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Dialogue
about Art

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LIVANI PUBLISHING ORGANIZATION
ATHENS 2002

Το βιβλίο αφιερώνεται στην Ολυμπιακή Εκεχειρία

The book is an homage to the Olympic Truce

Διάλογος

Dialogue



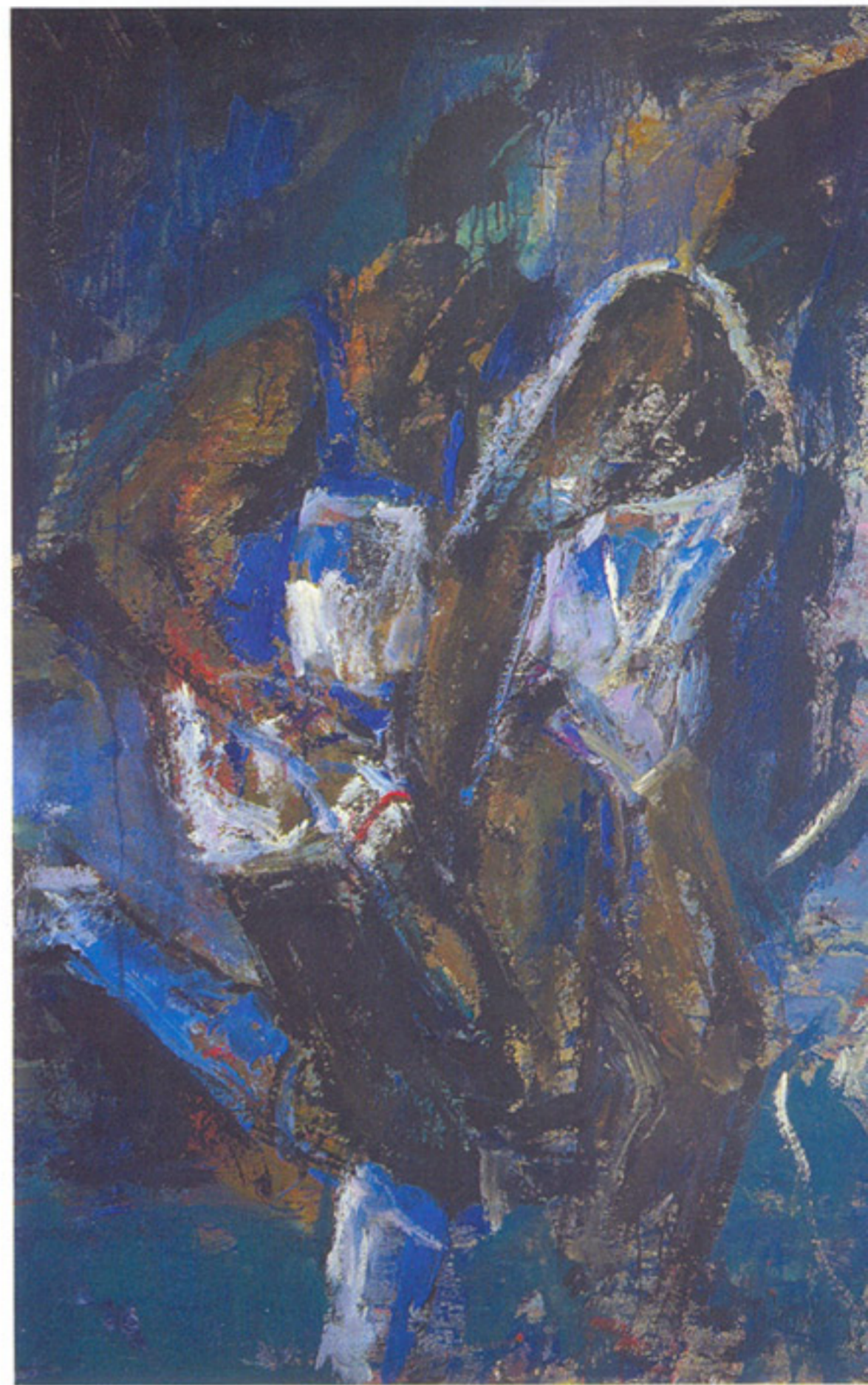
M. P.-V.: A canvas artist, for sure. But I also like space, environments, installations. In 1995, in the atrium of the Titanium Gallery I installed a black limo in front of a scene with headlights and painted grills of speeding cars while the cold nitrogen diffusing from the floor suggested the American subway. I am captivated however by the canvas and in the end I project the atmosphere of the environment in my exhibitions through the special light installations that I impose.

