

**Elisavet Kalpaxi**

**Landscape with Fountains - A Place of One's Own**

**14-20 November 2024**

**House of Annetta**



# What is a place of one's own for?

Virginia Woolf drew attention to the impact of money and personal space on women in fiction.<sup>1</sup> Creativity is often presented as the means to overcome one's limitations. Yet, the great art of the past is, more often than not, the outcome of freedoms already enjoyed by some individuals, usually referring to a small and privileged part of society. Nowadays, not all women are deprived of creative expression, but a few still are, and we are faced with many more old and new inequalities. 'A room of one's own,' indicated in the capacity to produce creative work, or as a fantasy within fiction, is still defined by rules and barriers, be they physical, socio-economic or ideological.

Inequality in art is evident in the limited opportunities provided to some, opinions and prejudices, and it is also evident in the content of artists' work. As Woolf cunningly pointed out in relation to women, if art is a site of freedom, it is also a ground of grievances, which in Woolf's terms results in creative work that may be pronounced, but not necessarily profound.<sup>2</sup> Beyond this, inequality is also inscribed in the stories themselves, the characters and their traits, the dramas that unfold, gestures of speech, the nuances of love, and more, illustrating the shared understandings and beliefs that make such distinctions possible within and outside art and fiction. While the issue of social and economic inequality persists, people participate consciously or subconsciously in a play of familiar routines and exertions of control that sustain this order. Overcoming one's barriers and meeting one's creative needs then reveal another level of constraints, which is ideological in nature, and which results in convoluted arguments across expressive registers, namely emotional, political, and aesthetic. For many individuals writing fiction, individuals within fiction, and even fictional individuals, there are still many barriers to overcome.

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The work presented here was produced in the limited time that I have available

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1. Woolf, V. (1929) *A Room of One's Own*. London: Hogarth Press.

2. *Ibid.*

to practice my art, while working as a lecturer in Higher Education. Balancing art-making, research, and teaching is becoming increasingly harder. Underinvestment, pressing workloads and work-related stress, low salaries, and lack of security, are a real challenge to the individuals involved. In the process, art—and practice-based research in art—has become a field of contradictory indices; it is more open and active than ever, but harder to sustain.

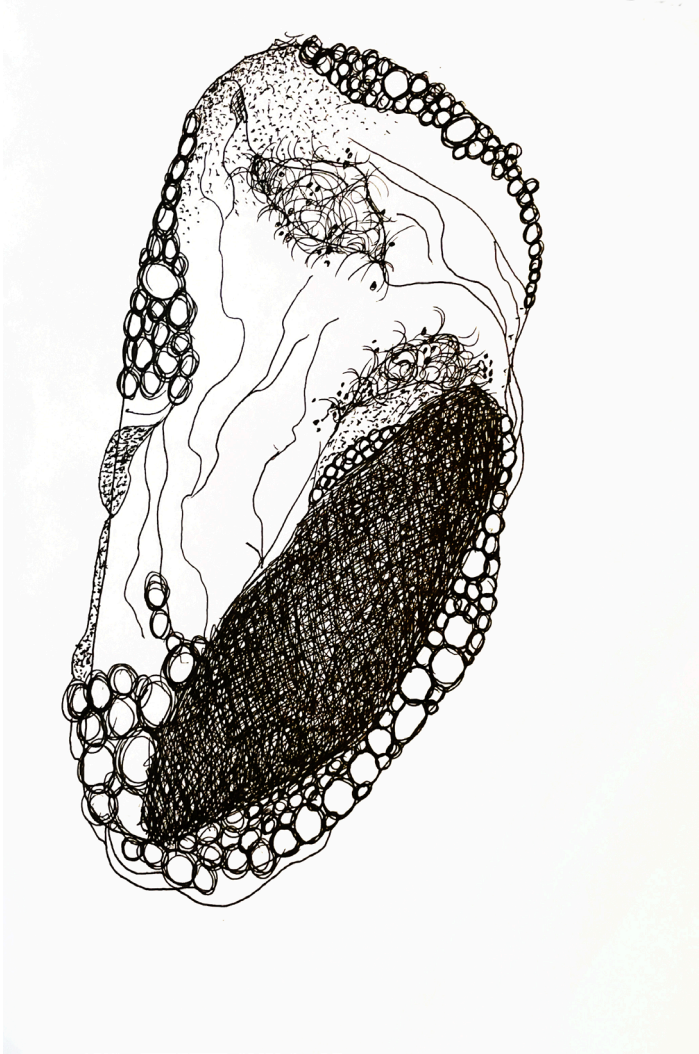
It may be insensitive to say that the current climate provides opportunities for positive change. Money and personal space are still very important for individuals to survive and continue producing work. But as some routes to being an artist—or dealing and engaging with art—close, more than an opportunity, there is a necessity to actively address and preserve the processes and functions that we want to retain. In the last almost one hundred years since Woolf wrote her essay on women in fiction, art has diversified in its applications, fields of influence, and roles, so there are many functions to process, other than the modernist paradigm. These could cover structures of resistance, participatory, collective and connective models, practice-based research that blends histories, references, and discourses, to create new pathways of thinking, or the oscillations between art and science for innovation, and more. Further, it is important to tirelessly continue developing opportunities for each other and support new possibilities, alternatives, and interventions that challenge conventions in our own and others' thinking. We can try and do things together to lift some weight from each other's shoulders. We can just be there to witness the effort. The role of our performative everyday acts can change. The act alone can turn into means of processing and expression and empower our freedom to choose.

