

ART AND IDEOLOGY IN MODERN GREECE

I awoke with this marble head in my hands
which makes my elbows ache and I don't know where to set it down.
It was falling into the dream as I was coming out of the dream
and thus our lives were joined and it will be very hard to separate them.

George Seferis
From *Μυθιστόρημα Γ'*

Hellenism awoke from the long lethargy of Turkish enslavement with a marble head in its hands. A marble head that did not belong to a genuine ancient statue. Was it meant to be ancient or neoclassical? It was simply a fake. We did not choose it in full awareness, we did not love it. Foreigners merely placed it in our hands. And it still makes our elbows ache. The lines of George Seferis acquire a sudden dramatic urgency when they are linked to the historical fortunes of Greece. The quest for a past that could be used as a historical and ideological support in the new state, appeared to be one of the most pressing concerns for this fledgling kingdom. This choice did not express, could not express the free volition of the Greeks. It was imposed by historical circumstances. The quest for models in the past presupposes a people with some political maturity. A people that looks to the past for its models of rejuvenation. Its choices must be dictated by the needs of the present and the future. Only then is a dialogue with instructive models productive and fruitful. Greeks belonged to a typical traditional society and emerged bloodied by a long period of servitude and an unfair struggle. Thus they did not meet any of the conditions which guarantee free choice.

But just what were these historical circumstances which determined the fateful choices? The London Protocol, which was signed in 1832 by the representatives of the Great Powers, made young Othon I, the son of Ludwig I of Bavaria, King of the Greeks. Ludwig was a fanatic Philhellene and an ardent devotee of antiquity. During his reign, Munich, his capital, was transformed into "Athens on the Isar river" with the heavy neoclassical architecture which still characterizes it today. Thus, the choice of ancestors, the choice of a historical past, one of the first and most urgent concerns of the new state, was left to the whim of historical circumstances. For a people with a four thousand year old history, this was not a small dilemma. The past best suited to the heroic inhabitants of modern Greece was classical antiquity. And the language deemed best suited to express it Katharevousa, an artificial neo-Attic dialect. The tragedy of linguistic discord had already begun.

In 1834 the capital was shifted from Nauplio to Athens. In this manner, the ideological choice of the classical past received festive sanction. It was certainly not by chance that the royal palaces were initially designed to be built on the Acropolis itself, on this holy rock on which had once risen the palace of Erechtheus, a mythical King of Athens.

Let us turn back to the Athens of 1834. The picture that emerges from the idealized lithographs and wood carvings done by the travellers and philhellenes of the time, is not all that picturesque. Grass covered ruins sit cheek by jowl with Turkish brick houses. The treacherous roads were full of lime pits, whose number kept increasing with all the construction; add to that all the herds grazing on the sparse grass on the hills and vacant lots. There were no more than 10,000 inhabitants.

Two years after the capital was transferred to Athens, in December 1836, the first School of Arts was founded. In the beginning, it was a School of Architecture, which is easy to understand given the fever of construction. Foreign architects, mainly Bavarian, were drawing up the plans for the new capital. Palaces, public buildings, and official residences were being hurriedly erected. Greece had a need of architects, stone-cutters, decorators, artisans. But above all else it needed – as strange as it may seem – painters and sculptors. Because how can the amazing development of the "School of Arts" be otherwise explained? In 1843, the year the Greek Constitution was ceded by the king, a Royal decree divided the school into three sections, giving priority to the visual arts. The decree revealed the ideological intentions of the state and foreshadowed the neoclassical direction the school would take: "In appreciation of historical remembrances which are connected to Greece in particular.." (31 December 1836). The School of Fine Arts had a five year course of study and was the only one promoted to a higher rank. It had 635 students in 1844-45. The same year the "Society of Fine Arts" was founded under the protection of King Othon with Queen Amalia as President and Prime Minister Kolettis serving as Vice-President. Its members included many renowned veterans of the Greek War of Independence.

The newspaper *Αιών* was right when it exclaimed: "Greece has a great need of artists! This multifaceted institution promises to bear the greatest fruit.."

