

The revival of German Romanticism in the 20th century by Greek artists in post-war Germany

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A dialogue with Romanticism: The connection between literature and visual art

The convergence between the two art forms, painting and literature, has a long history. Since antiquity, literature, especially Greek and Roman mythology, has inspired painters to narrate a story through paintings, drawings, engravings and sculptures. Likewise, the relationship between literature and painting can be observed in a significant number of artworks during the Cold War as well. A typical example of this dialectical relationship can be seen in the work of Greek artists who resided in Germany, including Fotis Zapras, Kyriakos Kampadakis and Matheos Florakis. Greek artists found inspiration in the dialogue between painting and literature, they used characteristics of the 19th century German romantic writers and they integrated these into their artworks. In their work, they captured a personal view of utopia, isolated from the social environment, expressing mainly inward existential concerns. They focused on the power of imagination, the better past and the natural environment while they were connecting reality to imaginative scenarios. The introversion of the artists brought them closer to the romantic view and elements that characterize it, such as the alienation between people, the destruction of old community forms of social life, the isolation of the individual, which are also critical dimensions of the modern industrial way of life.

The revival of Romanticism and the adoption of its characteristic elements were a trend observed in art, especially in literature, poetry, and German post-war cinema during the 1960s and 1970s, mainly in the German Democratic Republic. For instance, a German poet and politician of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), Johannes R. Becher, who was described as “der letzte Romantiker, der letzte Deutschland meine Heimat Dichter, der Träumer” [translation by the author: The last romantic, the last Germany My Homeland Poet, the dreamer], and several artists from the Leipzig School incorporated various characteristic features of the Romantic era.¹ According to the art historian Lothar Lang, German Romanticism and Magical Realism’s spirit was inhaled by the latter. The invocation of German Romanticism’s elements reached its peak in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) during the 1960s and 1970s.² Then, artists, writers, poets, and directors increasingly included characteristics of the German movement into their work.

Central features of Romanticism in the work of artists in Germany in the 1960s to 1970s

Sensitivity, melancholy, the nostalgia for an unpretentious past, and the natural landscape are at the heart of the Romantic attitude. Specifically, in the nature’s beauty, the romantics found inspiration for their artworks, id est poems and paintings. Meanwhile, the romantics dealt with the feeling of frustration and despair, they resorted to turning the real historical past into a dreamland. They did not want to feel constrained by social or political conventions since they were not conformists. On the other hand, they believed in their own individuality and they pursued their individual imagination. Following Romanticism trends, Greek artists, including Zapras, Florakis, and Kampadakis, used ro-

romantic elements to oppose the rational imitation of social reality. They suggested, as absolute ideals, the expression of internal emotions through sensitivity, the individual perspective of the world, the creative imagination, melancholy, nostalgia, the experience of loss. Moreover, artists in both the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany had been influenced by the tendency to return to nature and to the romantic ideal. They used these main features of Romanticism to find a way to escape from reality that seemed to trap them. However, all of them also adapted characteristics of Romanticism. Zaprasnis appears to be a particular case: he lived in the GDR and studied at the Leipzig School. His contact with the social reality and the art scene of the GDR contributed to his creation of works with utopian and nostalgic content. Zaprasnis was influenced by the political system of the GDR which focused on the impossible vision of creating the 'new man' through socialist society in an ideal state, an approach to basic principles of Utopian socialism concerning the restructuring of the social system and aiming at the improvement of living conditions.³ Therefore, he was connected to the Leipzig School and its influences by German Romanticism, Surrealism, and Fantastic Realism. The concept of utopia inspired Greek artists to create emotionally charged works with dreamy features of Fantastic Realism and German Romanticism, associated with the utopia and the nostalgia for pre-capitalist societies or idealized places. These features are found in the artworks and novels of various artists of the 20th century, such as Marc Chagall, Mikhail Bulgakov, André Breton, Andrei Tarkovsky and Aldous Huxley, who sought the soul of man in capitalism. Another characteristic example related to Romanticism is the sociologist and philosopher Karl Mannheim, who attempted a systematic analysis of Romanticism's political philosophy. Specifically, he argued, "the sociological significance of Romanticism lies in its function as the historical opponent of the Enlightenment's intellectual tendencies, in other words, against the philosophical exponents of bourgeois-capitalism".⁴ Furthermore, according to Lilian Furst, Professor of Comparative Literature, "all twentieth-century experimental fiction rests on a foundation of Romanticism in its move from the real to the imaginative world of dreams, myths and mysteries, its search for new symbols and new forms, its exploration of time and space, its rejection of plot in favour of an organic structure dependent on an associative sequence of recurrent images. The whole interior monologue technique, a stream of consciousness [...] derives from the romantic preference for seeing not the surface appearance but the inner reality beneath it."⁵ Furst's analysis could probably also refer to the trends in experimental novels and paintings with corresponding romantic features.

