

# ART AT EP

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WORKS OF ART  
FROM

Organised by the European Parliament  
in cooperation with the Cypriot Presidency  
of the Council of the European Union



European  
Parliament

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This publication was produced in Luxembourg, for information purposes, for the Cypriot Presidency Exhibition 2026, featuring works of art from the European Parliament Contemporary Art Collection and photos by Andros Efstathiou. It is intended to provide educational details about the background and artistic legacy of the artists whose creations are on display, and to preserve and promote their contribution to Europe's cultural heritage.

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WORKS OF ART FROM

C Y P R U S

# FORWARD



**ROBERTA METSOLA**

President of the European Parliament

For over a decade, this Parliament has been proud to host art exhibitions organised by the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, giving people the opportunity to explore art and cultural expression from across our Union. 2026 marks the second time that Cyprus has taken the helm of this Presidency, and as a fellow islander growing up in the Mediterranean, I am excited to see both Cypriot art and artists celebrated in the heart of European democracy.

The Parliament's Contemporary Art Collection was founded in 1980 by Simone Veil, the first directly elected President of Parliament, and today it brings together approximately 600 works of art from all Member States. It invites parliamentarians and the public alike to reflect on creativity and cultural diversity as shared European values. The Cypriot works in our collection reflect the diversity and richness of our Union and attest to the continuity of Veil's legacy in supporting new and young artists.

This exhibition draws from Parliament's collection in partnership with the Deputy Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Cyprus. The artworks displayed here deal with the complex questions of memory and heritage, and address important issues for our continent including tourism, migration, ecology, sustainability and technology. Maria Leonidou's digital prints of strange, futuristic shapes moving through unfamiliar spaces ask questions of our ever-changing landscapes and our place within them. Meanwhile, Andros Efstathiou's perspective-shifting photographs invite us to reflect on the challenges of the present and imagine possible futures.

Art connects us, fosters dialogue and encourages us to examine our shared experience – in short, it is a key, living part of our democracy. That is why I am glad that these important discussions are taking place right here, in Europe's House of Democracy, and why this Parliament will always support the arts and artistic expression.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this exhibition, and I invite you to enjoy this window into Cyprus' contemporary cultural scene. I wish you a rewarding and memorable visit.

# FORWARD



**VASILIKI KASSIANIDOU**

Deputy Minister of Culture

Cyprus has chosen to present the exhibitions 'Nicosia International Airport' by Andros Efthathiou and 'Growing Self' by Maria Leonidou at the European Parliament as an act of European identity and collective memory.

Assuming the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first half of 2026, the Republic of Cyprus seeks to strengthen the cohesion and strategic unity of the Union, while promoting cultural innovation and sustainable cooperation between Member States. Particular importance is attached to the promotion and safeguarding of the fundamental values of the Union and, in particular, respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law.

In the context of the Cyprus Presidency, we aim to strengthen and highlight the role of culture as a pillar of European policy, linking cultural development with democratic values. Through the Committee on Cultural Affairs and the Audiovisual and Media Working Party, we will consult on the legal basis of the new AgoraEU funding Regulation, which will replace the previous Regulations on the 'Creative Europe' Programme and the 'Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values' Programme, opening new avenues for strengthening mobility and cultural action in Europe. At the same time, we will promote the new legal basis for the European Capitals of Culture and the adoption of the Cultural Compass, a strategic tool that aspires to be the seed for robust cultural ecosystems in Europe's future, harnessing the possibilities opened up by technological progress. Furthermore, during our Presidency, we will actively contribute to the implementation of the European Media Freedom Act, creating a space for the exchange of

views on the protection of cultural rights and the fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural goods, thus ensuring a stable and fair framework for the development and protection of culture.

The value of culture is not limited to aesthetics or artistic expression. It is the cornerstone for the formation of identities, for the preservation of memory and for the creation of a common European vision.