What was the role of art in the fledgling kingdom? In the state which had emerged, bloodied and destitute from an unfair, lengthy and bloody struggle for independence? As strange as it may seem to us now, art in this young kingdom was considered a prime necessity. Painters and sculptors were as indispensable as skilled civil servants. The artist was urgently called upon to present a picture of this new society. A picture more ideological than real. A picture which would promote ideals, express aspirations and give a tangible form to the ideology of the new state and its ruling class. Art had regained its

primal function. Its role was to influence the shape of this new society.

But just what kind of society are we talking about? What one found here was a heterogeneous mosaic. On the one side, there were the palace and the Bavarians. On the other, the Phanariots, who were essential to the government because they alone were literate. Raised and educated abroad, in the west, conservative, supporters of Katharevousa. A true priesthood. Alongside them were the veterans of the War of Independence and the Captains who were also trying to play a role in the fortunes of free Greece. To redeem their blood and wounds with offices, titles, medals and pensions. Art addressed itself to this public. Everyone looked to it for assistance in their ideological promotion and the securing of their demands. This public is the one that determined the physiognomy of modern Greek art during its genesis, not Munich or the other artistic centers which were to illuminate and guide it.

At the same moment the School of Fine Arts was being founded in Athens, Romanticism was triumphing in Paris under Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863).

The aesthetic problem occupying the theoreticians of the time was the autonomy of art, in other words "l'art pour l'art" ("art for art's sake"). Art for art's sake, the catch-phrase that was first formulated in 1833 by Gustave Planche and strongly supported by Théophile Gautier, was a little later on to be fanatically opposed by the adherents of realism. Art for the Realists looked social reality square in the eyes and helped bring its problems to awareness and aspired to be used as an ideological instrument for social change. Art needed to be committed. For realism the theoretical framework was linked to the social theories which had developed in France just before the middle of the 19th century. Marx's Communist Manifesto circulated in 1848, a year marked by revolutionary uprisings and the establishment of realism by Gustave Courbet (1819-1877). These social theories were unquestionably related to the crisis created by the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century and the social realignments which followed it.

But let us return to Greece: this small country, territorially reduced, with a weak economy based on agriculture, dependent and ruled by foreigners, lacerated and with no fixed class structure. Furthermore, this class ambiguity – sociologists would now call it class mobility – has never ceased to weigh, as a historical destiny, on the modern Greek, even today, explaining the country's ideological fluidity as well. From this historical perspective, the harsh criticism levelled against Munich for its calamitous role it played in the artistic life of the free Greek state, appears excessive, without basis, if not outright comical. Let us not forget that avant-garde means revolution. And that revolution presupposes a long tradition, which has created a sclerotic and asphyxiating establishment which the revolution is turning against.

But let us look at things more closely. In architecture, Neoclassicism was effortlessly transplanted, thrived and in many cases surpassed its European models with the salutary effect of having authentic classical monuments right at hand. In painting and sculpture a provincial academicism prevailed, able to live under the same roof with any kind of stylistic source. When we say "academicism" we mean a conservative art, based on the rules of the Academy; a school art, based on Katharevousa. The Academy, hostile to all innovation, was to be the historical fate of Greek painting in the 19th century, just as Katharevousa was to be the historical fate of the language of the new state. An ideological choice. Not an alternative, but teleological historically.

In Greece academicism was stylistically uniform, and brought all the various currents to the same level. Because, in addition to the historical schemas, which would have Munich as the unique "lighthouse" of modern Greek art, other information and precepts come from practically everywhere: Pierre Bonirote (1811-1892), the first professor at the School of Arts, was a student of Ingres (1780-1867). The Teacher of Neoclassicism himself sent him to Greece in response to the plea of the Duchess of Placenza.

The Margaritis brothers were among the first Greek professors at the School of Arts. Philippos Margaritis (1810-1892) introduced a calligraphic form of neoclassicism from Italy (The Muse Euterpe). Georgios (1814-1884) studied in Italy and Paris. Karaïskakis Advancing on the Acropolis follows romantic models. Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) was popularized and became an academician.

