

A. DIAMANTIS

(CYPRUS)



COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE
ART GALLERY

Kensington High Street London W8
Thursday 9 April — Sunday 3 May 1964

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We continue our practice with one-man exhibitions by devoting half the gallery to a retrospective showing of oil paintings and drawings by A. Diamantis of Cyprus, who has most kindly sent all the exhibits from his Island home.

Diamantis was represented in our inaugural exhibition "Commonwealth Art To-day" in November, 1962, by "Trouble", which is included in this one-man show and which is notable for its effective use of primary colour. The qualities of that work, the deep sincerity and probity of the interpretation of visual experience and idea, are consistent throughout his painting and drawing, and we are grateful to the artist for his co-operation and pleased that he should be the first from Cyprus to be given a one-man exhibition in our Art Gallery.

DONALD BOWEN
ASSISTANT CURATOR (ART)
Commonwealth Institute

Biographical Note

I was born in Cyprus in 1900 and educated at the main Greek secondary school in Nicosia. In 1923 I graduated from the Royal College of Art in London and returned to Cyprus where I worked on my own and as an Art Master in my old school until 1962. In 1950 I held a comprehensive exhibition of my pupils' work in Athens. I also started a campaign for the collection of folk art and organised the Cyprus Folk Museum which I direct.

Painting has been my main occupation—Cyprus, with its scenery, villages and people, my interest. I have always been impressed by the traditions, language and dress, and the ethics, behaviour and habits which the Island has inherited as a unique living interest from Homeric and archaic times through its chequered history. The outside world filtered through to me by means of books and reproductions, but could not shake me from a vivid dream of a girl, half-hidden behind a wall, a real Doric 'Hydrophoros', and the eternal motive of mother and child. This was absorbed by me and became one with me. I sketched everywhere and painted in the studio.

In 1957 I held a retrospective exhibition in Nicosia with 116 paintings and drawings, and in 1962 an exhibition of 73 paintings in Athens, at the invitation of the Greek Government.

I am fully conscious of what is happening in art to-day. I feel it fully expresses our times. I admire and I am impressed by the daring, the invention and the exploration of the existing world for new aesthetic values. However, I disagree with the prevalent boneless imitation of this real and authentic exotic material. I also disagree with the apparent cynicism in artistic expression and the strong link with all-powerful business.

Personally, I will remain faithful to my world as long as it exists, is true and alive, and continues to inspire my respect. This world may be a much transformed remnant of the past, but it has been a continuous source of inspiration to me.

A. DIAMANTIS

A Friend's Appreciation

When I met Diamantis the artist for the first time his hair was white, but his body, slim and supple, had youthful energy. It was during my first visit to Cyprus, towards the end of the autumn, about eleven years ago. Then, and later too, I went round the Island with him, his eyes and mine in tune with what we saw together. He was one of those people one takes to straight away; he radiated love and so did his painting. Since then we have met on rare occasions, as chance decreed, but his presence is always in my memory, both during good and bad moments.

To live continually surrounded by paintings does not give me much pleasure; to live permanently with them tires me—tires them, too, I should say—nevertheless, I have two things of Diamantis's I often look at. The one, an oil, is a painting of hazelnuts thrown on to a chair. They remind me of what Georges Braque wrote: "It is not enough to make others see what you paint, you must make them touch it". I would say that in his best work it is this 'touch' that Diamantis gives us. The other is a sketch. It represents a priest, enormous, like Zeus. It was, I remember, one golden day in the yard surrounding one of the many small churches to be found all over the Island, which testify to the tenacity of its disparaged people, to its traditions, after so many centuries and so many misfortunes. Diamantis had paper and pencils with him. He drew a few vigorous lines. "I like your drawing", I told him. "This priest is archaic", he replied, "as deep-rooted as an ancient tree".

Looking at these two pictures I think of Diamantis once more. After studying at the Royal College of Art in London he returned to his Island and took the road of isolation, a dangerous road which so often leads us to aridity. Nevertheless, and this is what is so admirable, as the years pass you would say that Diamantis opens up new springs of freshness, the freshness of maturity, a thing which is rare indeed. I like the capacity he has to eliminate all the superfluous and to find the right tone, the one in harmony with himself. There is nothing artificial about him, he does not posture, he has no recourse to artifice, he is genuine.

The feeling in his work impresses you; he is not interested in schools and manifestos; he searches only for that which is true, the truth apparent in his clear colours, the mauves, the greens in their sap, in the yellows of a sun-drenched street.

It might be said that one is no longer up-to-date if one speaks of the expression on women's faces, when depicted with children especially, of their feeling of protective tenderness which they give out. But it is these feelings that we have treasured by recording and gazing on so many madonnas from one generation to another. They were our consolation and our inner strength. It is with these that we have lived, without empty sentiment, and we have not exhausted them yet.

I spoke about the feeling of touch that Diamantis's paintings give us. I came to understand this one day when we went together to another village on the Island. It was in an orchard which looked as if abandoned. In the middle was a ramshackle wheel-well of the kind they call 'alakatin' in Cyprus. Wooden all through, no metal at all, not even one nail, and the buckets made of pottery. Diamantis tried to set it moving. The wood groaned, he let go and stroked it with such affection, as if it were someone belonging to him. It was then I realised what his painting is nurtured by and how his life and his art are united.

(Translated from the Greek)



GEORGE SEFERIS
Athens, February, 1964

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2	THE PLANTERS II	1933		32	RECOLLECTIONS	1958
3	THE BEGGAR WOMAN	1933		33	OLD NICOSIA IV.	1958
4	THE CARD PLAYERS	1941		34	"1958"	1958
5	ARAKAS	1942		35	CURFEW	1958
6	THE GIRL	1943		36	TROUBLE	1959
7	IN THE LORRY	1943		37	OLD NICOSIA V. (houses)	1960
8	CART DRIVERS	1943		38	ON THE STEPS	1960
9	HYDROPHOROS I	1944		39	WALNUT LEAVES	1960
10	GIRL (Cyprus umber)	1945		40	THE OLD CHURCH	1960
11	ASKAS	1945		41	TOWARDS ST. GEORGE	1960
12	THE BLACK MAN	1945		42	HYDROPHOROS II	1960
13	VILLAGE FAMILY	1946		43	THE YELLOW FROCK	1961
14	TWO WOMEN (Cyprus umber)	1947		44	MOTHERHOOD	1961
15	OLD NICOSIA III	1947		45	FORMS	1961
16	SCULPTURAL (pencil)	1947		46	THREE FIGURES	1961
17	PATRIARCHAL	1948		47	"1958" (variation)	1961
18	IN THE FIELDS	1948		48	MOTHER	1961
19	STROUMBIS FOUNTAIN	1949		49	TOWARDS THE ARCHBISHOPRIC (Nicosia) VI	1961
20	THOUGHT	1949		50	ASMA-ALTI SQUARE	1961
21	THE MEETING (Cyprus umber)	1950		51	MOTHER (study for relief)	1961
22	MOTHER AND CHILD (pencil)	1951		52	MUSICIANS III	1961
23	WOMEN AND OX	1951		53	DAVLOS	1961
24	AT THE CAFÉ	1951		54	MOTHER FEEDING HER BABY	1961
25	THEODOROS THE FIDDLER	1951		55	MUSICIANS IV	1963
26	THE GREEN FROCK	1952		56	THE DONKEY RIDERS	1963
27	REVERIE	1953		57	AGONIES	1963
28	THE WINDOW	1953		58	AGONIES II (study)	1963
29	THE UNDERSTANDING	1953				
30	THE BALCONY	1957				