

Will painting save the world again? Or: Betting on black

Painting is when the canvas is not a domain for the terror of the visible

but for the terrible as a visual possibility.

M. S.

"I often think that the history of art - and also, history in general - is an arbitrary construction of chronologies, people, opinions and choices, which in no way represents or properly gauges the full range of human thought and creativity. Its usefulness lies only in that it works as a tool, like a cane for the blind, let us say; although it does not show the world, the blind cannot exist in the world without it."

"By the same logic another history of art could exist, with completely different people or events, claiming the same official standing in relation to a perpetually fleeing and inconceivable reality. So history, apart from being arbitrary - or precisely for this reason - is unjust. Its 'unjustness' however, is of vital significance if we want, at least, to approach the world of forms. Since El Greco or Vermeer remained unknown for centuries, why not assume then that there are other such cases, temporarily or permanently lost, the discovery of which would dramatically (?) change historical givens? History, of course, is not written with speculation. But how 'real' is the reality on which it is based? Moreover, is it not a fact that the antithesis of an obvious truth is another truth, even more obvious?"

Kyriakos Katzourakis is an artist who became caught up in the allure of art history and succumbed to its mythopoetic sway early on, depicting corners of the unconscious, nightmares and apotheoses. At the same time he tugged its precious garment as far as the edges of photography, cinema and video art. Approaching a half century of creation, Katzourakis can exclaim, like Peter Greenaway... "Everything is painting," but also that any geometry of the body is barely enough to uncover the dark mathematics of the soul. The truth again has no relation to the reservoir in which arguments and entrepreneurs wade to support the *je ne sais quoi* of their petty existence, but is an ocean proffered only to the drowning. There in the depths can be found the prize of those who still contemplate without fear of the market or of the regime of the beautiful. But is it possible for our sensitivity to be spent exclusively on works of art and to dry up when it comes to human beings? Unless, in fact, the geometry of the body painfully records the departure of the soul. Conclusion: Painting can now function as a theology without the need of a god.

The Katzourakis retrospective is of great significance mainly because, at this time of crisis and dissolution, it serves to confirm painting's ongoing domination in the representational arts and its necessary dialogue with them. For my part, with the work of this artist I am also supporting my own arguments as to the inseparable connection between visual code and the cinema, and my beliefs about the political dimensions and ideological power of a work of art. Thus, the activity of the suspected subject can better create forms within the inertia of history.

After half a century of "morphoplastic" experimentation and the like, Katzourakis manages to balance his production between our local artistic school - he has shown himself an able, critical reader of the narrative expressed by the hellenocentric "Thirties Generation" - and a broader, European artistic exploration as it was shaped during the 1970s.

We

could say, in outline, that his personal style was shaped through breathless dialogues, in a way, with Kontoglou, Diamantopoulos, Tsarouchis, and Moralis, but also Kitaj, Bacon, Freud, Blake... Katzourakis spans an arc of time which begins in the first years after the civil war, and covers the dictatorship, the "lymphatic" post-dictatorship period, the sweeping populism and over-consumeristic delirium of the PASOK leadership up to the Greece of crisis and the total overthrow of hitherto prevailing value models. His art is a peculiar mixture of a painful, almost clinical, record of reality, fully cohesive and apparently logical, but also an anarchist explosion of unordered images emanating from the submerged world of the unconscious, the land of dreams, illusion, instinctive associations, underground horror, and nightmare. How is social experience - that which remains when the uproar of reality settles into consciousness - shaped? In other words, when the drama of experience becomes an artwork? For Katzourakis all this experience of sight and understanding never became representation but transformation - which is the case in any painting which is real rather than opportunistic. This would indicate that we interpret our age by transcending clichés, stereotypes and facile communication. In this sense, the work of Katzourakis was, in each of its phases, a challenge to the dominant aesthetics and motifs of the era.