The Margaritis brothers would also open the first photography studio in Athens. As one found everywhere in the world, painters in Greece also hurried to adopt the new means for the mechanical reproduction of reality, so they would not be left without a profession by the rapid advance of the technology of the image. The first photographs of the veterans of the War of Independence are very important. The legendary heroes of 1821 have been transformed into foustanella (traditional white, pleated kilts worn by Greek men) wearing members of bourgeoisie. They retain the national costume, of course, as a reminder of the role they played in the War of Independence. But the well-pressed foustanella bore no relationship to the dirty and bloody uniform of the Klephts and Armatoles. The new garments symbolize the social realignments and the demands of the veterans of the War of Independence.

So Theodoros Vryzakis (1819-1878), the first Greek graduate of the Academy of Munich and the principal representative of historical painting, is not to be blamed if he beautified the War of Independence, if he "ironed" and bleached the fighters' foustanellas. Historical painting, the official painting of the new kingdom, praised, extolled, idealized and promoted the War of Independence, using its image for ideological propaganda and its claims. The monumental size of the works with historical subjects inspired by the Greek War of Independence confirms both their official use and their ideological role.

On 15 September 1844, the Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Kolettis visited the Margaritis brothers at their studio and ordered a "large picture" of Karaïskakis for his office. "Our history needs to be written," he told them. "If you so desire you can write it and give it life through your pictures. Our heroes die and in vain their children ask for their pictures, in vain our descendants look for the inspiration of heroism and patriotism in their ethos. So work, because Greece requires its historical gallery. We do not, of course, make a pretence of producing works on a par with the French and Italians, because our material means are of inferior quality and we are at the beginning of our cultivation. But we have ancestral memories as well..." (News. Αιών, 23/9/1844).

Vryzakis' compositions were faithful to the models of the academic historical romanticism of the German school showing all the zeal and calligraphic consistency of a proselytised provincial. An analogous development can be observed in literature. The other side of historical painting is found in the historical novel (as typified by Panayiotis and Alexandros Soutzos, Alexandros Rangavis, Stephanos Xenos, Konstantinos Ramfos, Spyridon Zambelios and others) where similar conventions and similar ideological exploitation of the War of Independence can be seen.

The rhetorical, large-spirited, neo-Renaissance painting of the Germans Ludwig Thiersch (1825-1909), Karl Raal (1812-1865) and others who worked on the decoration of the Palace, the University and other monumental buildings was not destined to find followers in Greece or to create a school. Another proof is that it was not the immediate models, which determined the style of a national painting, but its urgent expressive needs, its possibilities, its cultural level, the use and the ideological purpose of the image. In short, what today would be characterized as the "reception" of the work of art.

The criticism exercised on the academicism of modern Greek art of the 19th century had several nuances, determined by the ideological position of the historians themselves. One block of critics deplored the fate of Greek art which, instead of being enlightened by the European avant-garde of Paris, was darkened by the gloom of Munich.

The other, ideologically hostile to the West and its teachings, lamented the lost opportunity for Greek art to base itself on post-Byzantine and folk traditions. The degree to which these two hypotheses and proposals are anti-historical can be seen, I believe, from the review we have undertaken. The adherents of the second point of view usually point to an example which seems to strengthen their position: To the *Εικονογραφία του Αγώνα* (The Illustration of the Greek War of Independence) by General Makriyannis. Makriyannis, who learned to read and write just before he began to compose his *Απομνημονεύματα* (Memoirs), knew very well the ideological use and effectiveness of the image on a people who, for the most part, were still illiterate.

That is why he decided to set forth his "truth" about the War of Independence in a series of pictures which he planned on later transferring to lithographs and distributing. The story surrounding the western style painter he called on to paint his pictures is well-known. They could not come to an agreement, the General did not like the pictures, he threw out the foreign painter and called on a veteran of the war. It appears that the elder painter was not Panayiotis Zographos but Dimitrios Zographos, as recent research has shown. His son, Panayiotis, was a student at the School of Arts, on a scholarship from Othon and assisted his father as he painted, under the strict guidance of Makriyannis, the 24 paintings, done over a three year period from 1836 to 1839. The pictures were initially painted on wood using the technique for icon painting (egg tempera) and later were transferred to pasteboard using the water color technique, in four series of copies. When the illustration was completed in 1839 Makriyannis gave a large meal to the officials and gave them the chance to admire the paintings which he had hung on the walls for the event. This appears was the first exhibition, the first unofficial painting Salon in free Greece. He then gave a series of copies to Othon and the ambassadors of the three Great Powers to take back to their leaders.

