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Her Hyper-Realistic Art Is a Parallel Universe

by Alex Hawgood
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The artist Ariana Papademetropoulos in her Los Angeles studio with one of her otherworldly, large-scale paintings. Credit: Amanda Hakan for The New York Times

Ariana Papademetropoulos makes large-scale, iridescent works that transport viewers into alien worlds.

Name: Ariana Papademetropoulos

Age: 30

Hometown: Pasadena, Calif.

Currently Lives: In a three-story Victorian home in the Mount Washington section of Los Angeles that she shares with the musician John Carroll Kirby.

Claim to Fame: Ms. Papademetropoulos is a painter whose large-scale, hyper-realistic work offers a window into parallel universes. Her intricate renderings of abandoned interior spaces; massive opalescent soap bubbles resembling alien planets; and even the occasional pegasus have been

exhibited at the Vito Schnabel Gallery in New York and Soft Opening in London. "I'm very much inspired by finding the beauty in the unknown while still being based in reality," she said.

Big Break: From a young age, Ms. Papademetropoulos was fascinated by seashells and other natural wonders that exhibit iridescent colors. "The paintings have gotten bigger, but the subjects have always been the same," she said.

After attending the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts ("I was very rebellious," she said), she began working for her "mentor," Noah Davis, the influential figurative painter who died of cancer in 2015 at 32, and enrolled at the California Institute of the Arts, where she graduated with a B.F.A. in 2012.

Her art-world debut came in 2010, when her work was

ARIANA PAPADEMETROPOULOS

included in a group show curated by Mr. Davis at Roberts Projects in Los Angeles. "Working for Noah was one of the biggest influences on my life," she said.



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Latest Project: "The Emerald Tablet," a solo exhibition of new works by Ms. Papademetropoulos, which is on view at Jeffrey Deitch Los Angeles until Oct. 23. The show is loosely based around a theosophical reading of Frank Baum's "The Wizard of Oz" and includes a mind-bending selection of works from Beck and the occultist Marjorie Cameron. "The show is about Los Angeles as a place to create your own reality – a place for self-discovery," she said.

Next Thing: She can't reveal much, but she plans to construct a modern-day nymphaeum in Florence, Italy – a natural grotto devoted to nymphs used by Ancient Greeks and Romans. "I'm really interested in using architecture to create a journey," she said.

Lifelimitates Art: Like her paintings, Ms. Papademetropoulos's personal life borders on the surreal. Last December, she spent three weeks as a guest at an opulent 18th-century Sicilian villa belonging to Princess Vittoria Alliata di Villafranca, an eccentric 71-year-old descendant of one of Italy's oldest noble families. "The house is almost built as an installation," she said. "Every wall is painted a different color and each room educates you in some way."