We can and need to generate more questions.<sup>3</sup>

Questions too can be perceived as productive propositions. These questions could be situated anywhere—in our beginnings, middles, and ends.

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3. This is a reference to cybernetic thinking, and Annetta Pedretti's work, as is presented in the 2021 American Society for Cybernetics YouTube video 'Annetta Pedretti: Weaving Language, Reflections, Memories and Stories'.



## The work is a garden

[When the darkest thoughts, the darkest chapters of my memory, slip into consciousness, I allow them to become seamlessly absorbed into the grey mass of clay, and give the surprises of the kiln metaphorical significance as an affirmation of my goodwill. I find refuge in making. “I am good, I do deserve to live”. Similar words pronounced by Mary, Queen of Scots, months before her execution, “I am holy and worth keeping”,<sup>4</sup> beautifully performed by Isabelle Huppert. To affirm one’s right to live...

What are we executed for? What are we expelled for? What are we segregated by? Why can life not become a bit nicer still? Why can people not be nicer to one another? Why can we not make the experience that is life a bit more tolerable for one another?<sup>5</sup>

History is registered in our libraries and our subconscious biases, the words we pronounce, our propositions and expressions, that we no longer know, but imitate anyhow. The questions persist. No answer, structure, or religion can get us prepared for the face of death, war, and the darkness that humanity is saturated by.]

## Shadwell Centre

The work presented in this exhibition was produced in Shadwell Centre, a council-led community education and arts centre in Tower Hamlets, which provides opportunities for training and creativity to people from the local and broader London community, including a few artists. Shadwell has managed to survive numerous threats to its existence and integrity in the last few years. The work was produced in communal workshop spaces, alongside the perpetual chatter and noises of other people’s making.

Shadwell has become an important reference in the work, with the idea of com-

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4. Pinckney, D. (2024) *Mary Said What She Said*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, paragraph 52.