Together with the intact series given to Queen Victoria, which are kept in the Palace of Windsor, we have the good fortune to also possess the accompanying letters. The letter of Makriyannis to Queen Victoria is in the archives of the Foreign Office and was recently published. Several elements of it definitively undermine the ideological references to the example of unadulterated folk taste of Makriyannis. The General does not appear at all enthusiastic about the quality of the pictures, which he confesses unscrupulously that he did himself, neutralising the role of the "executors" of his thought. "The pictures ... are imperfectly and unskilfully painted because the tyranny of the Sultan only left us the power to paint like this but", he adds, "only a word from your Majesty could present them by the most perfect way of painting." It is obvious. The ideological and aesthetic values of the ruling class had managed to corrupt the mind of even one of the purest representatives of the people.

Toward the middle of the 19th century the national ideology known by the name of the "Great Idea" began to be fashioned. The "Great Idea" embodied the chimeric dream Greeks had of reclaiming the lands which had once belonged to a greater Greece and which continued to be inhabited by a Greek population. The development of the national ideology in a new direction during the second half of the 19th century, strengthened the "Great Idea" by incorporating it. But just what was this new ideological turn? The exclusive reference to the classical past was now replaced by the ideology of the unbreakable cultural continuity of Hellenism. "To the idea of a return to the past is juxtaposed the discovery of the past in the present."

In this ideological context not only the Byzantine but folk civilization as well are re-evaluated. Thus the disciplines of Folklore and Linguistics were created. The controversy over the value of demotic Greek began around 1880. Starting in 1883 the competitions run by *Εστία* magazine established "ethography", in literature as well. As the studies of Mario Vitti have shown this literary "ethography" is as far removed from reality as genre painting. For yet one more time Realism reached Greece in the clothes of an academic.

The genre painting, which helped bring to awareness this new turn in our national ideology, was inspired by the customs of the Greek people and the life they lived in the countryside. The bourgeois class, which bought and enjoyed these paintings, now felt sure enough of itself to confess without hesitation to its village origins and to return to these roots nostalgically. This new social class was in favor of and perpetuated academicism. This is the style which guaranteed it "quality", "perfection" and "refinement", which differentiated it from the illiterate mass of people. This ruling bourgeois class with its conservative and Katharevousa-based education, mentality, and elegance, explains the academicism of Greek painting in the 19th century, and not the various artistic centers where it was taught.

We need nothing more than re-pose the question regarding artistic education, to see the common platitudes of our historical writing breaking down: if Greek artists had not taken refuge in the Academy of Munich to study or do their post-graduate work, where would they have gone? To Paris you might

reply. But in Paris, the School of Fine Arts was then the bastion of the most virulent form of academicism: the painting of the pompiers. In any case, quite a number of Greek artists did study in Paris such as Theodoros Rallis (1852-1909), Iakovos Rizos (1849-1926) and Nikolaos Xydias (1826-1909). Their painting is no less academic. It simply adopted the idiosyncratic themes of the pompiers, showing a particular inclination for Orientalist themes and to daring depictions. Their technique followed the sculptural photographic line of the French academics. Nevertheless, some of their less important works, in particular, testify to the influence of Impressionism.

The third generation of Greek painters was in Munich at the time a dynamic avant-garde had already begun to be created there. Kandinsky (1866-1944), Jawlensky (1864-1941) and Klee (1879-1940) studied at the same Munich Academy. But it is well-known that: one does not seek, does not find and does not take from the others any more than he is prepared to take. Two of the most talented representatives of the School of Munich, Nikephoros Lytras (1832-1904) and Nikolaos Gysis (1842-1901) were in Paris in 1876 at the time of the second group exhibition of Impressionists. Nevertheless, they did not find anything of interest in the City of Light and hastened to return to Munich, as they themselves wrote.