In the exhibition 'Nicosia International Airport', Andros Efthathiou transforms the abandoned airport into a symbol of memory, endurance and hope, highlighting the power of collective historical consciousness. Through a theatrical approach, the photographs revive the last flight before the Turkish invasion of 1974, connecting material reality with memory and making the viewer a participant in an act of reflection and self-knowledge.

Inspired by the past, in Maria Leonidou's 'Growing Self', technology and imagination meet contemporary identity, creating a new perspective on the future where art functions as an act of rebirth and displacement. The two exhibitions converse with each other, as well as with Europe itself, reflecting the journey from memory to displacement, from the past that defines us, to the future that we are called to shape collectively.

The Cyprus Presidency aspires to continue this dialogue, strengthening cultural cooperation, innovation and the protection of cultural heritage, confirming that Europe continues to draw strength from memory and move towards a common future of solidarity, democracy and culture.

# FORWARD



## **MIRIAM LEXMANN**

Quaestor and Chair of the Artistic Committee  
of the European Parliament

The exhibition on the occasion of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU brings together two artists whose work defines a pivotal moment in contemporary Cypriot art.

As an island at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, Cyprus has long been a meeting point of civilisations, histories and artistic influences. Its rich cultural heritage, shaped by centuries of exchange, continues to inspire contemporary creators who bridge tradition with innovation.

Andros Efstathiou's photographs, taken at the abandoned Nicosia International Airport, confront us with the aesthetic of decay and absence. His images of a site that was once full of movement and is now frozen in time invite us to reflect on a historical rupture where the airport becomes a metaphor for collective memory – its silence is in fact not an absence, but a powerful imprint. In contrast, Maria Leonidou's *Growing Self* series takes us into the realm of the digital and the virtual by exploring technology.

Together, these two artists offer a conversation between memory and transformation, the past and the future. They remind us that Cypriot art is not static but continuously evolving, always searching for new ways to define itself and forging a dynamic dialogue between preservation and experimentation, memory and renewal.

I wish you an unforgettable and enriching experience at the exhibition.

# INTRODUCTION

Culture is one of the fundamental foundations of democracy. It is through culture that Europe finds its soul and purpose. It is culture that, through our shared values, defines us as Europeans. Therefore, it has assumed, from the beginning, a central and strategic importance in Parliament – to which contemporary art is no stranger.

Parliament's Contemporary Art Collection was established in 1980, at the initiative of the former President of Parliament, Simone Veil, with the aim of reflecting the vision of Europe through its artists. With approximately 600 artworks from all Member States, integrated over the past 45 years, the collection bears witness to European artistic production and cultural diversity over the past seven decades. Distributed throughout the various public and working spaces of Parliament, the collection is a daily reminder of how diversity unites us and how much we need to continue cherishing this shared and common vision – an ongoing construction.

A testament to this recognition of the social and communicative power of art has been the strategic vision for new acquisitions, which seeks to ensure contemporaneity, diversity and representation in the collection, with a growing investment in the acquisition of artworks by young artists, artists from under-represented Member States and female artists, thereby contributing to gender and regional balance. This vision is also reflected in the thematic approaches, with pieces that seek to focus on today's social challenges and underscore the importance of the legislative work carried out by Parliament.

The hosting of exhibitions dedicated to the contemporary artistic production of the various Member States holding the rotating presidencies of the Council of the EU also attests to this prominent position of art as an integral part of a larger strategy for the European project. Ranging from north to south, from east to west, these exhibitions are important moments of celebration of the diverse cultures that make up the cultural fabric that makes Europe so rich and unique. This transition is more evident than ever in the rotating of the presidency to Cyprus, which succeeds Denmark, making it a special opportunity to highlight the European motto 'unity in diversity'.

Cyprus is one of the most diverse and unique countries in Europe, a result of its geographical location and characteristics. It has historically occupied a central position in the geopolitical context, both as a meeting point and a centre of conflict, playing a decisive role in the relationship between the EU and the Middle East. It is therefore a territory of confluence, with unique and equally shared cultural characteristics, a rich mosaic that allows for the construction of a common ground. Naturally, its artistic production is not oblivious to the complexity and social challenges that this territory entails.

