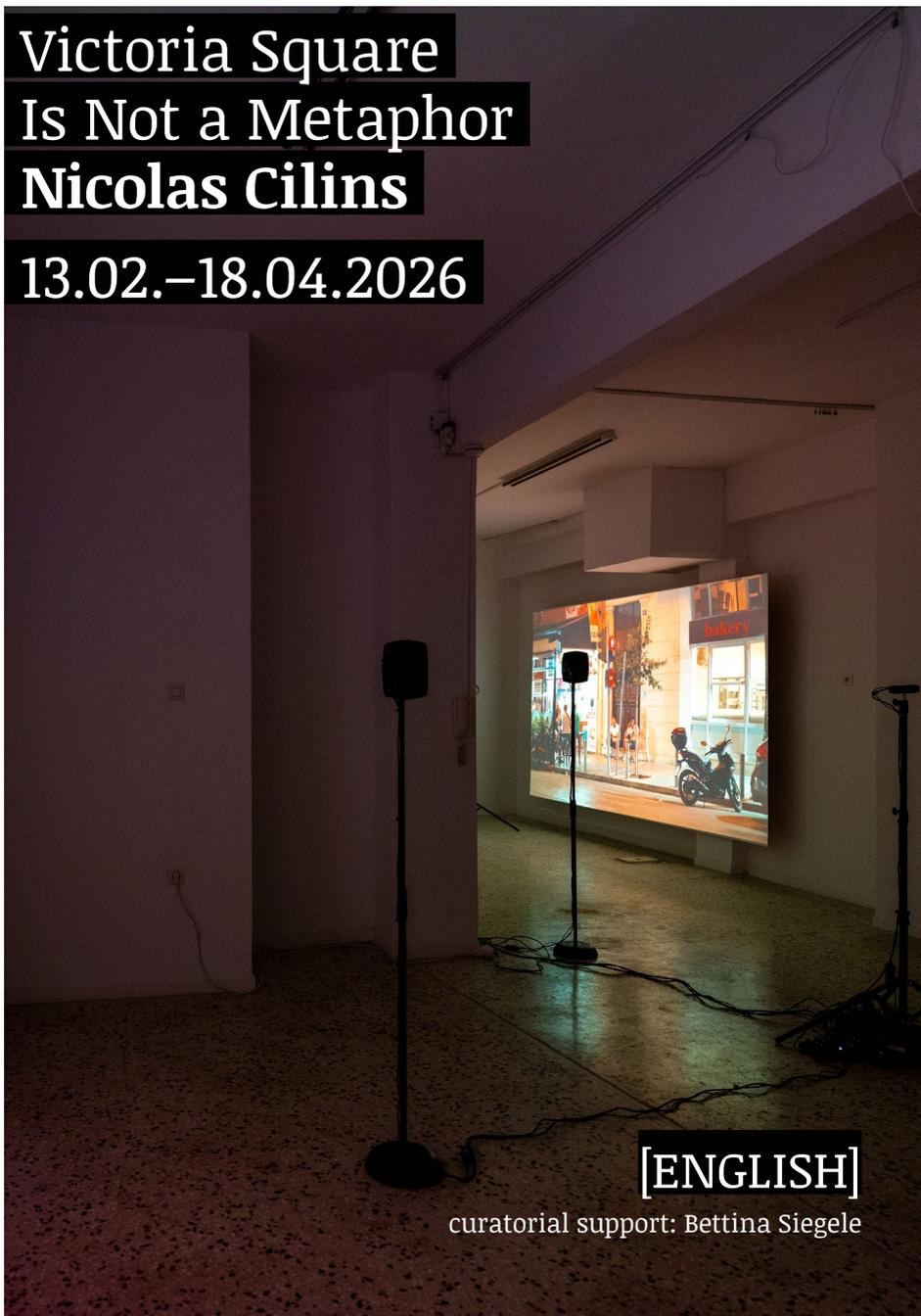


● neue
galerie

**Victoria Square
Is Not a Metaphor
Nicolas Cilins**

13.02.–18.04.2026



[ENGLISH]

curatorial support: Bettina Siegele

Victoria Square is Not a Metaphor Nicolas Cilins

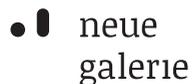
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Visitors Text