But let us make amends for the injustice of history. Thirty years were enough for Greek painting to reach maturity. The painters of the third generation of the School of Munich, as well as other fellow artists, who had studied at other European centers, not only had no reason to envy the academic painters of Europe, but were perhaps their superiors. Especially if they were compared with the pompiers of Paris. The quality of their painting, the certainty of the composition, the sensitivity to color were not only the only virtues that justify this critical judgement. What distinguished them above all else was a moral health which was translated into aesthetic virtue. Because the society they expressed and to which they addressed themselves had no relationship to the corrupt and sophistic bourgeoisie of the Second Empire of Napoleon III, which was experiencing a deep crisis. The painters Nikephoros Lytras, Nikolaos Gysis, who was an eminent professor at the Munich Academy, Georgios Iakovidis (1853-1932), and the seascape painter Konstantinos Volanakis (1837-1907) had all done many noteworthy works, several of which were masterpieces. Alongside them could be placed quite a number of other painters who represented a number of tendencies, such as Nikolaos Kounelakis (1829-1869), Polychronis Lembesis (1849-1913), Symeon Savidis (1859-1927) and Periklis Pantazis (1849-1884), who was working in Brussels and is to be numbered among the innovator-painters who introduced Impressionism to Belgium. But this occurred when Impressionism had already completed the revitalization of the language of painting and its descendants had prepared the modern art revolution.

With the rejuvenation of political life and the emergence on the forestage of the great Cretan politician Eleftherios Venizelos, coupled with the later victories in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the national ideology of Hellenism was enriched with new nuances. Periklis Yannopoulos (1869-1910) supplied a new definition for the aesthetic values which were embodied in the idea of Hellenism, while the poet Angelos Sikelianos (1884-1951) extolled the universal dimension of Greece in his poetry. At the beginning of the century the conditions were ripe for renewal. The public, even though still limited, was now in a position to understand and accept new currents. The first art galleries were created at that time. The wind of renewal was blowing from everywhere, from Paris and Munich as occurred a little later with the work of the superb and so very modern Nikolaos Lytras (1883-1927).

At the beginning of the century, the sought-for revitalization of Greek painting was brought about by two Greeks from the diaspora: the Alexandrian Konstantinos Parthenis (1878-1967) and the Constantinopolitan Konstantinos Maleas (1879-1928). Their education, the cosmopolitan surroundings of the cities they were born in, and their studies in Europe, had prepared them to fulfill this role. A genuine plein air painting with free brushstrokes and pure colors finally ousted the Academy. Greek plein air painting differed from Impressionism, which was not able to handle the unique quality of Mediterranean light. This particular quality, the "spirituality" of Greek light and Greek nature in general, Periklis Yannopoulos endeavored to define with nationalistic elation and some confusion in the choices and examples he summoned up in *Η Ελληνική Γραμμή* (The Greek Line), an essay published in 1904, which exercised a great influence on artistic circles.

Konstantinos Maleas, who studied in Paris from 1901 to 1908, remained faithful to post-impressionistic currents. The arabesques of Art Nouveau, the Symbolists and the Nabis, influenced the compositional structure of his beautiful Greek landscapes, so full of rhythm. A much greater influence was exercised on Greek art by Konstantinos Parthenis, who studied in Vienna and then Paris (1909-1911). The Viennese Sezession and French Symbolism finally imposed themselves setting aside the early plein air quests of his work. But these influences were Hellenized. His love of allegory, mythology and religious themes, his idealism, his schematic forms, inspired to some degree by Byzantium, the luminosity and transparency of his tones, his "immaterial" technique, and his spirituality were all recognized as elements of identity of an art that was the epitome of what was Greek. The principles of Periklis Yannopoulos found their confirmation in Parthenis.

The defeat of the Greeks in Asia Minor, the Asia Minor Disaster of 1922, the annihilation of the ancient cradles of civilization in Ionia, the uprooting of one and half million Greeks, who took to the road as refugees bringing their drama to their mother Greece, were the events which traumatically marked the consciousness of the Greeks. From the bitterness and the defeatism would be born, like a natural reaction, a new need for national self-awareness and self-assurance.

The return to the sources, the study of the immediate and the more recent forms of traditional culture, the discovery of naïf artistic painters and musicians were all set down and interpreted in this climate. The refugees from Asia Minor made an important contribution to this movement. For them, tradition was an existential truth, a way of survival, because it confirmed their ethnic identity. Uprooted and embittered, they stubbornly adhered to the values which guaranteed memory and continuity.

