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ABSTRACT ART IN GREECE: THE PIONEER ARCHITECTS

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ABSTRACT

The early years of the 20th century is a period of deep intellectual reappraisal as well as social and intellectual change. The modern painters' experiments have come right to the forefront of artistic attention. Modernism was the point when the idea of radical and innovating arts, the experimental, technical, aesthetic idea reached a formal crisis, leading to abstract art. Modernism predicates the origins of post-war art as Post-Modernism adds to the abundance of versions of Modernism. After World War II abstract expressionism achieved international influence.

On the contrary, in Greece during the first half of the 20th century, abstract art was absent. It actually appeared in the 1950s, but it became dominant in the 1960s. In the post-war period, there were many talented Greek architects such as, Marthas, Xenakis, Proveleggios, Tsingos, Fatouros who became interested in painting, following the contemporary art tendencies. This paper focuses on abstract painting in Greece both in the early years of the 20th century as well as in the 1950s and 1960s. In this context, the contribution of Greek architects as pioneer visual artists in the 1950s and 1960s to the gradual establishment of abstract painting in Greece is probed, using as a methodological tool mainly artworks and written sources of that period. It is argued that Greek architects with their artworks and their wide range of activities in the field of visual arts express the modern consciousness and pave the way for abstract art in Greece.

Keywords:

abstract art, architects, Marthas, Xenakis, Proveleggios, Tsingos, Fatouros

1. INTRODUCTION

Abstract art was the dominant mode in visual arts during the 20th-century. It was adopted, although to a different extent, by all movements of modernism and gained international culmination after the Second World War in both Europe and the United States. On the contrary, in Greece abstract art appeared after World War II and reached its peak in the 1960s, when it had been already established internationally. In the early years of the 20th century, it seems to be absent, except for a few abstract artworks, which were created much later than their European counterparts.

The particular political and social context in Greece provide a valid explanation for this delay. According to Loizidi (1992: 10), Greece, being in the margin of modern culture and a place of problematic reception of modernism, has passed into the postmodern era without having actually experienced the adventure of the modern. The exposure to abstract art in the 1950s and the 1960s would be a real revolution that would renew visual arts in Greece, as Greek artists approached contemporary art movements with a sense of experimentation.

Abstract art in Greece hasn't been studied enough, given that only a few monographs, essays, articles about visual arts in the 1950s and 1960s have been published. This paper attempts to fill some of this gap. It examines the role of architects such as, Takis Marthas, Kosmas Xenakis, Aris Proveleggios, Thanos Tsingos, and Dimitris Fatouros as pioneer visual artists and their contribution to the gradual establishment of abstract painting in Greece.

Specific artworks and written sources such as bibliography, scientific journals, catalogues of solo and group exhibitions, articles from the press, and mainly art magazines of that period, "Zygos", "New Forms", and "Epitheorisi Technis", are used as the primary methodological tools. Through their publications, they provide reliable information to the research about the starting point of the new tendencies in the early 1950s and the stages of the evolution process towards abstract art until its final acceptance and adoption in the 1960s.

2. ABSTRACT ART IN EUROPE IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The art of the 20th century didn't develop directly from the art of the 19th century. A number of historical, political, and social factors, such as the industrial revolution, the capitalist organization of society, and the bourgeois civilization, led to an abrupt break with all tradition (Hauser, 1984) and the appearance of Modernism which had a great influence on the form and character of visual arts.

Modernism was a metropolitan, cosmopolitan and international movement and a focus of many different intellectual aesthetic endeavors and moods which reached their peak in various countries at various times. The term has been used to cover a wide variety of movements subversive to the realist impulse (Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Fauvism, Futurism, Expressionism, Suprematism, Constructivism, Neoplasticism, Dada, Surrealism) (Bradbury & McFarlane, 1991). Modernism was also part of the disturbed, transformational period of European history, and contained the deep intellectual and social changes, incorporating the sensibility of transition and the rising sense of crisis. The revolution of physics brought into question the whole picture of the physical universe. Freud questioned the accepted views of psychology, Max Weber was laying the foundations of modern sociology, anarchy was rising. (Bullock, 1991).

