

**JANNIS**

**SPYROPOULOS**

**PAINTINGS 1969-71**



**DAVID JONES' ART GALLERY**  
ELIZABETH STREET, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA. NOVEMBER 9-27, 1971



Seeing the powerful, dramatic paintings of Jannis Spyropoulos for the first time you may be surprised at their darkness. Drama, passion, deep sincerity, elegance of form—these are qualities which an understanding of Greek history and character lead us to expect, or at least recognise. But from where is derived this obscurity, these brooding colours, the linear, textual components? It is with no sense of limitation that I describe Spyropoulos as a painter of Greece. The springs from which an artist draws his inspiration, the intuitional processes which cause him to select and develop a personal language, are virtually indefinable. That they should bear a close relationship to his origins, the natural aspects of the land of his birth, is not surprising. Painting, whatever else it is, is the making of marks. In the figurative painter the superficial meaning of the marks are recognisable, and for that reason sometimes misleading. The very familiarity of the objects may hide their personal significance and their universal references. A true abstract artist has no alternative but to seek the signs from within and these, once we can read them, are totally, even cruelly, revealing.

Jannis Spyropoulos is the most distinguished living Greek abstract painter, with a world-wide reputation. This achievement is all the more impressive since he is that rare phenomenon, an important and recognised artist who has remained in Greece. The very fact that he has done so indicates a deep attachment to his native soil and at the same time an ability to state, or translate, this personal situation into an art form of wide significance.

The first thing to be said about his paintings is that they are extremely beautiful to look at. Decorative in the best sense, they avoid any obvious effort to charm, any easy seduction by sensuous colour or gaiety of mood. Their beauty is at once immediate and at the same time evasive—a dichotomy surely present in all true works of art. Inherent in this beauty, which becomes evident once the paintings are examined, is superb craftsmanship. What may first appear as areas of monochrome colour, or at a distance seems to be the textural complexity of collage, are in fact brilliant, painstaking technical achievements, the work of a master painter who works with love and conviction.

It is an interesting common factor in modern Greek painters, as indeed in many of their Spanish contemporaries, that coming from a land of intense sun and light, they generally choose dark, monochrome colours and compose in linear, almost sculptural forms. If you visit Greece or Spain during the long, hot, dry periods of the year, you will soon recognise the source of these factors. In Greece the sun is not for long a friendly, life-giving phenomenon; for most of the year it drains life from nature, making dry and barren a large area of the country, bleaching the countryside and laying bare the very sinews of the earth. These sinews, the dried-up mountains, the deep-etched rocky coastline, are to be found in the paintings of Spyropoulos.



They were evident in the early landscapes and sea-scenes, in the broken, jagged, interlocking shapes and the sparse colour; now more developed, more sophisticated, rendered with more intensity and conviction they are still the principal elements in his art.

Born in an obscure town in the Peloponnese in 1912, Spyropoulos studied at the School of Fine Arts in Athens and in 1938 won a scholarship which enabled him to study in Paris for two years. Since then he has worked only in Athens. After twenty years creative development and a growing reputation in his native country and abroad, he won international acclaim in 1960 with the UNESCO Prize at the Venice Biennale, the first Greek painter to be so honoured. Before this he had already taken part in group exhibitions in the United States and since 1960 he has held numerous one-man exhibitions in New York, London, Milan, many parts of the U.S.A., and Germany. His paintings have also been included in major international exhibitions, such as the Carnegie International and Documenta III at Kassel.

It is therefore clear that whilst I have described Spyropoulos as a Greek painter, deriving his inspiration from his native land—from the sun and light, the mixture of barrenness and fertility, the linear quality of the land, and the drained colour—he has integrated these elements into a personal expression which is both meaningful to and appreciated by a broad public which could not be expected to analyse these origins.

Without stressing the Greek character of his art too much, I would however refer to one more important comparative source. That is Byzantine art. Modern Greece is just as much, if not more, the product of a Byzantine culture and way of life, as of Hellenism. It permeates the subconsciousness and the daily habits of the whole people, cradled in the Orthodox religion, as well as the long tradition of Icon painting and religious art in the churches and monasteries. These influences, alongside the natural scene, can be found in modern Greek art. Certainly in the paintings of Spyropoulos this ambiguous, spiritual and mysterious quality is of great importance. His dark canvases are like veils moving slowly and sensuously in the wind, revealing here a brief shaft of light, there a sharp burst of sun, an unexpectedly brilliant colour, textures of ancient stones and crumbling walls. Nothing is defined, nothing explained. Areas of great calm are disturbed by elements of tension and conflict. There is excitement and drama alongside simple acceptance. It is as though we are being given glimpses into the fascinating mystery of life through the equally mysterious processes of artistic creation.

