ELLI ANTONIOU



Recovering, 2026. Detail. Stainless steel, aluminium support frame, 120 × 84 cm. Photo: Nyssos Vasilopoulos. Courtesy of the artists.

A PORTRAIT BY

CATERINA AVATANEO

A bullet is a magic ring is a liquid state

Have you ever asked yourself what Bernini's David could possibly have in common with Sailor Moon? Fair enough that you most likely haven't. But place side by side an image of the marble sculpture and one of the Japanese anime character and you will be surprised. The twist lies precisely within *their twist*: David's drapery caught in the torsion of his combat gesture, Sailor Moon's ribbons and hair flaring outwards fierce and brave. Their movement is choreographed and expressive, the spiralling action frozen forever in representation. Don't get me wrong, I would have never thought of this association myself, Elli Antoniou did. For years, the artist has been collecting Baroque mythological and religious iconography, anime and manga, sci-fi ambients, sport photographs, astrophysical phenomena imagery, and digital worlds... all sharing a particular visual condition that she refers to as iconography of transcendence or transformation. It is mostly moments that register something intangible such as a gravitational pull, a burst of energy, a spiritual force or the instant before a body shifts into another form. Images of bodies or situations caught at the threshold of becoming. Because of this accumulation, some say her studio walls loom like those of a serial killer. I would rather imagine they gush schizophrenically like Rust's garage (Matthew McConaughey in *True Detective*) as Antoniou follows disparate threads across scales and timelines, connecting macro and micro narratives and material histories until a pattern, or a gesture, begins to emerge—a coin is linked to the water of a fountain, a lift's button to a solar system. I'll get back to this. But let's stick to David and Sailor Moon for a second because their pairing is also uncannily close to Antoniou's "millennial-sculptur" trajectory.

Trained in sculpture at the Royal College of Art in London, her early practice was deeply embedded in digital worlding. Her first solo exhibition, *_OVERLAPPING MOMENTS OF A SLIGHTLY PRESENT*, at Saigon in Athens in 2021, developed out of a computer game she designed, and included a series of hanging metal works overlaid with digital prints of dunes and other mirage-like rendered environments. That was the first occasion in which

metal appeared in her practice, marking a shift towards physical making. Over time, Antoniou has devised a technique of material subtraction, combining gestural drawing with the use of abrasive tools to subtly alter the surface of stainless steel panels and transform their reflective properties. The process is loud, physically exhausting and requires technical mastery. As the employed tools have their own fixed velocity and range of movement, Antoniou has to choreograph her body around them. Furthermore every touch on the surface, far from innocent, leaves a permanent trace. Can you see the violence here? Yet, what emerges from this process is remarkably ethereal. The aggression of the gesture is transmuted into something weightless. An illusion our technological existence knows all too well. Perhaps an inherent existential condition too.