Nostalgia, utopia, and idealization of the homeland

During the Cold War era, many visual artists in Germany were influenced by the German Romanticism's movement, as they expressed melancholic emotions, nostalgic feelings, even if they did not refer explicitly to this movement. They created imaginative works and incorporated symbolic and surrealistic elements. However, using these elements did not prevent that the artists also criticized social reality. The artists expressed their concerns through dream-themed images and the creation of a different world within these pictures, which were usually characterized by the contrast between an ideal world, a utopia, and an inhuman modern reality. Their works adopted the form of an 'escape from reality' and thereby challenged the bourgeois-social system, as observed in Austro-Jewish Marxist Ernst Fischer's work. The writer describes Romanticism "as a movement of protest – passionate and contradictory protest against the urban capitalist world, the world of 'lost illusions', against the harsh prose of business and profit [...] at each turning point of events, the movement split up into progressive and reactionary trends."⁶

Escape from reality is an element also found in the prementioned Greek artists' work. Particularly in Florakis' work reality diffuses into a dream as the artist attempts to create an unreal world. His painting follows the principles of realism in terms of style, but with fictitious content that connects him rather with the Fantastic Realism of the Vienna school in post-war Austria.⁷ For instance, his work *Escape* (1970) realistically depicts a rocky coastal landscape that probably could have been taken from reality, even with an imaginary winged figure flying over the scene. In her attempt to escape from the plausible scene, the female figure becomes even more unreal, while highly contrasting colors, created by the moonlight, intensify the dreamlike atmosphere of the work. Corresponding images are captured in Zapras' work during his temporary stay in Mecklenburg. During this period, he incorporated elements derived from his homeland's landscape into his work, such as images of the Aegean Sea, the bright moon, rivers, fictional birds, and foggy views, presented in a dreamily and poetic way. For instance, in his work *Dream* a female figure emerges from the abstract space surrounding her and she is becoming involved with symbolic elements, such as an eye and a screw. Zapras, combining abstract painting with representative forms, creates a world between reality, utopia, conventional imitation, and dreams, where the dialogue between the imitation of reality and abstraction gives a durable dreamlike feeling to his work. In this way, the artist tries to find his inner sanctuary by inventing 'a dream landscape of fantasy', as Michael Freitag described it, meaning that Zapras' work is a transition from reality to utopia.⁸

At the same time, Zapras used the motif of dream landscapes and the loss of reality to criticize the modern world. Indeed, feelings of sadness and melancholy characterize the romantic view as well. In particular the feeling of alienation, often experienced as an exile and which defines poetic sensitivity, is found in the work of the German philosopher Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel who refers to the soul 'under the mournfulness of exile' [unter der Trauerweiden der Verbannung], far from its true homeland [Heimat].⁹ In addition, according to Arnold Hauser, "the feeling of loss of home [Heimatlosigkeit] and isolation is a fundamental experience" of the early 19th century's romantics.¹⁰ Albert Béguin, referring to romantic authors and Walter Benjamin, mentions that "their appeal to dream-life was an alarm signal; it indicated not so much the return home of the soul to the motherland, as the obstacles had already made that return impossible" [Ihr Appell an das Traumleben war ein Notsignal; er wies minder den Heimweg der Seele ins Mutterland, als dass Hindernisse ihn schon verlegt hatten].¹¹ In the prementioned examples, the lost birthplace and the desire to return to the homeland, connected with nostalgia, is precisely the basic element of romantic behavior. Moreover, the past as a part of nostalgia can be mythological or mythical, such as in the Golden Age or the sunken Atlantis, or it could be a personal myth, such as the Mysterious City in Aurelia by Gérard de Nerval.¹² However, there are still references to the historical past. Romanticism must transform the past into a utopia in order to incorporate it into 'romantic expectations'.¹³