In Modernism era, artists continued the romantic quest for the self and for sincerity and emotional authenticity. The greatest value was placed on risk-taking and the adventure into the unknown. Therefore, the artists' sense of alienation and the need for individual expression led to a redefinition of their role within the society (Loizidi, 1992). Artists adopted the practice of political parties dreaming political changes through art. They issued manifestos and they acquired a utopian, messianic vision for art and society. Abstract art would be the vehicle

for that utopia in the early years of the 20th century.

However, its revolutionary mood, its vision for social changes through art, its experimentation with form, along with the use of techniques that drew attention to the processes and materials used in creating works of art didn't correspond with the Greek visual arts of that period, resulting in the delayed appearance of abstract art in Greece.

3. ABSTRACT ART AFTER WORLD WAR II

After World War II, the world was different. Europe was battered and exhausted. The United States was a dominant power attempting to spread its world domination in the cultural field as well. (Shapiro & Shapiro, 1990). Abstract Expressionism, the also known as the "New York School", marked an important historical shift. It was the first specifically American movement to achieve international influence and put New York at the center of the Western art world, a role formerly filled by Paris. The art critic Clement Greenberg was the leading figure of the movement (Greenberg, 1982). He befriended several abstract Expressionists and presented them as the vanguard of new American art, transforming the USA into the world's cultural leader. So, in 1948 he declared with pride that the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States (Shapiro & Shapiro 1990; Anfam, 1996).

The post-war abstract movements laid their roots deep in the rich soil of modernism. They represented a resifting and re-evaluation of forms and ideas that were already known before the war. Lucie-Smith (1979: 7) has written: "The art we now see being created by our contemporaries seems to me late modern". The contribution of European modernism in the post-war USA art was confirmed by Jackson Pollock, who upon being asked in 1944 whether there could be a purely American art he said (Anfam 1996: 51): "The idea of an isolated American painting, so popular in this country during the thirties, seems absurd".

But most of these artistic "revivals" differ from the pre-war originals in that they develop and exaggerate the borrowed form while playing down the content. In the post-War World II period the basic

myth of modernism, the revolt against what was established and accepted (Shapiro & Shapiro, 1990), has changed, while altering also the relationship between post-war art and the social and artistic establishment and consequently affecting the international character of post-war abstraction.

After World War II most artists depend their success on what has been called the "the dealer-critic system". Lucie-Smith (1979: 14) wrote: "In America, especially, a successful artist during the post-war years has tended to become a "product", packaged and promoted as such". Ambitious exhibitions were usually staged in museums and for the most part under government or other official sponsorship (Arnason, 1995; Read, 1978). The State became one of their principal patrons and the great international art fairs (Venice Biennale, the Biennale des Jeunes in Paris, the Sao Paulo Biennale, the "Documenta" exhibitions in Kassel) were soon a matter of national prestige (Lucie-Smith, 1979). Art dealers, art critics, literary scholars, collectors, museums, private galleries, and the Stage supported and promoted abstract art in different ways, spreading it quickly throughout the USA, in lesser art centers of Europe such as Greece.

4. ABSTRACT ART IN GREECE IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

During the first half of the 20th century, Greece had major political, social, economic, and institutional changes and its priorities were different from those of the other European countries where modernism appeared (Alivizatos, 1985; Mouselis, 1978; Tsoukalas, 1999), affecting how Greek artists understood the concept of Modernism.

In the interwar period the so-called Generation of the '30, a group of Greek writers, poets, artists, intellectuals, critics, and scholars who made their debut in the 1930s, introduced modernism in Greek art and literature. They abandoned the previous nationalist ambitions and transformed them into cultural ones. They had the vision to create artworks that would reflect the universality of Greek culture through the centuries, combining

Greek folk tradition with Modern art (Tziouvas, 2011). As a result, they established a new dogma, "Greekness" (Hellinikotita), that would aestheticize their Greek-centered opinions, attitudes, and symbols, and foster a new national identity, with certain criteria in art (Tziouvas, 1989).