Charles S. Spencer  
Athens,  
September, 1964.



### OILS ON CANVAS

1	TRIPTYCH F, 1969	162 x 270 cm
2	THE TRIPTYCH A, 1969	116 x 270 cm
3	ALKAR No. 9, 1970	162 x 130 cm
4	MENEMA 3, 1970	114 x 162 cm
5	LOGOS R, 1969	146 x 114 cm
6	SYNTHESIS C, 1970	114 x 146 cm
7	EPISODE No. 4, 1969	146 x 114 cm
8	ORA C, 1970	114 x 146 cm
9	STROPHE No. 17, 1969	114 x 146 cm
10	OROSSIMO No. 6, 1969	130 x 97 cm
11	TASSIS L, 1971	116 x 90 cm
12	SYNTHESIS N, 1971	92 x 73 cm
13	A DIALOGUE, 1969	81 x 73 cm
14	TASSIS R, 1970	81 x 65 cm
15	PHORA L, 1970	65 x 81 cm
16	SYNTHESIS M, 1971	81 x 65 cm
17	PAGE 6, 1971	65 x 54 cm
18	PAGE 3, 1971	65 x 54 cm
19	PAGE II, 1971	65 x 54 cm
20	PAGE IV, 1971	65 x 54 cm
21	PAGE V, 1971	65 x 54 cm

### OILS ON PAPER

22	THE IMAGE B, 1971	40 x 32 cm
23	THE IMAGE F, 1971	24 x 40 cm
24	THE IMAGE L, 1971	42 x 27 cm
25	THE IMAGE S, 1970	46 x 30 cm
26	THE IMAGE N, 1970	39 x 23 cm
27	THE IMAGE C, 1971	25 x 41 cm