Nicolas Cilins' artistic practice is characterised by its collaborative nature, actively involving people and communities in the creative process. Cilins' work cannot be classified as either fictional cinema or documentary film, drawing primarily on the formal and autonomous language of film as medium¹. In their projects, Cilins neither assigns scripted roles to the protagonists nor documents reality in a conventional sense; their films and moving image installations exist in an intermediate space between these modes. The artist's subject matter unfolds in various locations across Europe. This is also the case in the spatial installation *Pathways, Encounters, Thresholds: Victoria Square*, presented at the Neue Galerie of the Künstler*innen Vereinigung Tirol.

The multi-channel video and sound installation extends throughout the entire gallery space and was designed to protect the privacy and identity of the protagonists, whose lives unfold around a network of night bars surrounding Victoria Square in Athens. As if navigating an urban fabric, visitors move between large-scale projections, narrative voices and projected texts. The exhibition space is transformed into a cartography of social tensions, inviting visitors to move through it, to pause and to reflect, while listening and reading a number of personal accounts in Arabic, Farsi, Greek, French and German, observing scenes of everyday urban life, and navigating their way past sculptural-looking technical equipment.



Rennweg 1, Großes Tor, Hofburg, Innsbruck
Tel. +43 512 57 81 54, office@kuveti.at, kuveti.at
Mi–Fr 12.00–17.00 | Sa 11.00–15.00

¹ David Zerbib, "Dealing With Resistant Facts," in *Nicolas Cilins: Stills from Seven Works*, edited by Nero, 2024, p. 253.

Visitors Text

As the voices alternate, they recount fragments of their experiences and observations, oscillating between everyday life and formative events, in their respective native languages. Personal stories and local events are followed in the narration by global events such as the climate crisis, displacement, migration and mass tourism. Although the narrators do not explicitly describe the scenes observed from a close distance, it is evident that their stories are tightly interwoven with the location depicted: Victoria Square in Athens. Central to this place – and to the artistic work – is the lived reality of young male migrant sex workers.

A graffiti in the video reads “Support your local sex worker”. Some of the night bars around the square, which Cilins visited regularly for their research and which they have integrated into the work, have existed since the 1980s. These are places where people meet, celebrate, and sometimes engage in sexual services; they are permeated by a very masculine desire. The interpersonal relationships that develop in these places are mostly unstable, negotiable and transactional.

In Greece, sex work is strictly limited and only legal under specific conditions, including official registration and the presentation of a valid residence permit. For Nicolas Cilins, sex work, such as that around Victoria Square, represents a social mirror that exposes desire, longing and fantasy, but also social dependencies, power structures and collective blind spots. It is not about individual fates; what is at stake extends far beyond the individual. It is a space where the intimate and the political collide.

“I believe that the situations around Victoria Square document quite clearly how interlocking systems of oppression reinforce one another. Injustices do not simply add up; they are performed by people themselves at the intersection of their most intimate identities of gender, desire, ethnic and social origin, and legal status. It is conflictual and uncomfortable, and yet these dynamics are very much at work.”²

Visitors Text

The three years of on-site research were marked by a code of silence for Cilins, which is also expressed in the form of the installation. The fragile spatial setting renders the complexity of the situation tangible. The fragmentation and reconfiguration of all the elements of the work constitute an ethical, methodological and formal decision, producing an intended opacity and transforming the exhibition spaces of the Neue Galerie into a tactile field of experience. City noises and voices accumulate over the course of the artwork, forming a polyphony in which each individual sequence contributes to a collective experience. In this scenario, the fragile composition of visual, acoustic and sensory layers not only serves to protect the privacy and identity of the sex workers, but also addresses the ways in which economic, social, political and cultural pressures shape urban spaces.

Cities are spatial manifestations of social relations and connections. Our perception of them is shaped by their physical form but also by our ideas, experiences, media, art

² Nicolas Cilins and Bettina Siegele, interview, in *Victoria Square Is Not a Metaphor* (exh. cat., forthcoming, Spring 2026).

