

Greek Interwar Art and Design (1922-1939)

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An Overview

By

Johannis Tsoumas

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-9365-7

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-9365-7

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research, which started about two years ago, represents a personal challenge of mine: the dissemination of information about the very important Greek Interwar period, in terms of arts and design, to the scientific and artistic communities beyond Greek borders.

I think now is the time to win this bet with myself, as I have managed to document, even in the form of an overview, this great piece of history of modern Greek art and culture, and to share it with readers from all over the world.

I would like to express my thanks to all those who contributed to the completion of my work, in particular the library staff of the University of West Attica for their kind help in finding the rare bibliographical sources with which my work was fundamentally enriched, and Dr. Vassiliki Petridis, architectural historian, for her valuable advice.

I would also like to thank Dr. Dionysios Pollatos for his technical help and support in the photographic material used, and Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their trust in my ambitious proposal.

INTRODUCTION

The Greek interwar period (1922-1939) or *Messopolemos*, as it is known in Greek, is considered, in relation to the corresponding historical developments in the western world, to be quite critical for the national, political, economic and cultural development of the country. The Asia Minor catastrophe, however, and the consequent deterioration of social conditions after the arrival of millions of refugees in Greece, in combination with the global and domestic economic crisis, made it not only a time of shattering and acute social problems, but also a time of creative reflections, new ideals and the adoption of new laws and institutions. In these turbulent socio-political times, cutting-edge ideological and artistic trends were formed, while at the same time novel ideological values thrived, which decisively influenced the cultural formation of the Greek nation-state. Greek interwar art, through its broader approach, is one of the most interesting periods of art - not only in the context of Greece, but also Western art history.

This research does not aim to focus simply on classical art forms such as painting and architecture, but to expand the scope of knowledge of other important fields of creation such as applied arts and in particular graphic arts, furniture and ceramic design.

However, it should be noted that this book constitutes a rather holistic view - an overview of the events, ideologies and new artistic achievements of the time, most of which revolved around the idea of *Greekness* in art and the introduction of the new stylistic and ideological suggestions of European modernism that deeply influenced, in several cases, Greek artists, designers and architects. Here, it should be emphasized that Greek-centered modernism was essentially a movement that did not adopt the principles of European modernism as they were; it mixed and combined them with many elements of ancient Greek, Byzantine, popular, and traditional art, thus forming its unique visual vocabulary. Readers will have the opportunity to obtain a broad picture of the time, focusing on the most important historical and artistic events, to get to know the most subversive artists and designers and their work, but also to 'experience' the truth of an intensely feverish era through the author's documentary-style narration.

Specifically, in the first chapter (particularly in its first part), a general reference to the historical and cultural significance of the term 'interwar' is attempted through extensive references to the historical, social and cultural context of the respective era in Europe. This era will play a multidimensional role in shaping the physiognomy of interwar Greece through a series of some very important historical and social events which will be discussed extensively in the second part of the chapter. Of course, the puzzle of the overall picture of the country will be completed in the third part of the chapter, with an in-depth commentary of the cultural context of this emblematic era.

Nothing, however, could be discussed, analyzed, interpreted, and finally understood without an extensive reference to the historical, social and cultural context of the turbulent time that preceded the interwar period in Greece. This means that in the rather extensive and clearly informative second chapter, there is a review of the years that preceded the era of our interest, from the time of the founding of the Greek State until the dawn of the twentieth century. Specifically, readers will have the opportunity to learn about the conditions under which the Greek State was created after four hundred years of Ottoman rule and the development of the arts, especially painting, which sought its identity through the teaching of the Munich School in which many Greek artists resorted to be trained, but also the importance of the Athens School of Fine Arts which was founded and developed mainly during the 19th century. They will also come in contact with the work of great Greek painters and teachers at the School, and will begin to understand the significance of the search for the concept of *Greekness* in art. At the same time, readers will get to know the value of Modern Greek architecture and its main representatives, while finding out the developments that took place in the field of furniture design and publication (mainly that of magazines and newspapers) before the early 20th century.

In the third chapter, readers will begin to know and recognize the basic characteristics of the famous generation of the 1930s, from which important representatives of interwar painting and literature emerged. They will profoundly understand the role of the *Greekness* concept in the art of the time through the impact of ancient Greek, Byzantine, and folk art in its formation, while they will get to know great representatives of the generation of the 1930s, such as Konstantinos Parthenis, Spyros Papaloukas, Fotis Kontoglou, Nikos Chatzikyriakos-Gkikas, Yiannis Tsarouchis and George Gounaropoulos, whose work was of fundamental importance to the evolution of 20th century Greek painting.

Interwar architecture was one of the key social, cultural and artistic movements of this socio-politically eventful period. In the fourth chapter, readers will be able to see and recognize the influence of European modernism on the formation of the Greek modern architectural style, which characterized the evolution of the concept of housing, but also of aesthetics, through important, unprecedented and practically beneficial architectural types such as the apartment building (*polykatoikia* in Greek) - that is, the introduction of the multi-story building type that was initially addressed mainly to the middle class and the bourgeoisie of Athens. They will also have the opportunity to get acquainted with the new housing typologies that constituted an urgent solution to the housing problem which arose from the arrival of over a million refugees in Greece after the Asia Minor catastrophe, as well as with various other types of architecture, such as schools and public buildings, which constituted the pinnacle of the new interwar architectural style.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the interwar publications field, especially to the emergence of magazines, newspapers, and print advertisements. The social, cultural and political contribution of periodicals and newspapers within the context of the important historical developments of the period is thoroughly discussed, while special reference is made to specific, particularly popular, publications. In this chapter, readers will also have the opportunity to see the importance of print advertisements in the publications of the time, and in some cases the significance of packaging which constituted a type of advertisement in itself, within the new commercial, economic, social, and cultural framework. The artistic and aesthetic shaping of these advertisements according to popular taste and the available technological media is another important issue to comment on in this chapter.

