

Art spanning broad range of styles, eras

Marios Prasinos retrospective on Syros

A self-portrait of Marios Prasinos is one of the paintings on display at the Cycladic Gallery in Ermoupolis. The artist's most well-known works are his tree portraits, but the current exhibition reveals all of his artistic range, from the abstract to surrealism. Prasinos experimented with cubism, surrealism and expressionism. He sometimes used a rainbow palette of colors and at other times the simple austerity of black and white.

who was open to the trends and spirit of his times, yet always carved out his



own personal style.

His most well-known paintings are those of his tree portraits. However, walking through the door of the gallery, one discovers a dazzling artistic richness, ranging from the abstract to the natural. In his lifetime, Prasinos experimented with cubism, surrealism,

and expressionism, sometimes using a rainbow palette of colors, at other times the simple austerity of black and white.

His themes, too, were varied. He painted cubist canvases of people in grief, self-portraits, birds with geometric shapes, abstract representations, animal herds, thorny plants, Alpine views, and compositions of the face of his grandfather or trees comprising only dots.

The diversity of his inspiration derives from the eventfulness of his life. He was born in the middle of World War I, in 1916, in Constantinople. His half-Greek, half-Italian family weathered the storm, but left in 1922, along with many other foreigners, for Paris. Both he and his sister Giselle had an excellent education due to their father. An amateur painter and intellectual, he greatly encouraged his children's artistic natures. Marios and Giselle came into contact with the surrealist salon of Paris, and met all the great personalities of the movement, from Andre Breton to Paul Eluard, as well as Joan Miro, and Alberto Giacometti.

Later in his life, he became friends with Albert Camus, and the influential publisher Gaston Gallimard, with whom he worked as an illustrator. The three of them visited Greece together in 1958, where Prasinos became enthralled with the cypress tree's leaves and dark body. In his long career, he was also a set designer for the theater, and wove large tapestries, some of which are on display on Syros. He died in 1985.

The Prasinos retrospective – in the framework of the Ermoupoleia Festival, now celebrating its 17th year – is held under the aegis of the Ermoupoli Cultural Center. In trying to resurrect the great artistic tradition of the island of Syros, organizers have changed the style of their festival. Apart from the visual arts exhibitions (a retrospective of Chronis Botsoglou just ended), they have incorporated into their calendar many local amateur theatrical and musical performances, putting the beautiful Apollo Theater to excellent use.

The Marios Prasinos retrospective will end on September 3.

The paintings of Marios Prasinos that are on display in Ermoupoli on Syros provide a unique opportunity to get to know the work of a famous Greek painter who was born in Constantinople, lived in Paris, and experienced the upheavals of the 20th century at first hand.

The island's old customs warehouses, which now house the Cycladic Gallery, serve as the background; on display are approximately 80 works chosen from each of his various creative periods. Seen collectively, they reveal an artist

The art of the sandal

The Melissinos family continues trade and heritage in Psyrri

What did Maria Callas and Jackie Onassis have in common? There was Aristotle of course, but also Melissinos sandals – in the latter case, they opted for different models which were subsequently named after them.

Little has changed when it comes to the Melissinos family and the art of sandal-making – the original Monastiraki store has moved to Psyrri and you may place orders online.

On a busy summer afternoon, singer Sharon Robinson and drummer Rafael Gayol are picking their pairs – a few hours before climbing on the Terra Vibe stage alongside Leonard Cohen for the Athens leg of their current concert tour. Besides the world-class musicians, French and American tourists mix with locals – all trying and buying.

Many years have passed since Giorgos Melissinos founded the family business in 1920. He was succeeded by his son Stavros, aka “The Poet Sandal Maker”, who in turn passed the creative torch to his son Pantelis, known as “The Artist Sandal Maker.” Three generations servicing the likes of Gary Cooper, Sophia Loren, Barbra Streisand, John Lennon and Rudolf Nureyev, among other familiar faces, but also countless lesser-known fans from Greece and around the world.

“We are always solicited for mass production, we have proposals coming from the United States, Korea and Japan,” says Pantelis Melissinos. “But it's not our style, every single pair is finalized on the customer's foot.”

Using calf leather from northern Greece which is later tanned in Crete, Melissinos and his assistants make



Pantelis Melissinos at work in his store.

“I don't follow fashion trends, but I sense things. There is a sandal revival; it started last year, and this year it's a riot. People who never looked at sandals are now selling them,” says Melissinos, who was featured in the US edition of Vogue in 2004.

A painter and playwright, Pantelis Melissinos studied illustration and painting at New York's Parsons New School of Design and was artistic director of the Greek Cultural Center in Astoria.

“Following my studies I stayed on in New York and worked very hard. Yet despite the success, I began feeling empty inside. I thought to myself: ‘Who I am I going to be in five years? A success story running to my shrink and my guru?’ I left it all behind, came to Greece and immersed myself into culture and theater. But at the back of my mind

I always had this image of me as the sandal maker – an image I've had since childhood,” says Melissinos. At the downtown outlet it all seems to come together: His own works of art are on display along with copies of his plays and poetry editions by his father.

“People come into the shop and find little marks on the leather,” says Melissinos. “I say, ‘If you're looking for the perfect product go buy something industrial.’ What you see here is a hand mark, a mark of nature.”

Timeless style

Priestesses at the Olympic Flame ceremonies in Olympia wear Melissinos sandals – and so does Kate Moss



thousands of sandals every year. Beyond the numerous models on display, Melissinos also produces a large number of special orders.

Modern yet traditional, sandals have earned their rightful place in the world of style: Priestesses at the Olympic Flame ceremonies in Olympia wear Melissinos sandals – and so does Kate Moss.

