

**Giorgos Ioannou (1926-2017)
POP?**

Kalfayan Galleries (11 Haritos Street, Athens, Greece)

Opening: Thursday, 4 July 2024, 20:00-22.00

Duration: 4 July - 21 September 2024

Opening Hours:

JULY: Monday 11.00 - 15.00 | Tuesday - Friday 11.00 - 19.00 | Saturday 11.00 – 15.00

AUGUST: The gallery will remain closed

Kalfayan Galleries (Haritos 11, Kolonaki, Athens) present the exhibition “Giorgos Ioannou (1926 - 2017) – POP?”. The exhibition is the starting point of a series of future projects aimed at promoting - both in Greece and abroad - the work of Ioannou, one of the most important painters of the post-war period. A collector of images and objects with influences from comic books and Pop Art to Art Nouveau, Ioannou developed a purely personal visual idiom where the experience becomes an image, the comic co-exists organically with caustic socio-political commentary, personal memory meets collective memory, the present goes hand in hand with the past, and reality intertwines with the imaginary.

The exhibition presents works mainly from the 1970s and illuminates the hybrid, essentially anti-pop character of Ioannou's work. He clearly used the language of Pop Art (comics, posters, product packaging) but he never embraced the Pop culture of his time. On the contrary, Ioannou was suspicious of it. The Pop Art of the Greek artist was denunciatory and did not share the optimism of its American manifestation. Ioannou appropriates the visual language of pop art to aggressively criticize on the one hand the political situation and on the other hand the emerging, at the time, culture of mass consumption and its symbolic use in the Western world as a synonym for freedom.

It is no coincidence that he first used the expressive vocabulary of Pop Art -mainly inspired by the style of comics (saturated flat color, strict black outline) - as soon as he felt the need to denounce the dictatorship (1967-1974) in Greece. Thus he joined a radical tradition of artists whose artistic practice dictates an immediate and urgent response to the socio-political realities of their time and who use a clear and explicit artistic vocabulary that allows for the message to be as direct as possible: as the use of caricature by George Grosz in the 1920s or photomontage as used by John Heartfield in the 1930s as well as by Martha Rosler and Linder Sterling in the 1960s and 1970s. Ioannou utilizes the visual language of comic books in a similar way: to construct a highly direct and immediate vocabulary that can express clearly and effectively his urgent political message of aphorism/protest during a dark period of modern Greek history.

The main axis of the exhibition are works from the 1970s that combine features of Pop Art with elements of Folk Art and Surrealism, which compose an idiosyncratic painterly language, a distinct trend in Greek painting of the period. The exhibition also includes early works which demonstrate his first attempts in using posters as visual elements in the composition, as well as works from the 1980s when Giorgos Ioannou, while still using the visual idiom of Pop Art, has moved on to different explorations of subject-matter, a purely introvert, solitary kind of Painting.

Short biography:

Giorgos (Georges) Ioannou (1926-2017) was one of the most prominent post-war Greek artists. Born in Athens in 1926, he studied painting in Athens and Paris.

His work was presented in numerous international exhibitions: 35th Biennale di Venezia (1970); “The Panorama of Greek Painting 1950-1975”, Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund 1976; Il Biennale delle Regioni, Italy; Intergrafik, Berlin; ‘Regard ’73’, Brussels; Centre Culturel d’ Ostende; Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, Stuttgart; ‘Europa Arte’, Italy; Europalia 1982 (Brussels, Antwerp); Salon International de l’Art Libre, Paris; EU Building, Brussels et al. Galleries exhibiting his work include: ‘Isy Brachot’,

Brussels; 'Grosvenor Galleries', London; 'English Speaking Union', Edinburgh; 'Ateneului Roman', Bucharest; 'CNA Gallery', Chicago.

In 1959 he presented his first solo exhibition at the Zygos Gallery in Athens, with works of an impressionistic style. However, after his studies in Paris and his return to Greece he adopts a personal style with pronounced elements from comic strips and pop art. Past and present coexist in lyrical, often enigmatic images of a strong symbolic character and with a clear critical attitude towards social and political issues. In his works he often incorporates elements from the contemporary technological culture and satirizes the current political and cultural environment while denouncing consumerism.

In 1965 he received the 1st Prize in Europa Arte's "Pergamenta d'Onore", and in 1966 he was awarded at the "Prix Europa de Peinture de la Ville d'Ostende", the prize being a solo exhibition at the Musée des Beaux Arts d'Ostende, and was held in April 1968. The judging panel included Hodin, Apollonio, Argan, Penrose, Restany and Matney. The artist was also an award recipient at 'Il Biennale delle Regioni' and 'Premio Internazionale Europa Arte' in Italy.

In 1981 the Papazissis publishing house published the art book 'Album 1940-1974' with one hundred monotypes. This body of work was dealing with troubled historic periods of Greece, the Nazi Occupation of Athens, the Resistance Movement, the Civil War and the Dictatorship of 1967-1974. In 2002 the I. Sideris publishing house published the book 'Athens through postcards from the past' containing a part of his collection of postcards. Ioannou has published numerous articles in newspapers and magazines in Athens.

In 2012 he was awarded by the Academy of Athens for his lifetime body of work. Giorgos Ioannou passed away in 2017 in Athens, leaving behind an immense body of work spanning over five decades.

In 2022 a retrospective exhibition of his work (curated by Christoforos Marinos) was presented at the City of Athens Art Gallery and in 2023 a second retrospective exhibition was presented at Casa Bianca in Thessaloniki, Greece.