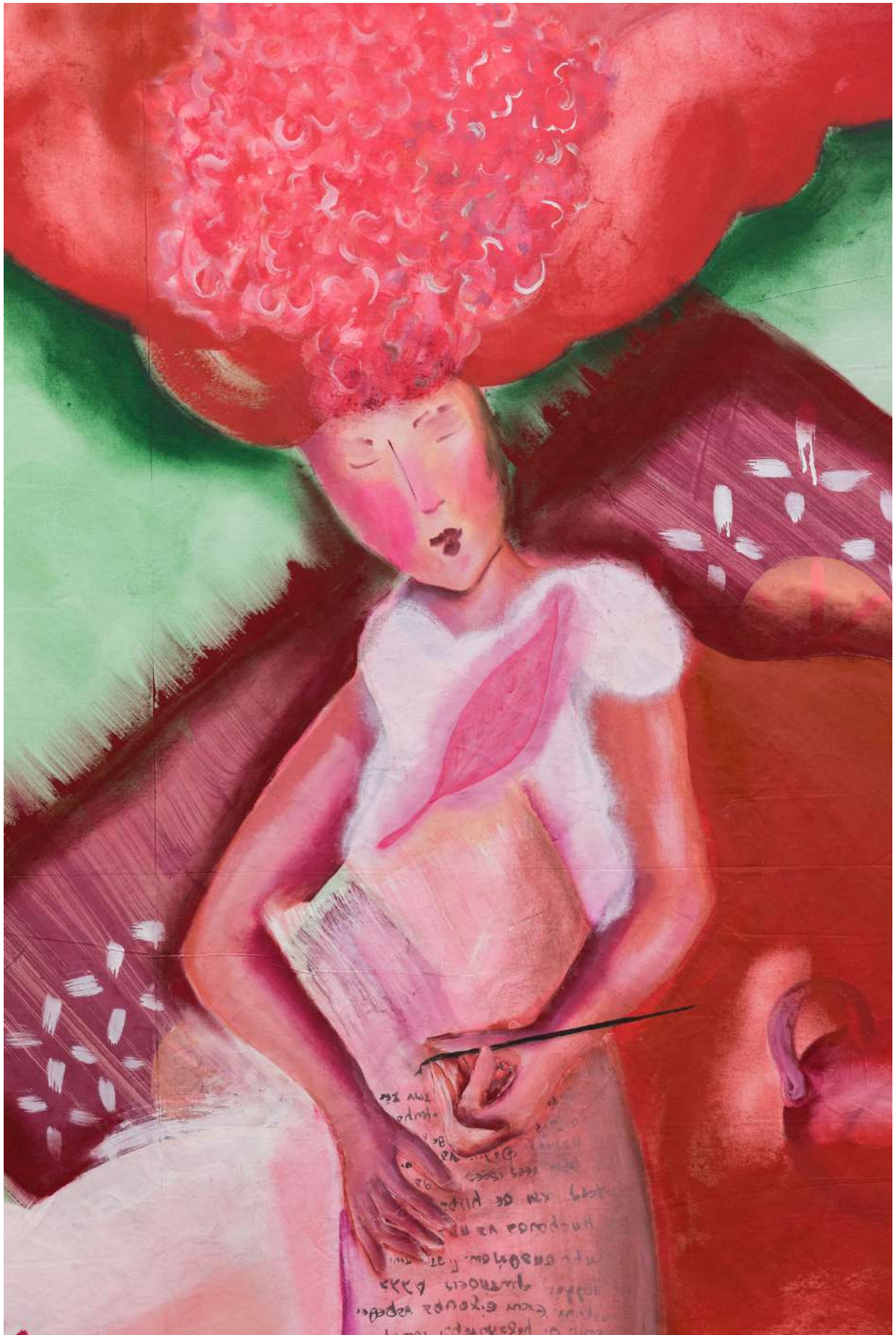


**Sofia Stevi**

*When we start to understand the world trilogy, The Letter (side B), 2023*

Acrylic on cotton fabric

256 x 370cm



**Sofia Stevi**

*When we start to understand the world trilogy, The Letter (side A, detail), 2023*  
Acrylic on cotton fabric  
256 x 370cm



**Sofia Stevi**

*When we start to understand the world trilogy, The Letter (side A, detail), 2023*

Acrylic on cotton fabric

256 x 370cm



**Sofia Stevi**

*When we start to understand the world trilogy, The meeting (side A), 2023*

Acrylic on cotton fabric

256 x 370cm



**Sofia Stevi**

*When we start to understand the world trilogy, The Journey (side B), 2023*

Acrylic on cotton fabric

256 x 370cm



**Sofia Stevi**

*When we start to understand the world trilogy, The meeting (side A, detail), 2023*

Acrylic on cotton fabric

256 x 370cm



**Sofia Stevi**

*The Guardian, 2023*

Acrylic on cotton fabric, mural  
dimensions variable

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# INSTALLATION VIEWS

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