

# **The Greek Pavilion in the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne.***

New Perspectives for National Art in the  
Context of Regionalism<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the impact of the ideological trends of the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* which took place in Paris, in 1937, on Greece's national participation in the exhibition. The modern artworks it showcased will serve as a case study to investigate notions of regionalism. The paper considers the conception and realisation of the Greek pavilion in association with the *Exposition's* affirmed focus on regionalism and examines the relation between nationalism and regionalism at that time. The Greek pavilion and its artists will also be discussed in regard to the local ideologies they expressed or contributed to generate. The aim of this paper is to highlight how, on the occasion of the 1937 exhibition, the Greek quest for a new form of national art – an authentic expression of "Greekness" able to overturn the European perception, which identified the "Greek" with the "classical" – converged or diverged from European regionalist and nationalist discourses as expressed by the exhibition's commissioner, as well as to draw attention to the paradoxes of this connection.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised and extended version of the paper "The Greek Pavilion in the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques de la Vie Moderne*, 1937: The Turn from an Art of National Inspiration to a 'National Art'" presented at the international conference *Southern Modernisms: Critical Stances Through Regional Appropriations*, ESAP, Oporto, 19-21 February 2015.

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## Introduction

[1] The *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*, which took place in Paris between 25 May and 25 November 1937, was one of the major international arts events of the 1930s. It was realised in the midst of political tensions: the Spanish Civil War, Nazi Germany, and the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.<sup>2</sup> In the exhibition, which took place in a climate of underlying menace, just two years before World War II erupted, the tension created by the aforementioned conflicts was already tangible. The exhibition aspired to promulgate ideas of peace and themes of international solidarity, to lead the way towards "universal happiness", and to be a lesson of "high progress", "beauty" and the "power of optimism".<sup>3</sup> With reference to the works of art commissioned or on display in public spaces and thematic, regional (French) or national pavilions, it incorporated very diverse styles: from neoclassical models with nationalist connotations – like the 21-foot bronze *Apollon musagète* by sculptor Henri Bouchard in front of the Palais de Tokyo or the Louis Billotey mural *Tragédie* – to the modern architectural propositions of Alvar Aalto or Mallet-Stevens. This overview of technological innovations as well as of traditional arts and crafts associated with "modern life" (as the title suggested) was as much linked to notions of tradition, national identity, popular and vernacular art or artistic realisms as to notions of modernity, universalism, avant-garde formations and abstract painting.

[2] The conception and realisation of the Greek pavilion took place, as frequently remarked, under the banner of the integration of art and technology applied to daily life, although, as also often pointed out, "its ostensible theme was overshadowed by brazen displays of nationalism".<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the choices of Greek art for the country's national pavilion are associated with the *Exposition's* affirmed focus on regionalism and examine the relation between nationalism and regionalism at that time.

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<sup>2</sup> Kate Kangaslahti, "Absence/Presence: The Efficacy of Text, Image, and Space at the 1937 *Exposition internationale*," in: *Word & Image Interactions* 7 (2011), 191-208. For more on the period see *Années 30 en Europe. Le temps menaçant 1929-1939*, exh. cat., eds. Suzanne Pagé and Aline Vidal, Paris 1997, especially 377-464. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

<sup>3</sup> Edmond Labbé, *Conférence faite par M. Edmond Labbé. Arts et techniques dans la vie moderne*, 11 February 1936, Grand Amphithéâtre de l'École d'arts et métiers d'Aix-en-Provence, Paris 1938, xi.

<sup>4</sup> Kangaslahti, "Absence/Presence," 2011.

[3] The composition of the artists' list, comprising painters such as Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika, Agenor Asteriadis, Giorgos Gounaropoulos, and sculptors such as Michalis Tombros or Antonis Sochos will be studied in regard to the main themes of the *Exposition Internationale*: modern life, technology, internationalism and regionalism but also – and foremost – nationalist antagonisms concealed under the promotion of progress and peace. Compared to the previous international exhibitions, especially the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs* of 1925,<sup>5</sup> the 1937 event put painting and sculpture at the forefront, tried to avoid pastiche and embraced modern architecture and technological progress.<sup>6</sup> But concurrently "conflict and the pervasive sense of a culture and a society under threat" remained as dominant features of the exhibition even when certainty and harmony seemed most apparent.<sup>7</sup>

[4] The Greek pavilion and its artists are linked to the local ideologies they expressed or contributed to generate. Artistic choices reflected not only the official guidelines of the organisers regarding regionalism but also Greek identity politics. This paper will scrutinise the displays as well as the styles and themes that were chosen for representation, in order to explore the way relations between artistic innovation, identity politics and cultural diplomacy were negotiated in relation to Greek artists and the aspirations of intellectuals at that time. In fact, the Greek commissioner's choice of artists and artworks supports the claim that the endeavour to promote indigenous characteristics was not solely a response to the exhibition's regionalist programme and to European national antagonisms. It was equally founded on debates in the circles of Greek intellectuals who called for the creation of an art that originated from local culture yet was internationally relevant. In view of the above, the role of international exhibitions in the construction and promotion of identity will also be discussed, especially in relation to the formation of the ideology of "Greekness" during the 1930s and its relation to nationalism and regionalism in Europe.<sup>8</sup> Emphasis will be placed on the importance of popular arts in this debate and on the construction of an art that would be expressive of national identity through a turn towards local characteristics

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<sup>5</sup> Polina Kosmadaki, "Η συμμετοχή της Ελλάδας στην Έκθεση Διακοσμητικών Τεχνών στο Παρίσι το 1925: μία απόπειρα πολιτιστικής διπλωματίας" ("The Participation of Greece in the 'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs' in Paris in 1925: An Effort of Cultural Diplomacy"), in: *Proceedings of the Symposium Eleftherios Venizelos and Cultural Politics*, 21-22 November 2008, ed. Benaki Museum, Athens 2012, 148-164.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Green, *Art in France 1900-1940*, New Haven/London 2000, 9-14.

<sup>7</sup> Green, *Art in France 1900-1940*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> For more on this ideology see Dimitris Tzionas, *Ο μύθος της γενιάς του Τριάντα, Νεοτερικότητα, ελληνικότητα και πολιτισμική ιδεολογία*, Athens 2011.

such as light, nature, and people, as the effect both of the international context and of national conditions.

Cultural politics through exhibitions:

new perspectives for national Greek art during the 1930s

[5] It has been argued by many authors such as Benedict Anderson<sup>9</sup> that the idea of the nation is inextricably linked to notions of heritage, memory and tradition, and that symbols, images and myths contribute to its invention. The role of exhibitions<sup>10</sup> as well as folklore culture<sup>11</sup> in the construction of the national imaginary has also frequently been emphasised<sup>12</sup> in the study of the impact of international exhibitions.<sup>13</sup>

[6] All this was especially apparent during the 1930s, a time when exhibition-making functioned as a strong vehicle of identity politics.<sup>14</sup> Michela Passini has accurately demonstrated that nationalism, as well as growing competition between European nations from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, directly implicated art history and its practices. She has shown that, as the discipline was forming, it became more and more engaged in narrating and reconstituting national heritage as well as in constructing a nation's identity. In her study, *La fabrique de l'art national*,<sup>15</sup> Passini discusses how nationalism has been a central and structuring factor of art history but also of exhibition-making. She demonstrates the ways in which cultural politics seized arts as a central issue in the competition between nations, through exhibitions which visualised

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<sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. London 2006 (first published in 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Rampley, "Contested Histories: Heritage and/as the Construction of the Past: An Introduction," in: *Heritage, Ideology, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe: Contested Pasts, Contested Presents*, ed. Matthew Rampley, Woodbridge (UK) 2012, 1-20.