You remain forever faithful then to painting values and a persistent thematology. For a number of years you have been working on themes such as the human body, athletics, boats, cranes, cars, and you always come back to them, however often you declare that you have exhausted your exploration of them. Is the constant besieging of a theme by an artist a natural outcome of his consistency? Does the circle never really end, and you only stop to start again from the beginning?

M. P.-V.: The “besieging” as you call it, of a theme has nothing to do with the creator’s consistency, but with the theme itself at the given moment, either the future one, or the past. The artist wants to intervene again in a semantically defined theme – area that he has deeply explored in the past, not because of consistency towards it but with a different mood, with other quests, with a different eye. The past theme itself which at one time inspired him becomes a challenge once more in another period of his life, when the quests are different, and he grafts them onto it.

And how do you ultimately arrive at the theme then? I quote your own words: “I embark upon whatever stimulates me the most and I study it. It takes a long time to elaborate”². What relationship do you have with the visible and how do you process it?

M. P.-V.: The visible has nothing to do with the moment when I see it. The visible is the succession of stimuli that I pick up. Moreover it has to do with the succession of feelings that need to be expressed, or else I am driven by an inner need to record them on what we call a painting surface.



Τετρατισμός, 1987. Μεικτή τεχνική, 130 x 80.
Ιδιωτική συλλογή.

Finish, 1987. Mixed technique, 130 x 80.
Private collection.

2. *Eyó Magazine*, 8-4-1997, page 89.

How does this happen? Where do you start from to render the theme that stimulates you? When you see the blank canvas do you feel that it has something abstract about it, that you want to attack it and challenge it? That you want to pass judgement on it? Do you feel a desire to eliminate the empty space by creating a presence?

M. P.-V.: At one time I did not want the white canvas, it repulsed me. At school I even made the canvasses myself out of calico prepared with chardin as our teacher, Mr. Moralis taught us. Afterwards for a while I wanted a dark preparation in order to graduate the lights. Now white does not frighten me. On the contrary, it makes me proceed with great confidence.

What is it that leads you to produce a representative image, by that I mean something recognizable and not an abstract form?

M. P.-V.: I am interested in the nucleus of my theme and very often I have reached abstraction, while strongly seeking to do so. The representational says more to me though, it is closer to my pictorial vocabulary. I admire abstract artists such as Y. Klein, F. Stella, Rothko, but something always attracts me to the representational centre.

The image has a chaotic dimension compared to the form which is by nature defined. What is the difference for you between the image and the form?

M. P.-V.: The image is the conception of the moment, it can be indistinct. The form comes back through the process that one has chosen semiotically, thus it can be defined.

And how does that process take place? When you paint a picture are you guiding it or is it guiding you? You have said "I don't feel that I paint consciously... I do not have a rational plan. I become one with the work at the time I create it"³.

M. P.-V.: The work "guides" you and you "guide it". You are challenged by the continuity of your intervention. In the flow of conception even only one tiny drop of paint can guide you, or the composition itself that is coming into being, or else the composition that has been planned in advance. In any case, whatever has been planned in advance can be upset.

In this way you are not left in the end with a sense of quest but each time with a sense of discovery of your own self. As Picasso himself used to say, "If we know exactly what we want to paint, then what is the reason for doing it?"