Zapras focused on homelessness [Heimatslosigkeit] by expressing his experience of leaving Greece. As he lived in the GDR since his childhood, his life there could be considered as a form of exile. He was among the 'Griechenlandkinder' [Children of Greece], the 'Griechen ohne Heimat' [Greeks without a homeland] or the 'DDR Griechen' [GDR Greeks], as the GDR authorities described the children of Greek political refugees.¹⁴ During the Greek Civil War, Zapras moved from northern Greece to Eastern Europe, to Radebeul, a small city close to Dresden. Despite his integration into the GDR's society and political system, Zapras distanced himself from the present. Instead of losing his Greek identity, he was engaged in presenting his past through art. Hence, his art is characterized by intense memories of and nostalgia for his lost homeland. The memories of the

forced removal from his place of origin followed him continuously and they were transformed into metaphorical and expressionist images. Zaprasis used scattered images of his childhood as a bridge to an inner world, the imaginary, dreams, but always in a dual way, where the past is connected with the present, memories with emotions, nostalgia with lyricism and colors with forms. The lyrical depiction of Zaprasis' feelings and memories during his stay in the GDR soon lead him to lyric poetry, especially to the German Expressionist poet Johannes Becher, who had adopted elements of Romanticism as well. Accused of high treason after the presentation of his poem collection *Der Leichnam auf dem Thron*, Becher fled Nazi Germany. First, he fled to Paris (1933), then to the Soviet Union (1935) and finally, he escaped to Tashkent, nowadays the capital of Uzbekistan. There he wrote several sonatas, aiming to stigmatize his country's political instability since the rise of Nazism. Simultaneously, he focused on the idealization of his homeland's past, following the Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky's poetic form. Becher, as Zaprasis' work *Mourning* shows, laments his home ("Heimat, meine Trauer, Land im Dämmerchein, [...] Deutschland, meine Trauer, du, mein Fröhlichsein"), expressing his sadness and his complaint "O Deutschland! Sagt, was habt aus Deutschland ihr gemacht?!" Meanwhile, he relies on his memories of the nature, culture and innocence of his childhood, which influenced his later life, links his poems to places in Germany and laments the landscapes he remembers: "Schwarzwald und Bodensee, was ist aus euch geworden".

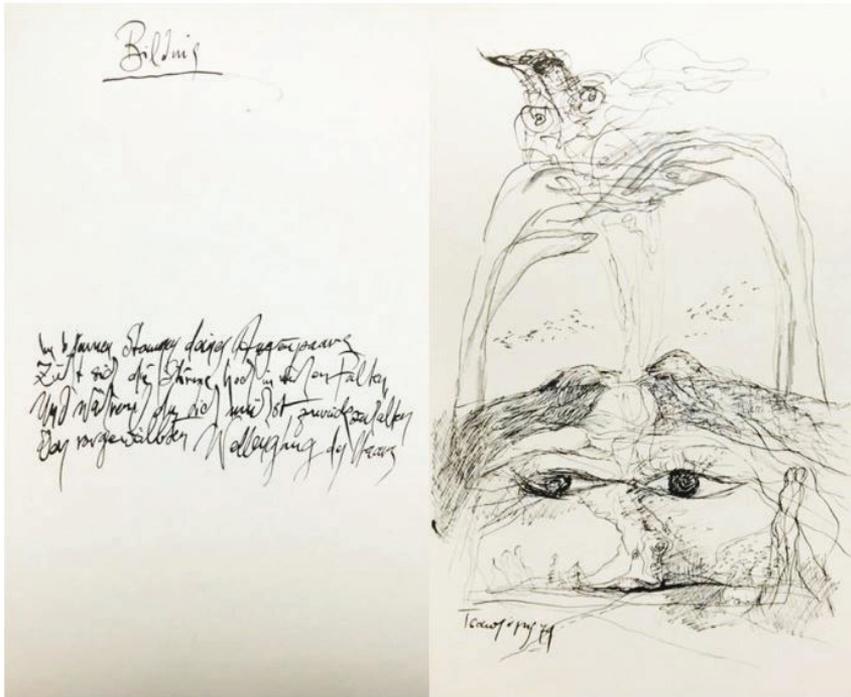
Similarly, Zaprasis uses images of his homeland Greece, which we can see in his work and letters to his wife. In one letter he specifically wrote: "There is an unspeakable light that transforms the naked place into a magnificent landscape. The flatlands have rich, fertile soils, full of endless plantations with citrus fruits, which have matured fruit, and olive groves." He continues the description of his homeland, saying that "even the cactuses that bloom are harmonized with the landscape like red and yellow spots in the background with the light blue landscape. The hillsides are covered with cyclamens and phacelia - all red, green-brown to bright green - pleasant colors" [translation by the author].¹⁵ Their thoughts about their homelands led the two artists to idealizing its landscape, and they captured it in their lyrical images. Becher attributed a higher dimension of experience to the feeling of nostalgia and to the longing for a return to his homeland. He mentions: "Heimat, meine Trauer, Land im Dämmerchein, Himmel, du mein blauer, Du mein Fröhlichsein."¹⁶ Strong emotions override logic and deprive every mood of its informative reference about the past. The poet addresses Germany in his poems *Deutsches Mutterbildnis* (1944) and *Liebe ohne Ruh*, illustrated by Zaprasis. He bestows a human dimension upon this country by expressing his love for it ("Du meine Liebe, wie unsagbar ich. Dich lieben müßte [...] Bin ich nur dein, und ich bleib ganz der deine: Heilige Liebe du, mein Vaterland"). In the same way, the Greek artist refers to Greece, idealized as a female figure emerging from its landscape.