<sup>11</sup> Shanny Peer, *France on Display. Peasants, Provincials, and Folklore in the 1937 Paris World's Fair*, New York 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in: *Modernity and Its Futures*, eds. Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew, Cambridge 1992, 273-325, here 293.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict Burton, "International Exhibitions and National Identity," in: *Anthropology Today* 7, 3 (June 1991), 5-9. Tony Bennett also points out that international exhibitions transformed "displays of machinery and industrial processes, of finished products and *objets d'art*, into material signifiers of progress – but of progress as a collective national achievement with capital as the great co-ordinator". Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London 1996, 67.

<sup>14</sup> See *Années 30 en Europe*, passim.

<sup>15</sup> Michela Passini, *La fabrique de l'art national. Le nationalisme et les origines de l'histoire de l'art en France et en Allemagne 1870-1933*, Paris 2012.

national narratives and were meant to promote national traditions. She concludes that these complex cultural events played a role, on an European level, in the elaboration of competitive identities, a fact that widely influenced the circulation and reception of works of art at the time.<sup>16</sup>

[7] This context is very important in an understanding of the Greek pavilion as part of the endeavour by Greek literary and artistic circles to change the ways Greek culture was perceived and to propose a turn towards a more authentic identity for modern Greece. As Vassilis Lambropoulos has argued, after Independence the modern inhabitants of ancient Greece found themselves "under immense external pressure to adjust to the demands of European and American romanticism" which wished "to affirm and satisfy its classical yearnings [...]. [...] pressure to be true Hellenes was presented to the Greeks as their only chance to define an acceptable identity and justify their political claims".<sup>17</sup> Consequently, as the liberated nation entered the stage of modern history, it had to immediately start creating its autochthonous moments and showing that the ancient spirit was still alive and flourishing.

[8] After 1920 things started to change in favour of "indigenous aesthetics" for two main reasons.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, intellectuals and artists were faced with the imperative of settling on a national style with more ties to modern Greece, following the new political, social and ideological challenges caused by the destruction of Asia Minor in 1921. On the other hand, the cultural modernization agenda of Eleftherios Venizelos (serving as Prime Minister of Greece from 1910 to 1920 and from 1928 to 1933) prioritised opening Greece to Europe and establishing its prominence on an international level.<sup>19</sup> The new version of nationalism that appeared then would replace the idea of territorial expansion with a cultural one. Greek intellectuals of the 1930s such as the poet Giorgos Seferis embraced this idea, reacting to what has been referred to as a

<sup>16</sup> It is symptomatic for instance that, a few years before the 1937 exhibition, the XXXIe Congrès International d'Histoire de l'Art in Stockholm (1933) was dedicated to the theme of *Kunstgeographie* and to the definition of the specificities of each nation's art. Passini, *La fabrique de l'art national*, 251-252.

<sup>17</sup> Vassilis Lambropoulos, *Literature as National Institution: Studies in the Politics of Modern Greek Criticism*, Princeton 1988, 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Dimitris Tziouvas, *Οι μεταμορφώσεις του εθνισμού και το ιδεολόγημα της ελληνικότητας στον Μεσοπόλεμο*, Athens 1989. On the aesthetics of autonomy also see Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature*, Minneapolis/Oxford 1991, 78-84.

<sup>19</sup> Venizelos based his modernisation programme on combining the internal reform of the state with its territorial expansion, while subduing the former nationalistic rhetoric, in order to privilege the construction of a modern liberal society in Greece. See Giorgos Mavrogordatos and Christos Chadziiosif, eds., *Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός*, Heraklion 1992.

"crypto-colonialist"<sup>20</sup> European strategy for the shaping of Greek identity during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The question then emerged of the creation of a "Greek Hellenism" that would replace the so far dominant "European Hellenism"<sup>21</sup> and the development of geopolitical nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

[9] The aforementioned situation was translated into artistic practices through an emphasis on "Greek line", "Greek light and landscape" as well as through a renewed interest in folklore.<sup>22</sup> Greek artists, mostly educated in European metropolises (especially Paris) and whose work was persistently accused of being either derivative of European aesthetic models or lacking in international relevance,<sup>23</sup> developed strategies to negotiate this new identity problem. "Greekness" was that kind of strategy, a construct of national content and "universal" form that developed in the interwar period as a move towards cultural autonomy. Authenticity would mean, in this context, a collective sense of identity achieved through the reconstruction of a cultural past that had been suppressed by dominant cultures. The integration of symbols of popular culture as well as of landscapes, activities and people from everyday life was necessary to relate the "imagined" to the "real" nation.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the turn towards these new themes as well as to popular tradition also represented an opposing move to surrealism as well as to the outmoded "official" models set by the Metaxas totalitarian regime (1936-1941).

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Herzfeld has introduced this term to speak about states not colonised properly but under strong western influence. According to Herzfeld crypto-colonialism is defined as "the curious alchemy whereby certain countries, buffer zones between the colonised lands and those as yet untamed, were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence, this relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models". Michael Herzfeld, "The Absence Presence. Discourses of Crypto-Colonialism," in: *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, 4 (Fall 2002), 899-926, here 901.

<sup>21</sup> This is thoroughly discussed in: Tzionas, *Οι μεταμορφώσεις του εθνισμού και το ιδεολόγημα της ελληνικότητας στον Μεσοπόλεμο*.

<sup>22</sup> Tzionas, *Οι μεταμορφώσεις του εθνισμού και το ιδεολόγημα της ελληνικότητας στον Μεσοπόλεμο*.

<sup>23</sup> This, for instance, marked the reception of the *Omada Techni* exhibition in Galérie La Boétie in 1919 by French critics. Katerina Perpinioti-Agazir, *Le "Groupe Techni"*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Université Paris I – Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris 2002; Katerina Perpinioti-Agazir, "Οι εντυπώσεις που προκάλεσε στο παρισινό κοινό η έκθεση της «Ομάδας Τέχνη» το 1919," in: *Παρίσι-Αθήνα 1863-1940*, exh. cat., ed. National Gallery, Athens 2006, 98-105.

<sup>24</sup> Venetia Apostolidou, "Η σύγκρότηση και η σημασία της 'εθνικής λογοτεχνίας'," in: *Έθνος, Κράτος, Εθνικισμός*, ed. Σχολή Μωραΐτη. Εταιρεία Σπουδών Νεοελληνικού Πολιτισμού και Γενικής Παιδείας, Athens 1994, 15-39, here 25.

[10] In this sense, folklore in Greece had mainly served the identification of survivals and continuities of Greek culture, and thus played an important role in the development in Greece of a sense of national identity.<sup>25</sup> At a time like this, national participation in an international exhibition presented a very good occasion for constructing national identity through art historical discourse. The paradox, as we will see, is that this occasion presented itself in an historical context where both cultural and political choices inevitably responded to an effort by liberal artists (that is, the ones associated with Eleftherios Venizelos' ideas and modernization programme) to reinvent national art as well as to the nationalistic claims of a totalitarian regime (such as the one that was in place in Greece in 1937).