Consider this: since the dictatorship, the themes and unadorned form of the Greek "New Realists" group functioned as a kind of political Pop Art which was developing in Europe and trying to fully differentiate itself from an American, mythopoetic approach to the same subjects. Where Andy Warhol and his like saw the overwhelming preponderance of the trivial through glorified objects, European artists used objects to record the drama of subjects. They used objects to demonstrate the dead-end materialism of an age which was used to seeing causes simply as effects. In other words, an age which mistook the surface for the depths.

Thus we arrive *grosso modo* at the deeper content of Katzourakis's painting: on the one hand, the political scene in Greece and the world, the struggle of ordinary people against the strategies and self-seeking imperatives of power, and on the other hand, the psyche of the creator, eager to talk about matters both personal and universal, such as loneliness, desire, fear, deception, depression, the futility of expectations, the ephemeral nature of human relationships, the need for contact, alienation, and the injuries of others. As the painter's favourite author, Adrian Stokes, wrote, "psycho-analytic theorizing about art trends to lag far behind psycho-analytic theory in general."

There is also the fundamental question of history and how we tailor it to suit us, whether we are talking of international history-which is conditionally perceived as an epistemological construction - or national history, which we carry on our shoulders whether we want to or not, and with which we are engaged emotionally and experientially. What I want to say is that you apprehend the image and meaning of a murdered Kennedy in an open limousine crossing Dallas in one way, and the severed head of a rebel, preserved in fearful photos recently reclaimed from the hidden depths of an old chest, in another. We are, of course, in an era of globalized images but also of local perception. Which is to say that, the more regional histories are differentiated from the steamroller of world history, the more a national artistic school not only has a reason for existence, but an obligation to exist...

The work of Katzourakis champions painting in a time of crisis for the medium, through purely painterly means. By this

I mean that it champions the dynamics of what is depicted and narrated through images, experimenting with its "subsidiary" arts, namely video art. This, in my opinion, is very significant and distinguishes Katzourakis from his numerous fellow artists. He remains both contemporary and (inseparably) an artist of the easel, the stage, and the camera (whether film or digital) in a way that his concerns may start in the static frame but from there they unfold into space, incorporating movement, action or the visual effects of media technology. A man of his time, he can speak with relevance for our times, incorporating his work into the framework of our local artistic history, and at the same time, more generally within the European framework.

The individual periods

Art is a dark and fierce thing which has little or no relation to "good taste." Good taste settles things, art overturns. Art is anything that defines itself as art. Evaluative criteria follow. And so, of course, do the scales of time.

A work of art is a public good and only becomes "private" through a breach or by coincidence. A projection of ownership onto a work of art bothers me. It is as if someone declares him or herself owner of the Pole Star. The best location for a work of art is in our minds. The society of the spectacle should make haste to become the society of the gaze. Otherwise, the neo-barbarians of the image will be lurking. Art is not a surprise but a revelation. Art is like love affairs. From time to time it must die, as only in this way does it avoid becoming necrotic. And when it is revived, it is tantamount to a revolution. Radical form is more interesting than radical content, because it directly reflects radical thought. And only radical thought can radicalize society. People, in their innocence or cunning, often ask of politics things that only art can give. Hence their frequent unhappiness.

However, let us see how the work of Katzourakis can be categorized, in more detail:

Paintings and studies in oil and tempera paints during the period of his studies at the Athens School of Fine Arts (ASFA) (1963-1968).

The use of photography in painting from the period of the New Realists to his first years in England (1968-1975).

Large compositions and studies for epic paintings (1975-1983).

Development within the space and the relationship between painting and other arts in relation to issues of form. This group consists of five works from the last ten years (the multi-layered installations, paintings, photographs, theatrical and film works, entitled *Templo - House of guilt*, *Prosopografia*, *Art box*, *The Way to the West: The Sacred Way*, *The Way to the West: The Immigration Experience*).