The personification of the homeland is familiar to other artists or writers who lived in exile as well. During his exile in Denmark and Finland, Bertold Brecht writes the poem *Deutschland, bleiche Mutter!* In this characteristic, Brecht bestows upon his homeland a mother's status, like Becher and Zaprasis do. The same pattern is found in Florakis' painting *Motherhood*. A non-human mother figure and her children are at the center of this painting. On the left, animal-like figures with human characteristics express their maternal sensitivity in the same way the female figure on the painting's right side does. The figures' forms are placed in an abstract space. The sharp contrast of light highlights the outline of the female figure. In the works of these Greek artists, the homeland is idealized by depicting it as the mother of exiles. The nation is the common place where they find resort to in order to declare the homeland as an essential ideal and the center line of the collective unconscious.



1 Fotis Zapras, *Die Angst der Geborenheit*, 1980, Engraving, 49 × 64 cm

The direct comparison between the mother figure and the homeland helped artists to emphasize the archetypal role of the birthplace. In particular, Zapras like Becher and like Brecht, gave the homeland the status of the mother. The Greek artist Zapras idealizes Greece and compares his country in one of his paintings with a female figure, elevating and floating over a Greek landscape. This symbolic element is often used in visual arts, as we can see, for instance, in the national personification of ‘Mother Russia’ (Rodina-Mat/Mother Homeland), which appeared on patriotic posters or statues during the Soviet Revolution period. We find the same pattern in Florakis’ painting *Motherhood* and in Zapras’ work, in which he praises his country’s natural landscape. Nature was a dominant theme in German Romanticism; romantics embraced nature and regarded it as a source of inspiration and freedom. Brecht, despite his critical view of Nazi Germany, incorporates images of landscape into his work as well. “I, Bertolt Brecht, come from the black forests. My mother carried me into the cities. As I lay in her body. And the cold of the forests. Will be in me till I die”, he said in the mid-20th century while developing transcendent talks with physical elements.¹⁷ Becher and Zapras describe the landscape in an expressionist way, showing their nostalgia and mental distress due to the loss of their homeland. They describe their feelings without hesitation and create poems that refer to melancholy that arises from lost time. Meanwhile, they seek to regain lost security and protection, as it is noted in the work of Zapras, *Die Angst der Geborgenheit* (*Safety’s Fear* [fig. 1]), to develop a sense of belonging, to feel fulfilment by searching for the lost homeland. Zapras follows the two German poets, Brecht’s and Becher’s, poems’ rhythms and creates images like lyric poetry is composed. He mentions: “My drawings are like poems [...]”¹⁸ Zapras was inspired by Becher’s work. In 1979, he created eleven colored