In the sixth chapter, readers will have the opportunity to study the variety of designs and types of furniture available during the interwar period, many of which are still classic examples of Greek furniture design. First, the types of domestic production furniture that prevailed in Greece in the first two decades of the 20th century are presented, and then there is an extensive reference to the development of furniture manufacturing units, as this is considered necessary information for the further knowledge of the development of furniture design of the period. Readers will also be able to discern the effect of the concept of modernism on Greek furniture design, and appreciate the importance of the innovative introduction of standardized furniture production in the market that has enabled many consumers from all levels of the social stratification to buy and enjoy cheap and good quality

furniture. Finally, the importance of the concepts of history and tradition in the constant and persistent efforts of furniture design, and applied arts in general, to find evidence that would help them to claim their Greek identity is also emphasized.

Ceramics, in terms of its industrial production, will be the focus of the seventh and final chapter of this research. After a systematic investigation of a very low-lit design field, this chapter presents the achievements of four very important pottery factories: the 'Kerameus' pottery factory, the 'Kerameikos' pottery factory, and the 'Kioutacheia' factory in the Athens and Piraeus areas, as well as the 'Icaro' pottery factory on the island of Rhodes. Through an in-depth approach to the historical origins of the industrial production of functional and decorative ceramic objects, such as vases, dishes, ash trays, tiles, etc., readers will be able to understand the importance of the constant effort to connect interwar ceramic art with its historical and traditional roots.

It is a very interesting investigation which was attempted regarding the integration of Orientalist aesthetics in the design of these objects, especially the tiles, and its connection with the Greek cultural origins of the refugees from Asia Minor.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GREEK INTERWAR PERIOD: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

1a) Interwar in the West

When talking about the interwar period, we refer to the twenty-year interval between the two World Wars, a time when humanity was left in the flood of important social, political, economic, ideological and cultural upheavals. More specifically, the official period of the European interwar period begins in 1919 with the signing of the treaties that ended World War I, and ends in 1939 with Adolf Hitler's invasion of Poland. Speaking solely about Europe, we have to note that the end of World War I in 1918 also marked the total collapse of the old governance and the powerful international system. From the ruins and ashes of one of the bloodiest wars in human history, Europe sought to pick up her pieces, having found herself politically, socially and economically devastated. Soon, severe financial problems, the result of the costly and deadlocked war, emerged and turned into an acute economic crisis, as many debtor countries were unable to pay their debts without having to borrow more money at higher interest rates, thus further aggravating their already strained financial situation. Germany, for example, within the framework of its politically ambitious but short-lived first democracy, the Weimar Republic, which went up in smoke with the rise of the Nazi Party in 1933,ⁱ was called upon to pay large sums of money to its defeaters in accordance with what was agreed in the Treaty of Versailles.ⁱⁱ The legendary League of Nations constituted a major hope in the global effort to break the strong link of traditional political forces, and to implement a global peace process in which Member States would work together in a spirit of solidarity and political stability - something that was never achieved.ⁱⁱⁱ The world political scene of the interwar years soon seemed to be divided into two ideologically opposed factions: those who argued that the far left had the power to provide immediate solutions to peoples' problems and those who believed that only the far right could achieve that. Those who had adopted more conservative and moderate

positions were not enough to bridge this huge political-ideological gap that, in those years, had brought to power regimes based on so-called 'authoritarian democracy'. Either in the form of fascism in Spain, Italy and Germany, or in the form of communism in the then Soviet Union, they created a dangerous socio-political mixture on the Old Continent, ready to explode.^{iv}

At the same time, in the US, the huge mass production of goods such as cars, machines of any kind, canned food, radios, and even movies had a catalytic effect on the consumer behavior of all Western societies.

It was then that mass production, in combination with the growing electricity phenomenon,^v managed to deliver the latest achievements of science and technology to middle-class households.

During that time, the sense of over-abundance and consequently over-consumption was very strong, but this does not mean that the sense of prosperity that had begun to be created was real; it was based, almost entirely, on banking credit. The 1929 financial crisis came at a time when the US believed that they had found a way to tackle poverty and offer most of their citizens a life flooded with material value. Some of the consequences of the crisis were the bankruptcy of many banks and the cessation of loaning, which negatively affected industries, as most of them could not meet their financial needs. Soon, their products would remain unsold, as people could not afford to buy them. All of this resulted in a sudden rise in unemployment, an explosion of social misery and, inevitably, intense resentment and indignation among frustrated European and American citizens. After all, the collapse of the US banking system had a direct impact on Europe as well, especially in countries such as Germany and Great Britain, which had trusted their growth to US capital.^{vi} In short, the rise in unemployment and its unfortunate consequences for the lives of both American and European citizens, the imperialist rivalries of many powerful countries, the dramatic changes in social classes worldwide, and the creation and development of labor movements, in combination with both the economic crisis and the new political situation that prevailed in many European countries, were some of the main factors that contributed to the start of the then-inevitable World War II in 1939.