### About the 1937 exhibition: on local tradition and progress

[11] The *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* was conceived as a continuation of the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* and was the first one to be held in France following the rules established by the "Convention de Paris" of 1928.<sup>26</sup> Its organisation had already been decided in 1931 by the French government. In 1934 Edmond Labbé was chosen as the General Commissioner and published the exhibition's first programme. In this text he asserted that the *Exposition* would gather works by craftsmen, artists and industrialists and that it would be creative and educative while forming the impetus for achievements that would seem to belong to the future. As was apparent from the first steps of the project, he stressed the need for art in all facets of everyday life and focused on the effort to prove the unity of "art" and "technique", since, as he claimed, they were not opposed but associated notions: "No incompatibility exists between the beautiful and the useful, [...] art and technique must be indissolubly linked."<sup>27</sup> Most importantly, Labbé directly promoted regionalism<sup>28</sup> stating, on the occasion of the fair's opening: "I have chosen a watchword,

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Herzfeld, *Ours once more. Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece*, New York 1986.

<sup>26</sup> Evelyne Cohen, *Paris dans l'imaginaire national dans l'entre-deux-guerres*, Paris 1999, 167-168. For a history of the organisation of the exhibition from 1932 to 1937 see Eric Storm, *The Culture of Regionalism. Art, Architecture and International Exhibitions in France, Germany, and Spain, 1890-1939*, Manchester 2010.

<sup>27</sup> "Aucune incompatibilité n'existe entre le beau et l'utile, [...] l'art et les techniques doivent être indissolublement liés." Labbé, *Conférence faite par M. Edmond Labbé. Arts et techniques dans la vie moderne*, 1936, xi.

<sup>28</sup> Philip Whalen, "Burgundian Regionalism and French Republican Commercial Culture at the 1937 Paris International Exposition," in: *Cultural Analysis* 6 (2007), 31-62, and Edmond Labbé, *Rapport général de l'Exposition internationale des arts et techniques de la vie moderne 1937*, 13 volumes, Paris 1938, vol. XI, 365-387.

regionalism" referring to the strong participation of 23 French provinces. They were represented in the Centre Régional, dedicated to promoting the "Renaissance des Provinces françaises". In the relevant chapter of the *Rapport général* of the exhibition this notion was explained as the intelligent interpretation of tradition in order to "condition progress".<sup>29</sup> Labbé clearly stated that regionalism:

*[...] entend [...] réaliser les apports combinés de l'expérience et de l'art locaux, pour montrer une fois de plus que le régionalisme n'est pas étroitement confié dans le culte du passé. Il s'agit en somme pour chaque région de garder son caractère bien marqué celui que le climat, les matériaux, les conditions de la vie ont imprimé à l'architecture. [Les arts régionaux] ne doivent pas être des copies et des pastiches du passé mais une résurrection de son esprit, sous des formes appropriées aux temps actuels. [...] [Il faut] trouver le moyen d'adapter à chaque 'climat' régional les solutions modernes. [...] En donnant à l'exposition un caractère régionaliste nous avons servi la cause de l'art lui-même. [...] L'art moderne a péché par excès d'abstraction. Nous avons voulu le mettre en contact avec ces réalités méconnues ou tenues apparemment pour négligeables [...] par les stratégies d'avant-garde: le climat, le paysage, les mœurs, les traditions encore vivaces de nos provinces.*<sup>30</sup>

[12] Discussions concerning the importance of regional practices were central to over 300 meetings, congresses, and conferences scheduled during the six months that coincided with the 1937 Paris *Exposition Internationale*.<sup>31</sup> This programme reflected the principles of French (but also German and Spanish) regionalist ideology of the generation born between 1860 and 1875, as Eric Storm describes it:<sup>32</sup> "A regional culture – like its national counterpart – was the product of a specific *Volksgeist*, which was the result of the interaction between man and his natural environment over the ages, as embodied in tradition. Moreover, regionalists, like the new nationalists, urged that contemporary painters, artists [...] should also conform to the particular *Volksgeist* of a region in order to produce 'good' art." According to Storm a painter would do that by showing the organic interaction of man and nature or by depicting typical landscapes, buildings, people (for instance workers). Stylistically, it meant that a painting should have a direct impact on ordinary people, a requirement which clearly promoted realism.

[13] Thus, compared to the 1925 project, regionalism in 1937 appeared as a more permanent and established value, promoting not only past

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<sup>29</sup> Labbé, *Rapport général*, vol. VIII, ix-xvi, here ix.

<sup>30</sup> Labbé, *Rapport général*, vol. VIII, xi.

<sup>31</sup> Whalen, "Burgundian Regionalism and French Republican Commercial Culture at the 1937 Paris International Exposition," 33.

<sup>32</sup> Eric Storm, *The Culture of Regionalism*, 2010.



traditions but also the actual particularities of different regions and nations, such as climate, landscape, light and popular customs. This agenda was apparent both at the *Centre rural* and the *Pavillon de l'agriculture*.<sup>33</sup> However, in parallel, the exhibition included many pavilions dedicated to achievements of the industrial age and to modern life, such as the *Pavillon de l'électricité et de la lumière*, the *Pavillon de l'aéronautique* and the *Pavillon des chemins de fer*, the *Palais de la découverte*, the *Pavillon de la publicité*, etc. The conjunction of city and country allowed for a coexistence of left and right, progressive and conservative, regionalism and cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, although programmatically concentrated on technological progress, the exhibition was also very conservative in that it was dedicated to drawing attention to the importance of the past by allowing the fields of science, arts and crafts to claim their "glorious predecessors" and to prove the "continuity of human mind".<sup>34</sup>

[14] As far as art and architecture were concerned, regionalism meant that the introduction of natural and vernacular forms or landscape painting were especially privileged, as were works that although less "modern" in style, prevailed as a consoling "lieu de mémoire", symbolically alluding to France's post-war reconstruction, as Romy Golan notes.<sup>35</sup> In addition, a renewed figurative art was set forth, with subjects of labour, peasantry, and the nude, related to a "return to man" which went along with a "return to the soil".<sup>36</sup>

[15] Labbé, chosen in 1934 by a right-wing government, was accepted by the socialists, in power since 1936, since this part of his project clearly also responded to the agrarian agenda of the Popular Front while at the same time ensuring the continuation of the fair's conservative world view.

### The Greek pavilion: antiquity, the "land" and "Greekness"

[16] In Greece, the Regime of the Fourth of August had established itself in power, since 1936, as a dictatorship under the general Ioannis Metaxas who governed until his death in 1941. His policy was characterised by its

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<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the regionalist agenda of the 1937 *Exposition* was served by the 1937 Congrès *international de folklore* while it also provided the 'final impetus' for the founding of the *Musée national des arts et traditions populaires*, dedicated to French arts and crafts. Shanny Peer, *France on Display: Peasants, Provincials, and Folklore in the 1937 Paris World's Fair*, Albany 1998, 140-148.

<sup>34</sup> Labbé, *Rapport général*, vol. I, xi.

<sup>35</sup> Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France between the Wars*, New Haven 1995, 1-22.

