

Accepting or refusing the lender: The line between action and loneliness

"When art talks about the foreigner, its words are neither granted nor revolutionary, neither democratic nor welcoming. Art that is sloganized, retrospective or engaged, which talks in favour of the foreigners, is just as dangerous as the art that ignores them; two different roads, which end up in the same destination."

"Van Gogh's Potato Eaters are of political value because they represent art that does not detract from its aims, which are always aesthetic, social and, ultimately, inclusive. Paul Klee was political not only with his 'decadent' -according to the Nazis- work, but also with his silence, which complemented it eloquently. More specifically, with his refusal to sign a form that he wasn't what he, indeed, was not: a Jew."

"The paintings surrounding us here and the words we are hearing serve their purpose through a writing that respects the others because first and foremost it respects itself politically, humanely and artistically. If they are indicting or deconstructing, they do so via the form, which is also an artistic pursuit, deconstruction and reconstruction, albeit on a different level, disappointment and enchantment, a revelation of darkness, gloom perhaps, which in the painting, as well as on the stage, is a perpetual game with light."

"The bony little girl that haunts some pedophile webpage comes to haunt one of Kyriakos Katzourakis's paintings, full of provocative bodies, indicting bodies, self-accusations, oblations, counter-gifts to the gifts of the immigrant, who offers himself as a supplicant, giving us the chance to appear welcoming, in other words egotists from the road to maturity. A maturity which leads away from the dead-end dipole of victimizer and victim and which constitutes knowledge."

"Only if we bear to look at what we owe the foreigner will we be able to tell him what he owes us."

Pepi Rigopoulou

Extract from P. Rigopoulou's talk at the conference on immigration, during the first presentation of The Way to the West, which took place at the abandoned factory of IME (Foundation of the Hellenic World), in December 2001.

The stage designer Kyriakos Katzourakis or: The humility of the good thief

Seeing again pictures of Kyriakos Katzourakis's stage design storyboards, many of which I have seen up close, in the theatre, I am thinking again of the few things I have been able to comprehend regarding stage design, which bring to mind words such as illusion, miracle, magic, movement, light.

Theatre stage design, at least in the form in which it was introduced in Greece, was always connected with illusion and miracle. Agatharchos, Aeschylus's stage designer, apart from his other accomplishments, with which he enriched the stage design tradition, is also cited for his achievements in perspective, that plays with illusion and miracle as it carves out of the two-dimensional surface the depth which captures the spectator's eye. A stage set, however, is more generally connected with miracle and magic. If we look at a stage design storyboard, even if it is its most faithful small-scale reproduction, it doesn't immediately reveal to us all the secrets of what we are going to see in the performance.

The storyboard first and foremost lacks movement. Movement that is not only - nor mainly - the movement of some wind-up toys, the automated toys known by the Greeks since Homeric times, which reached utmost perfection during the time of Hero of Alexandria. The changes that a successful set will go through during the play are most successful not when they are most impressive, but when they can be incorporated in the best possible way into the action, the myth, the play's composition of acts, meaning the scenic narrative as a whole, which is a product of speech, expression, movement, music and all other elements that comprise a performance.

Moreover, the storyboard lacks lighting, which is a key element in a performance in our days. Despite the fact that in antiquity there was almost a total lack of light, apart from what nature offered, or the occasional light cast by a fire (such as the watchtowers' fire in Agamemnon) or by torches (such as those of Cassandra in Trojan Women), and even though Brecht may have spoken in favour of the unmodified "rehearsal lights", I feel, however, that even then - and much more so today

stage lights help magnify a set, becoming a part of the action and many times taking centre stage in the theatrical dialectic movement from darkness to light, from the hidden to the obvious and vice versa. For Katzourakis, the importance of light is imperative, and this is obvious both in his paintings and his theatrical and cinematic works. Great areas of darkness and black alternate with colour and light - or change into colour and light - which thus become more drastic.