As for the evolution of art, science, technology, intellectual life and culture in general, it is true that these had been dealt a severe blow during World War I, although eventually all forms of culture continued to thrive during the two turbulent decades of the interwar period in one way or another. In

particular, the advent of new technologies combined with the scientific achievements of the nineteenth century and the revolutionary inventions of the early twentieth century, radically changed the lives of millions of people in Europe and America.

There were many artists who applied new technologies in their works, proposing new ways to improve the quality of mass-produced commodities through their art. In the fields of architecture and design, the buildings and objects created were functional and simple. The founding of the famous German Bauhaus School of Art and Architecture in Weimar in 1919 had a catalytic effect on both aforementioned fields and the shaping of contemporary art.^{vii} Its basic design principles revolved around the concepts of simplicity, functionality and usability, with a particular emphasis on geometric shapes and color, and were perfectly combined with the use of technology for artistic purposes.^{viii} Many of the works produced through the workshops of the school thus became models for extensive mass production.

Education, both on the old continent and in the US, began to grow dramatically as the number of universities, polytechnics, art schools, and (mainly) technology schools increased, thus giving graduates the opportunity to become executives of the new industrial units that had started emerging more and more often.

The social sciences, such as sociology, social anthropology, history, and psychology, were catalyzed by the radical changes of the time and were developed even more through research, while art that triumphed during the first decades of the century seemed to win the battle with history by forming another diverse movement: Surrealism.^{ix} The decorative arts, after the fussy appearance and spread of the multifaceted Art Nouveau throughout Europe and America, were represented by a new, international artistic movement: Art Deco. This innovative decorative trend in architecture, painting, graphic arts, industrial design, jewelry, glass design, miniature sculpture, fashion, and cinema first appeared at the International Exhibition of Contemporary Decorative and Industrial Arts (Exposition Internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes) in Paris in 1925, and came to prevail globally until the 1940s.^x Art Deco appeared to be in severe conflict with the decorative principles of Art Nouveau while drawing ideas from the tank of many different historical eras, as well as a variety of artistic movements of the 20th century.

The spread of cinema as a major means of entertainment in Europe and America was impressive, so it soon evolved into a productive and profitable

industry. Only in 1927 did the films acquire sound, and by around 1926 many synthetic methods of adding color had appeared.^{xi} Finally, three years later the first color films were made, in spite of the fact that coloring cinematic frames by hand had already been in practice since the beginning of the century. However, only the Technicolor method (1916) prevailed and was perfected in 1941, despite its expense due to the complex stages of the separation and appearance of colors.^{xii}

1b) The Greek interwar period: historical events

In Greece, the historical term ‘Interwar’ does not coincide with what is meant by the same term Europe, because the events that occurred in the history of the Greek State have their own, autonomous historical and national significance. Thus, for Greece, the Interwar period begins with the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922. The collapse of the Asia Minor front was followed by the resignation of King Constantine in favor of his son George II and the formation of a revolutionary government, which sought immediate help for refugees, the relief of social anger over the national catastrophe, and solutions to the enormous economic problems that followed. Elections were held in December 1923, while George II, pressured by the conditions, left the country and Admiral Pavlos Kountouriotis was appointed as regent.^{xiii}

Until then, the country was still suffering from the previous wars, and going through the difficult period of rehabilitation of about one and a half million Greek refugees who, leaving their homes and all their belongings in the cities and coastal villages of Asia Minor, arrived exhausted, first at the nearby Aegean islands and then at Piraeus.^{xiv} Most of them settled in unfavorable conditions, in the cities and villages of Macedonia, but also of western Thrace and Attica, where new settlements were built to receive them.^{xv} It should be noted, however, that the rural settlement of refugees was a priority in relation to their settlement in urban areas, despite the fact that most of them were of urban origin. The criteria for this decision were of an economic and national-political nature. The aim of creating rural refugee settlements was to make up for the losses caused by the previous wars to the adult male population - that is, the most important part of the active population. Also, due to the departure of Muslim farmers to Turkey – according to the ‘contractual’ compulsory exchange of populations – mainly from the tobacco-producing areas of Macedonia and western Thrace, the refugees would provide a solution to the continuation of agricultural production and the unimpeded collection of income. However, an equally

important criterion was the achievement of national homogeneity, and this could be done only with the demographic strengthening of the Greek population of the border areas and the creation of refugee settlements so the better protection of the Greek borders could be ensured.^{xvi}

The rehabilitation of refugees in large urban centers proved to be more difficult than that of rural areas. In contrast to the latter, the urban rehabilitation included only housing and not a provision for finding work. Many refugees settled in various parts of Attica in stumps, shacks and huts, creating purely refugee neighborhoods, such as Vyronas, Kaisariani, New Philadelphia, Nea Chalkidona, Nea Ionia, Nea Smyrni in Athens, and Kokkinia, Drapetsona, Nikaia and Keratsini in Piraeus. Of course, the financial situation of the refugees also played a role here, as those who were financially sound did not stay in stumps or later in the small apartments of the specially built refugee blocks of flats, but built their own houses, after being given free land. Such districts, famous for the financial prosperity of the refugees, were Nea Smyrni in Athens, but also the Kallipoli region in Piraeus.^{xvii} Despite the huge social and financial problems they had to face, refugees eventually played an extremely positive role in the cultural and economic development of Greece on a large scale. Although they were rejected, ridiculed and considered ultimate citizens, refugees were well educated and undoubtedly had a much higher educational and cultural background than many natives. Their contribution to the development of handicrafts and industry with their knowledge of entrepreneurship, their abilities in trading and their availability as cheap, usually manual labor was proved to be valuable. Their presence in the field of culture was also important as many remarkable Asia Minor painters, writers and musicians, with their works, made the Greek intellectual world even richer.