<sup>36</sup> Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia*, 85-87. This also relates to the fascist propaganda of the 1930s. For more see Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, Pierre Milza, eds., *L'homme nouveau dans l'Europe fasciste, 1922-1945: entre dictature et totalitarisme*, Paris 2004.

fascist ideological foundations but also by a more moderate authoritarianism, by state intervention on all aspects of cultural and intellectual activity, and by imposed censorship, violence and suppression of democratic rights and values.<sup>37</sup> However, literary and artistic creation were not interrupted, and many liberal artists and cultural agents remained in place. This was in part due to the fact that Metaxas did not have a consistent ideological programme apart from notions of anticommunism and "anti-parliamentarism" combined to serve the aspiration for a "renaissance" of Greek culture and the birth of the "Third Hellenic Civilisation".<sup>38</sup> In order to promote but also to disguise its totalitarian agenda, the dictatorship favoured the arts and education and adopted the cause of "Greekness" putting it in a nationalistic framework which Metaxas tried to establish by combining classical Greek references with modern creation and language (demotiki).<sup>39</sup> Metaxas was, nevertheless, not hostile to liberal trends and personalities within the arts. Consequently, the intellectual domain and its protagonists resulted in a curious mix of nationalistic manifestations, fascist doctrines and experimentation with progressive trends. For instance modern artists such as Constantinos Parthenis and Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika, formerly associated with liberal circles, continued to profit from institutional favour.

[17] This controversial climate, marrying totalitarian politics with progressive ideologies, was reflected in the choices for the Greek pavilion. According to the correspondence between the Greek authorities and the Ministère du Commerce et de l'Industrie in charge of the *Exposition*

<sup>37</sup> Evgenios D. Matthiopoulos, *Η συμμετοχή της Ελλάδας στη Μπιενάλε της Βενετίας 1934-1940*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Crete - Rethymnon 1996, 671-677.

<sup>38</sup> The "Third Hellenic Civilisation" was the central ideological dogma of the Metaxas dictatorship and was set forth as the main goal of the nation. Based on the glorious achievements of the Ancient Greeks, the "Third Hellenic Civilisation", perceived as the continuation of the classical and the Byzantine civilisation (respectively the "first" and "second") would assure the continuity and supremacy of the Greek race. "Φαντασθήτε μίαν ημέραν, όταν περάση ο καιρός και ο έχωμεν ανεβάσει τον τόπον μας υψηλά και καθένας από σας θα υπερηφανεύεται να λέγεται Έλλην, όχι μονάχα δια την αρχαίαν του ιστορίαν. Όταν ιδήτε τον τόπο σας να είναι σεβαστός εις τους έξω [...], όταν θα βλέπετε τον πολιτισμόν του τόπου σας να είναι όμοιος με τον πολιτισμόν των άλλων ευρωπαϊκών κρατών, όταν βλέπετε όλην αυτήν την πρόοδον και αισθάνεσθε ότι τα παιδιά σας θα έλθουν μίαν ημέραν να εύρουν την Πατρίδα καλλιτέραν και ευτυχεστέραν [...], ποίαν μεγαλυτέραν ανταμοιβήν θέλετε εις την ζωήν σας." Ioannis Metaxas, "Λόγος προς τον λαόν του Αγίου Νικολάου," in: Ioannis Metaxas, *Λόγοι και σκέψεις 1936-1941*, ed. Γκοβόστης, Athens 1969, 122.

<sup>39</sup> In this period the First Panhellenic Exhibition of Artists was organised. At the same time the School of Fine Arts was reorganised and works in public buildings were assigned to modern artists such as Gounaropoulos, Kontoglou, Parthenis and Vasileiou.

*Internationale*, a letter dating 11 May 1936 announced the decision for Greece's participation.<sup>40</sup> The appointment, during the summer of 1936, of Nikolaos Politis as Greece's National Commissioner seemed a logical one.<sup>41</sup> Politis (1872-1942) had been Ambassador of Greece in France since 1924, a close collaborator of former liberal Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, and Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1914 and 1920. Politis had studied political sciences and law in Paris and was Professor of International Law until 1914, when, invited by Venizelos, he returned to Greece to take over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1920 he was the first representative of Greece in the newly founded Société des Nations and from 1924 onwards he was Ambassador of Greece in Paris. His success and experience as National Commissioner of the Greek pavilion of 1925<sup>42</sup> secured him the position in this important office again in 1937, even if he was far from Metaxas' fascist ideology and had long served the liberal government and its modernisation programme. Politis was assisted by Nikos Fotopoulos, commercial attaché of the Greek government, who was in charge of technical and administrative matters.

[18] As he had done in 1925, Politis wholeheartedly embraced the guidelines of the *Exposition's* General Commissioner. As stated above, these guidelines were that all products were to be accepted

*à condition qu'ils répondent à l'article 8 du Règlement Général, c'est à dire qu'ils soient d'une inspiration nouvelle, d'une originalité réelle, exécutées par les artistes, les artisans et les créateurs de modèles, en se rattachant d'une manière quelconque aux Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes. Elle n'excluait aucune production, à la condition que celle-ci mette en évidence une idée d'art dans l'expression d'un besoin moderne.*<sup>43</sup>

[19] The question of locality and regionalism was also central. The national pavilion was obliged, by the official contract established with each state,<sup>44</sup> to comprise products made in the state in question<sup>45</sup> – here proving an

<sup>40</sup> Documents regarding the official invitation of the French authorities as well as the Greek response to that can be found at: Archives Nationales, Paris, France. Exposition internationale de 1937 à Paris. Rép. num. ms., par A. Labat, 1994-1996, F12.12273.

<sup>41</sup> See letter of 2 July 1936 from the Greek Embassy in Paris to Edmond Labbé, Archives Nationales, Paris, France. Exposition internationale de 1937 à Paris. Rép. num. ms., par A. Labat, 1994-1996, F12.12273.

<sup>42</sup> Kosmadaki, "Η συμμετοχή της Ελλάδας στην Έκθεση Διακοσμητικών Τεχνών στο Παρίσι το 1925."

<sup>43</sup> Labbé, *Rapport général*, vol. I, 37-38.

<sup>44</sup> "Convention" dated 12 December 1936, Archives Nationales, Paris, France. Exposition internationale de 1937 à Paris. Rép. num. ms., par A. Labat, 1994-1996, F12.12551.

<sup>45</sup> "C'est la situation du lieu de production qui détermine la qualité de l'exposant national et non pas la nationalité de l'exposant." In: "Convention" dated 12

association of nationality and locality – except when it came to artists and original works of art, which had to be created by people of Greek nationality. While respecting this general framework, valid for all national participations, Politis also tried to maintain a balance between a conservative, neoclassical style, responding to the ideals of the Metaxas regime and local characteristics which would defend the value of a more authentic Greek cultural spirit.

[20] A public competition was launched in June 1936 for the architectural design of the pavilion, situated in front of the Porte Albert-de-Mun. The project adopted was a neoclassical building with an Ionian portico by Zoulias (Fig. 1), hosting in its enclosure a copy of the sculpture of Poseidon found at Cape Artemision (Fig. 2).



1 Façade of the Greek pavilion in the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*, Paris 1937 (Edmond Labbé, *Rapport général de l'Exposition internationale des arts et techniques de la vie moderne, 1937*, Paris 1938, vol. IX, 205-208)



2 Ionian portico of the Greek pavilion in the 1937 *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*, hosting a copy of the sculpture of Poseidon found in Cape Artemision (Labbé, *Rapport général*, vol. IX, 205-208)

[21] Zoulias collaborated with French architects Robert Mondries and J. Neel. The pavilion was built around an open atrium, in a composition alluding to a rural Greek house, opening to a garden with plants and flowers from all over Greece. According to the organisers, it "represented the national character by a joyous alliance between ancient and modern architecture" that was secured by marrying the Ionian columns to modern simplicity.<sup>46</sup> This was the introduction, in the entrance, to a classical journey promoted by the official tourism office. The exhibits comprised photographs of Greek monuments (mostly ancient but also from other periods), ceramics, carpets, textiles from the islands and other crafts, mostly produced by family workshops around Greece, such as wooden furniture from Skyros (Fig. 3).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "Il représentait le caractère national par une heureuse alliance d'architecture ancienne et moderne." In: Labbé, *Rapport général*, vol. IX, 205-208, here 206.