The ideology of "Greekness" and the orientation to the tradition were major factors that led to a selective adoption of specific movements of modernism and the exclusion of abstract art in the early years of the 20th century (Sarakatsianou, 2008). Artists through "Greekness", refined and rejected the abstract forms of Modernism that seemed to threaten the identity of Greek art with their revolutionary vision and their social perspective. So many abstract movements that had flourished in Europe in the modernism era and were the major precursors to abstract expressionism and post-painterly abstraction after World War II, such as Kandinsky's paintings of the period of "Der Blaue Reiter", Surrealism, Suprematism, Constructivism, De Stijl, Orphism, Purism, were excluded from Greek art (Sarakatsianou, 2020).

This had as a major consequence both abstract expressionism and the tendencies of geometrical abstraction that appeared in post-World War II Greek art not to be part of an evolutionary process that had begun in the first half of the 20th century, as happened abroad.

5. ABSTRACT ART IN GREECE IN 1950^s AND 1960^s

In World War II and during the Occupation of Greece by the Axis Powers, art depicted the harsh reality of war (Kotidis, 2015). The idea of "Greekness" was emphasized as an element of resistance to the conqueror and heroism. This resulted in the complete dominance of "Greekness" in painting (Kotidis, 2015; Vakalo, 1983).

After World War II, Greek art was gradually liberated from the need for a kind of art with a national identity, while at the same time fading the utopian vision of resistance in the Western culture, so Greek artists approached Europe, seeking communication, inspiration, and fruitful dialogue with contemporary art (Spiteris, 1983). The official support of abstract expressionism by the State and its promotion in great international art fairs has given the movement a universal character, facilitating its spread in lesser art

centers of Europe and provincial countries such as Greece (Lucie-Smith, 1979).

In the early 1950s, Greek artists' experiments with contemporary art provoked initially strong controversies. Once again, the idea of "Greekness" opposed art movements that threaten to alter the character of Greek art (Vakalo, 1983), and the dilemma "Modernism or Tradition" appeared at that time. In this context in 1956 Zygos magazine posed the question "Are there common points between Greek art and Modernism?", trying to relate the international tendencies in visual arts to the national situation. Many distinguished artists accepted the challenge, revealing, judging by their response, a developing antagonism between adherents of abstract art and figurative painting.

Among others who took part in these ideological controversies attempting to release the visual arts in Greece from the idea of "Greekness" and defending the contemporary tendencies, were also five talented Greek architects, Takis Marthas, Kosmas Xenakis, Aris Proveleggios, Thanos Tsingos, and Dimitris Fatouros. They turned their interests towards painting and as visual artists, through their artwork and their active presence in the artistic life of their era, contributed to the gradual establishment of abstract painting in Greece in the 1950s and 1960s.

Although they found it difficult to use abstract expressionism as a starting point as the American and European statement had a completeness of its own, their radical, innovative, as well as experimental artwork renewed visual arts in Greece, which, in turn, revealed those architects as part of the pioneer visual artists in abstract art, in Greece.

6. TAKIS MARHTAS (1905-1965) 1960^s

Takis Marthas was an architect and a pioneer visual artist in abstract art in Greece. He studied in the School of Architecture at the National Technical University of Athens (1924-1929). Although he never studied painting academically, he gradually developed his personal style through

Gallery" with paintings from his last twenty years' production is distinguished by a lyrical spirit and echoing influences of fauvism or expressionism and is considered as the last presentation of traditional figurative painting in his overall work (Vakalo, 1981). Two years later Marthas exhibited his first attempts towards abstract art in Pan-Hellenic Art Exhibition 1957 and in 1958 he had his second one-



Figure 1: Takis Marthas, "Cyclades", 1959, Mixed Media on Styrofoam, 103 x 87 cm. National Gallery - Alexandros Soutzos Museum (Donated by the Ministry of Education)

continuous experimentation in materials, means and techniques. His participation in the 1st Pan-Hellenic Art Exhibition 1948 at Zappeion Megaron with artworks that seemed increasingly remote from the traditional forms, was a prelude to his further orientation towards contemporary art (Spiteris, 1983; Spiteris, 1979). In 1955 his first solo exhibition at "Adel

man exhibition at "Zygos Gallery" where his orientation towards abstract art was undeniable. He tried to increase the materiality of the painting surface and the sense of relief, so he used cheap materials such as paper, cork, wood, plaster, fabric, cement. His aim was to reconstruct the space of the painting surface and detect the third dimension which is generally

absent in the abstract painting. As he has written emphatically (Kyriazi, 1992: 9-10): "I left myself free in color, shape, dream, fairy tales and I followed my soul and my heart...". [Figure 1].