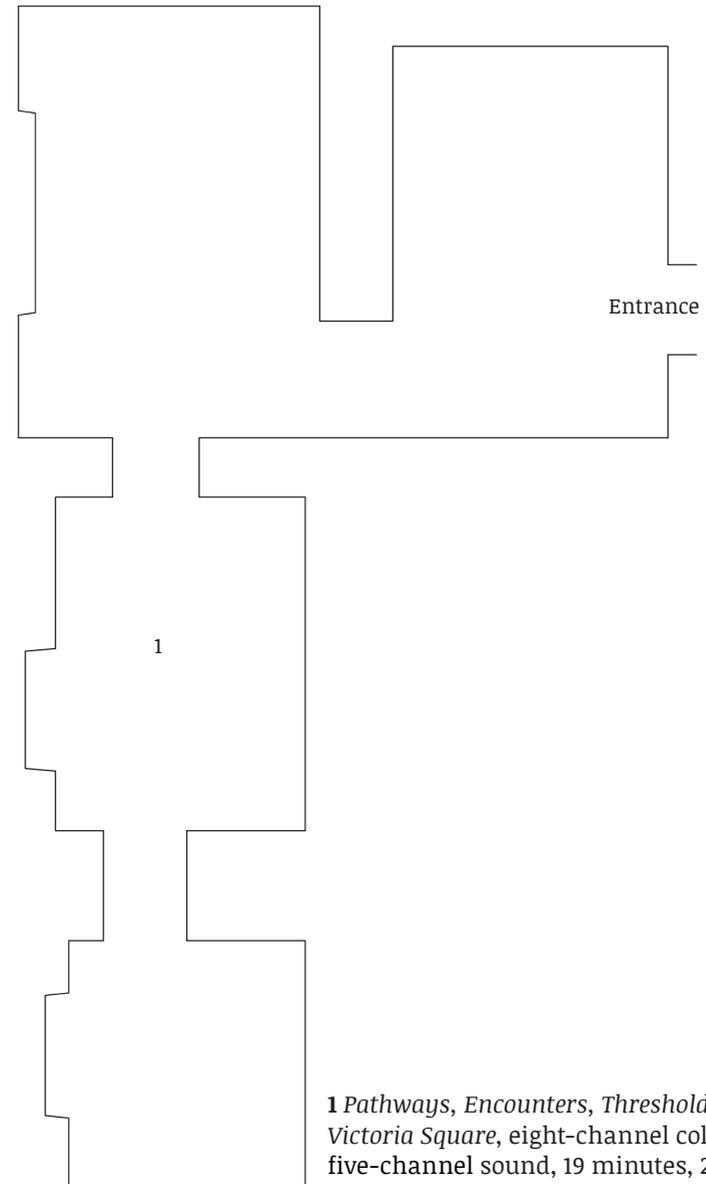
Visitors Text

and culture, rumours and, ultimately, our own desires and fears.³

The example of Victoria Square in Athens bears witness to the consequences of this. However, the intention is not to make it a symbol or allegory for the multiple crises of an urbanised society characterised by migration, marginality and precariousness. Such a generalisation would only obscure the complexity of the situation. Victoria Square is not a metaphor; its specific conditions resonate with globally pressing issues, extending the work's relevance far beyond the borders of Athens through a dense network of interrelations.

Bettina Siegele

³ Leslie Kern, *Feminist City: Claiming Space in a Man-Made World* (London: Verso, 2020), 11.



1 *Pathways, Encounters, Thresholds: Victoria Square*, eight-channel color video, five-channel sound, 19 minutes, 2024.



*Pathways, Encounters, Thresholds: Victoria Square,
P.E.T Projects, Athens, Greece.© Bruno D'Hubert*

Credits

Αν τα ονόματα άλλαξαν είναι για να διατηρηθεί η ιδιωτικότητα αυτών που έχουν μεγαλύτερη ανάγκη προστασίας.

Names may have been altered in order to preserve the privacy of those most needing protection.