<sup>47</sup> See the "Liste des exposants", Archives Nationales, Paris, France. Exposition internationale de 1937 à Paris. Rép. num. ms. par A. Labat, 1994-1996, F12.12273.



3 Interior of the Greek pavilion in the 1937 *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* (Labbé, *Rapport général*, vol. IX, 205-208)

These were exhibited next to industrial products ranging from biscuits, chocolate and cigarettes to fabrics, shoes and pharmaceuticals as well as to products coming from nature or from the soil whose "exceptional quality was due not only to the warmth of a generous sun, but also to the ingenuity and care undertaken during their preparation": flour, wine, ouzo, soap, oil and olives, sponges, honey, wool, silk, furs. All of these were displayed alongside paintings and sculptures which did not particularly hold the attention of the organisers in the *Rapport général*. The artworks appear to have merely played a minor role in this composition; the exhibition report simply stated: "Le pavilion grec, tout en faisant d'opportuns retours vers le grand passé, s'ingéniait à mettre en valeur l'apport spirituel de la Grèce actuelle dans les arts et techniques modernes."<sup>48</sup>

[22] The first stone was set by King George on 26 February 1937, while at the inauguration (3 July 1937) Edmond Labbé as well as Nikolaos Politis gave the official speeches. Various manifestations and performances took place in the pavilion, for instance a performance of the tragedy *The Persians* by Aeschylus by the *Groupe théâtral antique de la Sorbonne*.<sup>49</sup>

### National and regional variations: the fine arts selection of the Greek pavilion

[23] With reference to the works of art chosen for display in the Greek pavilion, the same equilibrium between progress and local tradition, modernism and regionalism was pursued: Antiquity was alluded to through casts of well-known sculptural works, such as the *Ephebe* of Marathon,

<sup>48</sup> Labbé, *Rapport général*, vol. IX, 205-208.

<sup>49</sup> Labbé, *Rapport général*, vol. IX, 205-209.

while representative samples of Byzantine icons were shown as well. A substantial section of the pavilion was, to the satisfaction of the organisers, dedicated to popular art, in their view particularly original, colourful, "*plein de poésie*". In this field, two of the pioneers of popular art exhibitions and publications, Angeliki Hatzimichali<sup>50</sup> and Ellie Papadimitriou,<sup>51</sup> appeared in the official selection. The paintings of both Hatzimichali and Papadimitriou were academic-impressionist renditions of Greek landscapes and still lifes, however the ideology behind them revealed a progressive intent and, although filtered through the conservative lens of the exhibition's officials, they were loaded with a rather revolutionary content.

[24] The official description of the exhibits belonging to the broader "popular arts" category is indicative of the "modernity" pretext for promoting nationalistic ideology as well as of the association between nationalism and regionalism in the exhibition: They were described as proof of the taste and refinement of the Greek craftsmen's race, of a specifically "oriental" character.<sup>52</sup> As noted, the official discourse especially valued these folklore expressions and the national characteristics (perceived in an essentialist way) they promoted. This is why most works of art were chosen according to the same criteria. The core of the fine arts selection comprised mostly paintings, sculptures and engravings by living Greek artists who had for the main part studied in Paris, worked in either academic-impressionist or post-cubist styles and systematically used references to the particularities of the Greek land and Greek people. "Le choix des tableaux n'était pas moins heureux et plusieurs d'entre eux, lumineux de coloris, puissants de composition, représentaient les aspects typiques de la Grèce" proclaimed the organisers.<sup>53</sup>

[25] In this spirit, the work *Hercule et les Amazones* by Constantinos Parthenis (Fig. 4) – a last minute addition since it did not appear in the

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<sup>50</sup> Angeliki Hatzimichali was a painter and folklorist, known for her dedication to the study of popular Greek culture, especially the publishing of studies like the ones on Sarakatsanaioi and Greek popular costumes but also for organising the first exhibitions of Greek artefacts in the beginning of the 1930s.

<sup>51</sup> Ellie Papadimitriou was committed to the Left and known for her struggles, around 1922, for the welfare of the Asia Minor refugees and the preservation of their cultural traditions. She was later active in the anti-Fascism struggle in the Middle East (1941-1945). An artist as well as author of poems and plays, she had a wide range of interests, especially around folk culture, and played a major role in consolidating the acquaintance of many artists with popular art.

<sup>52</sup> "L'artisan hellène avait su y faire preuve des qualités de goût et de finesse de sa race dans une technique d'un caractère nettement oriental." In: Labbé, *Rapport général*, vol. IX, 207.

<sup>53</sup> Labbé, *Rapport général*, vol. IX, 207.



original list – was the most successful participation and earned the Golden prize.<sup>54</sup> It clearly reflects the leading orientation of the selection as

*he was one of the first artists who had conceived and attempted to form, not only thematically but also stylistically, the problem of "Greekness" as a demand for developing a new "Greek canon" and not as a continuance or revival of some Greek tradition.*<sup>55</sup>

[26] Parthenis was a liberal artist who, after a Parisian period (1909 to 1911, but also in 1920), moved away from his first symbolist style to fuse the genre of cubist *nature morte* and its structural characteristics with various cultural references. In these works he acknowledged the ideological role of past styles and used them not didactically, but in a "modernist" manner in order to investigate the formal qualities of painting.



4 Constantinos Parthenis, *Battle between Heracles and the Amazons*, 1921-1927, oil on canvas, 116 x 130,6 cm. Donated by Sofia Partheni, National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, inv. no. Π.6503 (photograph © Stavros Psiroukis)

[27] Other artists like Aglaia Papa (Fig. 5), Hélène Zongolopoulou, Agenor Asteriadis, Giorgos Gounaropoulos or Yannis Mitarakis (J. Mita), who participated with portraits or nudes, experimented combining modernism with local features and paid growing attention to form and to directions given by European avant-gardes before the war (such as fauvism, cubism or expressionism) with a special interest in the creative potential of Greek resources. Asteriadis, for example, creatively assimilated elements from

<sup>54</sup> Evgenios D. Matthiopoulos *Κ. Παρθένης. Η ζωή και το έργο του Κωστή Παρθένη*, Athens 2008, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Matthiopoulos, *Κ. Παρθένης*, 13.



folk art and Byzantine tradition, like bi-dimensionality and schematisation combined with cubist elements (Fig. 6). Mitarakis, a Greek who had spent several years studying in the "free" academies of Paris, where he experienced the artistic heyday of Montparnasse, also attempted to align to French modern style. Gounaropoulos focused on combining the modern and the classical, in accordance with the demands of the times, to conform to some sort of general call for measure and order linked to the current *retour à l'ordre*<sup>56</sup> (Fig. 7). Living in the French metropolis since 1919, he followed Parisian styles, especially cubism, surrealism and expressionism, and associated them with the symbolic use of mythological subjects, the simplification of form and colour and a reference to the typical line that characterises Attic vase painting. A linearity and simplification inspired by ancient Greek vases represented for him an ethnic component, which added local features to French modernism.<sup>57</sup>



5 Aglaia Papa, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1932, oil on canvas, 60.5 x 60 cm. Donated by the artist, National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, inv. no. Π.6097 (photograph © Stavros Psiroukis)

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<sup>56</sup> For recent analyses of modern classicism during the interwar period see: *Chaos & Classicism: Art in France, Italy, and Germany 1918-1936*, exh. cat., ed. K. E. Silver, New York 2010; *Modern Antiquity: Picasso, de Chirico, Léger, Picabia*, exh. cat., ed. Christopher Green, Los Angeles 2011; also *On Classic Ground: Picasso, Leger, De Chirico and the New Classicism 1910-1930*, exh. cat., eds. Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy, London 1990.