The artist who was destined to embody this return to the sources, not only through his painting, but also through his marvelous tales, where the legends of the East were given life, was Fotis Kontoglou (1896-1965), from Ayvalik in Asia Minor. Kontoglou consciously rejected the doctrines of the Parisian avant-garde, which he knew very well (he was in Paris from 1915 to 1919), and sought his inspiration in Byzantium and his eastern roots. As both teacher and guide, Kontoglou played a leading role for an entire generation of artists who were to define the features of Greek art. Among his friends, who along with him called for a return to tradition, was the important architect Dimitrios Pikionis (1887-1968). In his works, tradition was creatively wed to the technical

and aesthetic demands of modern architecture.

A dialogue with tradition also lay at the center of the preoccupations of another important painter: Spyros Papaloukas (1892-1957), a close friend of Kontoglou. These two artists followed the same path, having pursued the same studies in Athens and Paris. But their attitude to tradition differed radically. Papaloukas believed that only when one starts out with the urgent expressive needs of the present and the preoccupation of modern art, can one make creative use of tradition, comprehend it and draw up useful and living precepts from it. The superb landscapes of Papaloukas from Mt. Athos and Mytilene, as well as the more spiritual works of his mature years authenticate and justify his choice.

Papaloukas' attitude toward tradition was the creative motivation behind, and the basic aesthetic problem of the "Generation of the Thirties". The Nobel prize winning poet Odysseas Elytis and leading representative of this revitalizing generation would formulate the following axiomatic creed: "A work of art, the deeper it plunges, as an essence, into the roots and the sources of a specific country, and at the same time the better adapted it is as a form to the general aesthetic spirit of an era, the better chance it has of winning the trophy of international interest and the more effectively it will stand up to the wear and tear of time... Just such a point of view, progressively freed from superfluous fears, helped "moderns" look at their own countries with a clearer eye and turned their attention to the values of the East, neglected until then" (O. Elytis, *Ανοιχτά Χαρτιά*, [Cards on the Table], Athens 1974, p. 388).

But just what was the "Generation of the Thirties"? This particular "generation" was first established as a literary term and a chronological context. During this decade a group of young writers, mainly poets but with a few prose writers as well, appeared at the center of Greek intellectual life; these writers were linked with the introduction of avant-garde movements into Greece and their conscious endeavor to politicize them and give them Greek citizenship: Seferis, Elytis, Engonopoulos and Embeirikos set the tone for this form of Greek modernism. The opening to Europe had been trumpeted on the eve of this decade by a young prose writer, G. Theotokas, in the pages of his essay *Το Ελεύθερο Πνεύμα* (The Free Spirit) (1929). The group's theoretical instrument was the Greek magazine *Νέα Γράμματα* (1935-1941), edited by its young critical apologist, Andreas Karantonis. Extending the use of the term to the visual arts was improper, for there was never any cohesive group with a common program and goals in that field. It would perhaps be more proper to seek such dominant values in the period between the two great wars. The Asia Minor Disaster, moreover, is a fateful landmark in the history of modern Greek art which the "Generation of the Thirties" did not treat. That is, whatever happened in the plastic arts during the Thirties was nothing more than the natural development of the ideological and plastic preoccupations determined by that fateful date: 1922.

In this climate of quest for genuine Greek sources of inspiration artists and intellectuals discovered the *Απομνημονεύματα* (Memoirs) of Makriyannis, the painter of *Εικονογραφία του Αγώνα* (Illustration of the Greek War of Independence) and the folk painter Theophilos (1867/1873-1934). The proof that these concerns went back further than the Thirties, is found in the fact that Seferis had "discovered" Makriyannis and his pure, efficacious Greek language by 1926, and the art critic Stratis Eleftheriadis (Tériade) had located Theophilos in Lesbos five years before his death and had assisted him so that he could devote himself undistracted to his beloved painting. The harvest of these final years today constitutes the main bulk of the exhibits at the Theophilos Museum in Vareia, on Lesbos. With the further assistance of Tériade, the works of Theophilos were exhibited in Paris and enthusiastically received by famous artists such as the architect Le Corbusier and the art critic Maurice Raynal.