At that time, amidst severe socioeconomic problems, Greece faced political instability from intense conflicts between the two bourgeois political factions – the Venizelists and the anti-Venizelists. The conflict arose from questioning of the regime itself - that is, should the regime exist as a reigning or non-reigning democracy. Simultaneously, there were frequent military movements that resulted in the establishment of dictatorial regimes. However, the elections of 1928 highlighted the period 1928-1932, under the rule of Eleftherios Venizelos, not only as the longest-lived, but also the most stable and creative of the interwar era. That government successfully implemented a program of reconstruction and reforms, but also of suppression of socialist ideas and social struggles; while, regarding the hitherto unstable foreign policy, Venizelos, in order to achieve peace and

tranquility for the development of his country, signed with his Turkish counterpart the 'Greek-Turkish friendship pact' in 1930.^{xviii}

Paradoxically, in this tense socio-political climate and time of great international economic crisis, domestic economic growth proceeded at a relatively rapid pace in the early 1930s. Its main feature was the development of the industry, shipping and construction sectors, while rural development was largely benefited due to the agrarian reform of 1923, with the distribution of much of the arable land to farmers, to whom almost half of the refugee population had been added.^{xix} During the same period, although the working class exceeded a quarter of the population, having increased since the first two decades of the 20th century and especially after the arrival of refugees, farmers exceeded 50% of the population and, along with small shopkeepers, traders, craftsmen, and handicraftsmen, the traditional smallholder class still constituted the largest part of the Greek population.^{xx} However, immediately after the end of the four year prosperity marked by Venizelos' resignation in May 1932, Greece began to be torn apart by the greedy and destructive mechanism of the global economic crisis. The fact that the country, to a large extent, relied upon exports of agricultural products (raisins, tobacco, vegetables, etc.), for which demand fell sharply, played a particularly critical role. Similarly, remittances from immigrants, which were a valuable source of foreign exchange for the country, also began to decline. Greece also had large external debts, due to loaning from the international money market to rehabilitate refugees, cover the balance of payments deficit, and finance economic growth, which made it particularly vulnerable to the then already fragile global economic climate. The result of all these parameters for the country, as a victim of its insatiable creditors, was a declaration of bankruptcy in 1932. Nevertheless, their usurious pursuits ultimately had the exact opposite effect: with the bankruptcy of 1932, Greece not only completely stopped its international payments, but also committed itself to the path of economic self-sufficiency, which gave a new impetus to the domestic market and economy.^{xxi}

At the same time, the country began to be shaken by extreme political events, such as the failed military coups by Venizelists in 1933 and 1935, resulting in the return of King George II and therefore the restoration of the institution of the monarchy in 1935. After the elections and during the negotiations for the formation of a government, the news of Venizelos' death gave the King the opportunity to administer the oath to Ioannis Metaxas as Prime Minister on April 27, 1936.^{xxii} On August 4 of the same year, in agreement with the King and the British, the greatest political and military power of Europe that exerted influence in the countries of the

eastern Mediterranean, Metaxas abolished the constitution and established a dictatorship.^{xxiii} During the years of his rule, Metaxas ousted almost all political parties and severely persecuted those who supported their democratic beliefs – especially the left – by exiling them to small and isolated Aegean islands, many of which became known as places of torture and exile. The dictatorial regime also tried to ‘convert’ the youth of the time by abolishing all of the hitherto known organizations – such as the Scouts – and establishing one alone: the famous governmental organization NOY (National Organization of Youth). The main goal of the organization was to ethically and ideologically, ‘graft’ young Greeks with the nationalistic concepts of solidarity, purity, bravery, self-denial and discipline - a fact which would make them not only good patriots, but mainly ardent supporters of the regime.^{xxiv}

The turbulent period of the interwar period typically ended with the historic declaration of the Greek-Italian war on October 28, 1940, which was preceded by the sinking of the historic submarine ‘HELLI’ in the port of the island of Tinos on August 15 of the same year. The war between Greece and the coalition of Italy and Albania lasted until May 1941, when her occupation was completed by the German forces which had already attacked on April 6 of the same year.^{xxv}

1c) The Interwar period culture

According to the common position of many modern historians, the culture of modern Greece was formed during the interwar period. Art, the perpetual and never falsifiable mirror of social stratifications, and political, economic, and cultural conditions, constituted once more in the interwar period the reflection of the ideas, ideologies, facts, thoughts, and concerns of the time. As early as the 1920s, the perception of the uninterrupted continuity of Hellenism, from antiquity to modern times, had begun to take shape. In art, in all its forms, this perception was expressed through a return to tradition, with the subsequent projection of anything related to Greek folk culture, but also to earlier periods such as Byzantium or even Antiquity. *Greekness* was a basic quest for the intellectual world of the interwar period, but also an essential tool for the formation of national identity; we will see this being asserted in the following chapters as it is directly related to the evolution of the arts and design in this period. Thus, the interwar period proved to be the ideal time for the emergence of important personalities of art and literature, whose works shaped the intellectual life of the country for generations to follow.