<sup>57</sup> Matoula Skaltsa, *Gounaropoulos*, Athens 1990.



6 Agenor Asteriadis, *Ioanna. Green Shadows*, 1927, watercolour, 50 x 31.5 cm. Donated by the artist, National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, inv. no. Π.4990 (photograph © Stavros Psiroukis)



7 Giorgos Gounaropoulos (Gounaro), *Muse*, 1937-1939, pencil, charcoal on paper, 71 x 51 cm. Donated by Karolos and Lili Artiotis, National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, inv. no. Π.5825 (photograph © Stavros Psiroukis)

[28] Older and acclaimed artists, like Periklis Vyzantios and Spyros Vikatos, were also included. They presented landscapes and portraits representative of the bourgeois aesthetic, favouring styles like

impressionism (Vyzantios) or the romanticism of the Munich School (Vikatos) thus attesting to the origins of Greek art's shaping in accordance with European currents during the nineteenth century (Fig. 8).<sup>58</sup> The combination of mythology and symbolism in the work entitled *Hercule tuant les grues de Stymphale* by Frixos Aristeas was in the same spirit although more interesting and original as he was one of the few Greek artists who adopted the "Jugendstil". The Greek pavilion's selection also comprised lesser known artists who corresponded to some sort of established taste, such as E. Ioannidis, a painter reproducing Byzantine and popular models and subjects; E. Voila, a known artist specialising in painted 'mosaics' working on variations of Byzantine, folklore and ancient models; P. Diamantopoulou specialising in decorative arts such as batik or enamel painting with orthodox iconography; J. Tchiller-Dima, an impressionist painter; and Céleste Polychroniadi, a student of Suzanne Valadon, who applied an impressionist style to Greek subjects and landscapes and who was mostly dedicated to printing and applied arts.



8 Spyros Vikatos, *Portrait of a Woman*, n.d., oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm. Donated by the artist, National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, inv. no. Π.663 (photograph © Stavros Psiroukis)

[29] During this period, other painters presented in the Greek pavilion used a post-cubist vocabulary that resulted from Picasso's classical turn, Le Corbusier's purism and references to Greek sources or landscapes, in order to establish and propagate in Greece some of the underlying "constants" (measure, order, and clarity) of the universal aesthetic

<sup>58</sup> For more on Greek art of the nineteenth century and the 'European currents' of the period see: Antonis Kottidis, *Ζωγραφική του 19<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα*, Athens 1995.

experience, according to the way classical values were perceived at the time in Europe. This approach allowed a faith in the superiority of Greek heritage to coexist with the modernist commitment to "primitive" art and to autonomous form. It thus laid the groundwork for the connection of painting and sculpture with the local "Greekness" movement, and associated the ideology of the autonomy of form with the cultivation of a collective national identity. Ghika for instance, who associated with both the cubists and the purists and was personally acquainted with Picasso, Léger and Le Corbusier, focused on the geometry and structural symmetry of the work, in order to find "the essence of things" and trace their internal structure.<sup>59</sup> He used mathematical canons of beauty expressed by Plato and Pythagoras and sought perfection in a disciplined kind of expression that subordinated reality to number and geometrical form. He appropriated classical principles of composition, measure and order to renew the Greek painterly idiom while at the same time taking part in the classical version of cubism that prevailed in Paris after the 1920s. He promoted the idea of the permanence of the Greek spirit throughout time, and he claimed for modern Greeks an inherent sense of beauty found in ancient art through the surviving traces of the austerity and purity of the Greek spirit.<sup>60</sup> In his works of the 1930s, he took this investigation a step further and connected the preference of the ancients for proportion and purity with the country's geomorphology and the unique character of Greek nature.

[30] It is very telling that in the work submitted for the show – which also won a medal – Ghika opted for a very unique and unexpected subject. He distanced himself from portraits, still lifes, interiors and landscapes, and presented *Stonebreaker* (1936) (Fig. 9), a work far removed from his well-known bourgeois subject matter.

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<sup>59</sup> Nikolaos P. Paissios and Jean-Pierre De Rycke, eds., *Ghika and Avant-garde in Interwar Europe*, Athens 2004.

<sup>60</sup> Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika, "Περί Αναλογίας," in: *Ο Κύκλος* 1 (1935), republished in: Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika, *Ελληνικοί Προβληματισμοί*, Athens 1983, 147. Analogous ideas are described in Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika, "Χαρακτηριστικά της νέας τέχνης. Η δίκη του ρωμαντισμού," in: *20ος Αιώνας* 3 (1933), 22-26.



9 Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika, *Stonebreaker*, 1936, oil on cardboard, 42 x 27 cm. Current location unknown (photograph provided by the Ghika Gallery archive, Benaki Museum, Athens, inv. no. ιδιωτΧΓ490)

[31] Apparently inspired by the many artists and architects living in France who were concerned with modern people in modern society at the time<sup>61</sup> – a fact that "increasingly brought an explicit political agenda to the modernity they observed and dreamed", as Christopher Green remarks –, Ghika favoured realism. He followed the example of non-communist modernists, like his friend Léger who embraced new "popular" subjects in order to celebrate, as the programme of the *Exposition* called for, "la vie ouvrière et paysanne".<sup>62</sup>

[32] This was also the case of left-wing artists like Mikis Matsakis (here represented by the work *Déchargement d'une péniche*) who in the early 1930s turned to realist depictions of Greek landscapes in order to distance himself from impressionism.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Dimitris Yannoukakis, who had pursued studies in Paris, presented a *Paysage* that combined elements

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<sup>61</sup> Green, *Art in France 1900-1940*, 173-182.

<sup>62</sup> This is of course to be linked to the ideology of the Popular Front then in power. In fact, the impact of the Depression during the 1930s had further accentuated the shift toward organicism influencing the works of modern artists such as Léger, Le Corbusier and Ozenfant but also Ghika, who turned their attention to manual craft, site specificity, texture and local colour. Green, *Art in France*, 175; Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia*, 62.