In the following five years - we can call the works from this period the fifth group - he made three feature films, *The Way to the West* (2003, a combination of documentary and fiction), *Sweet Memory* (2005) and *Small Revolts* (2009), and two short films, *Cafe Grava* and *Locked Words*. Following on were a solo exhibition, *Vulnerable Body* at Ekfrasi gallery in 2010, the artist's collaboration with Babis Venetopoulos on the video installation *A while ago* (2010), and his participation in an exhibition/event at the Benaki Museum entitled *Time. People. Their stories*, in 2010-117

From 2005 to 2011 he taught painting and its relationship with cinema at the School of Visual and Applied Arts at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Apart from the fundamentals of painting, his classes also included the relationship of the concept of time with both the static and the moving image.

Let us make a case study. Modernism once referred to the essentially aggressive strategy of (avant-garde) art and the recruitment of "names" in the service of ideas. Today the reverse is true. Modernism adopted specific educational methods to change the world - its first, fundamental utopia - and to give art its metaphysical power. It was well aware that great art died when belief in God (or gods) died. It thus attempted the following dialectical manoeuvre: it claimed faith without God, setting up itself (modernism) as "religion." This, more or less, was also the great contradiction - and power - of the Bauhaus, a school which methodically and ambitiously attempted to address a number of fundamental questions. It sought to answer what art is, how and if it can be taught, what its relationship with the subject and society is, what connects it with technique and technology, what aesthetics is and how it diffuses to the world of forms, what a work of art is and what an artist is, and so on. Today, of course, the relentless aphasia of the gushing television image dominates. It bombards the viewer rendering him/her a passive receiver, and enslaving the viewer emotionally, as he/she is unable to decode the plethora of its indirect and direct messages. In contrast, painting demands the time of someone whom it engages in dialogue, requiring the viewer to slow down in order to read a work properly, and to partake in its pace and intensity. In this new age the rules of the game are set to become even tougher. From a simple decorative procedure or a matter of social prestige, art must again function as an act of resistance, as the personal revolution of each individual.

The Visit or Der Besuch der alten Dame

Yannis Tsarouchis once told Katzourakis (even before the latter became involved with the cinema), "Your painting has scenarios, you take different stories and present them in a way which makes you keep thinking when you look at them..." The way that the artist balances exploratively between the painted and cinematic image, having already worked with photography as document early in his career, makes him an emblematic figure in our post-war art history. This is not only because of his conscious involvement in our socio-political affairs but also because he conscientiously addresses questions of "inside-outside," "international-local," "tradition and avant-gardism," and "handmade-technological."

For Katzourakis, visual stimulus serves more as a catalyst for the operation of a process that is markedly more self-contained and complex. His mature painting does not interpret or judge (for example, the historical past of the civil war) and it avoids evaluative rhetoric, merely juxtaposing figures or situations, today and yesterday, charging them with key emotional material and thus exposing them openly to the viewer, who is, in any case, already exposed - since none is innocent before the sorcery of images.

In his book *Ta^n aio chaos* [Order in chaos] Katzourakis passionately relates the way in which painting was gradually revealed to him, while presenting the process of maturity which every young person at ASFA undergoes. His relationship with his teacher Moralis, and the living artistic legends of the time, was decisive. On the other hand, the full-blown and often romantic hellenocentrism of the Thirties Generation operated in an ambiguous manner in his own generation. This was a generation which was living the Greek drama of the early post-civil war years and the still-open wounds of horrifyingly wasted blood that preceded it, rather than an idealized Greek myth. This gap

between sanctified beauty and ubiquitous anguish is where the painting of Katzourakis took root. And of course the events and general atmosphere of the 1960s had a huge influence on this "coming of age."

The 1972 exhibition of the New Realists at the Goethe Institute in Athens, of comparable importance to the exhibition by Vlassis Caniaris at Nea Gallery in 1969, was made possible thanks to the determination of Johannes Weissert, who was director of the Contemporary Art Workshop at the German Institute, and the determination of Katzourakis and Valavanidis, who set up the exhibition.

From this period onwards, blacks would play a leading role in the artist's compositions. These are the blacks of mourning, condemnation, restless shadows, lurking fascism, of drama and of a fate that is not easily exorcized. This is the return of Durrenmatt's Lady, reclaiming her rights in relation to the world of images. Or otherwise, betting on black again. What irony! The early 19th century modernists condemned the black shadows of Gerome's pompiere painting or the dream dramas of Bocklin as the cliché par excellence of academicism. Now blacks were back, used by young avant-garde painters not as romantic metaphor but as a weapon of direct condemnation. Black as political implication par excellence.