As far as the field of literature is concerned, Greek poetry made its appearance, especially in the 1920s, with representative poets of the Neo-Romantic and Neo-Symbolist movements who seemed to have many characteristics in common, some of which were a sense of deep pessimism, melancholy and deadlock, an absence of ideals, contempt for society and a turn towards daydreaming and the unattainable. Their poetry was low-key, presenting an image of disintegration and decadence, without faith in the great ideas that to some extent guided the work of the great poets of the past. The most important poetic figure of that period, Kostas Karyotakis, highlighted through his works the stigma of futility and the generalized pessimism of the interwar period, sealing it with his own grievous suicide.^{xxvi} However, poets such as Napoleon Lapathiotis, a rather strange and unpopular poet of the time since he was openly communist, atheist, and homosexual, the romantic Maria Polydouri, incurably in love with Kostas Karyotakis, and the idyllic visionary Tellos Agras formed the backbone of the literary generation of that era. The well-known generation of the 1930s generously offered its gifts to the poets of the decades that followed. Many of its later representatives, such as the Nobelists George Seferis and Odysseas Elytis, but also other great figures of Greek poetic art like Yiannis Ritsos, Andreas Embiricos, and Nikos Eggonopoulos, sparingly gave the world the first samples of their astonishing works through an intellectual climate of innovation and questioning, thus creating Greek Modernism. This avant-garde art myth was not only about poetry, but also about prose which, with representatives such as Angelos Terzakis, M. Karagatsis, Menelaos Lountemis, Elias Venezis, Georgios Theotokas and Kosmas Politis, transferred Greek prose from the idyllic countryside to the cities, close to the concerns, fears, dreams and hopes of post-war man.^{xxvii}

The domestic visual arts, with painting as the main focus, flourished during the same period. The intense anthropocentrism of the subjects of the compositions would be rendered with a particular emphasis on drawing rather than color, while the notion of tradition and *Greekness* sharply reappeared in the quests of young painters, who seemed to be searching for their roots. The allegorical and religious compositions of Konstantinos Parthenis were considered as the continuation of ancient Greek and Byzantine art, as were the evocative works of the anthropocentric, but less 'navel-gazing' Yiannis Tsarouchis, who sought the Greek tradition through further sources of inspiration, including the Renaissance and Modern art.^{xxviii} The artistic pursuits of Georgios Gounaropoulos, famous for his works which represented ethereal, poetic figures, mainly inspired from the classic black- and red-figured ancient Greek vessels, but also the strictly Byzantine style of the work of the Asia Minor artist Photis Kontoglou, who

rejected anything related to Western art, were contrasted with the work of Spyros Papaloukas. Papaloukas approached Greek tradition through the provocative lens of the new Western conquests in art. The work of Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghikas, who painted landscapes, interiors and still-life in a post-cubist style bathed in Greek light, also moved in the same modern style.^{xxix}

The generation of the 1930s, in the broad context of reflection and contemplation on the search for national identity, developed other forms of art which were directly linked to the concept of 'primitive' or 'popular' expression. These art forms, which were directly related to folklore, were reflected in the work of self-taught folk artists such as Theophilos (Hatzimichael or Kefalas), known for his naive work inspired from Greek Antiquity and Byzantium, the popular Karagiozis shadow puppet theater,^{xxx} the craftsmen of traditional professions, the artisans, etc.

Interwar architecture was characterized by a shift to European modernism, albeit quite out of date. There were many new forms of public and private buildings that transformed, especially in Athens and its wider area, but also the major cities of the country, in densely populated urban centers. Thus, a new urban environment was slowly taking shape with new types of buildings such as schools, hospitals, factories, and refugee housing.

In Athens, however, for the first time there is the appearance of a new type of housing, *the apartment building*, widely known as *polykatoikia*. This type of modern domicile was constructed of reinforced concrete and bore all the innovations of European and American architecture of the time: elevators, central heating and water supply, gas and later electricity for lighting indoor and public spaces alike.

The social housing sector, due to the immediate housing of large numbers of refugees from Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, and Pontus, proved to be a big challenge for the government of the time. It was difficult for their housing to be completed by a State that had no previous experience in housing programs and, in addition, its financial resources were limited due to the defeat in the Asia Minor Campaign and the wars that had preceded it. However, as early as the mid-1920s, the construction of new settlements began on the periphery of Athens and Piraeus, thus laying the foundations for the creation of the social housing sector, since in this way thousands of refugees were housed.^{xxxi}

Despite the difficult political, social and economic conditions that followed the Asia Minor Catastrophe, but also partly due to inflation, industrial activity began to grow rapidly. Refugees, with their triple role, as a large consumer population that led to the expansion of the domestic market, as a strong workforce, and also as very capable entrepreneurs, were undoubtedly the most valuable contribution to the realization of the miracle of rapid industrial development.

At the same time, the inflow of foreign capital into the country created increased liquidity, while inflation often pushed the conversion of liquid assets into fixed assets. Building material industries – particularly favored by huge housing needs, especially in Athens and Thessaloniki, which had suffered the devastating fire of 1917 – as well as textiles, food, cigarettes, chemicals, metalwork, ceramics and many basic goods industries, were at the forefront of industrial expansion.^{xxxii}