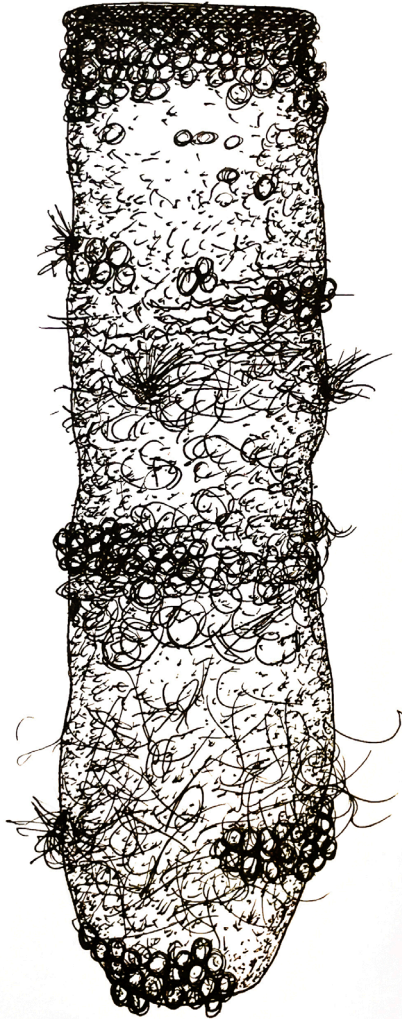
5. This is mediated from a chat I had with my friend and artist Elena Poka this summer.

munity being increasingly embedded, if not in the content of this present work, in the process of its making. Community spaces are different from professional studios, in that the people involved are not necessarily artists. The aesthetics of the buildings is informed by policy, social urban planning, and the diverse references of local communities. People bring their own experiences with them. Stories get told. People help one another, and the work is shared with and entrusted to others all the way through. Makers and audiences merge, as we become witnesses of the making, and often touch or move other people's work. Differences are reduced. This is not a room of one's own in the individualistic sense described by Virginia Woolf, and which was appropriately addressed within the context of her argument. However, something that I have often heard from people in the workshops is that this space is their own. Such spaces are indicative of methodological possibilities that are largely ignored in canonical definitions of art. There are ways to work on and expand our references and expressions.

## The work

Six tubular, modular sculptures, including three fountains, some smaller sculptures, and four nests, a series of prints inspired by the sky. All resemble structures and shapes that can be found in a garden. This garden consists of synthetic abstractions, and its functioning relies on artificial maintenance. In a sense, this is not much different from what a garden actually is. Gardens contain plants and flowers, the material substance of life, but they are necessarily constructed.

A common feature in all these objects is repetition, which lies either with the circular movement that was followed in their making, or the production of small parts to be assembled later. However, compartmentalisation of the effort here, unlike what happens in industrial production, entails a conscious resistance to overproduction, an emphasis on pleasure, and the production of objects that can be reused by adding more facades and potential centres of compositional balance. Making the work, there was significant emphasis on slowing down and allowing the process to alter my state of consciousness. The conceptual development of the work happens in stages, to give physical making a central role in the outcome. The work aims to activate empathic, sensory, and projective functions in the audience, similar to the functions adopted in making the work, and create an idiosyncratic landscape, a garden of potentialities.





The work is also inspired by urban spiritual practices and deep listening. Here, ritual is replaced by circular structures and feedback loops that are animated by the mechanics of objects. The space is also an important part of the landscape. The space accommodates the objects, allows the sound of running water to magnify as it bounces back from the walls, and turns it into harmonising rippling vibrations that reflect the space's shape and structure. Ritual and circular structures of completeness are seen to animate spirituality. Rising vibrations and loops aim to incorporate the space into the work's economy, physically and conceptually. This refers back to Annetta Pedretti's work and cybernetic interest in feedback loops,<sup>6</sup> but also the community space that Annetta's house already is. The exhibition was visualised as a community space already in the planning stages, as this is the kind of space that the work also derives from. Food will be served, and people can continue doing what they are doing.