Ancestors and fellow travellers

fear that what dominates globally today is an art of immediate consumption influenced by market strategy and "lifestyle" principles. This is what I call "Coca-Cola art" - namely, an expression that goes with everything and seeks "phantasmagoria" instead of communion. Let us not forget that the phantasmagoria was a central concept in the cultural criticism attempted by Walter Benjamin, following Marx when he talks about commodity fetishism; that is, an illusion and a substitute for human relations. In this case, Baudelaire proposes daydreams which become a work of art, identifying the artist as the hero of the new age, and one who will relieve the bourgeoisie of its hysteria. Today we face a total eclipse of being when faced with the tyranny of "entertainment." You can see, therefore, that this art of which I am speaking can function as a form of resistance to the emerging alienation and uniformity imposed from above; to the happiness of boredom."

After the New Realists' exhibition, shortly before the group broke up, Katzourakis was working on the last painting that connects him with their concerns. This was the work Family, which is composed of pictures from the artist's family album and a multitude of images taken by the young emigré in the British capital (1972). There, he continued his studies and began a "very promising" career, as he was soon to produce one of the most original and stimulating works of the whole European art scene at that time. His acquaintance with the Italo-Scot Eduardo Paolozzi assisted him to exhibit his anarchist stories at the Serpentine Gallery, recalling Poussin, Velázquez, Caravaggio, Foucault, Tsarouchis and Edward Hopper in his large canvases. By then in his thirties, the artist was familiar with the work of Bacon, Freud, Hockney, Kitaj, Hamilton, and Blake and knew how to mesh all this disparate visual information into a compelling and paradoxical whole. He had found his personal style - a style comprised of Baroque chiaroscuro, and his personal desire to do justice to whatever images remained hitherto neglected in his subconscious and dreams. Speaking of the "history of art" and using the Greek case as a starting point, we must consider that we are dealing with two concepts that are essentially in conflict: "history," a field of study with methodology and systematic processes, and "art" the most interesting feature of which is that we are unable to integrate it into the above systematic approaches. In other words, the interweaving of the national and international through specific actions and (individual or collective) events would lead us to reconsider certain historical conclusions which are presumed to be fixed. That is to say, European art history equally includes (no matter how much distinguished European historians are unaware of this) both the "bodily" Lucian Freud and Yannis Tsarouchis, and both Eduardo Arroyo and that geometer of tenderness, Yannis Moralis. Only in the Greek case there was no Greenberg to claim the "excellence" and "greatness" - or at least the adequacy and relevance - of the domestic art on offer.

Resident of London, 1973-1985

His period in London is perhaps one of the most vivid in the career of Katzourakis. It is this period in which all following periods germinated and which saw the consolidation of the artist's intimate feeling for a theatrical-dream sense of things, for the history that is missing from the everyday, or for banality and the opposite; for the "horror" of the large plastic forms of the past which is placated only by the sacrifice of the present.