However, culture in its broadest sense is also characterized by other activities that were perhaps more popular than history, art, and architecture for most Greeks of the time, such as entertainment and recreation. Thus, during the period of our interest, these types of cultural activities were very intense and almost always linked with the political, economic and social developments of the time. In the mid-1920s, amid multiple socio-political upheavals, Athenian society was confused. In addition to the tragic catastrophe in Asia Minor, phenomena such as galloping inflation, impoverishment of the masses, and scandals and frauds in food, were sweeping through the lower social classes. Opposed to these developments, was not only the secular life of the upper social strata, but also that of the lower ones, in different forms of entertainment. For example, the Rembetika songs that were composed so as to be addressed mainly to the working and marginal strata, began to be imbued with the refugee drama and to be enriched with many features of oriental music thus constituting a form of fun and relaxation for the people of the poor and degraded suburbs of Piraeus.^{xxxiii} It was then that the Greek folk music orchestra began to expand, adopting instruments such as the baglama, the soizia, the tamboura, the violin, the oud and the canon. Rebetika soon began to incorporate the cultural influences of the refugees, the results of which gradually became known as ‘Smyrnaean songs’. However, in no time, they became synonymous with both Turkish culture, which automatically sent them to oblivion in the national consciousness for obvious reasons, and with ‘marginal culture’, which is why they were thought to be the kind of songs aimed at the lower classes and marginal individuals.

Also, other types of music, such as classical and symphonic music, but also light, artistic songs showed great development and acceptance by the Greek audience with representatives who left a heavy legacy to the following generations of Greek musicians and singers and of course, they were mainly addressed to the upper social classes of Athens.

Manolis Kalomiris, a composer heavily influenced by Richard Wagner's music vocabulary, had shown his synthetic talent through his new stylish musical ideas since the first decades of the 20th century. However, he continued to be a distinctive composer of many kinds of serious music such as opera, chamber music, and symphonies during the interwar period, too. It should also be mentioned that his contribution to music education was fundamental. At a time when music education existed only in Athens and the programs of the Athens Conservatory were written only in French, he founded conservatories throughout Greece and wrote musico-pedagogical works in Modern Greek, adapted to the needs of Greek music students. Of particular importance was the work of the then-young music composer Nikolaos Skalkotas, which included symphonic works, piano concertos, folk ballet, etc. Although distinguished for its originality and ingenuity, his work did not become widespread until after his death in 1949.^{xxxiv} Both composers stood out for their significant efforts to produce contemporary and original work which nevertheless would bear all the characteristics of the authentic Greek tradition and history - that is, what characterized the Greek artists of every art form of that period.

The artistic songs of the time were represented by two great personalities of the Greek music scene: Attik (Kleonas Triantafyllou) and Costas Giannidis (Giannis Konstantinidis), who both settled in Athens in 1930, coming from Paris and Berlin respectively. 'Attik's Mandra' was a multifaceted musical/literary cabaret which soon became an entertainment reference point for Athenians, but also for the people of the province, as it successfully presented shows with celebrated singers, artists and mimes.^{xxxv}

On the other hand, Costas Giannidis' orchestra dominated the discography field, which seemed to be developing rapidly at that time. He, together with the composers Christos Hairopoulos and Michalis Sougioul, wrote songs that became extremely popular, after being performed by the famous singers of the time Sofia Vembo and Danae Stratigopoulou.

Cinema had become a popular form of entertainment for all walks of life, reducing not only the audience of the theater, but also of the traditional shadow puppet theater. Of course, it had already begun to be established as

an important type of entertainment since the beginning of the century when the first cinemas appeared, but these were used as *cinematheatres* - that is, as places that sometimes staged theatrical performances and sometimes screened films.

At the end of 1910, there were already six cinemas in Athens: 'Kosmos', 'Royal', 'Variety', 'Pathé Frères', 'Rome' and 'Hellas'. Most of them had a pianist who accompanied the silent movies. During the interwar period, their number increased to thirteen, and all of them had huge success with almost any film they screened.^{xxxvi}

Although theatre, the traditional form of entertainment of the Greeks for many decades, was going through a crisis, it did not completely lose its audience, as it seemed to be beginning to adapt to the new socio-political conditions. By staging vaudevilles, revues and satires, it managed to successfully transfer political and social events to the stage in order to present them to the audience in a pleasant, witty, mocking, but also poignant way. Apart from the big troupes of the well-known protagonists Kyveli and Marika Kotopouli, many lesser-known ones which toured the Greek countryside to confront the crisis, also appeared.

Notes

¹ Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Emigres and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 4.

² The 'Treaty of Versailles' (1919) is the peace treaty that officially ended World War I and was signed between the victorious countries which were France, the United States of America, Great Britain, other allied countries and the German Empire. This treaty, according to many historians, created the conditions for World War II to follow because of the unbearable financial reparations that had to be paid by the defeated Germans, leading them to a financial impasse. German citizens in the face of economic misery and humiliation were trapped in Hitler's National Socialism, which came to power with the slogan of annulment of the treaty and the national uprising of the country.

³ The League of Nations, the first international, intergovernmental organization, was founded shortly after World War I, with an initial number of forty-two Member countries, including twenty-six non-European countries, while just before World War II that number rose to fifty-seven. It was founded in January 1920 after strong demands from the peoples of France, South Africa, Britain and the US who advocated that a world international organization could prevent the recurrence of the horrors of World War I. After all, at the time, it was possible for an effective global organization to be set up, given that communication had greatly improved and there was a great deal of cooperation experience within international organizations. Thus,

coordination and cooperation for economic and social progress began to gain importance. One of the main goals of the organization was also to protect weak countries from the hostile attacks of other stronger ones. But with the declaration of World War II, it became clear that the League of Nations had failed in its main goal, which was to maintain peace, and consequently some years later it ceased operations.

⁴ Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain, and Romania, 1870–1945* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 3.

⁵ Bernard C. Beaudreau, *Mass Production, the Stock Market Crash, and the Great Depression: The Macroeconomics of Electrification* (New York: Author's Choice Press, 1996), 17.