Soon the use of dark colors was limited and replaced by vivid colors in an almost gestural manner at his work, entitled "Myths", which was presented at a solo exhibition at "Hilton Gallery" in 1963 (Spiteris, 1978). His aim was to articulate the deepest levels of experience, without destroying the solid structure and the internal discipline of the painting surface. The spirituality of his painting was expressed through the combination of structural-rational elements with emotional sensitivity.

After 1963 Marthas abandoned abstract expressionism and returned to more geometric compositions, attempting a new interpretation of the visual space through the balanced use of color along with geometric discipline. The abstract meaning of space itself became a field of continuous experimentation. Those artworks were presented at the 8th Pan-Hellenic Art Exhibition in 1965 (Vakalo, 1965), which according to Vakalo (1981: 90) was "the last official manifestation of the bloom of abstract art in Greece".

Marthas had a vivid presence in the artistic life of the country, participating in numerous group exhibitions devoted to abstract art. In August 1958 he took part in the first group exhibition of abstract art in Greece organized by "Kouros Gallery" and he was favorably reviewed (Vakalo, 1958; Evangelidis, 1958). In September 1960 participated in a group exhibition at the "New Forms Gallery", aiming to present the abstract tendencies in Greece to the general public (Vakalo, 1960a). He also took part in the 6th Pan-Hellenic Art Exhibition 1960 (Byzantios, 1960; Vakalo, 1981) with abstract works and then in the 7th Pan-Hellenic Art Exhibition 1963.

It wasn't long before his contribution to the establishment of abstract art in Greece gained recognition. In 1960 he was elected professor of Freehand Drawing at the School of Architecture (Xydis, 1976), and his artworks were included in the first book devoted to the significant Contemporary Greek Artists published by "Zygos Gallery" in 1961 (Christou, 1962). Professor Ch. Christou in his extensive and highly informative review about a group exhibition in "Zygos" magazine typified Marthas among the most impor-

tant representatives of abstract expressionism in Greece (Christou, 1963). In 1964, a year before his death, the Museum of Modern Art in New York recognizing the quality and the innovation of his artwork honored him by purchasing one of his paintings (Kyriazi, 1992).

Mathas' radical, innovative, experimental artwork renewed visual arts in Greece, and he is nowadays classified as a pioneer visual artist in abstract art.

7. KOSMAS XENAKIS (1925-1984)

Kosmas Xenakis was an architect and a significant visual artist of geometric abstract tendencies in Greece. He studied at the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens (1942-1948) and he worked as an architect and urban planner for many years. During his studies, he had his first contact with painting, encouraged by his teachers, Dimitris Pikionis and Nikos Hatzikyriakos-Gikas to attend painting classes at the School of Fine Arts (1942-1943) (Maragou, 1990). Like other painters of his generation, his first paintings echoed the idea of "Greekness" and the influence of Giannis Tsarouchis, Diamantis Diamantopoulos, Nikos Nikolaou, and Theofilos (Christou, 1999; Christou, 2002; Kalligas, 1962).

During the period 1955-1956, he became acquainted with abstract art in Paris and he decided to abandon the aesthetics of "Greekness", following the contemporary tendencies, experimented with new materials and techniques. He used non-artistic materials, such as roll papers and newspapers and although the outline of the object was still present in his early work, the background was flat, and the details were limited. These paintings were presented at his first one-man exhibition at "Pein Galley" in Athens in 1957. (Spiteris, 1957a).