These folk models, Makriyannis and his painter and Theophilos, were also idealized and worshipped during the second half of the Thirties, the years of the Metaxas dictatorship. The avant-garde Greek magazine, *Το Τρίτο Μάτι*, dedicated two pages to Makriyannis in January-March 1936, while *Νεοελληνικά Γράμματα* republished the *Απομνημονεύματα* (Memoirs) (1938) in installments. Makriyannis and Theophilos were frequently linked in the texts of the writers (Seferis, Elytis for example) and critics of the time. The same intellectual climate also explains the rekindling of interest in Periklis Yannopoulos and *Η Ελληνική Γραμμή* (The Greek Line). The magazine *Το Τρίτο Μάτι*, (vol. 2, 1936), republished an excerpt from the renowned text.

The painter who in the eyes of modern Greek criticism embodies the values of Greek art is Yannis Tsarouchis (1910-1989). A student of Parthenis at the Athens School of Fine Arts, he worked at the same time alongside Kontoglou for three years (1931-1934). Kontoglou had created around himself the atmosphere of a monastic community. This young and exceptionally endowed student was initiated into the mysteries of Byzantine painting. In 1934, after he left Kontoglou, he painted, perhaps as a reaction, several post-cubist paintings but with surrealist elements. At the same time, he discovered the charm of the Karaghiozis posters – which were painted by the artists of the shadow theater themselves, such as Eugenios Spatharis – and the plastic values of the work of Theophilos. His painting appears to contain all these influences creating a stylistic idiom which is strongly reminiscent of Matisse (1869-1954). Moreover, he himself would confess: "In 1937 I returned to Greece from Paris. The Greek sun, my eternal love for the Karaghiozis posters, for Theophilos, for the purity of Mediterranean painting, led me to a painting like that of Matisse, while I wanted to be like Courbet". Later, just before the war, Yannis Tsarouchis would turn toward the teachings of Hellenistic painting, the mosaic and the funeral paintings of Fayum.

Tsarouchis was not slow in understanding the common elements that connect the styles which had succeeded one another in the Mediterranean basin from the time of Greek vases until Byzantine art and finally the Renaissance. "For me" the artist stated in the same text*, "there are not styles hostile to one another: the eastern, and the western, the modern and the old... The one method is the eastern which is based on color and its harmonious combinations and in the recreation of forms, inevitably doing violence to perspective, and the other, the Greek or Hellenistic, which is basically the same as the eastern – harmony of lines, harmony of colors – but which also endeavors to render objectively, practically like a mirror, reality, that is, which respects perspective, more or less. These two styles are not separated by any great gap and in many painters are reconciled. I am not divided, but frequently I

study these two unique potentials for the representation of reality separately . Tsarouchis approached the art of the Renaissance and felt it as a Greek, through its sources, through Hellenistic art. Thus, he did not observe any dichotomy in his choices and creation. Both of the directions belonged to the cultural heritage of the Greek. A similar starting point, and similar course, but with a different outcome can be seen in the classmate of Tsarouchis, Diamantis Diamantopoulos (1914-1995), another highly talented painter:

Among the students of Kontoglou it is worth examining Nikos Engonopoulos (1907-1985), the only painter in Greece, who could be considered to be a follower of Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978). The paintings of Engonopoulos were inspired not so much by de Chirico's metaphysical period as by his later style. His originality does not lie only in the mythical repertoire of his themes, but also in the stylistic relationships he retained both with Byzantine art and traditional painting.

Nikos Chatzikyriakos-Ghika (1906-1994), an early developing talent, was also a student of Parthenis. He is linked to his teacher by the luminosity of his tones and the spirituality with which his works are imbued. In 1922 he went to Paris where he studied literature and art. Although he was a student of the Greek engraver Galanis and the French painter Bissière, he was more deeply influenced by the post-cubist period of Picasso's painting.

Chatzikyriakos-Ghika nevertheless managed to Hellenize cubism, transforming this intellectual expression into a kind of plein air painting. After his return from Paris in 1934, the artist worked together with the architect Pikionis, the painter Papaloukas, the writer Stratis Doukas and other intellectuals in the review *To Τρίτο Μάτι* (1936-1937), the theoretical organ of the idea of the syncretism between traditional art and avant-garde currents.