<sup>63</sup> Matthiopoulos, *Η συμμετοχή της Ελλάδας στη Μπιενάλε της Βενετίας 1934-1940*, 413.



from cubism, fauvism and expressionism with Greek light and colour. Giorgos Velissaridis' *Maison à Santorin* also exploited cubist vocabulary to translate typical Greek island architecture into a modern language. Such depictions coexisted with more conventional and conservative approaches, such as the landscapes presented by Georgios Kosmadopoulos (Fig. 10), Dimos Braessas, Sophia Laskaridi or Maria Anagnostopoulou, which proposed romantic, lyrical depictions of national land and peasantry in a nostalgic attitude. In a similar spirit, other artists selected episodes from recent national history (*Assaut d'Evzones*, Stavros Kantzikis, Fig. 11). The same "safe" choices were also made by previously progressive artists, such as engraver Angelos Theodoropoulos. Established and acclaimed in Greek intellectual circles, Theodoropoulos presented in the Greek pavilion recent woodcuts which were clearly informed by his Parisian experience and his admiration of Derain and Matisse but also by his conviction that artists should look anew at the past for inspiration (Fig. 12). However, as Matthiopoulos has shown, these works were deprived of an ideological agenda (Theodoropoulos belonged to the Communist party) and of any interest to serve the "Greekness" debate.<sup>64</sup>



10 Georgios Kosmadopoulos, *Paysage*, n.d., oil on cardboard, 60 x 73 cm. National Gallery - Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, inv. no. Π.3543 (photograph © Stavros Psiroukis)

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<sup>64</sup> Matthiopoulos, *Η συμμετοχή της Ελλάδας στη Μπιενάλε της Βενετίας 1934-1940*, 894.



11 Stavros Kantzikis, *Assaut d'Evzones*, n.d., oil on canvas, 50 x 76 cm. National Gallery - Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, inv. no. K.701 (photograph © Stavros Psiroukis)

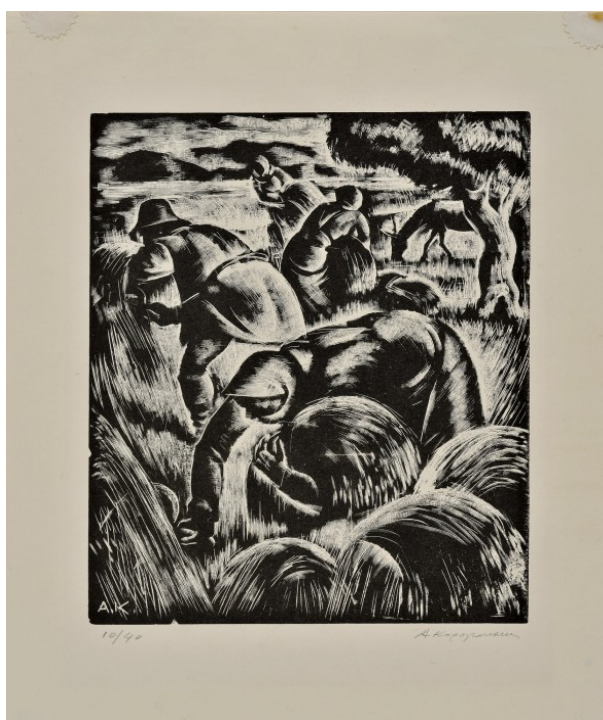


12 Angelos Theodoropoulos, *Paysage*, n.d., woodcut on paper, 27 x 34 cm. Donation of the Ministry of Education, National Gallery - Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, inv. no. Π.3917 (photograph © Stavros Psiroukis)

[33] The direction towards the land, the soil, peasant life, traditional customs and outdoor living also marked the choices of the printed works decorating the Greek pavilion. The importance of engravers in this selection reflects the birth, at that time, of a school of Greek engraving as a result of the re-opening of the printing studio in the Athens School of Fine Arts in 1932.<sup>65</sup> As most Greek engravers were leaning towards realism in style as well as subject matter, their works conformed perfectly with the regionalist agenda of the *Exposition*, even if ideologically they distanced

<sup>65</sup> Andreas Delivorrias, *Αφιέρωμα στην ελληνική χαρακτική, Ενότητα 1: οι Δάσκαλοι*, Athens 1988, 7.

themselves from the conservative political and cultural stance of the Metaxas government. For instance, Korogiannakis's three works in the exhibition, *Moisson*, *Vendanges* and *Pêcheurs* (Fig. 13), manifested his inclination towards socialist realism, while celebrating labour and reflecting the effort to "question how art could relate to the proletariat",<sup>66</sup> very strongly discussed in the cultural debates of the Left in the 1930s in France. Similarly Giorgos Moschos, an artist specialising in woodcuts, represented landscapes and architectural subjects that combined Byzantine-style and folk elements, with emphasis on detail and realism. In the pavilion, he presented the four etchings *Carpenisi*, *Maison de Roumeli*, *Ruelle à Myconos*, and *Habitant de Roumeli* clearly drawn to this direction.



13 Alexandros Korogiannakis, *Moisson*, 1937, end grain woodcut, 17.5 x 15 cm. Donated by Eleni A. Korogiannaki, National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, inv. no. Π.2917 (photograph © Stavros Psiroukis)

[34] The sculptural works presented were also very diverse in style and subject matter. Antonis Sochos, a sculptor who then opted for the revival of classical style, presented academic busts in marble and bronze.<sup>67</sup> The selection also included modernist works like the marble *Poissons*, *Femme assise* and the abstract *Synthèse en deux tons* by Michalis Tombros. Tombros, who was close to Ghika, combined elements from different currents of the École de Paris with national and local characteristics and

<sup>66</sup> Christopher Green, *Art in France 1900-1940*, 175.

<sup>67</sup> Even though he would turn later to popular art capable of "expressing the people's soul" as he claimed. Matthiopoulos, *Η συμμετοχή της Ελλάδας στη Μπιενάλε της Βενετίας 1934-1940*, 495.



drifted from one style to the other in order to serve his personal and professional aspirations: to attain the style of modernist abstraction and secure his acceptance into Parisian circles. He studied ancient art, especially Cycladic and archaic sculpture, and superficially referenced methods of modern French sculpture, from Maillol to Brancusi, with the ambition, as he expressed in his own journal, *20os Aionas (The 20<sup>th</sup> Century)*, of achieving a "new hierarchisation and a new publicity of modern Greek art, that will henceforth count in the international world".<sup>68</sup> Although essentially opposed to neoclassical trends, this view equally served the *Exposition's* demands as the artist's ultimate aim was to bring forth "the spiritual liberties and the liberated qualities of our Mediterranean and primitive race".<sup>69</sup> The quest to fuse French primitivist style with archaic Greek references in an effort to propose a modern Greek style in sculpture also marked the participation of Bella Raftopoulou with the works *Une tête* and *Deux têtes* (Fig. 14).<sup>70</sup> A student of Bourdelle (1925-1930), Raftopoulou had also carefully studied ancient vases, and followed her master's precept to turn to archaic art.<sup>71</sup> She thus rejected both realism and classicism, favoured abstract forms and direct carving and adopted the simplification, schematisation and anthropocentrism of archaic art.

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<sup>68</sup> Michalis Tombros, "Pourquoi je fais paraître un périodique," in: *20ος Αιώνας* 1 (1933), 1-2, here 2.

<sup>69</sup> Tombros, "Pourquoi je fais paraître un périodique," 2.

<sup>70</sup> *Bella Raftopoulou*, exh. cat., ed. National Gallery, Athens 1980.

<sup>71</sup> Bourdelle famously advised his Greek students: "Look at the Parthenon's Theseus, look at the Apollo of Olympia, Egypt, our glorious cathedrals and our great Rodin. Don't waste your time on ideas that want to call themselves new." Quoted according to Thanasis Apartis, *Από Ανατολή σε Δύση*, Athens 1984, 62.