2 Fotis Zaprasis, *Bildnis - Variationen zu Liebesgedichten von Johannes Becher*, 1979, Ink on Paper

and black-and-white based on Becher's poems (*Liebesgedichte*). In particular, Zaprasis linked images to handwritten excerpts of Becher's poems (*Bildnis* [fig. 2]), *Müde*, *Das Schneegesicht*, *An die Unbekannte*, *Drei Nächte*, *Baudelaire*, *Umfangen*, *Die Großmutter*, *Der gleiche Weg mit dir III*, *Lautlos gehst du*, *Trauernde Liebe*). The landscape and expressionistic forms are engaging with each other, symbolically and physically, lines follow the poems' lyrical rhythm, synthesizing images that correspond to Zaprasis' memories. The depiction of the landscape within the works, as seen in the case of Zaprasis, is a feature linking Greek artists to German Romanticism. Including lonely forms or elements into a natural environment, the exogenous landscape, which is the area of unknown sites and which is sometimes also linked to the inner space of the landscapes of a collective or individual psychosis, is undoubtedly present in the Greek artists' works. Similarly, the Romanticism approach shows the mental and physical relationship with the landscape. The approach of Romantics is to wander around, as seen, for example in Caspar David Friedrich's landscapes, depicting the feeling of Romanticism through solitary figures in nature.¹⁹

In the imaginary world of Florakis' work, which often depicts streets of big cities, mythological images, and melancholic figures, the ideal natural landscape is represented as well. In the lithography *Nature morte sur Table volante* (1974), the natural landscape at the bottom of the image comes from his homeland's island area. In addition, there are isolated white houses and a lonely female figure wanders over it, involved in a composition built of dead nature, and a table floats across the sky. This painting reveals the artist's connection to his homeland; its composition is melancholic and nostalgic. The nostalgia for the lost paradise is usually accompanied by the quest to rediscover or rebuild an ideal reality. In this way, Florakis attempts to reconstruct the perfect past, in line with the quality or the sen-

sationalism of the present. The romantic approach explores the nostalgia for returning to the past, intending to restore it, so its idealism is an integral part of the utopian vision. At the same time, in the works of Greek artists as well as in modern literature, various attempts are made to reinvent the lost place and the mode of its depiction. The nostalgic search of the community which has lost his homeland is shown in several other paintings of the 20th century. For example, the German expressionist Auguste Macke depicts in his *Spaziergänger (Walkers)* human figures with sad faces, placed in different layers and oriented in different directions. In Greek artists' works, these characteristics of loneliness and sadness often appear in the titles of their art. *Loneliness* is the title of a work by Kampadakis, a marble sculpture depicting a torso of a female figure. The torso's posture, combined with a twisting head, reflects the dynamic of the isolated figure, which reveals the influence of the spirit of Romanticism and the effort to reflect physical elements, internal expressions, and mental states. The *Solitude* series (1976–1977), on the other hand, does not focus on expressing grief, they rather have to be interpreted as a source of calmness and an expression of the desire to reflect. In Zapras' work, feelings and concepts, such as the loneliness of existence, melancholy, grief, mourning, or internal divisions, are inherent in the painted subjects. We can understand the artist's ambivalent feelings, his need for protection, the constant search for a lost place, the inevitability of death, which are outlined and shaped in dark colors, idle forms, bold strokes, and sharp light-shadow contrasts. Loneliness, pain, death and the search for his identity, are often explored in his works, however, they do not prevail (couples in love – “As long as there is love, there is also human warmth”, eyes – “I look”, screws – “for folding and protecting”, dry leaves – “dead thoughts and hopes”, endless stairs – “lead to loneliness and vacuum”).²⁰