Οι μάρτυρες

يلعلا دمحا

Αλέξανδρος Καλλέτ

Σοφία Κουλουκούρη

Witnesses

Ahmad Alali

Nicolas Cilins

Alexandre Collet

Bruno D'Hubert

Sofia Kouloukouri

Urich Tchamba Nya

Sound mixing

Philippe Ciompi

Πρόσθετη φωνή

Κωνσταντίνος Χειλάς

عاطفه يار محمدى

Additional voices

Konstantinos Hillas

Atefeh Yarmohammadi

Με τη συνεισφορά των

Εύα

Μιχάλης

ديجو

Βασίλης

Δημήτρης

داليم

Κωνσταντίνα

يوسف

عبدل

With the complicity of

Eva

Michalis

Wahid

Vassilis

Dimitris

Milad

Konstantina

Youssef

Abdul

Συνεντεύξεις και μεταφράσεις

يلعلا دمحا

ايلام

Σοφία Κουλουκούρη

Αντιγόνη Παπαντώνη

سگرن

Αραβικά Arabic

Ελληνικά Greek

Φαρσί Farsi

Interviews and translations

Ahmad Alali

Maya

Sofia Kouloukouri

Antigoni Papantoni

Narges

Για τα σχόλια και τις συμβουλές τους

Αγγελος Πλέσσας

Σοφία Κουλουκούρη

Ελένη Ρήγα

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Biography

Biography

Nicolas Cilins (they/them) is a queer conceptual, video, and performance artist from Geneva, Switzerland. Cilins' practice unfolds via collaborative processes and site-specific interventions, engaging with archives and translations—both linguistic and cultural. By fostering connections between individuals and communities, Cilins explores situations that challenge our capacity to form and care for collective communities.

Cilin's work has been shown in museums and centres for contemporary art such as MAC VAL, Paris; Kunstmuseum Bern; Kunsthalle Geneva; Sàn Art, Ho Chi Minh City; the Academy of Arts, Berlin; Mucem, Marseille, and Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, as well as in theatres and venues such as the Festspielhaus Hellerau, Dresden; Théâtre Arsenic, Lausanne; Gessnerallee, Zurich, and Nouvelle scène nationale de Cergy-Pontoise/Val d'Oise. Cilin's films have been screened internationally at festivals including the Berlinale (Forum Expanded), BIEFF, Bucharest; Côté Court; Pantin; Kashish, Mumbai; FID Marseille, and Solothurn Film Festival.

Nicolas Cilins received the Swiss Art Award in 2018, the Swiss Grand Prix Theater in 2019 for their collaboration with the collective *Dreams Come True*, and the Geneva Art Award in 2020. They have been supported by grants and residencies from organizations including the Conseil du Léman, Geneva; the Golden Mask Festival, Moscow; the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris; the Literary Colloquium, Berlin, and the Cinémathèque de Tanger.

Cilins's works can be found in several public collections, including Arsenal – Institute for Film and Video Art, Berlin; FRAC Poitou-Charentes, Angoulême; Kunstmuseum Bern; the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum, Geneva; the Fonds cantonal d'art contemporain (FCAC), and the Fonds municipal d'art contemporain (FMAC), Geneva.

www.nicolas-cilins.com/

Biography

Credits

Credits
kuveti

Curatorial Support: Bettina Siegele

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Victoria Square Is Not a Metaphor is part of the annual programme *Under Pressure*, curated by Bettina Siegele.

Jury 2026: Nele Kaczmarek (director Kunstverein Nürnberg – Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft), Kata Hinterlechner (artist and board member of the Künstler*innen Vereinigung Tirol) and Bettina Siegele (artistic director Kunstpavillon and Neue Galerie).

The exhibition and its accompanying programme have been made possible thanks to the generous support of:



Dates

Opening

Dates

Thursday, 12.02.2026, 7 pm
Welcoming: Miriam Tiefenbrunner (member of the board)
Introduction: Bettina Siegele

Screening with Nicolas Cilins
in cooperation with BARTIBAE @ St. Bartlmä 3
17.03.2026 | 6 pm

Curator's tour with Bettina Siegele
25.03.2026 | 5.30 pm

Exhibition tour Art & Coffee
04.04.2026 | 11.30 am

Exhibition catalogue presentation
15.04.2026 | 7 pm

Current information on the events and outreach in the realm of the exhibition can be found on our website:

www.kuveti.at

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