There are also two more contributors in the exhibition. On Saturday 16th November at 4pm and 6pm, Cathy Eastburn will bring to the exhibition two sound meditation sessions with gongs and singing bowls. Cathy Eastburn is a musician, Sound Therapy practitioner<sup>7</sup>, and activist who, amongst numerous other events, workshops, and action, has also been previously involved in workshops at House of Annetta, and peaceful civil resistance workshops in particular. Any donations relating to these two events, will be given to the Free Political Prisoners Campaign<sup>8</sup>. Niki Soroli is an artist whose work uses a multimedia approach to express personal autobiographical narratives. On Sunday 17th November, 2pm, artist, poet and writer MILENA will deliver a talk titled 'BEAUTY and WHY it matters'. MILENA's work focuses on spirituality, intersections of science and spirituality, sacred geometry, and art. She has delivered numerous talks that promote a cosmic outlook on life, to raise awareness of the inherent unity, order and harmony of the creation, and of the urging need for human beings to transcend duality consciousness, accept one another, and unite. This talk is also featured as a slideshow, a permanent for the duration of the exhibition intervention that can be accessed through the QR code on the last page of this booklet. On the 17th of November, 6-8pm, Niki Soroli will present a playlist of Rebetika, a genre of Greek music associated with the lower classes and urban subculture that flourished in Smyrna, Asia Minor, and which further developed in Piraeus, Thessaloniki and other harbours, that immigrants from Minor Asia moved to after the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922 and deportation of Greek population. In that sense, the exhibition is concerned with

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6. ASC (2021) 'Annetta Pedretti: Weaving Language, Reflections, Memories and Stories'.

7. For more, see information provided here: [sarasasound.com](http://sarasasound.com)

8. [defendourjuries.org/free-political-prisoners/](http://defendourjuries.org/free-political-prisoners/)

ambiguous boundaries, emergent topographies and radiating processes, more than the actual objects presented and simulacra of biological or divine order.

## On a garden's variable dimensions

The creation of a garden was not the intention from the beginning. The objects can be dismantled and be put together in different arrangements. This decision was made because, amongst other metaphors, a garden seems to be particularly potent for the conscience-changing operations described earlier, much needed in the currently obscure landscape of art, research, and education.

A garden is a site of miracles. It is perhaps relevant to mention the direct association between wishful thinking and the tradition of miraculous or oracular fountains with their magic properties and associated rites. The cult of water has survived since prehistoric times. Such gardens are expected to literally transform people's lives, by curing a variety of ills and opening people's eyes to the future.

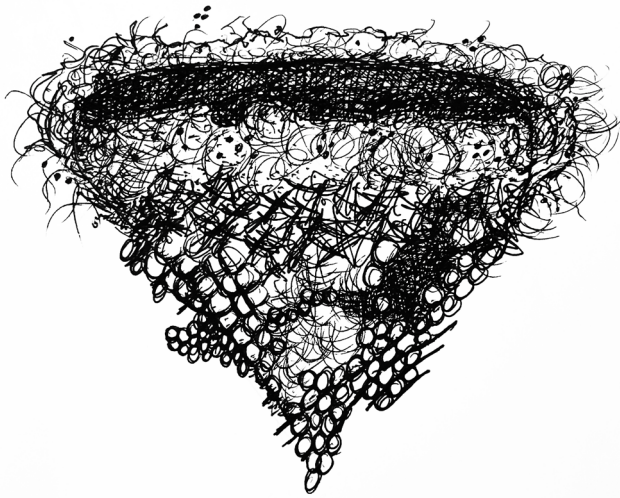
But there is more. A garden is where Virginia Woolf is situated in the opening lines of her book:

To the right and left bushes of some sort, golden and crimson, glowed with the colour, even it seemed burnt with the heat, of fire. On the further bank the willows wept in perpetual lamentation, their hair about their shoulders. The river reflected whatever it chose of sky and bridge and burning tree, and when the undergraduate had oared his boat through the reflections they closed again, completely as if he had never been. There one might have sat the clock round lost in thought. Thought—to call it by a prouder name than it deserved—had let its line down into the stream. It swayed, minute after minute, hither and thither among the reflections and the weeds, letting the water lift and sink it, until—you know the little tug—the sudden conglomeration of an idea at the end of one's line: and then the cautious hauling of it in, and the careful laying of it out?<sup>9</sup>