The artist's frustration and despair led him to the creation of melancholic works, rejecting the modern world. In Zapras' illustrative lithographs, the artist composes, through invasive transformation, a tribute to the magnificent natural landscapes and historical wounds of his homeland, and the human form is always present. These lithographs emphasize the artist's melancholy mood and deep mental pain, thus eloquently describe the Civil War. However, his will of freedom is still visible, the artist rejects being controlled and disciplined by rules. Instead, he creates highly emotional images through monochromatic surfaces in his art, using only shades of black and white. Zapras followed the example of the romantic writers who opposed the classic ideal of perfect rational imitation of reality, who fought for a different absolute ideal: the individual perspective of the world, creative imagination, and expressing internal sentiments through sensitivity. The human being is the ideal of the romantic rebel who revolts against the world and society, and who is in a constant state of mental imbalance. In this context, romantic poetry elevates anxious and melancholic heroes, who are flooded by a feeling of hopelessness, by a feeling of death and incompleteness, which often turns into a longing for death. The incorporation of surreal elements into their work combines and expresses the melancholic and the romantic mood prevailing among these artists.

Surrealism was the movement in which the utopian ideals of revolt and the revolutionary dimension of Romanticism found their superordinate expression. But the surrealist André Breton and his entourage concealed their deep attachment to the romantic tradition of the 19th century, mentioning in the Second Surrealist Manifesto, “We say that this Romanticism, of which today we are willing to conceive ourselves as the tail (...)”²¹ Surrealism inspired Greek artists, especially Zapras, who adapted symbolic elements from Marc Chagall's painting. According to Breton, “no work was ever so resolutely magical as Chagall's.”²² However, in contrast to Surrealism, Greek artists rejected Sigmund Freud's automatic, random, subconscious and psychoanalytic theories. They supported the idea of the imaginary, of dreams and mythological scenes unfolding anti-logically, connecting reality with a world

that does not exist and which provided a resort for these artists. Chagall's vivid colors, mainly blue and white, had significant influence on Zaprasis' works. In contrast to them, the shapes of ancient temples in his pictures demonstrate the effect of his Greek origins on his work. He used symbols from the Russian artist's painting, such as roosters, horses and candles, thinking of his own life to resemble Chagall's. The two artists from the periphery of their respective homelands, Evros Vrisika in Greece and Vitebsk in present-day Belarus, left their hometown during their childhood, sought refuge which they found in painting. During their childhood, both artists have lived in the countryside and found it difficult to accept the urban life of the respective cities they moved to, a condition that resulted in a constant search for their inner self. The dark shades in Zaprasis' and Chagall's work reflect the artists' psychological collapse when they realized that politics determines their daily lives. Both artists created paintings that refer to their homeland and their origins in a very personal visual vocabulary. They kept their childhood memories, images from the provinces and its residents, such as the fisherman in the case of Zaprasis and the violin musician in Chagall's. Zaprasis' work, like Chagall's, is also characterized by a prevalence of the fantastical element, of fluid and uncertain objects, and both artists' topics often refer to their Greek or Russian origin. Decomposed figures, houses, geometric shapes in the sky create a kind of arbitrary perspective, an unverifiable space, in which human figures, mostly women, animals, flowers, landscape float. Scenes unfold in an anti-logical way and similar to dreams, fictional elements are connected with ones of personal character, they create peculiar scenes where poetry and imagination meet to uncover their inner realities. Zaprasis' and Chagall's themes, poetic and imaginative, are inextricably linked to their personal experiences, memories, and feelings, but portraits are scarce. We can see similar features in Florakis' work *Souvenir by Austria*. It is a drawing made of fantastic and factual elements that refer to life in Austria, where the Greek artist studied between 1971 and 1972. In a dream synthesis, based on visual reality, homes, female figures, animals and roads overlap, they are involved in a synthesis with no perspective, a fantastic scene filled with personal data.

Although Greek artists significantly were influenced by contemporary artistic trends and artists of their time, they maintained their autonomy and pursued their internal artistic tendencies and needs. Chagall even argued that art needs an internal revolution, an additional dimension that neither the geometry of space nor the colored strokes of impressionism can provide. Similarly, Zaprasis expressed his inner necessity by noting that "an artist must be critical of himself and others, to stand honestly and convincingly towards society. He must also have the difficult experience, offer little with his images and have the power to seek the causes within him."²³