The presence of Cypriot artists in the collection reflects this cultural richness and uniqueness. Although representing a small group of only eight artworks by seven artists – Constantinos Kounnis and Costas Mantzalos, Eleni Nicodemou, Maria Leonidou, Michael Panayiotis, Rea Afanditou, Svaella Michael, and Theodosios Gregorios – these pieces are of particular relevance because

they address themes such as identity, nature, conflict, time, memory and innovation, through mediums such as painting, drawing, photography, installation and digital technology. They are an example of the concerted effort undertaken by Parliament, illustrating the collection's geographic, gender, age and thematic representation. Most of the acquisitions were made in 2007, by decision of the Bureau, and the most recent in 2023, with the inclusion of Maria Leonidou's works, featured in this exhibition.

Maria Leonidou develops a multidisciplinary work at the intersection of sculpture and digital technologies, often creating immersive and interactive pieces and installations, imbued with a fanciful visuality that transports us to imagined fictional worlds, like possible futures. She exemplifies the shifting paradigm of art and its embrace of an increasingly digital and technological world, using different types of media and techniques to create works that explore and challenge the boundaries between physical and digital identities, and how these identities are shaped and defined by the consumption and use of new technologies. She works at the centre of the encounter and conflict between the human, the non-human and the machine, the ambiguity between the material and the virtual, to produce hybrid works that materialise what was once digital, between fiction and reality.

*In Growing Self I and II*, which were recently acquired for Parliament's collection, Leonidou uses 3D digital modelling to explore these issues and address the idea of a post-natural, post-material and post-human world. She creates imaginary, digital, liquid-like bodies that seem to be in constant motion and suggest the potential for transformation. Alongside them, forms

flourish, moulding and adapting as symbols of resistance to an apparent end, creating a universe with its own codes and rules that allows us to think of digital space as a political space, in an attempt to liberate ourselves from systems of control and conflict that hinder growth.

Leonidou's works are joined in this exhibition by a series of photographs by Andros Efthathiou, which were selected in cooperation with our partner in this exhibition project, the Deputy Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Cyprus. Efthathiou dedicates his photography work primarily to the memory and identity of the city and island where he lives, focusing on the various cultural flows that compose it and reflecting on the unity and division of a territory deeply shaped by diversity.

*In Nicosia International Airport*, Efthathiou presents a series of images taken at the former international airport in the capital of Cyprus, which has been closed since 1974 following the Turkish invasion. It is therefore a physical manifestation of the conflict and long-lasting political impasse in this territory. Through a process of post-memory, since Efthathiou was born the same year that the airport closed and therefore did not directly experience this historic event, he uses the communicative and narrative power of photography to actively participate in collective historical memory and reflect on the last 50 years of life on the island, intervening in a past that is also his, which continues to be present and allows us to imagine a new future.

Once a symbol of progress and prestige, the former airport – now located within the buffer zone and therefore under the control of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus – finds itself frozen in a specific moment and time: situated on the border between the living and the dead. This idea is further emphasised by the presence of the crew members who witnessed the last commercial inbound flight of *Cyprus Airways*, portrayed with a dramatic intensity brought about using contrast that highlights human pre-eminence over the ruins of a recent past, as a symbol of resistance of those who await a future that never seems to arrive. Their presence brings vitality to the space, creating images that evoke a dystopian narrative that blurs the boundaries between the real and the imagined, between the physical and psychic dimensions, and seeks to prevent oblivion. They carry within themselves the absence and deafening silence of the historical and social burden, confronting us directly with the emotional weight of their gazes that reveal truths that go beyond what can be conveyed through words.