Gardens often feature as sites where ideas are generated. They have been associat-

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9. Woolf, V. (1929) *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 8-9.



ed with poetry, but also utopian imagination by providing the structuring frame of autonomous political possibilities, as a few utopias are presented as gardens. This is the focus of Jim Endersby's lecture series *Utopian Gardens* at Gresham College in 2019. In gardens we find an interplay between culture and nature. Drawing on Thomas Henry Huxley and other research, Endersby discusses the ethics of gardening and claims that all interventions on nature are a form of gardening, including environmental efforts. The question presented at the end of the series is 'what kind of gardeners do we want to be?'<sup>10</sup> This is an important question, also with reference to the work presented in this exhibition.

Art, by means of artifice, is embedded in references to gardens all the way back to the 16th century, but it became a conscious preoccupation, around the 18th century, with aristocrats in Northern Europe creating gardens that resembled paintings by painters like Claude Lorrain or Nicolas Poussin,<sup>11</sup> giving material for later artists and their paintings. Taken from a picture, to be placed back into a picture.

Borrowing from Linda Hutcheon's analysis of self-reflexive fiction, in its overt form, circularity is a self-reflexive device, a sign of self-awareness.<sup>12</sup> So, what happens when our room, our garden, is turned to art, when it resembles this kind of circularity?

It becomes silence, and this is the kind of silence that is produced when a system is complete, when it gives way for emphasis on other problems and resolutions. A room of one's own can be a landscape that envelops itself in its seeming perpetuity, allowing our thoughts to stop and merge with the advances of nature. And there comes again chanting, turning, repetitive gestures, and rippling sounds of water, to let life take its course, and make the garden the celebration of life that it is.

Here is a version of my own, lying admittedly in this space of longing that I find impossible to fill, awe for the intersubjective space that has been created for us within and by communities, women, people with not much money, people with not much room of their own, and with gratitude for the House of Annetta who made this exhibition possible.

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10. Endersby, J. (2019) *Utopian Gardens* [Gresham College lecture series].

11. This applies for example to Henry Hoar and the design of Stourhead. "The greens" Henry Hoar mentioned in his diary, "should be ranged together in large masses as the shades are in painting: to contrast the dark masses with the light ones, and to relieve each dark mass itself with little sprinklings of lighter greens here and there." Henry Hoare in Woodbridge, K. (1970) *Landscape and Antiquity: Aspects of English Culture at Stourhead*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 31.

12. Hutcheon, L. (1980) *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.





Elisavet Kalpaxi is a London based artist, art-based researcher, and lecturer.



House of Annetta is a social centre and platform for practicing systems change. Over the past three years the house has been used by hundreds of different groups, individuals and networks for learning, practicing, eating, talking, exhibiting, listening and making. <https://houseofannetta.org/>

### Address

House of Annetta  
25 Princelet St,  
London, E1 6QH

### Exhibition Opening Times

Monday-Friday 5.00-8.00pm  
Saturday-Sunday: 2.00-8.00pm

### Opening Evening

Thursday 14 November 2024  
6.30-9.30pm

### EVENTS:

#### Cathy Eastburn Sound Meditations

Saturday, 16 November 2024  
4-5pm & 6-7pm  
Eventbrite Booking Required:  
<https://tinyurl.com/33vs9zn7>



#### MILENA 'BEAUTY and WHY it matters'

##### Talk:

Monday 17 November 2024, 2pm  
Eventbrite Booking Required:  
<https://tinyurl.com/44rh7nav>



MILENA slideshow:  
<https://962769.cargo.site/>



Niki Soroli  
Rebetika music playlist  
Sunday 17 November 2024  
6-8pm