14 Bella Raftopoulou, *Two Friends*, 1937, plaster, 37 x 51.5 x 39.5 cm. Bella Raftopoulou Bequest, National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, inv. no. Π.8675/β (photograph © Stavros Psiroukis)

### Conclusions on the Greek participation in the 1937 *Exposition Internationale*

[35] The choice of artworks to be displayed in the Greek pavilion was grounded in nationalist discourse, since the idea of nation was closely linked to the quest for self-identity in the modern age.<sup>72</sup> Nationalism was a structural component of modernity, viewed by writers such as Hobsbawm, Gellner, Anderson or Giddens as "a consequence of political or economic modernisation".<sup>73</sup> The artwork selection showcased in the 1937 Greek pavilion brings forth the importance attributed to Greece's institutional presence abroad for the shaping of a new Greek identity. Especially given that, fifteen years after what is known as the Asia Minor catastrophe (1922), the organisation and promotion of "neo-Hellenic" elements contributed to the recovery of the country's authority, and the claim of aligning with modern Europe appeared as a way to regain national pride.<sup>74</sup> In this sense, the exhibition can be considered as one manifestation of the

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<sup>72</sup> For more see: Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge 1990. Tziouvas asserts that for the Generation of the 1930s in Greece the reconsideration of tradition and the reflexivity towards cultural models were identified with a demand for modernity. Tziouvas, *Ο μύθος της Γενιάς του Τριάντα*, 323-324.

<sup>73</sup> Rampley, "Contested Histories".

<sup>74</sup> For more on Greek nationalism see the proceedings of the symposium *Έθνος, Κράτος, Εθνικισμός*, ed. Σχολή Μωραΐτη. Εταιρεία Σπουδών Νεοελληνικού Πολιτισμού και Γενικής Παιδείας, Athens 1994.

state's cultural nationalism that aspired to contribute to the moral regeneration of the people.<sup>75</sup> This process also aimed for the formation of a distinctive and autonomous cultural community where the meanings of "modernity" and "tradition" were transformed: The modern was particularised as the local manifestation of international styles and tradition was associated to regionalism seen in 1937 with an essentialist interpretation: that of an identity which is not constructed but lies there to be discovered as does the culture of the nation.<sup>76</sup> So in Greece the tendency for regionalism put forth by the 1937 exhibition (although largely disregarded in the studies of the exhibition that followed 1945, as Storm explains<sup>77</sup>), made possible a national coming together of Greek artists and intellectuals towards a common cause: An art that would be "national" while aspiring to play a role in the global art world. Thence arose an important paradox, one that is not unique to Greece, but has been structural to the birth of discourses about art as well as to art practice itself: The pursuit of a national artistic identity which is at the same time aspiring to universalism and internationalism.<sup>78</sup>

[36] The French context of the exhibition, in regard to local characteristics of French provinces as well as of foreign nations, urged Nikolaos Politis to respond to the demand to combine national characteristics with general notions such as locality, order, humanism and progress. This context allowed for a coexistence of masters and students, conservative and progressive approaches, modern and classical references, exactly as in the majority of the works displayed at the *Exposition*. Greece's previous participations in international exhibitions – from London's Great Exhibition in 1851 to the *Exposition Internationale* of 1925<sup>79</sup> – had not managed to satisfy the ambition of presenting abroad a "glorious" image of the nation. This, according to contemporary accounts, was due to the fact that they

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<sup>75</sup> In this context the return to the folk is, as Hutchinson duly notes, "a means to catapult the nation from present backwardness and divisions to the most advanced stage of social development", and this because through the re-invention and re-evaluation of folk art can be constructed "a modern scientific culture on the ethnic remains of the folk, who, remote from the great metropolitan centres, are the last repository of national traditions". John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, London 1987, 12-19.

<sup>76</sup> Storm, *The Culture of Regionalism*, 3.

<sup>77</sup> Storm, *The Culture of Regionalism*, 12.

<sup>78</sup> "Dans la g n se d'un discours sur l'art comme lieu d'identification, le recours   l' tranger, et donc la d finition par l' tranger, ont  t  structurels. Autrement dit, toute construction intellectuelle, artistique et politique d'un art *national* comporte n cessairement une dimension *internationale*." Passini, *La fabrique de l'art national*, 254-255.

<sup>79</sup> Fernand David, *Exposition internationale des arts d coratifs et industriels modernes, Paris. Rapport g n ral pr sent  au nom de Fernand David*, vol. 2, Paris 1927, 65-66.

opted for established artists and did not invest in the dynamic potential of modernists.<sup>80</sup> Another significant contradiction then is revealed: Although in 1925 the planning and realisation of the Greek pavilion were closely related to the liberal party's programme of modernisation, the choices of the artists (mostly members of the *Association des Artistes et Gens des Lettres Hellènes de Paris*)<sup>81</sup> reflected a more conservative attitude - apart from the rural style pavilion that was again aligned with the exhibition's regionalist programme. On the contrary, in 1937, Politis tried to promote Greek particularity in an environment longing for *couleur locale*, but also to put forth progressive trends that would align with the exhibition's programme for innovation and invention. Under a totalitarian regime and in a neoclassical building that reflected its ideological inclinations, the turn to popular culture and indigenous characteristics as a channel for modernism was combined with the quest of Greek artists for self-identification in a *milieu* that praised cultural specificity and regionalism.<sup>82</sup>

[37] Apart from complying with the General Commissioner's guidelines, the priority given to authenticity, realism as well as to the folklore and indigenous characteristics of Greek culture corresponded to the "Greekness" movement as described above, rising in the 1930s, while the classical exterior was more in tune with Metaxas's programme for a "Third Hellenic Civilisation". However, even if the political landscape radically changed in Greece as in the rest of Europe after 1936, we can discern in this selection elements of patriotism and systematic modernisation proper to Venizelos' second period programme (1928-1932) that attest to the continuation of its principle aspirations: That the renewal of Greek civilisation identified with cultural equality with Europe, while the international promotion of Greece was an absolute institutional priority.<sup>83</sup> Thus, contrary to France where regionalism is now linked to modernism's regression towards conservatism,<sup>84</sup> in the example studied here the turn to

<sup>80</sup> For instance, artists such as Parthenis, Ghika, Tombros and others belonging to the *Omada Techni 1930* (Katerina Perpinioti-Agazir, *Le "Groupe Techni"*), although already active in Paris, were excluded from the 1925 pavilion. Kosmadaki, "Η συμμετοχή της Ελλάδας στην Έκθεση Διακοσμητικών Τεχνών στο Παρίσι το 1925," 148-164; Matthiopoulos, *Η συμμετοχή της Ελλάδας στη Μπιενάλε της Βενετίας*, 27.

<sup>81</sup> *Exposition d'un groupe d'artistes hellènes de Paris* [1-20 March 1926], exh. cat., ed. Association des Artistes et Gens des Lettres Hellènes de Paris, Paris 1926.

<sup>82</sup> Polina Kosmadaki, "Modern Perspectives for Greek Artists during the Interwar Period: The Parisian Effect and the Turn to Tradition," to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Mouseio Benaki*.

<sup>83</sup> Giorgos Mavrogordatos and Christos Chadziiosif, eds., *Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός*, Heraklion 1992.

<sup>84</sup> This trend was consolidated immediately after the turbulent period of the First World War, when several French authors, artists and intellectuals, such as Jean Cocteau, Roger Bissière and Guillaume Apollinaire, saw the need for a period of

local tradition, to Greek soil and Greek people, emerged from a progressive political agenda and is today regarded as part of the modern peak of Greek art.

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organisation, order and science through the return to classical values. Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de corps. The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War 1914-1924*, Princeton 1989, 200-235.