A successful set is sorcery, albeit in a different sense. It is an empty seashell, which transmits, however, music from the depths of the sea. A vacant shell that invites, through a centripetal force, the entities - the characters, the actors who portray them, the audience's breaths-to enter and offer it the ephemeral and eternal life of the performance. This sorcery reminds me of the words of a French director of the first half of the 20th century, who spoke of the power of an empty stage; not the stage which is orphaned because a performance failed and was disdained by its audience, but the stage that remains empty because the round of performances has come to an end, and is now becoming the premise of another drama: in front of the eyes of the soul of a theatre person, who is lingering there, bound by his recollection, parade like a vision - or, more precisely, are reenacted - the scenes of the plays that have been performed, the silhouettes of the actors, the energy loads of feelings, props and other things, loads that remain active, even though the things that created them may long since have passed.

It is the same when it comes to the creator we are discussing. A stage design of his is a shell, a deliberately incomplete work, which must be filled, completed, by the ideas, the recollections, the emotions of others, the director, the musician, other people's bodies, the bodies of the actors. In addition, a stage design is always a vision for him. A vision that must

cross paths with the directing and the acting, but which begins from starting points that may culminate in a dialogue with the play, the text, the contributors, but which, undoubtedly, have a much more personal and at the same time more complex origin. The stage designer reads a text and envisions a world. And it is this encounter that creates the composition of his own load and that of the other, the new, which is the play and its performance, the converging energies, in other words, which are called in to create the unexpected.

Katzourakis's load is varied: on the one hand there is the dialogue of the present with the past, of the here with the elsewhere. Of the classical, ancient or even Renaissance, with the modern and even the folklored, as seen through the eyes of modernity: elements we mostly find in Tsarouchis and Diamantopoulos, Koun and Lazanis. Moreover, the obsession with that kind of perspective and writing, which is the opposite of a small-town seclusion and the prerequisite for an opening towards the world. On the other hand, there is his fertile dialogue with painting, which - and here Tsarouchis also springs to mind -, through its stillness, already encapsulates movement, action and drama to such an extent, that we are entitled to say that their theatre works, one's Trojan Women or another's Templo, are in a way works that reveal a stage dimension that was always concealed in their paintings. Finally, the stage designer who is our subject here claims for himself the title of a miracle worker, just like others who made history in this field, from Klonis, who was underestimated by the ignorants, to Tsarouchis, for an additional reason: that he manages, aspires, I believe, to present to us as rich that which is poor and as strong that which is weak, by transmuting humble materials. A few examples: In Brecht's Man Equals Man, cable reels are transformed into cannons, a bridge, a train, a podium, etc. In Strindberg's diptych Miss Julie/Svanevit, the menacing ropes hanging from the ceiling above a butcher's counter in Miss Julie are transformed into a circus in Svanevit. A white cloth in Gorky's Summerfolk is transformed into brightly lit night skies. A perforated background in Minni the innocent is constantly changing into city lights. The iron spears in Iphigeneia in Aulis become an iron stranglehold, and a red spot in the centre of the orchestra in Epidaurus becomes the omen of an oncoming massacre. In Happy End the political aspect of German expressionism comes to life through simple elements. These prove, after all, to be an aesthetic stance, an "arte povera" beyond fashions and introductions and thus a political stance, since we perceive politics as the opposite of slogan chanting.

Here the artist deserves a special praise, because, even though he himself has been incurably struck by the directing virus, he did not seek, collaborating with various directors, to over-direct, to give, in other words, to the appearance of the props, costumes and utensils that negative precedence which Aristotle so aptly condemns in his Poetics and which, unfortunately, is so often the case in our times, when the image functions in absentia, or even against the logos, in all aspects of the word. And here I will try to reconnect the stage designer with the painter in Katzourakis, by saying that, just as he doesn't over-direct, so he doesn't over-paint at any point; meaning that nowhere does he endeavour to show off his abilities, since he surrenders to the miracle of the image with humility, being right in admitting that anything good that comes out of our hands has been stolen from some cave with hidden treasures, maybe that of Plato or that of Aladdin or maybe some other, hidden closer to us. And that is because real humility, the humility of the good thief, is the seal, the confirmation of the writing's quality.

Yangos Andreadis