Here I must say that the (limited) tradition of modern Greek painting is haunted by a deep complex, an "absence of the father," to speak in psychoanalytical terms. This is because when the European tradition of forms forcibly entered our closed culture with the Bavarian rulers of the new Greek state, an obligatory "modernization" took place, and since then, our great painters, from Gyzis to Parthenis and from Papaloukas to Spyropoulos, Tsarouchis or Moralis, have intuitively sought that lost centre, atavistically reproducing the missing periods of European imagery - the Renaissance and Baroque - in their work. This is particularly evident in the work of Moralis, which was also reflected in his teaching at ASFA. The fact, therefore, that post-war, dozens of artists with diverse aesthetic preoccupations "returned" to the great works of European tradition, painting tributes to (hommage a) Velazquez, El Greco, Caravaggio, Poussin, Delacroix, Manet, Renoir, Monet, Matisse, Magritte, Picasso, De Chirico, Bacon, Yves Klein, Beuys and so on, is completely justified. If Kontoglou and the Thirties Generation sought to reclaim a Greek timelessness with modernist terms, their heirs wanted nothing more and nothing less than their European heritage, that is to say, the "Old Continent's" golden age of painting. I think this is where the distinctiveness of Katzourakis's London period also fits. On the one hand, we have the National Gallery and its constant surprise at paintings bearing the stamp of brilliant mastery and the verdict of history, and on the other, the emergence of a postmodern style through the fringes of modernity, which legitimized modern intermarriages, counterbalances, superpositioning, visual trappings and anarchic connotations. For Katzourakis, however, resorting to History, and especially the history of art, was a kind of justification for a reality that seemed to be dragging its feet. His painting flirts with the narcissistic "folkloric" and an obsession with narrative and representation that is the "cancer" of Greek painting, but it is never really infected by it. On the contrary, his most ambitious compositions remain "pending" as far as their interpretation and classification is concerned; the greater their justification, the greater the bewilderment of the public that scrutinized them. Thirty years later they maintain their initial mystery and charm intact - and this is a great achievement.

How the end of the world is painted

In the beginning was the space. A room, usually the studio, which is transformed into a stage set in order to receive Las Meninas or the Horatii as they take their oath. Then the space opens up through a travelling shot and brings forth a new dramatic horizon or a purulent night. Or else rooms and more rooms and corridors like stage wings or interiors by Vermeer, to guard the shades of the dead or those left behind to anguish. But what are all these heroes doing in this confined setting, at the front of a coffee-house dimly lit by a carbide lamp, with a naked girl exposed to the eyes of drunken denizens, soldiers and Theodoras Kolokotronis proudly bearing both his helmet and his skull? In the mythology of Katzourakis you might see the juxtaposition of resistance fighters, dusty heroes and shadowy workers with comfortable, white-collar bourgeois, or the heroic themes of great paintings with the mundane of everyday life, a boat rowing on the road captured in song by Woody Guthrie/Homer, (always) a girl, and Himeros, son of Aphrodite, illuminating the

composition and giving meaning to the contrasting and divergent images. Katzourakis is an erotic painter because he is a political artist. He is always mindful of epic and emotion, desire and debt.

The careful observer will notice that from the period of the New Realists to Templo, Katzourakis was experimenting with polyptychs, or rather, composite multi-form images, a kind of altarpiece (predella, retable) of an iconostasis with an intermittent narrative as one sees on metopes. A typical example is the diptych Double story (1969-1970) with images set onto the canvas, facsimiles of photographs or notes and the shadow of the artist, as spaces within the space. Templo, comprising four panels with two (more or less full-length) figures in each, and four smaller portraits reminiscent a la Fayum, was exhibited in England in 1978. A work organized in a similar manner is a single canvas from 1992-93 entitled Story, 200 x 300 cm. in size, which develops its erotic nocturnal theme in 24 square frames of the same size. I recently saw the exhibition Kunst in Berlin 1880-1980 at the Neue Nationalgalerie and the Berlinische Galerie. The tortured bodies of Ludwig Meidner and Felix Nussbaum, and even more so, the despair of Karl Hofer's prisoners, reminded me strongly of similar tortured figures by Katzourakis, in works from Templo to the exhibition Vulnerable Body in 2010. We should be suspicious about art that addresses the emotions rather than intellect, which seeks more to move us than to alter the view that we have of the world. The Renaissance system of perspective is as false in its verisimilitude as watching a football game on TV and thinking that you have a three-dimensional overview of the space.

Eros, Death

If you eat progress, eat its skin and seeds as well.