In 1960 he had his second one-man exhibition at "Armos Gallery" in Athens (Vakalo, 1960b), and at the same time, he attempted to relate concrete architecture with sculpture, creating a series of reliefs (Lydakakis, 1981). These works were presented in 1966 at "Hilton Gallery" (Xydis, 1962; Petris, 1966)

His business trip in Iraq during the pe-



Figure 2: Kosmas Xenakis, "Composition", before 1965, Oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm. National Gallery - Alexandros Soutzos Museum

riod 1957-1959 played a definitive role in his decision to turn into abstract art. His starting point was abstract expressionism but gradually he gravitated towards geometric abstraction, obviously influenced by his architectural knowledge on geometric design. The painting surface articulated from end to end by rhythmic rectangular shapes, giving a sense of ordered harmony. The study of light played an important role in his work. Measure, balance, and rhythm were always present in his art (Xenakis, 1962; Christou, 1962). [Figure 2].

Xenakis had an active presence in the field of culture. He has published articles on issues related to abstract art. He was a founding member of "Art Group a" (1961-1967) (Kouloufakos, 1962) [1]. He believed

in the educational and social role of art and he organized with the cooperation of the other members group exhibitions, events, and open discussions about abstract art in Athens and the suburbs, aiming to communicate with the general public, outside the conventional art spaces. He also participated in artistic group "Tomi" (1963), organizing group exhibitions, and presenting contemporary tendencies in visual arts. Like Marthas, Xenakis is included in the first book devoted to the significant Contemporary Greek Artists published by "Zygos Gallery" in 1961 (Christou, 1962).

Xenakis is known as one of the pioneer visual artists of abstract art in Greece, creating a geometric abstraction with lyrical elements (Spiliadi, 1976).

8. ARIS PROVELEGGIOS (1914-1999)

Aris Proveleggios was a distinguished architect completing a lot of works in the field of architecture and he is also considered a pioneer of abstract art in Greece. He studied at the National Technical University of Athens (1931-1936) and in 1945 he arrived in Paris on a French Government scholarship where he stayed for more than a decade. During that period, he became acquainted with contemporary art and he started painting in 1954. Proveleggios (1982: 17-18), in a statement written in 1982, declared: "I studied at two different schools. The one was typical, the Sorbonne Institute of Urban Planning (1948-1951). The other was the substantial one, the co-called "University of Life", the real "Open-Free University" of the everyday life in the city of Paris 1945-1960".

His first works had a geometrical structure, and the painting surface as articu-

lated with small brushes of vivid color. Soon he came in touch with "tachisme", the European parallel of the American "action painting" which was dominant in Paris that period, and he absorbed abstract expressionism in an attempt to get rid of traditional techniques and figurative painting and express the new and more freely abstract way of seeing things. [Figure 3].

In 1957 he returned to Greece, and he was confronted with the destruction of the Attica landscape by the extensive constructions. Deeply disappointed he gave up painting with oil colors and began to use markers. Proveleggios (1982: 19) has written: "In those years I painted many drawing blocks with markers [...]. The nervous and kinetic design with the markers comforted me from the division of my life and the deprivation of an atelier". He never stopped experimenting and renewing his techniques and materials. During the period 1960-1962, he used typographic inks and monotypes on glass or copper plates, creating abstract works with black and white colors. The inserted red, yellow, and blue touches mitigated the strictness of the structure (Tamvaki, 1982). This work was presented in his one-man exhibition at "Klio Gallery" in Hydra (Proveleggios, 1982) [Figure 4].



Figure 3: Aris Proveleggios, 1956, Oil on canvas, 80 x 60 cm. National Gallery - Alexandros Soutzos Museum (Bequest of Catherine Proveleggiou)



Figure 4: Aris Proveleggios, 1962, Monotype on paper, 68,5 x 86 cm. National Gallery - Alexandros Soutzos Museum (Donated by the artist)

Proveleggios had always a leading role in the establishment of contemporary tendencies in Greece. In August 1958 he took part in the first group exhibition of abstract art in Greece entitled "Modern Art", organized by "Kouros Gallery" (Vakalo, 1958). The exhibition made quite an impression, provoking strong controversies about abstract art. Proveleggios took part in these ideological discussions, defending abstract art with passion. He didn't hesitate to respond to the engraver Tassos (Petris, 1958) and he also accused George Petris [3] of empathy, dogmatism, and inaccuracies in his writings about modern art (Proveleggios, 1958).