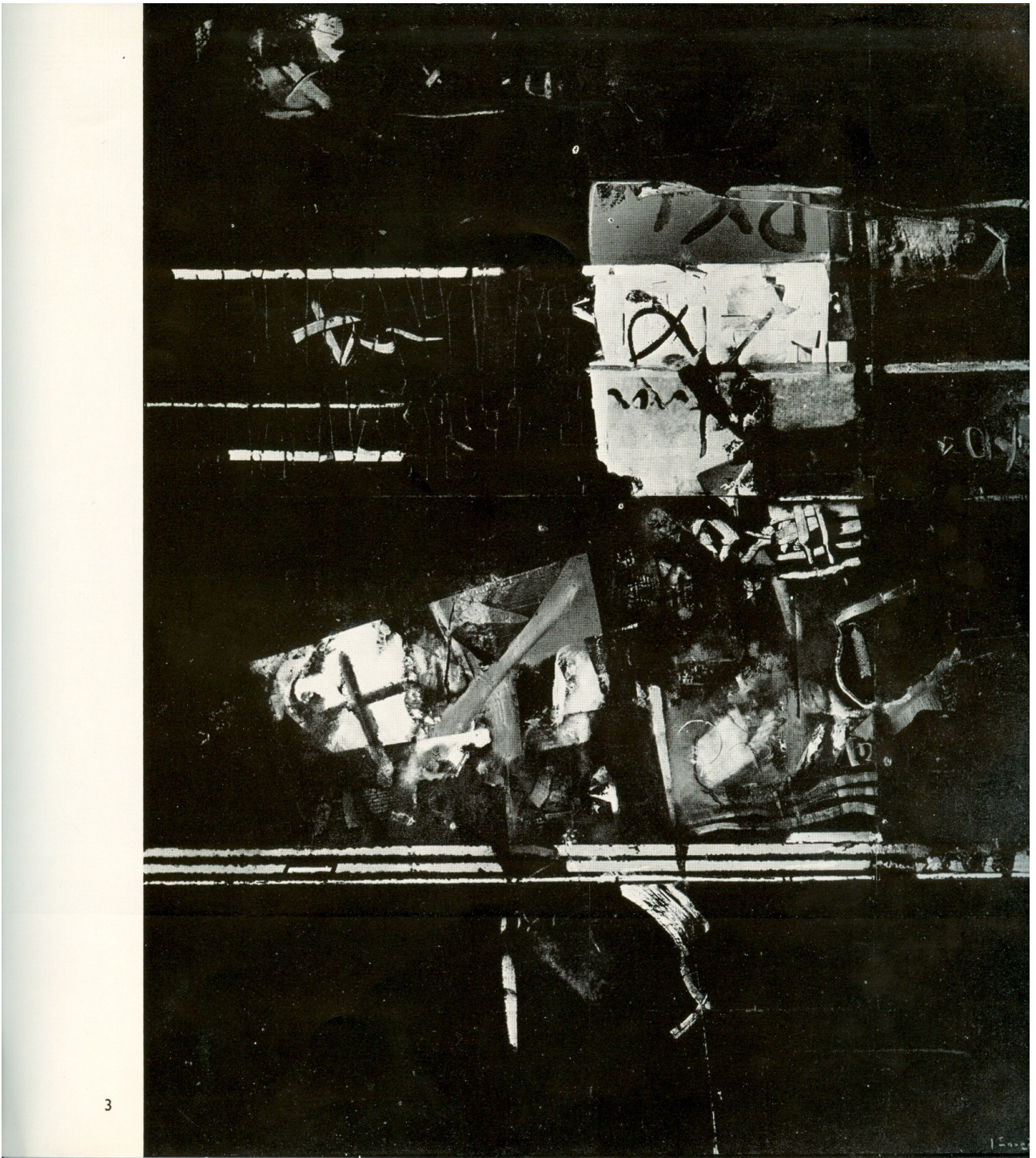
## **JANNIS SPYROPOULOS**

1912 Born in Pylos—Greece. He studied at the School of Fine Arts in Athens between 1933 and 1938 and received his diploma there. In 1938, after winning a scholarship from the Academy of Athens, he went to Paris where he stayed until 1940, studying at the ECOLE DES BEAUX ARTS and at several Academies. He spent the war years in Athens. His work has been widely exhibited in his country and abroad. Lives in Athens.