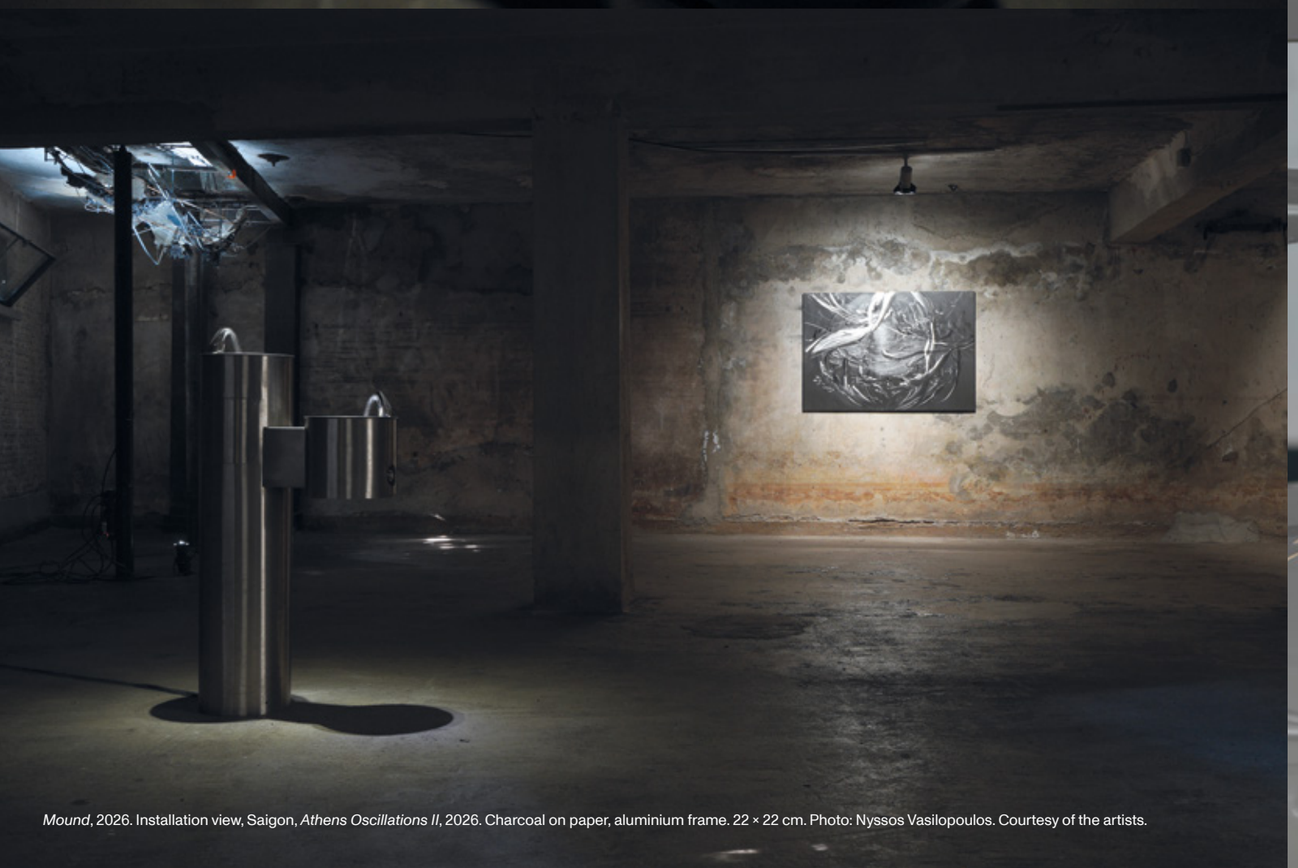
Light plays its part, animating the surface into dancing images—a result close to a lenticular print one might say. The metal seems to lose its industrial fixity and return to an alchemical, ever-changing fluid state. Antoniou's abstract artworks retain all the stories and images the eye might conjure. They offer a glimmer into intangible worlds: the web of life and all those invisible traces that the artist is so passionate about. With my pareidolia I have seen naughty pixies (*Permanent Present*, 2024), a couple of languid dragonfish seduced by the gravitational pull of a mysterious black hole (*Abyss*, 2026), a submerged landscape irradiated by a distant sun (*Latent Detail I*, 2025), swamps (*Dusk or Dawn*, 2026), and magnetic fields (also *Dusk or Dawn*, 2026). But all these artworks rather portray the traces those things leave behind: the wake of a body in motion or the afterimage of a fleeting event. At Artissima in Turin last year, Cob Gallery presented *Proximal Volution* (2025), a suspended sculpture composed of concentric, lasercut sheets of metal evoking two galaxies caught in a gravitational encounter. A speculative image of cosmic collision, beyond human perception.

The notion of transformation is already inscribed in the material itself: in its passage from liquid to solid and, in the case of stainless steel, in its recyclability. The metal carries a lineage that begins in the mine and stretches all the way to the screens of our portals to virtuality. Bound to technological and alchemic traditions, since ancient times it has embodied at the same time the violence of extractive practices and the softness of shimmering allure. A bullet is a magic ring is a liquid state; transmutation a material and existential essence. Antoniou lets all this unravel in her practice. And what brings together a coin in a fountain (*Wishing Well*, 2024) or a lift's button in a solar system (*Temporal Relations*, 2024) is the notion of circularity. Recently, the artist has started working with paper too. Analogously to the metal drawings, she operates through subtraction, covering the sheet in charcoal and then erasing it with her fingers and rubbers. The resulting artworks are astonishingly tonal, closer at first glance to an ink print with faded greys, recalling absence. *Untitled* (2026), included in the recent duo-exhibition *Antechamber* at Cob Gallery, appears as a particularly spectral landscape, where the stillness of two pools of water is encircled by a crown of ancient rocks, literally eroded by the artist's repeated erasures. There is something haunting about Antoniou's artworks, but this is another story for another time.



Mound, 2026. Installation view, Saigon, *Athens Oscillations II*, 2026. Charcoal on paper, aluminium frame. 22 × 22 cm.
Photo: Nyssos Vasilopoulos. Courtesy of the artists.

Installation View, *Mound*, 2026, Elli Antoniou & Alexandros Tzannis, Saigon, Athens. © courtesy of the artists. Photography by Nyssos Vasilopoulos.



Mound, 2026. Installation view, Saigon, *Athens Oscillations II*, 2026. Charcoal on paper, aluminium frame. 22 × 22 cm. Photo: Nyssos Vasilopoulos. Courtesy of the artists.



Proximal Volution, 2025. Detail. Aluminium slab, stainless steel sheets, stainless steel threaded rods, chains, fixings (washers, dome nuts, connectors, carabiner clips, adjustable hooks), aluminium tubes, pearls. 300 × 150 × 70 cm. Photo: Stathis Mamalakis. Courtesy of the artist and Cob Gallery.