Aris Proveleggios is one of the pioneer visual artists of abstract expressionism in Greece and an important defender of contemporary tendencies. He was always a dreamer of a better world with the power of art. In 1982 at his retrospective exhibition, the painter (Proveleggios1982: 9) described himself: "I think that what I did not accomplish, what was left as a vision, as a wish, as a willingness, was better than what I was able to accomplish ...

9. THANOS TSINGOS (1914-1965)

Tsingos was an architect and one of the pioneer painters in the abstract expressionism of his time. He studied in the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens (1931-1934) and he adopted the wild lifestyle of the bohemian artists of the modernism era, embodying the myth of "artiste maudit"

(cursed artist).

His adventurous life began with World War II. He served in the Middle East front, he fought in El Alamein, he got involved in the Middle East coup and was sentenced to death at first, then to life imprisonment. In 1946, on the recommendation of Le Corbusier, he went to Brazil, where he worked on the studies and designs for Brasilia, participating in the reconstruction program of the new capital of the country. During that period, he had his first contact with painting.

In 1947 he went to Paris where he abandoned architecture and gradually devoted himself to painting and stage design. In Paris he felt under the influence of "art informel" and adopted its highly gestural technique. For Tsingos expressionism was a way of living. He transformed his feelings into visual fact through the bodily gestures of abstract expressionism and he created works feverish in style. He got further away from the usual painter's tools, preferring sticks, knives, dripping fluid, and creating a heavy impasto. He had no fears about making changes, destroying the image. His wife Christina Mavroidis described him: "He was not only tall, slender, masculine and handsome, but above all, there was something about him that set him apart from everyone else. Later I realized what it was, his courage, his passion for truth, for freedom" [4]. In the middle 1950s, he started painting "flowers" which would become the most characteristic motif of his work. [Figure 5]

Soon he gained international recognition. His first solo exhibition was held in



Figure 5: Thanos Tsingos, "Flowers", 1960, Oil on canvas, 35 x 70 cm. National Gallery - Alexandros Soutzos Museum 3

Paris in 1950. More solo and group exhibitions followed in France and other European countries. Tsingos sold his works in Europe, America, and Canada. In 1953 the famous art critic Charles Estienne reviewing his one-man exhibition in Studio Facchetti, has written: "According to what I feel today, Tsingos is among the five or seven painters, the so-called Tachistes, who count" [5].

In 1961 he settled permanently in Greece and his first one-man show in Athens was held at "Architecture" (Andreadi, 1981), where he presented his large-scale works from his production in Paris. Although his main motif was flowers, the figurative elements had been discarded and most of his works were gestural and completely abstract. In 1963 he had his last solo exhibition at "Zygos Gallery" in Athens and his work was presented in a retrospective exhibition in 1965 at the Technological Institute of Athens. Unfortunately, the freedom and boldness of his painting style were not duly appreciated in Greece on time. He felt a lack of financial support from the public during his living years and he died destitute in 1965. Later, his paintings became very popular.

Tsingos is considered a pioneer visual artist of the avant-garde movements of the time. Pierre Restany (1991: 13), the internationally known French art critic and cultural philosopher, reviewing his retrospective exhibition described his work as "a hellish lyricism that flows from the depths of time".

10. DIMITRIS FATOUROS (1928-1920)

Dimitris Fatouros is known as a distinguished architect and professor at the School of Architecture of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, but he was also a painter creating significant artworks from the late 1940s until 1966 when he decided to finish his painting activity (Marinos, 2017).

He became one of the pioneer visual artists of the first post-war generation who turned his interests towards contemporary art. He also participated in the ideological controversies of the 1960s and contributed to the transition of Greek art from figurative painting to abstract art.