Odysseus Elytis, Maria Nefeli

Shortly before the end of the 1980s, an event of global importance came to overturn political relationships and put an end to the balance of terror that the Cold War had cultivated. The Berlin Wall, which fell literally overnight, divided not only two cities and two countries, but two entire worlds. The vision of "actual socialism" was buried beneath the wall, while the graffiti that decorated it - exercises in painting and political protest - was sold to tourists as historic souvenirs. In the same period, Greece was experiencing a reconciliation between the deeply and bitterly divided left and right, which were enacting (so to speak) the title of Marcel Duchamp's book *L'opposition et cases conjuguées sont reconciliées* [Opposition and Sister Squares are Reconciled] - although this was actually about his beloved chess. However, *Ingenieur du temps perdu* - a book of Pierre Cabanne's interviews with Duchamp (published in English as *Dialogues With Marcel Duchamp*) and *Aipvaia Oduoieia* [Lagoon Odyssey] by Yannis Kounellis, published in the 1990s (Greek editions by Agra Publications) revived the modernist "problematic" - its attack on "retinal painting" and its demand that art and intellect "dine at the same table." In any case, politico-social conditions favoured, and indeed prescribed such a stance. The open borders due to the European Union and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc created modern nomads who, either as economic migrants or as participants in mass tourism, had a radical effect on the make-up of the population, ethnic homogeneity

and cultural osmosis. On the other hand, the nomads of the digital desert faced the proliferation of the Internet initially as a terra incognita until they took ownership of it as terra nostra. So as globalization became an indisputable reality there was an upsurge of nationalist trends (such as the Macedonia Issue in Greece) and secessionist movements (for example, the dismemberment of Yugoslavia), and a resurgence of religious feeling (a point in case being Islamic fundamentalism). The phenomenon of terrorism, culminating in the collapse of the Twin Towers, was interpreted by some as an inevitable clash of cultures, with the new world order trying to convince us that the global enemy is no longer the evil communists but fanatical Muslims.

If however, the US proclaims (through Fukuyama) the "end of history," Europe - at least its artistic orders - insists that everything that springs from the human presence is inevitably recorded on the body of art. The Venice Biennale, for example, remains a barometer of artistic pursuits through which international art is filtered and summed up. Its pluralism and perplexity are mirrored there. However, where is painting heading to today? How necessary can it be amongst a barrage of electronic images and mass visual information? By what ideological, historical, and aesthetic codes can it be supported to justify its presence, to intervene and exist as an autonomous image-making mechanism and to restore again a positive and fruitful relationship with the receiver-viewer? Today that the individual properties and specific characters of traditional painting have spilled over to its rightful (or otherwise) descendants - cinema, video art, the television image - what factors would enable it to exist unchanged and intact? To remain topical and meaningful? I would say that today there is not a home anywhere on the planet that does not contain at least one "painting," so to speak: a television screen, the modern mechanism for the production of myth-making symbols and hero-making images. Previously this role was held exclusively by painting. Painting had the power to give form to God, a face to the ruler, to describe with authority the invisible forces of the beyond.

For Katzourakis, the act of painting is always ideologized. He must engage the indigenous school with the wider European tradition, and creatively deliver it to the broader world of the image. There are few occasions in the history of Greek art that we have had an artist with such strong consciousness of history. At the same time, the painter struggles with his fears and Furies and lets himself go in the soothing influence of free association. As Adrian Stokes wrote: "Freud found that art provided some catharsis to repressed sexual wishes in the manner of the dream... Perhaps, as a therapy, painting is the simplest of aesthetic activities; perhaps for that reason the artist has come to signify the painter foremost."

In the 1981 tetraptych *Bathers I*, Masaccio, Cezanne and Bacon are conveyed to us, not as an anarchist collage but as a narrative with a strong internal coherence. Since these legendary painters are the artist's best-loved, it could not

be otherwise. The same applies to *Bathers II* (collection of Nikos Hatzinikolaou). The figures belong to an indigenous genre but their semantic lineage goes much farther. Finally, the way the figures themselves - such as the "glass man" or the "blond resistance fighter" - travel from one painting to another, as if they do not want the story to end, is charming; it is like a writer's beloved hero, whom we meet in many of his or her books, defending his existence, with a wink in our direction. It is reminiscent of how the bourgeois couple comes and goes in the painting *Las Meninas*.

