



ANAPLOUS
CULTURAL & EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS

THE PAINTING OF YANNIS MANGANARIS

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PAINTING OF PERSONAL SURREALISM OF THOUGHT- PROVOKING SPACES, OF IMAGINATIVE COMBINATIONS, INSINUATING TYPES AND POETIC FORMULATIONS.

An artist with first-class studies at the Athens School of Fine Arts, a pupil of Parthenis in painting and of Kefalinos in engraving, of Papaloukas and of Klonis in stage design, Yannis Manganaris has given us works with a wealth of extensions of expression. He was an Alexandrian, born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1918 but studied in Greece and, when he returned to Alexandria, was a leading light in all sorts of cultural events. In fact, besides painting, he was also occupied with literature, in particular the study of Kavafy and Tsirkas, where he distinguished himself for his original and fertile positions.

His work was shown in numerous exhibitions in Egypt, Greece and other centres of cultural dynamism, culminating in the major retrospective exhibition inaugurated in September 2009 at the Megaron Eynardou in Athens. Yannis Manganaris left our world of the living in 2007, in Athens. But the characteristics of his work, consisting in the artist's preference for working on and presenting it in entities – not at all unusual also for many other painters and not only of our epoch – with such titles as Waters, Clouds, Stones are of assistance in our approach better to study the edition of exceptional quality published in 2009 by ANAPLOUS Cultural & Educational Projects, Yannis Manganaris. It is in four languages, Greek, English, French and Arabic and, without of course being an exhaustive presentation of the entire spectrum of the artist's creative output – hundreds of oils and other techniques, and thousands of drawings – it gives us the possibility and the opportunity to get to know the characteristics determining the special place he occupies, in an overview of his course of creation. We may moreover observe the serene and purely personal manner in which his quests continue on, from his student days at the School of Fine Arts, the spirit of Parthenis's painting, the character of Kefalinos's line, to an ever more clearly evidenced liberated and personal idiom of painting, even than the trends of artists of the pioneering movements.

There is no room for doubt that Yannis Manganaris evolves in the framework of Realism and that he had a preference for portraiture, where he can but remain faithful to the visual reality. It may easily be seen in the works typical of him, particularly in pencil and charcoal, such as his Self-Portrait, the Portrait of his Sister and of his Mother, that beyond the external identity and realistic precision, the artist aspires to and succeeds in transmitting to the viewer something of the individual character of the subjects portrayed, he is capable of psychological insight. Thus, in his Self-Portrait, the head with well-groomed hair, lively eyes, relatively pronounced nose, full lips and jutting chin, reveal a person of strong will for himself, with certainty of his capacities and decisive about being a winner in life. Even his rendering of the three quarters and the whole facial expression lead in essence to



the same ascertainment. In his sister's portrait on the contrary, there is a hesitancy, a doubt, whether in the eyes or more in the rather compressed lips as well as a look with some perplexity. In other portraits there is no lack of idealistic elements, as well as in some instances, of a certain tendency of schematization. This is more noticeable in his oil paintings of subjects of diverse categories, human faces, mothers with children in their arms, compositions, nudes. In some of the works of this group, such as the Portrait of a Woman of 1949 in the Antonis Papadimitriou Collection, realistic and idealistic elements are wonderfully combined to give a whole distinguished by the delicacy of colour and its purely poetic inspiration. In the same early period of his creations Manganaris does not neglect abstract trends, both in geometric and Expressionist abstraction, evidenced in some of his works. He does not however seem to have been carried away in this direction, since in accented schematization such as the Building with Sheafs of 1955; Egypt, Lake Mariut of 1958; Bouquet of Flowers of 1959; The Paper Kite of 1959; Tenderness of 1959, together with others, he attains exceptional results of expression.

In the ensuing period, from 1963 - 1972, there is no doubt that without entirely sacrificing visual reality but also without being completely impelled toward abstract trends, he experiments with diverse directions, even in thematic areas. An element that in any case appears to prevail in all topics occupying him: heads, landscapes, full human figures, animals and various combinations is ever greater schematization and a neutral at times and at others undefined thought-provoking space. Manganaris's ever more accented schematization may be more clearly seen – as well as the purposely undefined space – in typical examples of his work, the watercolours, with the 1969 Landscapes, the series with horses of 1966, and much more complete in the 1970 Flight, where a purely personal surrealist morphoplastic idiom. All the elements give rise to questions and insinuate, the colours grey and bluish, cold, the whole is all queries. In 1970 exactly, Manganaris seems to decide to turn more definitely to Surrealism, with emphasis on enigmatic and questioning themes, the curious combinations of human figures with architectural types, in such works as Man and Environment, painted in that same year. We have in essence the same elements also in watercolours of landscapes of 1972, in which again specific scenery is not depicted, they are instead imaginary, with emphasis once more on every sort of colour combinations.

