

Concepts of Artistic “Greekness” in the Post-Junta Period: The Case of the Exhibition of Tsarouchis, Ghika, Kontoglou, Theofilos in the Greek Month in London, 1975

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This presentation will study the case of the exhibition “Four painters of 20th century Greece. Tsarouchis, Ghika, Kontoglou, Theofilos” at the Wildenstein gallery as part of the *Greek Month in London*, an interdisciplinary festival curated by Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal in 1975. The Greek Month was one of the major artistic events which animated the art world right after the fall of the Dictatorship in Greece and provoked heated debates around national identity and the international re-framing of Greek art. The event thus contributed in revising and recontextualizing the very concept of Greekness in the context of the post-Junta political climate. It took place from November 4 to December 4, 1975 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, following the model of the French Month and the German Month that the Institute had organized the previous years. The Greek Month was supported by Prime Minister’s Karamanlis Government and funded in large part by the National Trust for Greece, a charity association created in 1972 by Greek businessmen and ship owners living in London to protect and promote Greek heritage abroad. The program included various artistic events: theater performances, concerts, literary nights, book fairs and artistic exhibitions.

Two artistic exhibitions were at the center of the festival: the first entitled “8 artists, 8 attitudes, 8 Greeks” took place at the ICA and showcased avant-garde artists who, for the most part, lived and worked internationally. The second one put forth the work of four important painters associated with the “Generation of the 1930’s”, aiming to promote a Greek version of modernism both in relation to international artistic currents and to the cultural particularities of Greek art. It comprised works by Theofilos, a naive painter who was heralded at the time as representing the most authentic expression of Greek art; Fotis Kontoglou who revisited byzantine tradition and whose work was framed as a version of local expressionism. Yannis Tsarouchis, who had developed a personal manner of depicting everyday Greek reality and Nico Ghika, a Greek post-cubist painter who frequented the circles of Picasso.

The example of this exhibition, the curatorial choices, the political implications as well its critical reception will be used to investigate the changing perception of Greekness and the so-called “Generation of the 1930s” during the 1970’s, right after the fall of the Junta, in relation to questions of identity, national representation, and cultural diplomacy. This kind of “national” exhibition practice will also contribute to addressing the scope of “metropolitan” and “other” modernisms, but also to highlight the importance of exhibition practice in identity politics.