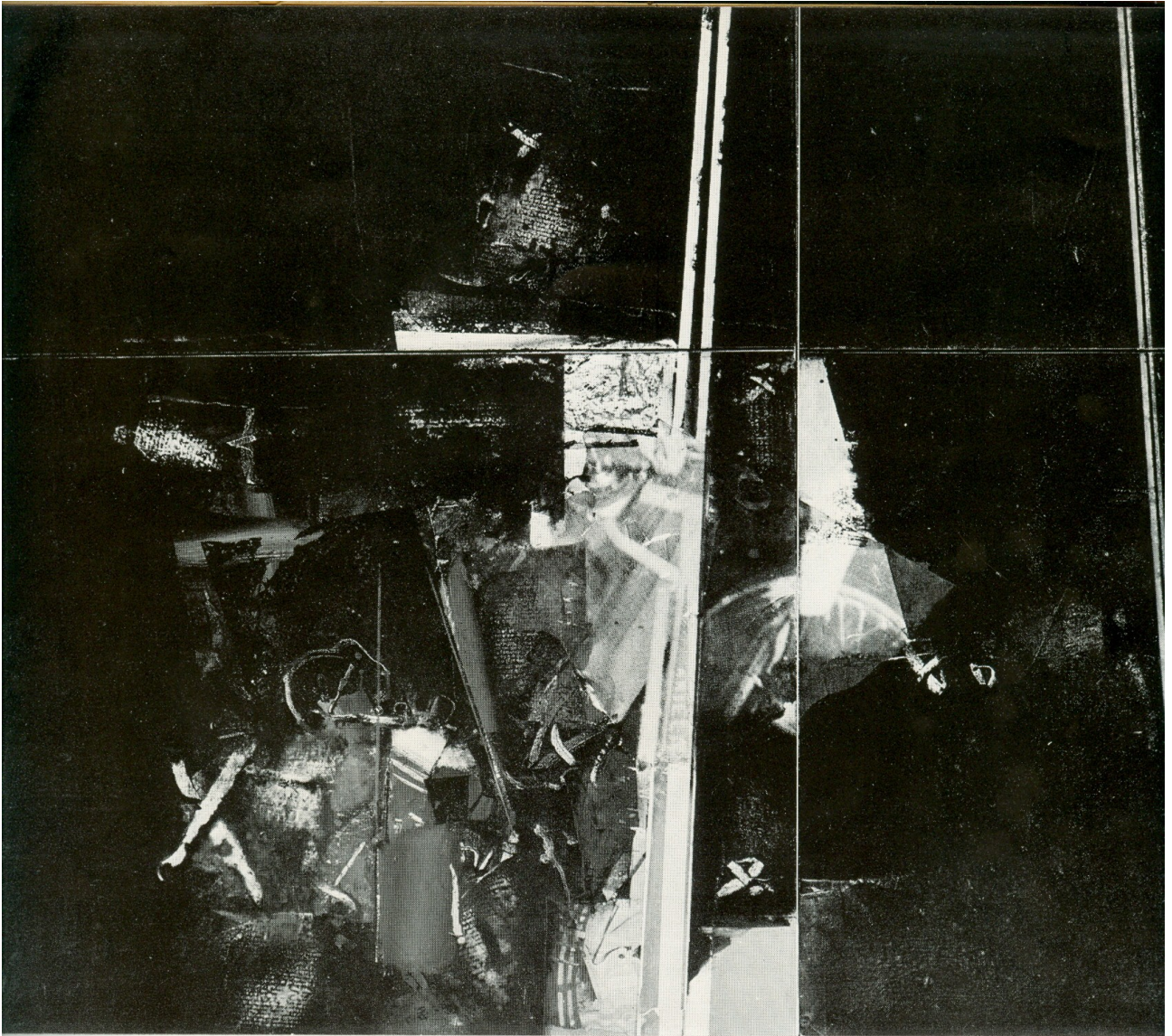
### **GROUP SHOWS**

- 1946 International Art Exhibition, Cairo-Egypt.
- 1948 Panhellenic Exhibitions of Art, Athens. Participated also in the Exhibitions of Greek Contemporary Art: Rome—1953, Belgrade—1954, Malmo and Gotteborg—1955, Galerie R. Creuze, Paris—1959, Helsinki—1960, touring Exhibition of Arts in Cyprus—1960.
- 1955 Biennale of Alexandria—Egypt.
- 1957 Biennale of Sao-Paulo—Brazil.
- 1958 One of the candidates for the S. R. Guggenheim Prize—New York.
- 1959 Touring Exhibition of "8 Greek Painters" in U.S.A., organized by the Smithsonian Institution of Washington, D.C.  
Touring Exhibition of "12 Greek Painters" in Canada.  
International Exhibitions of Art at the Colgate and Virginia University Art Galleries, U.S.A.  
Summer International, World House Galleries, New York—U.S.A.  
Painting International, organized by the Jewish Federations of U.S.A., in New York.  
Group show of the Stephen Silgay Art Gallery, Beverly Hills, California—U.S.A.
- 1960 One of the Greek Representatives at the Venice Biennale at which he was awarded the UNESCO PRIZE.  
Group show of the New European School, Anvers and Lausanne.  
International of Art at the Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York—U.S.A.
- 1961 Touring Exhibition of the "Venice Prize Winners in 1960", organized in U.S.A. by the American Federation of Arts.  
Print International 1, Sardegna—Italy.  
Print International, Ljubljana—Yougoslavia.  
International of Painting, Eschenbach—West Germany.  
CARNEGIE INTERNATIONAL OF ART, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—U.S.A.