After his graduation from the School of Architecture in 1952, he gradually drifted

away from the influences of his teacher, N. Hadjikyriakos-Ghikas (Pavlopoulos, 2020), attempting to be released from the dominance of the "Greekness". The starting point of these changes was his meeting with Thanos Tsingos in Paris in December 1955. He was impressed by the bodily gestures in Tsingos' work and his embodied emotional force, so he adopted "tachisme" himself. In November 1957 he presented his solo exhibition at "Pein Gallery" with abstract artworks characterized by the logical structure of the shapes and the processing of the paint with thick successive layers (Spiteris, 1957b).

His election as a professor at the School of Architecture of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in 1959 gave a new perspective to the artistic life of the co-capital. Fatouros had always a leading role in the diffusion of abstract painting in Northern Greece along with Christos Lefakis, Nikos Sachinis, and Nikos Svornos (Vakalo, 1981).

After 1960 like other Greek painters, he gradually moved on a more constructive approach of the painting surface. Using color as a viscous texture and other materials, he created relief surfaces (Kotzamani, 1965).

Fatouros took part in the ideological discussions about abstract expressionism. He defended abstract art with passion, and he contributed to the acquaintance of the general public with contemporary art (Fatouros, 1960; Fatouros, 1961a; Fatouros, 1961c). In August 1958 he also took part in the first group exhibition of abstract art in Greece entitled "Modern Art", organized by "Kouros Gallery" (Vakalo, 1958) and in 1961 he participated in the conference of the International Association of Art Critics (A.I.C.A.) held at Benaki Museum, where he (Fatouros 1961b: 23) expressed his belief that "Today's art exists as a great and true event. It is a universal truth and expresses a historical necessity".

Fatouros had always a leading role in the adoption of contemporary tendencies in Greece. He is also one of the pioneer visual artists who with his artworks and his wide range of activities expressed the modern consciousness and paved the way for abstract art in Greece.

11. CONCLUSION

Abstract art was the dominant mode in visual arts in the Modernism era. However, in Greece in the first half of the 20th century, there was a selective adoption of forms and techniques by the modernism movements and an explicit exclusion of others. This factor played an important role in the time of the appearance of abstract art in Greece. The idea of "Greekness" proved in many cases extremely restrictive, leaving out forms and techniques that would appear later.

After World War II the perspectives of the post-war abstraction have been differentiated internationally. In this new context, five talented Greek architects, Takis Marthas, Kosmas Xenakis, Aris Proveleggios, Thanos Tsingos, and Dimitris Fatouros, turned their interests towards painting and as visual artists attempted to shift from the idea of "Greekness" and the figurative painting, which was considered outdated and obsolete towards the contemporary tendencies. Their exposure to abstract art in the 1950s and the 1960s was a real revolution that renewed visual arts in Greece, contributing to the formation of the identity of abstract art in Greece.

Although it is difficult to classify them into groups, the artists mentioned above had a leading role in the configuration of the basic tendencies of abstract painting in Greece. Thanos Tsingos and Aris Proveleggios were characterized by their energetic and more gestural manner. Takis Marthas' and Dimitris Fatouros' artworks were more structural and tranquil. Kosmas Xenakis created a geometrical abstraction with lyrical elements.

Marthas, Xenakis, Proveleggios, Tsingos, Fatouros through their radical, innovative, experimental artwork and their wide range of activities in the field of culture contributed to the gradual establishment of abstract painting in Greece in the 1950s and the 1960s. Their role in the renewal of visual arts was decisive so they are considered pioneer visual artists in abstract art in Greece.

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NOTES

- [1] Artists such as D. Kokkinidis, G. Maltesos, P. Sarafianos, G. Haines took part.
- [2] Artists such as A. Kontopoulos, D. Kokkinidis, L. Arlioti, T. Stefopoulos, G. Hainis, Ch. Karas, K. Koulentianos, K. Loukopoulos, and the art critics A. Xydis and E. Vakalo took part.
- [3] George Petris was the editor of the visual arts column of "Epitheorisi Texnis" magazine from June 1956 until February 1967.
- [4] It is quoted from his solo exhibition catalogue: "Tsigos." AD Gallery, 9-26 January 1991, p. 4.
- [5] It is quoted from his solo exhibition catalogue: "Tsigos." AD Gallery, 9-26 January 1991, p. 4.



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