⁶ Vassilios Skoulatos, Nikolaos Dimakopoulos and Sotirios Kondis, *Ιστορία Νεότερη και Σύγχρονη (Modern and Contemporary History)*, Vol. C (Athens: OEDV, 1999), 154-173.

⁷ The Bauhaus School was moved in 1925 to Dessau and in 1932 to Berlin. A year later, it suspended operations due to the conservative, perhaps modernophobic, ideology of Adolf Hitler himself, while many of the school's teachers and artists were exiled.

⁸ Richard Kostelanetz, *A Dictionary of the Avant-Gardes* (London: Routledge, 2001), 49.

⁹ Surrealism was inextricably linked to the interwar period, and between 1918 and 1940 it coexisted with social, political, scientific and philosophical events, from which it received profound influences. Its birth took place in a Europe of winners and losers, where winners were in a state of misery that was different from that of losers: it was not only a material misery, but also a moral one. The main goal of the Surrealists, both through writing and painting, was the exploration of the psychoanalytic method and psychic world initiated by Freud. Through his scientific positions, they tried to transform the worlds of dream and reality into a kind of absolute reality, or hyperreality (surréalité in French).

¹⁰ Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton and Ghislaine Wood, *Art Deco: 1910–1939* (New York: Bulfinch, 2003) 16.

¹¹ It was then that Warner Bros. introduced a new invention: the famous *Vitaphone device*, which made it possible to play music via a disc synchronized with the movie projector. The first film to be released with the help of this device was *The Jazz Singer* which, although silent for the most part, was the first to contain dialogue.

¹² The American Wide Screen Museum, 'What? Color in the Movies Again?' *Fortune Magazine* (1934): 1.

¹³ Pavlos Kountouriotis, born in Hydra in 1855, was an admiral of the Royal Navy, chief of the General Staff of the Navy and commander of the Fleet II. He participated in the government of Thessaloniki as a member of the Trinity and was twice President of the Republic of Greece.

¹⁴ For the past thirteen years, Greece had faced a series of intense political and military events which marked its development in recent history. Some of them are the Movement of the Military League in Goudi in 1909, the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, its participation in World War I in the years 1917-1918, and the Asia Minor Campaign from 1919 to 1922.

¹⁵ Dionyssios Kokkinos, *Ιστορία της Νεωτέρας Ελλάδος (History of Modern Greece)*, Vol. II (Athens: Melissa Publishing House, 1978), 1361, 1362.

¹⁶ Elsa Kontogiorgi, 'Η αποκατάσταση: 1922-1930' ('The rehabilitation: 1922-1930'), in *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού: Ο Μεσοπόλεμος 1922-1940 (History of Modern Hellenism: The Interwar Period 1922-1940)*, Vol. 7 (Athens: Hellinika Grammata Publications, 2003), 179.

¹⁷ Fanourios K. Voros, *Μικρασιατικός Πόλεμος, Θέμα Νεότερης και Σύγχρονης Ιστορίας από τις πηγές (Minor Asia War, Subject in Modern and Contemporary History from the sources)* (Athens: OEDV, 1992), 398, 399.

¹⁸ Eleftherios Venizelos, after the sinking of the Great Idea and the Asia Minor Catastrophe, turned to the recovery of the country. A basic condition was the final settlement of the outstanding issues with Turkey and the conclusion of a friendship agreement with the neighboring country, which would allow Greece to deal with its reorganization on a new basis, undisturbed by external risks. The price of Venizelos' turn, however, with the signing of the Greek-Turkish Friendship Pact was high as it brought him face to face with the refugees who until then had considered him their savior.

¹⁹ Mainly houses for the housing of refugees, but also large land improvement projects in the countryside.

²⁰ Giorgos Alexatos, 'Η Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου και ο φασισμός (Προδημοσίευση) Μέρος 1ο: Κοινωνικές και ιδεολογικοπολιτικές αντιθέσεις στην περίοδο 1922-36' ('Greece between the Wars and Fascism (Pre-publication) Part 1: Social and ideological and political contrasts in the period 1922-1936'). *To Periodiko*. March 11, 2016, <http://www.toperiodiko.gr>.

²¹ Costas Vergopoulos, *Εθνισμός και οικονομική ανάπτυξη, η Ελλάδα στο μεσοπόλεμο (Ethnism and economic development, Greece during the interwar years)* (Athens: Exantas, 1993), 99.

²² Ioannis (Michael) Metaxas (1871-1941) was an officer of the Greek Army and took part in the Balkan Wars. Having an active role in the political life of the country, in 1936, amidst various conjunctures, he was appointed the Prime Minister of Greece, replacing the late Prime Minister Konstantinos Demertzis, and then led the way in imposing a dictatorial regime, ruling until his death in 1941. He went down in history for the rejection of the ultimatum of fascist Italy of October 28, 1940, for the rapid military preparations of Greece in view of the Greek-Italian war and the subsequent German invasion of Greece in April 1941.

²³ Gregorios Dafnis, *Η Ελλάς μεταξύ δύο πολέμων 1923-1940 (Greece between two wars 1923-1940)* (Athens: Kaktos publications, 1997), 401.

²⁴ Spyridon G. Ploumides, 'Το καθεστώς Μεταξά 1936-1940' ('The Metaxa regime 1936-1940'), in Evanthes Hatzivassiliou (ed.), *Η δικτατορία του Ιωάννη Μεταξά 1936-1941 (Ioannis Metaxa's dictatorship 1936-1941)*, *Ta Nea* (2010): 49.