But beyond each artist's individual proposals, the dialogue sparked by both works on display creates space for reflection on several of the current strategic priorities central to the European project. While Maria Leonidou places us at the centre of an increasingly digital, technological and post-material world, with all the challenges this entails, Andros Efstatiou reminds us of the material and symbolic importance of our built heritage as a testimony to the collective memory that endures, and that must be conceived as a space for dialogue, unity and peace, in times as challenging as those of today's society. Both evoke themes such as sustainability and ecology, whether through the metaphorical airport, which highlights the growing efforts to develop a

strategy for tourism and mobility that continues to allow free movement in our common Europe, but is more conscious and sustainable; or even through utopian worlds in which nature seems to regenerate and flourish, which urge us to address the need for climate action that promotes biodiversity protection and contributes to a more resilient natural and built environment. They emphasise the idea of flux, of transit and of a world that is rapidly and increasingly changing – from which it is impossible to escape.

Contemporary Cypriot artistic production thus recognises art as a powerful tool – and even as a possible solution. Founded on a shared past, it reflects diversity, various circulations and transfers, and a watchful eye on the other – our neighbours – as fundamental characteristics of a united Europe. Between reality and fiction, conflict and connection, art reveals itself as a desire, a meeting point and a transformation agent – a possibility for the future!

Info Hub and Visitors' Support Unit  
DG for Communication – Directorate for Visitors

# INTRODUCTION

# 'Nicosia International Airport'

Andros Efstathiou x 'Growing Self' - Maria Leonidou

**H**ow much truth can a photograph hold? How much history can a photographic moment capture and how many emotions can a photographic lens withstand? These questions find space and time in the photographic exhibition 'Nicosia International Airport' by Andros Efstathiou.

Through a series of photographs, which have now become almost symbols of memory, Cypriot photographer Andros Efstathiou records the island's history of the last fifty years in a way that is simultaneously comprehensive, descriptive and revealing.

At the same time, Maria Leonidou's work invites us to negotiate abandoned spaces as politically charged places, where abandonment and absence reveal the underlying systems of control and conflict. This parallel vision is reflected in Efstathiou's depiction of the dilapidated Nicosia International Airport: a structure that is not simply a static ruin-monument, but becomes a metaphor for the fragmented, unresolved trauma that permeates Cyprus's divided history.

'This collection tells the truth and nothing but the truth,' states the artist, emphasising that audiences were moved by the power of this truth from its very first presentation in Nicosia (2012) and later in Thessaloniki, where it was presented at the Photobiennale (2014). The exhibition was also hosted at the Euripides Gallery in Athens (2017) and at the European Central Bank in Frankfurt (2017), and was shown again in Nicosia in 2024.

Just as Maria Leonidou's fragmented three-dimensional digital forms embody the philosophical idea of the 'other', so too Andros Efstathiou's photographs capture a living space within the ruins, where memory and emotion are preserved within the abandoned airport. These images transcend the concept of a simple architectural monument, transforming the space into a symbol of what is lost and what is constantly under negotiation, both on a political and personal level.

With a discreetly metaphysical aesthetic, Efstathiou sends a message of return and rebirth. In turn, Leonidou's sculptural works attempt to reclaim the 'other' and show how these spaces, although marked by absence, still have a presence and demand to be recognised and not ignored. Through the contrasts in his images, Efstathiou highlights human pre-eminence among the ruins of the past, a dynamic that is also reflected in Leonidou's exploration of fragmented forms, which simultaneously express conflict and connection.

In Andros Efstathiou's photographs, the ruined Nicosia Airport ceases to be a static architectural fossil and is transformed into a living space. The images function as fragmentary flashes of memory of a group of people who witnessed the last flight on 20 July 1974. Wearing vintage uniforms, they are depicted in scenes with hints of cinematic horror, seemingly awaiting the announcement of the next flight. The intensity of these images mirrors the fragmented forms of Leonidou's sculpted shapes, which do not simply depict absence, but embody presence within a fragmented reality.