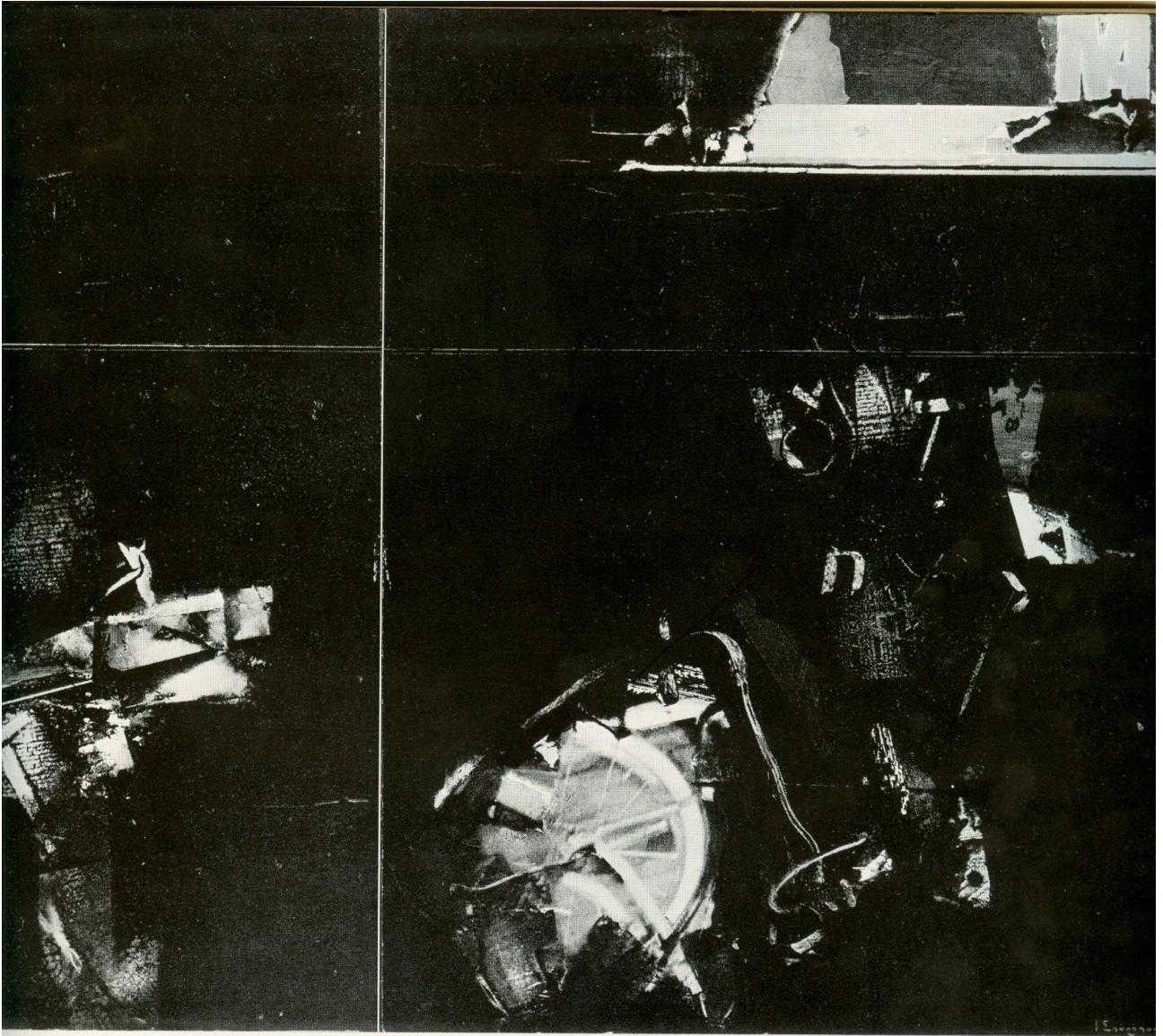




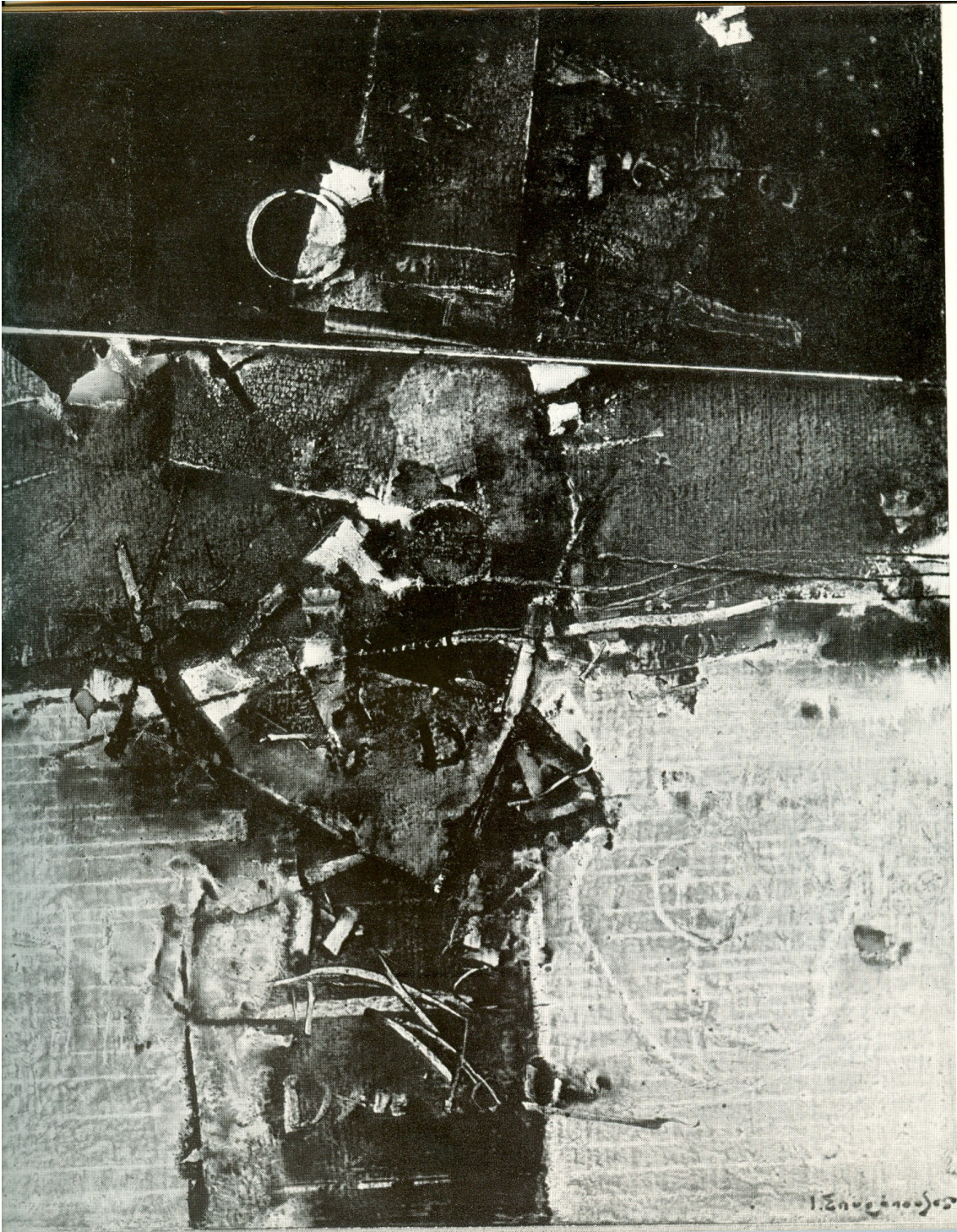














## GROUP SHOWS

- 1962 Touring Exhibition of the Abbott Laboratories' Collection in U.S.A., organized by the American Federation of Arts.  
"20th Century Painting", Bezalel National Museum, Jerusalem—Israel.  
Print International, Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio—U.S.A.  
Touring Exhibition of the Candidates for the Premio Marzotto in Europe.
- 1963 Summer International, World House Galleries, New York—U.S.A.  
International Seminar of Art, Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, New Jersey—U.S.A.
- 1964 DOCUMENTA III, Kassel—West Germany.  
CARNEGIE INTERNATIONAL OF ART, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—U.S.A.
- 1965 International Exhibition of Art, Europahaus, Vienna—Austria.  
Selection from the Carnegie International, J. L. Hudson Art Gallery, Detroit—U.S.A.  
"Spontaneous Creation"—Touring Exhibition in the U.S.A., organized by the American Federation of Art.
- 1966 International Exhibition of Art, at the Brandeis University, organized by UNESCO, in Washington D.C.—U.S.A.  
Print International, Biennale of Cracovie—Poland.  
Galerie Pilotes, Musee Cantonal, Lausanne—Switzerland.  
Collectors Club Exhibition of Art, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota—U.S.A.
- 1967 Contemporary Greek Art, Delft Museum of Fine Arts, Delft—Holland.  
EXPO 1967, Montreal—Canada.
- 1968 Painting International, Toronto Art Gallery, Toronto—Canada. | RETROSPECTIVE OF HIS  
WORK - ATHENS HILTON, ORG  
BY OLYMPUS CEMENT CO.
- 1970 Selected Works from the Collection of Mrs. A. B. Sheldon, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery,  
University of Nebraska, Lincoln—U.S.A.  
EXPO 1970, Museum of Fine Arts, Osaka—Japan.  
EXPO 1970, Greek Pavillion, Osaka—Japan.
- 1971 Triennale of International Art, New Delhi—India.
- 1972: SUMMER INTERNATIONAL REDFERN GALLERY, LONDON
- 1972: ONE WORLD THRU ART - MINNESOTA STATE COLL. OF FAIR  
GROUNDS ST PAUL - MINNESOTA.