3. *Living Magazine*, July-August 1995, page 56.

M. P.-V.: The theoretical writings of Kandinsky *Point and Line to Plane* and *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* are decisive lessons for artists. For me however the greatest lesson of all is the period of the “*Improvisations*”, although not so much those of the Fiaba or the Bauhaus. Besides, the subject of my thesis was originally Kandinsky. The death of my professor, Salvini, forced me to change direction and to study two Byzantine Codices from the 11th Century which are in the Laurentian Library: “*On Joints*” by Apollonius of Kition and “*On Bandaging*” by Soranus of Ephesus. It was difficult for me to set about analysing the iconology and iconography of a codex. I decided to do so however because of the codices’ Greek character and their uniqueness in the West.

The relationship between speech and image is one of the greatest chapters in the history of art. I imagine that your study was extremely interesting.

On some occasions you have expressed your admiration for Piero della Francesca – I imagine that you are attracted by his implementation of the geometric perspective, the pure geometry of volumes and the use of light. You also hold in high esteem Raffaello, who profited from the lesson of the first and became known as the premiere painter of the classical Renaissance, and later Magritte, who links the object with its surroundings in an unexpected way, giving them surprising relationships.

M. P.-V.: Piero della Francesca is the founder, the cornerstone of the early Renaissance; he is the “Doric column” from which to move on and meet in “*Stanza della segnatura*” the Renaissance painter par excellence, Raffaello. As for Magritte, I meet him in the evening, before sunset, on the little island that floats in front of my house in Eretria. Isn’t it metaphysical?

You have a liking for Pop Art, in the whole spectrum of its stylistic exuberance. Don’t you think that the mass culture with which this artistic current is linked is a product of low quality? Isn’t culture an excellent pursuit that runs counter to the lack of “dignity” of the masses?

M. P.-V.: But mass culture is imbued in all of us. Of course we resisted it and maintained our spirituality. Pop Art was purely a reaction to the abstract expressionism of the ’50s which was flourishing at the time in America. That was why it also extolled the consumer goods that were accessible to all.

You mean that the Pop Art artists did not represent the consumer society but, to the contrary, an about-turn on and against that society, denouncing “anti-personalization” through over-statement and exaggeration.

M. P.-V.: It is clear that it is a denouncement of “anti-personalization” thus giving everyone the opportunity to take part and rejoice through this superlativeness.

In Warhol’s works consumer goods are idealized in an apparently playful guise that has an ironic function of parody, and deception. The real desire is neutralized by the satisfaction of a consumer desire.

M. P.-V.: The satisfaction of a consumer desire does not only neutralize the real desire but it also always bypasses it. Warhol extolled Campbell's canned foods, Coca Cola and the electric chair, but through his art. He adored painting.

A number of your most well-known and characteristic works with the car as the theme are assignments or commissions. How can a contemporary artist work under such conditions?

M. P.-V.: In my case it was, and still is, a challenge. I started out from an inner need to express the dynamics of cars that inspired me. In turn this resulted in my works inspiring the people of the great automobile manufacturers in Italy. Thus they requested me to represent them pictorially, something that was not at all binding for me since they followed whatever suggestions I made to them. Challenging!

I will refer to U. Eco who writes: "The object 'car' transmits a semantic unit, which is not merely the unit 'car', but also, for example, 'speed' or 'comfort' or 'wealth'"⁶. A car, and, in particular, the type of car that you yourself are concerned with, indicates a certain social status.

M. P.-V.: On the one hand I do not only produce works of art based on aerodynamics and technology. The executive car and the Formula 1s are unique stimuli which make you study the majesty of movement emanating from them. In short, they are design masterpieces. On the other hand the town vehicles, even the taxis, represent our daily routine, which we all live. I am simply interested in portraying it because I like to. Or, even if I didn't, it is within this that I move and, at the same, it is from this that I want to break free, to evade, to liberate myself.