The adventurous photographic story, in the case of Efstathiou, is full of perseverance, determination and boldness (characteristic of the Cypriot photographer's effort) to overcome the obstacles related to both the limitations of the 'Dead Zone' and the clichés that accompany the perception of a historical building, which here functions as a symbol of division, the so-called Green Line.

'It could form the basis of a film script,' notes the photographer, thus aptly describing his five years of persistent 'wandering' around the airport, where the implementation of an exhibition began, coinciding with a round of bicultural peace talks. As he himself says, 'the idea of photographing people at the dilapidated Nicosia Airport had been in my mind for years.' A long period of contemplation, as if he were sitting in an empty lounge waiting for a 'sign': a sign that was not long in coming, while this work had become an inexplicable obsession. What paved the way was a stroke of luck and a lot of determination, since these images had been engraved in his mind since childhood. His generation did not experience the war. On the contrary, the narratives and repetitions of the events of the Turkish invasion created these images within him and strengthened his desire to bear his own testimony to a building that is a symbol of the modern history of the Republic of Cyprus.

Andros Efstathiou's work enables Cypriots who experienced the invasion to recognise parts of themselves in the photographs, while for younger generations it functions as a time machine that revives an essential part of the island's recent history. As Efstathiou himself says: 'No matter how many years pass, I will carry this work with me...', emphasising that this project now defines him both as a photographer and as a person.

Art historian Louisa Karapidaki notes:

*'Photographic art acquires a special narrative power and tells untold truths through personal visual intervention, the bold "virtual reconstruction" of the historical place. Everything is frozen in a given moment and everything is alive-dead in the "Dead Zone" of the so-called Green Line of the former Nicosia international airport. The protagonists, as animators, initially steal the show, but they are emphatically integrated into the depicted environments as tragic remnants and become part of the narrative of the place, of individual and collective memory. Efstatiou's narrative is neither a memorial of events, nor an attempt at historical documentation or cinematic representation, but rather aims to leave the viewer free to relate the real and symbolic space with the historical events of the artist's country, in order to thus pass into the 'land' of not forgetting.'*

The Nicosia Airport is a powerful historical symbol, a stark reminder of the Turkish invasion that led to the division of Cyprus 50 years ago. It is located west of Nicosia and was considered an architectural jewel of the Eastern Mediterranean. From 1968, the year of its reconstruction, until 1974, it was the main airport of Cyprus.

Today, the once ultra-modern 'Nicosia International Airport' remains abandoned, and is located within the Dead Zone and under the control of the United Nations. Each new round of peace talks on the Cyprus problem begins there, with the hope of finding a solution.

CONTEMPORARY  
ART OF CYPRUS

# From Memory to Relocation

Nicosia International Airport, Andros Efstatihou  
and Growing Self, Maria Leonidou

Contemporary Cypriot art is going through a period of successive self-definitions. If we consider the 2008 exhibition *Where do we go from here?* (part of the N. Pattichis collection) presented at NiMAC [Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre, Pierides Foundation], as a landmark, we can trace the axis on which the artistic production of Cyprus has moved since then. From 2010 onwards, what once seemed like disjointed institutional activity began to be synthesised into a polyphonic network of artistic spaces, museums and independent initiatives. Structures and collectives established foci of critical inquiry, testing the limits of both curatorial and artistic practice, within an environment that continued to negotiate its own institutional vocabulary. A dialogue between preservation and experimentation, memory and renewal then took shape.

Cypriot art is often 'read' as self-referential, where the creator's gaze is identified with that of the viewer. Perhaps this is what is inherently wrong with Cypriot self-definition itself, a cultural stigma that we have not yet shaken off. A stigma that was sometimes born of historical conditions and sometimes imposed by external narratives. In the present curatorial context, this stigma is recognised as a dynamic element of creation, which is being transformed.