Two worlds, two eras, two aesthetics and two stories are constantly juxtaposed in the compositions of Katzourakis. In this way, the most important considerations for an ontology of our national art are "imperceptibly" put forward:

The art of the Renaissance and Baroque and the "lack" of such an expression in Greece. It is as if the artist intuitively wants to fill in the gaps, to correct the "injustices" of history, and to see artistic justice done.

The difference between the dominant means of cultural production and the passive peripheries. Who ultimately writes History? The most talented or the mightiest? How is History written? Perhaps always from the perspective of the (cultural) winners.

Lastly, there are marginal works where these two worlds do not communicate and where the artist projects his own period or his traumatic experiences onto the charmed, ideal "background" of the masterpieces of European painting (for example, in the 1977 diptych *Homer*, where the blind poet is the blues and country music artist Woody Guthrie and *Troy of the seven gates* is depicted as a boat stuck on land, while the young bride alludes to a timeless Iphigenia).

The artist's self-portrait as "Aghios Karaiskakis" (October 1975) fits into this same context. It is still the era of youthful excesses (the heroism of youth), political battles (the heroism of ideology) and of exquisite emotions (the heroism of desire). The vibrant body is our weapon to conquer the world, and at the same time, the spoils of happiness. The same body, gaunt and defeated, becomes the raft of the Medusa, the repellent symbolism of Gericault: namely that flesh is nourished only by flesh and that there is nothing more cannibalistic than desire and need. Here Katzourakis takes a step forward and the concerns of 2000 are bridged with the reflections of the 1980s. The obviously political steps back in order for the existential to emerge from the depths of memory.

"I'm still trying to understand the mechanism of memory," says the artist. His language is becoming more and more associative. It functions within painting sequences (cf. *Nocturno* with its 24 frames from the collection of the Panteion University), and even the inverted epic style of compositions such as *Omonoia* from 1987, a nocturnal descent, essentially, to an underworld of the living dead, the marginalized, and the immigrants to come. The broken lance of a Raphaelesque Saint George discourses with the atmosphere of Picasso's youthful works. Of interest is the theme of the glass sheet - a transparent, reflective surface interposed between two layers to separate here from there and the protagonist from the other figures in the narrative.

In his latest compositions Katzourakis is almost exclusively preoccupied with the issue of the Third World which seeks to penetrate the enclosed paradise - guarded on all sides - of the West, in any possible way. This concern goes hand-in-hand with his criticism of the world of entertainment and of the mechanisms which steadily and methodically embellish a dreary reality because such "naturalism" runs counter to the organized happiness of "lifestyle." This is the case, for example, with 50 portraits of young women from behind the former curtain, brought to Greece for modern-day slave-trafficking.

Over the last twenty years Kyriakos Katzourakis has been engaging with his concerns along two parallel paths: firstly, through the creation of large multi-panelled compositions which unfold into three dimensions, a kind of "holistic painting" or "spatial painting" such as *Templo II*, *Portrait* (1997) or *Sacred Way* (1999), and later a combination of static and moving images such as, for example, the film *The Way to the West* (2005) or the video installation *A while ago* (2010).

In these compositions, the artist space is expanded, while an innovative feature is the direct intrusion of time. This intrusion is accomplished both technically and through the use of form. In *Templo II*, a large construction 11 m. high, resembling a modern political iconostasis, a real space is created within the space and a kind of "stage design" of our history from the civil war to the present. Saints of the resistance, heroes of non-conformity, and anti-heroes of everyday life are intertwined with everyday stories where violence, torture or death alternate with tenderness and love. On equal footing, the sacred rids itself of the metaphysical and becomes human once more. The blood of

people has been so avidly wasted, we would say, that the blood of only one God is not enough to save them. It has been 2,000 years now. Angelos Elefantis and Katia Gerou are depicted full-length, one on either side, like archangels beside a beautiful gate. The entire composition automatically acquires an utterly personal character. Katzourakis paints what he loves, from Tsarouchis to Mayakovsky, and his companions in love; from the darkness of ubiquitous violence to the open glade of the soul.