Following the invention and widespread use of the car people no longer walk. They speed about like crazy in the large cities on their four-wheels. They have become indifferent. Do your works on the theme "town-movement" transmit a message on that? Do they express a socialized dimension of human relationships?



*Πόρτα ταξί N.Y.C.T.A., 1996.
Ακρικό σε μουσαμά, 150 x 100.
Ιδιωτική συλλογή.*

*N.Y.C.T.A. Cab door, 1996.
Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 100.
Private collection.*

6. U. Eco, *Trattato di Semiotica Generale*, 1975.

I read a "protest" by S. Sorogas: "Even the large galleries terrorize the person who paints, treating him like someone from the third world, as if he were out of season"¹⁰. *Is that true?*

M. P.-V.: It is. It hasn't happened to me.

I think, however, that little by little the paintbrush and the dynamics of colour are recovering, alongside the development of new types of pictorial expression, conceptual art, performance art etc. as the result of a morphologically saturated pictorial creation, since by now all the trends of "modernism" have been tried out.

M. P.-V.: It's true that we are returning to the age of the canvas which I never abandoned. I always wanted the surface in front of me as a challenge, to start to explore on top of it. Different kinds of surface, as you know.

From paper, canvas, papyrus to lead and copper...

The United States Sports Academy unanimously nominated you Athletics artist of the year 2002. You are only the second female artist to be awarded this title, the first being Sheila Wolk from New York. The Down hill skier, Kenderis, The Women's High jump, The Yellow Runners and The High jump were your works that decorated Salt Lake City during the 2002 Winter Olympics. How does an artist perceive and address this success?

M. P.-V.: Those works were all exhibited in Salt Lake City and in the Museum of the Academy. *The Down hill skier*, a work from 1992, was the official poster for the Olympic Games. The distinction and being awarded a prize came as a shock. The feeling of responsibility was very great and I trembled all the way to Florida and to Salt Lake City, where I presented my work, in interviews and before the media. All that sounds fine from the outside, but it was very difficult to experience and deal with at the time. Afterwards, however, you feel very good having



Δάφνη και Απόλλωνας, 2002.

Ακρικό σε μουσαμά, 200 x 130.

Μουσείο της Αμερικανικής Αθλητικής Ακαδημίας,
Δάφνη, Αλαμπάμα, ΗΠΑ.

Daphne and Apollo, 2002.

Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 130.

American Sport Art Museum and Archives
of the Academy, Daphne, Alabama, USA.

10. *Symbol Magazine* in *Επενδυτής Newspaper*, 10/11-11-2001.

that success, the recognition. It is a justification, a challenge for you to go on and continue to create.

Picasso said: “Success is something very important! They often say that the artist must work above all for himself, ‘out of a love for art’, and that he must despise success. That is wrong! An artist needs success. And not only for him to make a living, but mainly so that he can create”¹¹.

M. P.-V.: Picasso was on to something. That was why he reached the age of ninety-five and never stopped creating.

We often forget that artists are people, and for me real artists are exceptionally down-to-earth people – people who can be worldly in their life (in the French sense of the word “mondain”, opposite of “bohème”), have a family and, like the rest of us, have a right to be enthusiastic over their professional success.

M. P.-V.: I think that greatness comes through simplicity and not through complexity. Clearly real artists are down-to-earth as they have nothing to prove beyond their work.

In closing, let’s quote A. Gide, “there are no ‘problems’ in art for which the work of art cannot constitute the adequate solution”¹².

M. P.-V.: Both adequate solution and proof, but most of all a way out.

Κάτω από τη γέφυρα, 1996.
Ακρυλικά σε μουσαμά, 150 x 100. Ιδιωτική συλλογή.

Under the bridge, 1996.
Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 100. Private collection.



11. Brassai, *Conversations avec Picasso*, Paris, 1964, pages 161-162.

12. A. Gide, *L'immoraliste*, Paris, 2001, Introduction, page 10.