Mythological elements and mythical figures in the work of Greek artists

Greek mythology seems to be among the most frequently used elements of Romanticism. Greek myths caught the imagination of the Greek artists, particularly Zaprasis, Florakis, and Kampadakis, as Romanticism and Surrealism before. However, the perversion of myths by German fascism, their manipulation as national and racial symbols, contributed significantly to the defamation of mythology after World War II, especially in Germany. Thomas Mann wrote in 1941: "It is essential that myth be taken away from intellectual fascism and transmuted for humane ends [ins Humane umfunktionieren]. I have for a long time done nothing else."²⁴

Originating in German Romanticism at the beginning of the 19th century, the idea of a new myth was outlined by August Wilhelm Schlegel and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling.²⁵ By situating the Golden Age rather in the future than in the past, Schlegel transformed mythology into a utopian energy and imbued mythology with magic power.²⁶ A few decades later, in 1942, Breton advocated the

need for a counterattack in the area of mythology. “Faced with the conflict which is at present shaking the world, even the most recalcitrant mentalities are beginning to admit the vital necessity of a myth which can be set up in opposition to that of Odin and various other belligerent gods”, he would point out.²⁷ This was also the aim of other German intellectuals, such as Ernst Bloch and Thomas Mann. Ancient mythology, however, is not their only reference. As Breton wrote in 1942 in an article on Max Ernst, the new myth is also inspired by the prophetic power of some visionaries of the past or present, such as Arthur Rimbaud, Friedrich Nietzsche, Comte de Lautremont and Max Ernst. Their work has a mythological and prophetic character, as it predicts the subsequent historical events. Myth becomes one of the essential elements of the spiritual and emotional world of hyperrealism, beginning in the late 1930s. In particular, mythical figures are, as Breton mentions, “the ultimate expression of the romantic idea.”²⁸

Elements and themes of mythology can be found in Greek artists’ work who follow the basic principles of Surrealism, German Romanticism and Magical Realism. In Zaprasis’ work, the myth appears in a sensitive way and is used to express the artist’s melancholic and nostalgic feelings. In his drawing *Daphnis and Chloe*, inspired by the homonymous Bucolic novel written by Longus, Zaprasis narrates the story of two young people in a sophisticated lyrical manner. The two children’s abandonment, their removal from their family and the vivid erotic feelings evokes memories, experiences, and images of his own history as an uprooted one. The Greek artist continues to render lyrical imagery, engaging in the depiction and appreciation of contrast, subtle traces of color and externalizing his feelings for his lost homeland through art, while discovering the power of a narrative using symbolism. Zaprasis creates works that narrate short stories of life, love, and death, displaying his doubts and nostalgia with insinuating and symbolic elements. For instance, the painting *Adam and Eve* narrates a story that concerns his thoughts about humanity, freedom, and love. It is noticeable that Zaprasis sought to express his profound sorrow with poetic expressions and light management by relentlessly returning to a dreamy nostalgic past. Zaprasis used several scenes from Greek mythology in his artworks, such as *Prometheus* and *The Myth of Orpheus*. However, he did not transmit political messages criticizing the GDR regime, as it has been observed in works by other artists of the Leipzig School.²⁹

Scenes from Greek mythology can be identified in Kampadakis’ sculptural work as well. Icarus gains a flagship role in the work of this artist and enables him to express natural desires or to discuss conditions of society. Kampadakis created the series *Humans*, displaying attributes that refer to the birth of man, a new beginning and his desire to begin to fly, while in other compositions the central figure of Icarus, accompanied by other characters, remains stuck in the matter. In other works, Icarus again shows superiority again, as the sculptures depict the moment of inner satisfaction that flying gives. Kampadakis suggests the stages of flying within the forms of his sculptures. The torso’s posture, head-turning and bold diagonal developing form, provides the sculpture with movement, spreading its dynamics into space. The material of Greek artists’ sculptures is a crucial element in the formation of the idea and emotions so that the external form is identical with the content. For instance, wooden material and its deterioration refers to the material nature and to the nature of human being. Narratives of mythical stories also feature in Florakis’ work, namely the capture of Beautiful Helen, also known as Helen of Sparta. In his work, there are similarities to Magical Realism and Surrealism and its apparent myth elements. The central figure of Beautiful Helen is placed in the center of the image. Human hands over her female figure are attempting to grab and pull at her body. This violent scene symbolizes the removal of Beautiful Helen by Paris, when he stole her along with many of Menelaus’ treasures and took her to Troy. Before that, Helen was seduced by Paris. Along the sidelines of the scene, figures wit-

ness the abduction, set in an abstract environment where sky and earth spread out, while the intense color contrasts give the scene a rather melancholic tone.

