

Kostas Paniaras

Landscapes of Memory

May 19 – July 17, 2018

Poros

Kostas Paniaras lived as a cosmopolitan, as a worldwide traveller with a strong international presence as a visual artist, having spent twenty years in Paris, Geneva, New York, Teheran. In Athens he studied under Yiannis Moralis; in Paris, where he spent twenty years (1956-1976), his teachers were André Lhote and Gino Severini. In Paris he developed his identity as an artist. He became a friend of resident Greek artists: Tsingos, Gaitis, Molfessis, Sklavos. He became acquainted with the representatives of the international avant-garde: Giacometti, Victor Brauner, René Magritte, Marx Ernst. He came in contact with the work of avant-garde artists: Jean Fautrier, Mark Tobey, Jean Dubuffet.

International elements and influence kept him away from the 'constricting Greekness emitted by the reverberations of the School of Munich', as he put it. Even so, cultural memory and identity and allusions to personal experience remain crucial elements in the whole of his oeuvre and coexist with the evolution of the 20th century avant-garde. These works are characterised by gestural writing, fluidity of motion, striking combinations of colour or extreme monochromy and, for the most part, have a monumental dimension.

In his first representational works, such as the aquarelles in this exhibition, it is possible to detect his desire for an abstract approach to his subject which gradually led to his first aniconic works. His contact with international movements liberated him utterly. During his long stay in Paris he was influenced by the ideas of the aniconic movement 'Informel' and by the automatism of the surrealist movement. Already in the 1950's such a sensation of unconscious writing emanates from his works, which point to the automatic writing of the surrealists and Max Ernst's frottage. Avantgarde artists

in the 20th century attached great importance to randomness. Kostas Paniaras integrated this in his visual idiom, he caused it, guided and controlled it, thus inducing allusions to primordial memories. As they expand in space, these works, whether monochrome or marked by chromatic contrasts, create a heavy, impressive aesthetic environment which traps the viewer in the artist's quest.

In Kostas Paniaras' one-man show in Gallery CITRONE, 'Landscapes of Memory' supplement and frame the artists' 'Ambivalence of Memory' on show in the Archaeological Museum, which focuses on overpainted replicas and the ambivalent treatment of the cultural past. The exhibition 'Landscapes of Memory' aims at approaching the development of the artist's aniconic idiom and to bring out the distinct visual and thematic components of his works. In tandem with the works in the Archaeological Museum, the gallery presents a section broader in terms of time and theme which features overpainted sculpture alongside of two-dimensional paintings on canvas and paper. The exhibited works thus belong to his more general artistic production. At any event, the artist regards his overpainted works of sculpture as paintings; that is, in his view the copies of sculpture make up another painted surface. The gallery is therefore showcasing paintings on canvas and on sculpted surface just as he used to do.

The exhibition has three particular sections. The first presents some of Paniaras' last works, which belong to the large section entitled 'The View', a visual retrospective in space and time, with references to his personal memories of landscapes. The sea of the Corinthian Gulf dominates, as also do nature and the sky, mental images of the land of his ancestors. The second section contains overpainted works of sculpture in the spirit, and according to the concept of, the works in the Archaeological Museum. The first overpainted sculptures date from the beginning of the 1980's and treat almost exclusively topics of memory ('The Memory', 1984; 'The Memory of the Night', 1984; 'Triple Memory of Sikyon', 1984). Many of these works reappear in the next decades, for instance, 'Sebastian' (1985 and 1993)—at times drastically transformed, like the complete but bisected head of Alexander (1983). Finally, the third subsection features early works with fantastic landscapes and abstract forms. It is possible to detect a gradual transition from particular, naturalistic elements to abstraction. These works, little known or entirely

unknown in Greece, show the thread of an artistic trajectory culminating in a final phase. In the works from the 1960's it is also possible to discern the element of 'randomness'—actual, specific material that is part and parcel of his artistic creations.

Kostas Paniaras deeply believes in the proposition of 20th century art and in Marcel Duchamp's revolution of the 'ready made'. What is more, he does not distinguish between visual media: 'in art everything is permitted... I painted on ancient replicas... in order to integrate them in my own painting' (2007). Thus he seeks to traverse time, combining heteroclitite elements, at times also mixing temporally incompatible persons and symbols—for example, the goddess Hygieia exists alongside Alexander the Great and St Sebastian.

Paniaras considers himself a painter, not a sculptor. He paints over sculpture, multiplies and/or bisects ancient replicas which in his view he uses as a painting surface. In his two-dimensional works he works with diptychs, triptychs, even also tetraptychs. That is, he splinters his paintings, rejecting the notion that a painting is a fixed 'window', a pure work, a unified image.

He sets out to eliminate the differences between artistic media: what he seeks is 'landscapes' of the artist's mood, landscapes of the mind and soul. His works do not depict 'external events but only my private mood... I dredge them up one by one from inside me' (Paniaras 2010). Through his abstract visual idiom the artist strives to create an atmosphere freely, without being limited by realist commitments.

It is this atmosphere that 'Landscapes of memory' create and describe in Gallery CITRONNE.