The aesthetics of ruins, decay and absence have repeatedly served as points of reference for Cypriot artists. The series Nicosia International Airport by Andros Efstatihou and Growing Self by Maria Leonidou fall within this context. The former elaborates the aesthetics of ruins as a ritual of memory. Meanwhile the latter develops an aesthetic of digital fragments, attempting to recreate the subject itself through technological tools. Each artist proposes a different way of reading collective experience: one through nostalgia, the other through displacement.

When, around 2010–2012, Andros Efstatihou began photographing the abandoned building of the Nicosia International Airport (located on the Green Line), he created a dialogue with decay and national memory. As Dr Yiannis Toumazis notes, 'in Efstatihou's photographs, the once bustling gateway to and from the newly established Republic of Cyprus [...] is depicted mute and abandoned, left to the ravages of time and the elements of nature. With the melancholy they evoke, his photographs are a silent witness to the turbulent developments that have characterised the island's recent history' (catalogue of the exhibition *Cyprus Insula: History – Memory – Reality, 2025–2026*, Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, Nicosia). This observation accurately summarises

the work's dual function: on the one hand as evidence of a material reality, and on the other as a metaphor for the Cypriot collective consciousness. The silence that surrounds Efstathiou's images is not simply quiet; it is a resonant imprint. The melancholy to which Dr Toumazis refers is not an emotional tone but a performative act: a call to the viewer to reconsider their relationship with place and history. The airport, built during a period of optimism for the newly established Republic, was a space of constant transition. Its sudden silence embodied the cessation of historical continuity. Where people once circulated, today only memory circulates. Thus, Efstathiou does not photograph a ruin, but a point of interruption: a temporal wound.

The choice of the medium of photography reinforces this sense of suspension. Efstathiou, however, does not simply capture the past, he directs it. With a ritualistic theatricality, he enlists the crew of the last flight (CY317) to fill the void of space. He thus creates a second reality, a memory within a memory. For the post-war generation, Efstathiou has staged a theatrical verbatim, or even a motion picture as George Trillides put it in the text of the exhibition of the same name (isnotgallery, Nicosia, 2024), within the space itself, with real people, costumes, emotions and experiences. The airport is transformed into a scene where history is not simply a document but a ritual of revival. Thus, the photographic act is transformed into the moment when loss acquires a visible form.

Cypriot photographic practice, like Efstathiou's practice, moves between testimony and aestheticisation. Photography functions simultaneously as a tool of testimony and as a process of rewriting memory. Here, the medium acquires an almost metaphysical character: it functions as an intermediary between the visible and the invisible, between history and experience. Efstathiou does not seek to console the viewer, but to return to them the responsibility of viewing - to stand against the silence not to 'interpret' it, but to endure it. In his work, photography is not simply testimony but a tool for reflection. The act of recording is transformed into a process of purification. The image functions as a mediator between the real and the imagined, between fact and experience. The carefully orchestrated silence of his images makes the viewer a participant in the act of memory, and invites them to listen to time. The photographic gaze is transformed into a gesture of persistence, an exercise in viewing that reaffirms the human need to connect and restore.

Against Efstathiou's materiality, Maria Leonidou juxtaposes the ethereal imagination of the digital. The *Growing Self* series functions as an extra-human projection of identity, where the body has been deconstructed and reconstructed through technology. Consequently, the photographs in the *Growing Self* series testify to a shift of the Cypriot art scene towards the technological world, suggesting that the next phase of self-definition may no longer be about memory, but simulation.

If Efstathiou photographs the absence of the human, Leonidou depicts its mutation. If the former explores the ruins of the past, the latter constructs the imprints of the future. Both, however, investigate the same question: what remains when form changes? Both artists approach the concept of the archive: Efstathiou as an excavation of memory and Leonidou as a construction of displacement. Their meeting constitutes a meta-archive of the Cypriot experience: a source of memory and imagination where the past and the future do not operate in opposition, but coexist. The ruins and the virtual, the real and the artificial, melancholy and contrivance: all are composed in a common field of interpretation. Efstathiou's photographs and Leonidou's digital images constitute two sides of the same coin: the constant articulation of Cypriot identity through art. With a gaze sometimes directed at loss, and sometimes at transformation.