Furthermore, the need to return and the creation of a pictorial world, containing the world that one has been forced to abandon, are also reflected in the Greek artists' work through symbolic and metaphorical elements. Zapras, for example, recalled Aristophanes' poetic utopia by creating his own *Birds* (*Die Vögel*), which was a part of his research at the Leipziger Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst. The homonymous comedy inspired him, and in poetic terms, he dealt with the exodus of man from the tyranny of the world to the realm of the fairy tale, proposing another planet instead of the existing one, a utopia. Symbolic references intensify the implied nostalgic atmosphere by creating trends of escape, as observed in his painting *Bird Migration*. Florakis used the same allegory in his work *Ornithes* (1973), in which two female figures are depicted, talking to each other. Besides, a male character is shown, hidden behind the trunk of a tree, who secretly tracks the conversation. In this painting, there are surreal and abstract elements, tree logs interacting with non-specific physical and organic forms that depict the emergence of a supernatural, imaginary, and utopian world.

The affinity between contemporary Greek artists and the romantics

During the 1960s and 1970s, a significant number of artists in Germany experimented with new art styles, forms, and practices. Thus, visual artists became involved with authors and writers, and all of them approached the romantic ideology. In practice, integrating the characteristics of German Romanticism, in particular, the early German Romanticism of the 19th century into their works led to the revival of this German movement. Meanwhile, the trend towards the revival of Romanticism is evident in modernist art movements and in other areas of culture, which were equally permeated with nostalgia for a lost paradise. For instance, groups such as the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism and the Leipzig School drew on the nostalgia for a lost past and related their art forms and figures to the Romantic cosmology.

The use of German Romanticism features peaked in the GDR during the 1960s and 1970s, when artists, writers, poets, and directors expressed in their works their own melancholy, a nostalgia for an unparallelled past and landscape, a great sensitivity to nature with idealistic romantic elements and strong feelings such as intense pain and fear. Hence, their frustration and desperation led them away from a historical past into a daydream. Particularly the Greek artists Zapras, Florakis, and Kampadakis adapted characteristics of Romanticism to oppose social reality's rationalization and to express their internal. It is the present's decadence that is opposed to the dream, the nostalgia for an idealized past. Therefore, art becomes a medium that represent the artists' concerns.

Despite the emergence of common features in the artists' works of the 1960s and 1970s in Berlin (West and East) and the revival of German Romanticism, no specific aesthetic movement developed as a continuation of this form of Romanticism. The only exception was the Leipzig School, combining most of the fundamental characteristics of Romanticism. Hence, the affinity between these artists and the romantics is probably based on a common 'Stimmung', mood, rather than doctrine or shared aesthetic characteristics. In other words, both create an atmosphere in which utopia, nostalgia, despair, and rebellion are combined. This atmosphere is reinforced by the melancholic tone derived from the denial of reality, painted and drawn in an intense contrast of color and tone, as well as by the desire for artists to express their innermost. In that way, they emphasized the need for unfettered creative imagination and for the expression of individual feelings, main characteristics that can be observed in all fields of art, particularly in the GDR territory.

Endnotes

- 1 Kerstin Decker, "Johannes R. Becher, 'Ausgebürgert aus der Sprache'", in: *Der Tagesspiegel*, 14.12.2000.
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Fig. 1: Fotis Zaprasis, *Die Angst der Geborenheit*, 1980, Engraving, 49 × 64 cm: Ralf C. Müller, *Weggehen-Wiederkommen. Zeichen aus seiner schicksalhaften Epoche Griechenlands. Zur Erinnerung an Fotis Zaprasis*, Leipzig 2007, p. 93.

Fig. 2: Fotis Zaprasis, *Bildnis* - Variationen zu Liebesgedichten von Johannes Becher, 1979, Ink on Paper: Fotis Zaprasis, *Variationen zu Liebesgedichten von Johannes R. Becher*, [Mappe mit 11 Bildern von Fotis Zaprasis und Gedichten von Johannes R. Becher], Berlin 1981, Blatt 1.

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