## ONE MAN SHOWS

- 1950 Parnassos Gallery, Athens—Greece.
- 1959 World House Galleries, New York—U.S.A.
- 1960 Techni Art Gallery, Salonica—Greece.
- 1961 World House Art Galleries, New York, U.S.A.  
Molton Gallery, London—U.K.  
Galleria Gian Ferrari, Milan—Italy.  
Kursaal (organized by the Cultural Center of the City) Ostend—Belgium.
- 1962 Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon—U.S.A.  
Roswell Museum and Art Center, Roswell, New Mexico—U.S.A.  
Neue Galerie im Kunstler Haus, Munich—West Germany.  
Institute of Art History, Mainz—West Germany.  
Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, Urbana—U.S.A.
- 1963 Jerrold Morris International Gallery, Toronto—Canada.  
World House Galleries, New York—U.S.A.  
Theater der Stadt Lunen, Westfalen—West Germany.
- 1964 Sheafer Art Gallery, Grinnell College, Iowa—U.S.A.  
Frankische Galerie, Nurnberg—West Germany.  
Galerie des Deux Mondes, TWA Flight Center, J. F. Kennedy Airport, New York—U.S.A.  
Frankfurter Kunstkabinett, Frankfurt—West Germany.  
PALAIS DES BEAUX ARTS, Brussels—Belgium.
- 1965 David Jones' Art Gallery, Sydney—Australia.  
Galerie Arnaud, Paris—France.
- 1966 The Israel Museum, Jerusalem—Israel.
- 1967 Nicosia Hilton Art Gallery, (organized by the Cyprus Government).
- 1968 Athens Hilton Art Gallery, Retrospective, (organized by the Olympus-Hercules Cement Company)—Greece.
- 1968 David Jones' Art Gallery, Sydney—Australia.
- 1969 National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.—U.S.A.  
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln—U.S.A.  
Byron Gallery, New York—U.S.A.

1971 DAVID JONES' ART GALLERY - SYDNEY - AUSTRALIA

1974 DAVID JONES' ART GALLERY - SYDNEY - AUSTRALIA



## COLLECTIONS

Musee d'Art Moderne, Paris—France.  
S. R. Guggenheim Museum, New York—U.S.A.  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem—Israel.  
Musee d'Art Moderne, Brussels—Belgium.  
Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts—U.S.A.  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Dallas, Texas—U.S.A.  
Roswell Museum and Art Center, Roswell, New Mexico—U.S.A.  
Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio—U.S.A.  
Bezalel National Museum, Jerusalem—Israel.  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade—Yugoslavia.  
Museum of Fine Arts, Ostend—Belgium.  
Kranert Art Museum, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois—U.S.A.  
The Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Nebraska University, Lincoln, Nebraska—U.S.A.  
Toronto National Art Gallery, Toronto—Canada.  
City of Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland—New Zealand.  
Famagusta Art Gallery—Cyprus.  
Frankische Galerie der Stadt, Nurnberg—West Germany.  
Athens National Art Gallery, Athens—Greece.  
Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, New York—U.S.A.  
Atlantic Richfield Company, New York, Washington D.C., Los Angeles—U.S.A.  
Bundy Art Gallery, Waitsfield, Vermont—U.S.A.  
Institute of Art History, Mainz—West Germany.  
Grinnell Art College, Grinnell, Iowa—U.S.A.  
Fairleigh Dickinson University Art Gallery, Madison, New Jersey—U.S.A.  
The Ben and Abbey Grey Foundation, St. Paul, Minnesota—U.S.A.  
Collection of American Republic Insurance Company, Des Moines, Iowa—U.S.A.  
Townhalls Athens—Greece.  
Hamilton—Canada.  
Rathaus, Lunen, Westfalen—West Germany.  
Royal Palace of Greece.  
Ministries of Presidence, Labour, Education, Foreign Affairs—Greece.  
Presidential Palace of Cyprus—Nicosia.  
Many private collections in Greece and abroad.



**AWARDS AND PRIZES**

UNESCO PRIZE at the 30th Venice Biennale, June 1960.

Golden Medal of the City of Ostend, Belgium, June, 1961.

Commander of the Royal Order of the Phoenix, Athens, 1966.



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