Maria Efstathiou  
Observer of culture and other moving targets

# Andros Efstathiou

Nicosia International Airport, 2007-2012

Photographs, print on fine art paper

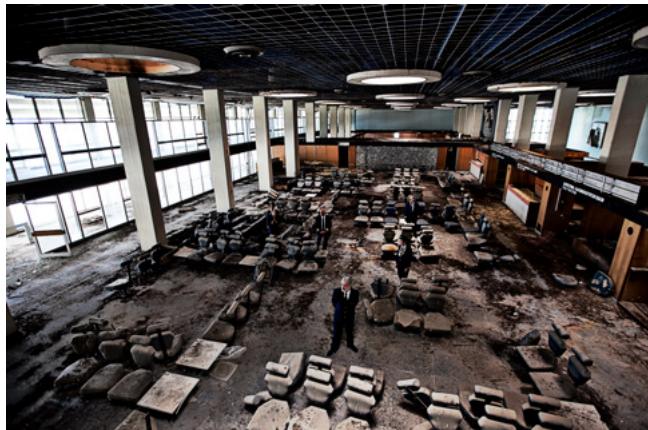
Various dimensions

Courtesy of author









# Maria LEONIDOU

Growing Self I., 2021

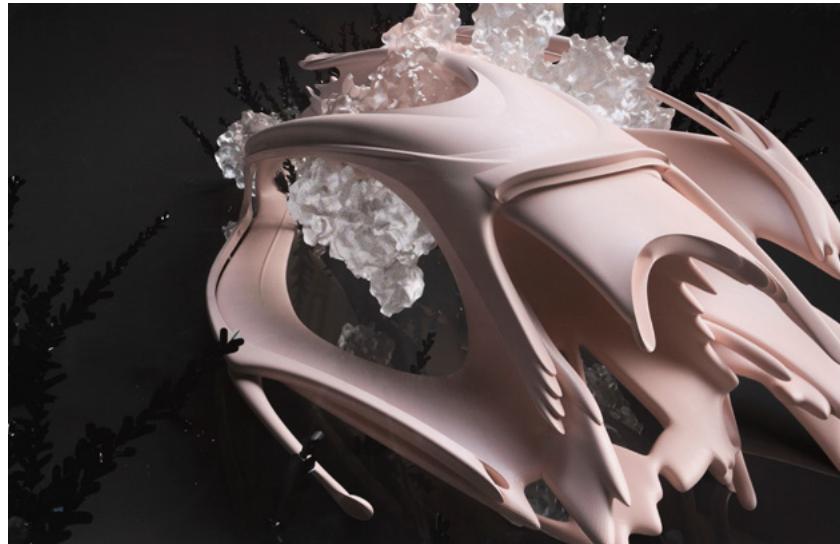


Digital print (1/3)

594 x 841 mm

Purchased from the artist in 2023.  
European Parliament contemporary art collection

## Growing Self II., 2021



Digital print (1/3)

594 x 841 mm

Purchased from the artist in 2023.

European Parliament contemporary art collection

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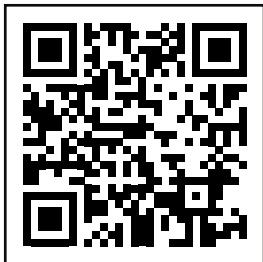
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**Curators:**  
Info Hub and Visitors' Support Unit, Directorate-General for Communication,  
Directorate for Visitors / Andros Efstathiou

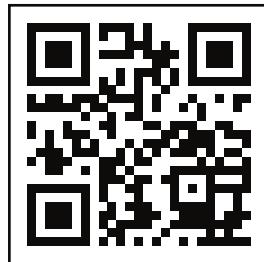
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