

**Valinia Svoronou**, solo show

***Clocks of the tides***

28 May – 5 July 2025

CAN Christina Androulidaki Gallery, Athens

**Valinia Svoronou** (b. 1991 Athens) is an artist based in Athens, Greece. She graduated from Slade School of Fine Art (MFA Sculpture 2015) and Athens School of Fine Arts (BA Painting 2013). In 2018, she was awarded the Stavros Niarchos Foundation ARTWORKS fellowship. She is currently in residence at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin as part of the International Studio Programme of the project SUB 6.4, funded by the European Union-NextGenerationEU and initiated by EMST.

Svoronou's practice navigates cultural and technological shifts in human history through both personal and collective perspectives. Informed by her upbringing in Athens within an immigrant family from Istanbul and Asia Minor, she explores the entangled histories of conflict and exchange between the East and the so-called West, and how these dynamics continue to shape contemporary identities and geopolitical realities. Her work reimagines historical narratives, creating space for understanding, reinterpretation, and the possibility of empowered futures.

Working across text, moving image, apps, prints, and sculpture, she constructs layered frameworks of storytelling rooted in feminist and postcolonial critique. Central to her practice is an interest in overlooked women's histories and their resonance within patriarchal and postcolonial systems. Drawing on creative tools traditionally linked to resistance and empowerment—such as science fiction, literature, subcultures, myth, gossip, and craft—Svoronou fosters transgenerational dialogue and the imaginative reconstruction of memory and meaning.

*Clocks of the Tides* (2025) marks Valinia Svoronou's fifth solo show. Previous solo presentations include *The Moonless Mountain* at Callirrhoë gallery (2022), *Endymion/ Chapter 1: Partial Lunar Eclipse* at the Theocharakis Foundation curated by Panos Giannikopoulos (2020), *Hot Wheels Projects* at Art Athina (2018), and *The Glow pt. 2*, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin (2016).

Recent group exhibitions include *...That Creeps From the Earth...*, curated by Kyveli Mavrokordopoulou at Tavros (2024); *Room 505, Έσπερος*, a duo show with works by Chrysa Romanos, curated by George Bekirakis at Perianth Hotel (2023); *Outraged by Pleasure*, curated by Nadja Argypoulou at the Nobel building (2023); and *Mythologies*, curated by ARTWORKS at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (2022). Svoronou has also participated twice in the exhibitions organized by the DESTE Foundation in collaboration with the New Museum, *The Equilibrists* (2015) and *The Same River Twice* in the Benaki Museum (2019). She took part in the Athens Biennale *Eclipse* (2021), and has shown her work at the ICA and The Showroom in London, Haus am Lützowplatz in Berlin, and Futura Gallery in Prague, among others. Her practice extends to writing and research, with contributions to Ocean Archive and other platforms.

***"Ah! The miraculous tiny thing – which has fallen in the sea – like a diamond fallen off the fingertips of god. The forsaken pearl one would want to adorn with the alabaster-like neck of the belle he loves."***

Is an excerpt from one of Akylas Milas' books, used to describe early 20th century Princes Isles; as a gem fallen into the sea, an ornament to decorate a beautiful paramour. The phrasing echoes, in our times, somewhat archaic and old fashioned; it sounds like something coming from a different more lyrical milieu that is now long gone. Still, that place doesn't fail to pay a visit, a visit from a stranger that has come from the past. Like something washed ashore by the afternoon tide, like a pearl that's lost its shell, like language that has lost its time, a lost soul wandering in the sea: object to the tides.

A tide clock as a metaphor to position oneself and salvage particular bits in the cycles of a non linear and fragmented world. The ebbs and flows of different times, the stories, the minutes, the stones, the knots, the moons. This exhibition is an attempt to mark some of these moments, narrated to the artist via transgenerational stories, experienced by her and reconfigured in order to come to terms with a time that is both idiosyncratic and confusing; a memory that is personal and also collective. Sculptures, notes and moving image operate like wavebreakers in an environment reminiscing moments of times in the eastern mediterranean and Athens, The Sea of Marmara, and Asia Minor, instances of pause and reconfiguration within the exhibition itself.

*Sat at her desk, her mind fluttering back to the lighthouse that is the westernmost point of the east. Thoughts come and go like light flashing; the ebbs and flows of the tides.*

*Water breaks when we come into this world and it is finally water that will break us.*

*She is looking at an ancient figurine. It is young and with regal dress, she wears a pointy hat that looks a bit like the hat of a witch. Copies of her are found in tombs across the Mediterranean; the hat must be a result of Anatolian influence.*

*What is this hat?*

*But more importantly, is she a witch?*

*We sure know that her outfit is that of a traveler. A traveler that accompanies humans in different realms.*

*When someone thinks about you long enough you always have a place to come home to: Like a bird of migration.*

*It was the time when the swallows nest in Ayvalik which made her think of their return.*

*Swallows, the children of an ever changing country; fall prey to vast stretches of lands, nations, towns, asphalt roads, this nuanced world that we have come to call the human..*

*In Athens it will soon be autumn, the time when bitter oranges fall from the trees, their smell mixing with the bitumen. Let's go to Nisantasi and try on all the dresses! Her friend said enthusiastically, holding a crooked cigarette.*

*She tied a knot around her finger so that she would never forget him.*

Valinia Svoronou

"*L'amour dérobe les heures*" originates from the artist's exhibition text, which predates all the works in the exhibition and serves as a guide to their transfiguration. The drawings—characterized by sparse lines and black-and-white compositions—are abstract interpretations of images drawn from two books: Tatiana Stavrou's *Secret Springs* (Μυστικές Πηγές) (1940) and Akylas Millas' *Prinkipo* (1988). These works serve as paradigms of a bygone era, where lyricism was embraced as a vessel for radical thought. Svoronou further instrumentalizes this lyricism, shaping it into a language of animation through which she reflects on the present, as well as on her own and her family's entangled histories of migration from Istanbul and Asia Minor.