And here is a highly distinctive detail: The thirteenth face of the Dodecaorton (Christianity's twelve "great feasts") in Templo II, with the name ΕΙΡΗΝΗ ΧΑΪΜΑΝΟΓΛΟΥ (IRINI CHAIMANOGLOU) etched above, wearing broken glasses, screaming and bleeding, is reminiscent of the woman with glasses and an injured eye seen in close-up in Battleship Potemkin (1925). This is an image that also haunted Bacon, and was published in the Tate Gallery's Bacon catalogue in 1985 and cited by Dawn Ades in her article "Web of Images," along with the painting Head III from 1949. A - much-annotated - copy of the catalogue can be found in Kyriakos's studio. The video A while ago, constructed by him and his collaborator Babis Venetopoulos, is similarly self-confessional: memories of the artist's military service, in a dialogue with a group of semi-naked men (prisoners, anywhere on the planet). It constitutes a unique project, as painting and the language of film meld beautifully together to convey the human in the shadowy light of history.

Instead of an epilogue

Images, words, and prattling obsessions - our heritage and our future...

M. S.

Today the melancholy of disappointment abounds, as the arts are relegated to the fringes of both cultural and social life. The art championed by Katzourakis can and should serve as a form of resistance to an emerging alienation, a uniformity imposed from above. To the happiness of boredom in other words... Much else converges in the ferment of modern art whose chief figures are massive. Even so, an underlying and growing tendency is the presentation of the work of art as a fact made out of facts (materials), rather than as a fact that also variously records matters other than an architectural use of material. "Psychic reality" as Stokes goes on to say.

In other words, the art which we are defending wishes to exist within history, when history - setting aside communicational pyrotechnics and pyrotechnics "experts" - starts fulfilling its function.

One last thought: truly great painting, the expansive power of the image, can lie dormant, mysterious and silent within a painting or a verse. See (do not read) for example, how the words of the following verse create spaces, and how resonance is transformed into a pair of complementary colours: ΒαπΚες npnvfs peoa oca npiva [boats lie prone in the brambles]. Volanakis, Altamouras and Pantazis all gave us compositions with overturned boats on the shore, rooted amongst plants that descend as far as the waves and the footprints of fishermen in the sand.

Images, words, and prattling obsessions - our heritage and our future...

The English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote that artists reveal less their own spirit and more the spirit of the age (A Defense of Poetry, 1821). This is correct except that at the same time, when the forms of art that are produced are particularly meaningful and ideologically powerful - when they have "significant form" - it is mainly these that form the spirit of the age.

Speaking of Greek painting we see grosso modo a spirit of consensus towards the dominant forms produced by the major artistic centres, and the prevailing attitudes expressed by the respective centres of power. Thus it was often created as a way of expressing escape from whatever external factor proved bothersome, or from introspection (which typically meant the same thing).

From the early 19th century, culminating in the first decade of independence, German, Italian, and French painters came to this extremity of the Balkans to reveal the glorious past through a pitiful present. But whether it is modern or classical Greece in question, the romantic gaze of European artists sees more a "historical theatre" than a reality. The "heroicness" of individuals and areas is probably linked more to the mythology which the West early on connected with Greece rather than with history.

What is beautiful, on the other hand, was and is revolutionary! Contemporary art, or rather the dominant mechanism for the promotion of images, requires a memory for names. Exclusively. You see, neither prevailing concepts nor prevailing tendencies are "players," only celebrated "names." This is because the Leviathan of visual marketing and the market constantly spews new names onto the scene with the question mark of the ephemeral "star," so that the carousel can keep turning. Thousands of "names" are huddled up on the threshold from the 20th century to the 21st, claiming a place in history. However, linear history is decidedly the past - just as the theory of a single universe is also past history - and in its place have emerged a number of independent stories that are embedded in local particularities but also watered by the great spring of modernism. In other words, that revolutionary movement that promoted a system of art in place of religion and which sought the rewriting of history on its own terms.

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