In the years following the period of 1973-1983, the artist's tendency in this same direction becomes ever more clearly evident. What in fact now makes a greater impression than the purely personal morphoplastic surrealist idiom of the painter is among others the more accented poetic character of the whole. This is better noticed in works such as The Goddess of the Yellow Bush of 1967- 68, wherein everything is fragmentary, insinuated, and it is the colours, especially tending to brown and orange which, in combination with the questioning of the setting, give the whole a purely poetic dimension. Works such as the Embrace of 1973 are even more clearly based on schematization, where the theme of Mother and Child appears as a single curved whole. From now on there is in fact an ever increasing development of curve-shaped themes, giving new extensions of expression to the paintings. Also from now on in most works the artist restricts his palette ever more to hues of grey, pale blues, and in some instances pale brown. The manner in which his purely personal surrealism



is also based on the thought-provoking and insinuating characteristics may be seen in typical works of Manganaris such as *Woman-Island* of 1969; *Arrowing and The Eye* of 1970; *Pebbles* of 1972-73; *Play of Light* of 1972-74; *Clashing Rocks* of 1973-74 as well as others. Curve-shaped themes are used, starting from stones, in works such as *Intercourse* of 1974 and *Love and Death* of 1975, where beyond thematographic values the setting too questions, insinuates and is opaque, while only greyish and pale brown colour is used, with special emphasis on tonal gradations. In a series of subsequent works it appears that the artist does not wish to have correspondence of title and image, as in *Face Down*; *Cross-Legged*; *Forbearance*; *Motherhood*; *Solitude*, all of 1974-75. There are curious combinations of shapes starting from stones, always shown in an undefined and questioning setting approaching the type of work of another surrealist, Yves Tanguy. Many typical works dating to the years 1975-83 in essence have the same atmosphere, where any possible relation between subject and title is sought. In many of these in fact the painter sets out from the human figure, as in *Endurance* of 1977, *Gazing at the View* of 1978-80, *Motherhood*, *Stones*, *Giants*, *Woman and Sun*, all of 1978-1980. Other works, dating to 1975-1985 have the same orientation: *At the Seaside*; *The Rear*; *Affection*; *Stones*, appearing as diversifications of the artist's previous personal types. There is no doubt that it is in this period that Manganaris establishes his purely personal surrealist morphoplastic idiom, with the insinuating elements, the questioning setting and imaginary combinations which – even when they start out from visual reality: stones, clouds and others – are transported to an unreality, surreal with types of the imagination.

In the works of Manganaris's last creative period, of 1984-2006, we see the finalization and definitive formulation of all his questing. Indeed, it is now possible to itemize all the foregoing experimentation and note the outcome in an expressionist entity. The course toward an ever greater simplification and schematization is found in typical drawings of the artist executed after 1984, starting out from the theme of the human face and human form in general. His oils also have the same morphoplastic characteristics where, naturally, the tone is given by his personal surrealist formulation, with a deliberate thematic indefinition, the space open to questioning and typical insinuating elements in numerous instances. In these works too, the human figure is latent: standing, seated or lying down. Their purely surrealist direction is also marked by the manner in which other subjects are interposed – plants and others – giving the works fresh dimensions of expression. These are notable in works such as *Stones – Vegetation*; *Stones - Flower*, both of 1988; *Asphodel* of 1989; *Ram's horn* of 1990, a work in which are combined hard acute-angled themes with the biomorphic and curved. There is however no doubt that during this period too the artist does not give up the human form, the human body as starting point, in works typical of him such as *Wet-nurse* of 1990; *Titan* of 1977; *Stones – Vegetation* of 1990-92; *Stones - Life* of 1990, and even more clearly in *On the beach* of 1990 with a female form lying on some beach. Most impressive in most of Manganaris's last works, together with the surrealist voice and the use of the human body, always in a questioning and insinuating manner is his tendency to monumentalize. This is noticeable in *The death of Herakles* of 1992; *The Eclipse* of 1993-4; *Communication* of 1998-2000 and *Couple* of 2005, where once more he reverts to the questioning rendition of two bodies: male and female, and the emphasis on the biomorphic and purely curved themes.



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In his permanently restless creativity, in all phases of his artistic career, Yannis Manganaris is distinguished for the extent and character of his questing. Without being confined to any precise stylistic direction nor a restricted thematographic area, he has given us distinctive and significant works. Paintings using the surrealist morphoplastic vocabulary in a manner peculiar to himself, giving us the effect of their sincerity and truth of expression, their immediacy, spontaneity and wealth of formulations. These works, without startling the viewer, are persuasive of the quality, the character and the poetic dimension of their voice.

February 2010

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