Images from Stavrou's erotic novel *Secret Springs* (Μυστικές Πηγές), particularly its first chapter, appear almost untouched—Svoronou's narration merging seamlessly with that of its female protagonist. A larger-than-life heel, held by a disembodied male hand emerging from a small boat, echoes Stavrou's depiction of a woman (perhaps herself) who, upon seeing her own reflection as an older woman in the bathroom mirror, embarks on a fragmented journey through memory. Her recollections transport her to an anachronistic past where her relationships with men take center stage, revealing glimpses of her own evolving identity through them.

A parallel narrative unfolds through Akylas Millas' *Prinkipo* (1988), a volume dedicated to the island of Prinkipo (Büyükkada). Though professionally a doctor and only a self-taught historiographer, Millas blends historical fact with lyrical narration. This is exemplified in the excerpt featured in Svoronou's text, where he poetically depicts the island as a rare and almost divine gem, as if it had accidentally fallen into the sea from God's fingertips. Described as a "forsaken pearl," the passage expresses both admiration and nostalgia, possibly alluding to the island's shifting history and cultural transformations. By likening it to a jewel fit to adorn a beloved, Millas highlights Prinkipo's beauty while evoking a longing for a past that has gradually faded.

In addition to his writing, Millas—an illustrator as well—intersperses his narration with minimal drawings that reinterpret historical artifacts. This methodological choice is particularly striking given the accessibility of photography at the time. His use of lyrical abstraction and decorative motifs as a means of engaging with dark histories resonates with Svoronou's animation. Through her own process of secondhand transfiguration, she extends and repositions these visual and narrative elements in the present.

A final and essential element of the animation is language itself—animated words that unfold at their own rhythm, forming a silent expression. Composed from the same lines as the drawings, as if emerging from the same primordial matter, these words—often eclipsed from contemporary vocabulary—manifest in real time while echoing Millas' text, where a pearl has lost its shell, swallows symbolize borderless travel, and a soul drifts aimlessly at sea. As in Stavrou's fragmented journey through memory, time becomes further abstracted, replaced by tempo, where meaning ultimately distills into symbolism—expressed as lines with the potential for endless recomposition. This framework extends into Svoronou's ceramic sculptures featured in the exhibition—material reinterpretations of these ideas, where decoration becomes central to a form of political narration.

Five groups of sculptures—bows, lace with wood, bitter orange candelabras, Tanagra figures, and swallows—adorn the gallery space like instruments of architectural narration, repurposed from churches, abandoned houses, and the streets of Athens. A language of transfiguration underscores themes of power struggles and historical resilience, further expressed through the binary of fired versus unfired clay. Clay—like the sparse lines of the animation—becomes Svoronou's primordial material, a means to manifest her collected symbols: an idiosyncratic assemblage of references tied to her specific identity. Her life, shaped mostly in Athens, resonates with echoes of her family's past in Imvros and Istanbul and her more recent revisitation of these places, where time has eroded the traces of yet another bygone era.

The bows, often dismissed as frivolous and feminine adornments, take on new significance. In this context, they reference their unexpected presence in the frames of religious icons within Orthodox churches in Imvros and Istanbul, as well as their simultaneous role in Turkish rituals of offering, where they are tied to tree branches as votives. Lace with wood, a recurring motif in Svoronou's cyanotypes and drawings, originates from an heirloom—a very old piece of lace inherited from her grandmother, who herself was unaware of its origin or journey. Like the soul lost at sea or the borderless swallow, the lace has traveled across time and geography, arriving in Svoronou's hands without a clear direction. Its pairing with wood evokes construction materials—timber beams, planks, and MDF—used to board up abandoned houses in Imvros and other former Greek-inhabited areas of Asia Minor, shielding them from outside intrusion.

The swallows, sculpted as hybrids of unfired clay and Posidonia—a type of seaweed brought to shore by the tides—further explore the fragile boundary between protection and exclusion. Posidonia, a material that both fortifies the shoreline and purifies the water, serves as a metaphor for the tension between purposeful refuge and accidental displacement. Similarly, the bitter orange candelabras and Tanagra figures speak more directly to cycles of birth, death, and renewal. The bitter oranges evoke the distinct fragrance familiar to anyone who has walked through Athens in the autumn, while the Tanagra figure—one of the earliest mass-produced ceramics, found across the Eastern Mediterranean—recalls the notion of a grave good. Yet, in Svoronou's work, the figures appear in reverse, excavated as if they had never been buried—an echo of a language lost in time, suspended between past and present, infused with atmospheres that are neither entirely melancholic nor joyous, but bittersweet and unplaceable.

As in her previous work, Svoronou's sculptures embrace decoration and symbolism—methodologically anachronistic—as a means of reclaiming meaning and offering an alternative way to interpret the present through a rapidly fading past. Where sentimentality and the senses converge in her unlikely use of clay, an appreciation emerges for what is often considered unfashionable or ornamental—elements that, in their quiet radicalism, carry unexpected weight and significance.

*Maya Tounta*