²⁵ Christopher M. Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece* (Introduction by Richard Clogg) (London: Hurst & Company, 2002), x.

²⁶ Kostantinos G. Karyotakis, *Άπαντα (Complete Works)* (Athens: Zacharopoulos S.I. Publications, 2012), 6.

²⁷ Lambrini Kouzeli, 'Η γενιά του '30 δεν υπήρξε' ('The generation of the 30s never existed'), *To Vima* (2011): 18.

²⁸ Georges Gilson, ‘Γιάννης Τσαρούχης’ (‘Yiannis Tsarouchis’), *To Vima* (1999): 35.

²⁹ Its island origin (Hydra) played an important role in shaping its aesthetics, as it allowed it to combine elements of geometric cubism, architecture, and light. He himself had stated that he was deeply influenced by Matisse’s work, but the influence he received from the Cubists Braque and Picasso was also significant.

³⁰ The traditional Turkish and Greek shadow puppet theater, which in many cases is named after its protagonist, the well-known *Karagiozis* (*Karagöz* in Turkish, means the black-eyed man). In Greece, *Karagiozis*, as a popular hero, representing the poor, impoverished, and cunning Greek in the difficult environment of the times of the Ottoman rule. He is ugly and hunchbacked, but smart, and is always surrounded by family and friends. He lives in a shabby shack, is barefoot and dressed in poor clothes, and lives opposite the luxurious palace of the Vizier (*Seray*, in Turkish), thus indicating the chaotic class and economic differences between the two. As early as the 19th century, and especially in the years following the Greek Revolution of 1821, the themes of the shadow puppet theater were satirical and symbolic, causing laughter but also concern within the spectators as they often referred to real and contemporary issues.

³¹ Vika Gizeli, *Κοινωνικοί μετασχηματισμοί και προέλευση της κοινωνικής κατοικίας στην Ελλάδα 1920-1930* (*Social transformations and the origin of social housing in Greece 1920-1930*) (Athens: Epikairobita Publications, 1984), 45.

³² Christina Agriantoni and Georgia Panselina, *Η ελληνική οικονομία. Διεθνής κρίση και εθνικός προστατευτισμός* (*The Greek economy. International crisis and national protectionism*), in V. Panagiotopoulos (ed.), *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού 1770-2000* (*History of Modern Hellenism 1770-2000*), vol. 7 (Athens: Ellinika Grammata Publications, 2003), 126.

³³ Elias Petropoulos, *Ρεμπτολογία* (*Rembetology*), 2nd Edition (Athens: Kedros Publications, 1990), 18.

³⁴ His works include the famous ‘36 Greek Dances for Orchestra’ and the folk ballet ‘The Sea’, which incorporate elements of Greek folk music in a completely personal and innovative way. Skalkotas sought to capture the essence of our national heritage, contributing in his own way to the formation of modern Greek culture.

³⁵ It was, in fact, an art group, formed in the summer of 1930, when a police officer pointed out to Attik himself a free stockyard (mandra in Greek) on Mithymnis Street, near Agamon Square, in the center of Athens. Over the next few years, the small wooden shack placed there to house Attik’s theatrical sketches and songs was transformed into a beautiful stage on which many talented artists acted and a new generation of animators, actors, singers, mimes and generally young artists was born. The performances, according to Attik’s ideology, were usually interactive; anyone could go on stage and show their talent in singing, poetry, dance, and acting.

³⁶ Katerina Assimakopoulou, ‘Σινέ Αστρον: Η ιστορία ενός κινηματογράφου που κατάφερε να μη γίνει σουπερμάρκετ’ (‘Cine Astron: the story of a cinema that managed not to become a supermarket’), *VimaDeco* (2013): 29.

CHAPTER TWO

ART AND DESIGN IN THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES – THE ROLE OF THE ATHENS SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS

2a) Art in a newly born State

After the 1821 Revolution and the erratic decade that followed until the partial stabilization of the political situation, Greece of the 1830s was found to be a small country with limited territory, almost destroyed by the War of Independence, with a largely rural population and with minimal infrastructure. Agricultural production, as well as the urban sector, had suffered enormous damage and needed time to be rebuilt. During the creation of the Hellenic Kingdom, the main centers of culture and trade that indicated the Greek economic renaissance in the late 18th and early 19th centuries such as Izmir, in Asia Minor, Istanbul in eastern Thrace, and even Volos in Thessaly and Thessaloniki in Macedonia were outside the borders of the newly independent state. It was, therefore, expected that the new Greece would not be, at least at that time, the center of Hellenism, since it did not include any important big city in its territory. The modern Greek state literally began its historical course in the 1830s, after a decade of hard struggles, major disasters, and significant human losses. The restoration of order, even the basic functioning of the state and the beginning of reconstruction, was the main objective of the administration of the Bavarian King Otto (1815-1867).^{2; 3} The Bavarian government had tried to lay the foundations of a modern, European type state, but the difficulties were often insurmountable. During this transitional period, the newly arrived European state institutions coexisted, but also clashed with the Greek people's established perceptions, much influenced and shaped by the Ottoman culture. However, even during Otto's reign, the government demanded discipline, obedience and respect – to the state, laws and institutions – from the Greeks, who, in order to survive the long Ottoman rule, were used to maneuvering between the Sultan's decisions, the orders of the Greek chieftains, and the sermons of the Greek Orthodox priests. However, the