The Metaxas military dictatorship was imposed on Greece in 1936. It is only natural for us to ask what position it took toward art, what the official aesthetics of the dictatorship were and what cultural policy it followed. During that period the currents we described above had already been fashioned. The battle cry for a return to tradition was completely suited to the nationalistic ideology of autocratic totalitarianism. Mussolini had set the example with the favor he had shown the Novecento Group (its members were Funi, Oppi, Campigli and former Futurists, such as Carà, Russolo as well as former Metaphysicians , such as Morandi and De Chirico) in the 20th century, embodying similar tendencies for a return to indigenous Italian tradition. Metaxas was quite clever and took the situation he found already prepared and incorporated it into his policy. Thus he did not lose the official opportunity to send his best regards to Greekness and the national character of the art of his time.

Chatzikyriakos-Ghika, commenting on the invitation issued by Metaxas for the creation of a genuine Greek art, in January 1938 wrote an article in the Greek magazine *Νέο Κράτος*, the official organ of the regime. A similar speculation was also developed by Konstantinos Tsatsos in the celebrated, *Διάλογος με την Ποίηση* (Dialogue with Poetry) with George Seferis, published in 1938-1939 in the Greek magazines *Προπόλεια* and *Νέα Γράμματα* in the form of an essay. The painter confirmed that contemporary Greek artists were making a conscious endeavor to create a genuine Greek painting. In

order to succeed, Ghika believed that they had to study traditional art, the only real tradition that exists . Only there could artists discover the more enduring elements of the Greek artistic tradition. He himself sought out and identified the special hallmarks of the Greek countryside, which can be verified in Greek art down through time:

1. The main characteristic of the Greek countryside was for him the ethereal quality of Greek light which has no relation to the painting light of other countries which contains grey. In Greece, shapes are outlined clearly, and shadows are practically hard-edged.
2. The mountainous character of nature in Greece turns every rock, every stone...into a prism, an unworked piece of sculpture.
3. The aridity makes sharp, geometric drawing, imperative. Chatzikyriakos-Ghika further noted that this geometric shape, existed in unbroken continuity from ancient vase-painting to Byzantine art and folk embroideries and pottery.
4. He noted the primacy of drawing over color; the domination of intellect over sentiment.
5. In Greek painting there is no chiaroscuro . The color is not atmospheric. For the most part, color is pure, and applied to unbroken surfaces without fluctuations. Color modelling is rare . According to the painter, shape and color are the two entities that we do not grasp either simultaneously or in the same way.
6. Greek art of each period has, according to Chatzikyriakos-Ghika, an intensely decorative character.
7. Greek art has harmonious proportions, which are based either on mathematical ratios or are achieved only by the artist's instinct.
8. Greek art avoids the slavish reproduction of nature. It prefers to re-create, setting off from abstract elements.
9. What particularly distinguishes the Greek from the foreign is spirit.
10. Religious inspiration has now been replaced by something of a plastic, metaphysical, geometrical character.

A critical reading of this text reveals its ideological and aesthetic stratigraphy. The emphasis it places on spiritual quality and on the ethereal character of Greek light is derived from *Η Ελληνική Γραμμή* (The Greek Line) by Periklis Yannopoulos, who set the basis for the creation of the aesthetics of Greekness . The idea of absolute homography , which the plastic code of Greek art possesses throughout its long course, echoes the ethnic-nationalistic ideology of the unbroken continuity of Hellenism. The emphasis that is placed on the values of traditional art, which is equivalent to great art, expresses the preoccupations of the Generation of the Thirties. New and startling is the equation set up between the special characteristics of a Greek artistic language and the special characteristics of modern art. Tradition and modern art here are seen as dual catalytic forms of reciprocal action. With the assistance of the one, an understanding and familiarization with the other is brought about. For the Generation of the Thirties this dual reference to

tradition and modern art did not contain the slightest contradiction. On the contrary, it was the necessary condition which guaranteed art its national character, its "Greekness". The principles of the avant garde could be confirmed in the living and familiar doctrines of Byzantine and traditional art. The experience of modern art, justifies and esteems forms of art which until then were considered primitive and clumsy. What was Greek was now simultaneously and automatically modern.

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Note: The introductory part of the above text was published as the introduction to the book by Antonis Kotidis, *Ελληνική Τέχνη. Ζωγραφική 19ου αιώνα*, Εκδοτική Αθηνών, Athens 1995.