

London calling

COLLECTOR and curator George Stathopoulos (photo) continues to push the national boundaries of Greek art by exhibiting the work of Greek artists abroad.

Over the years he has presented Greek creativity in New York and Florida, while more recently he has organised a number of shows in London.

Stathopoulos' current showcasing of Greek art at the Belgravia Gallery in London's exclusive Mayfair area runs until November 5 and features the work of five well-established female artists: Daphne Angelidou, Maria Filopoulou, Erietta Vordoni, Chrysa Verghi and Irini Iliopoulou.

Taking a moment, Stathopoulos tells what makes Greek art stand out, whether there's a difference between artworks produced by a man or a woman, and the role a piece's investment potential plays in his decision to buy something.

Impressions so far

You have been promoting Greek contemporary art abroad for some time now.

What's the feedback been so far?

Extremely positive. In all the shows in Florida, New York and in the last three years in London, art enthusiasts coming to see the exhibitions have praised in superlatives the artistic quality and beauty of the Greek paintings.

Renowned art magazines such as Art in America and Art News have written and



presented the various shows in the US. The exhibit at the National Arts Club in 2006, in New York, attracted over 1,000 people to the opening.

All this is very encouraging and stimulating for me to continue promoting Greek art abroad.

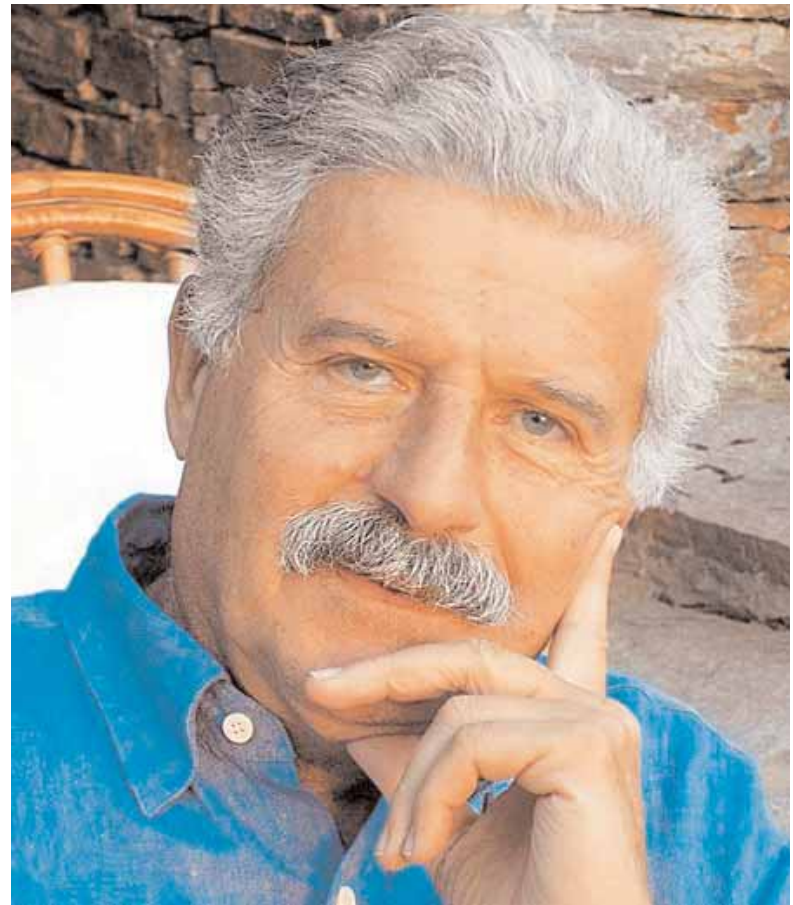
What do you think makes Greek art of today different or appealing?

I don't feel that Greek art - at least representational art - is very different from that of other European countries or the US. Of course, the themes differ and are affected by the seas, islands, the Greek colours and light - particularly in landscape paintings.

I believe Greek painters bring out certain feelings of happiness and optimism that attract foreign art lovers.

Representational painting - what's the future of this traditional form?

Representational art flourished in the Renaissance period and continues to do so. Various artistic styles come and go, but representational art is particularly pleasant to the eye and will always be popular. People feel this art form



has a calming effect - something which is much needed in the hectic times we live in.

Men vs women

Women artists today - a risky or safe investment?

I don't believe that women artists are any more or less risky, or safe, in terms of an investment. It's not the gender that counts but the quality of the work.

As a collector, how important is the investment appeal of art?

As a collector, my primary criterion is - if I like the artwork, I buy it. I've never bought an artwork for investment and have never sold any of the works in my collection.

Of course, I am very pleased when I see that what I bought a few years back has doubled or tripled in value, but that's not the primary reason I collect.

What really counts is the aesthetic value of the art and what the artworks do to enrich my everyday life.

Apolacypse Maya

APOLINARIO Chile Pixtun is tired of being bombarded with frantic questions about the Mayan calendar supposedly "running out" on 21 December 2012. After all, it's not the end of the world. Or is it? Definitely not, the Mayan Indian elder insists. "I came back from England last year and, man, they had me fed up with this stuff."

It can only get worse for him. Next month Hollywood's 2012 opens in cinemas, featuring earthquakes, meteor showers and a tsunami dumping an aircraft carrier on the White House.

At Cornell University, Ann Martin, who runs the "Curious? Ask an Astronomer" website, says people are scared. "We had a mother of two young children who was afraid she wouldn't live to see them grow up," she said. Chile Pixtun, a Guatemalan, says the doomsday theories spring from Western, not Mayan ideas.

A significant time period for

the Mayas does end on the date, and enthusiasts have found a series of astronomical alignments they say coincide in 2012, including one that happens roughly only once every 25,800 years. But most archaeologists, astronomers and Maya say the only thing likely to hit Earth is a meteor shower of New Age philosophy, pop astronomy, Internet doomsday rumours and TV specials such as one on the History Channel which mixes "predictions" from Nostradamus and the Mayas and asks: "Is 2012 the year the cosmic clock finally winds down to zero days, zero hope?"

It may sound all too much

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like other doomsday scenarios of recent decades - the 1987 Harmonic Convergence, the Jupiter Effect or "Planet X". But this one has some grains of archaeological basis.

One of them is Monument Six.

Found at an obscure ruin in southern Mexico during highway construction in the 1960s, the stone tablet almost didn't survive; the site was largely paved over and parts of the tablet were looted.

It's unique in that the remaining parts contain the equivalent of the date 2012. The inscription describes something that is supposed to occur in 2012 involving Bolon Yokte, a mysterious Mayan god associated with both war and creation.

However - shades of Indiana Jones - erosion and a crack in the stone make the end of the passage almost illegible.

Archaeologist Guillermo Bernal of Mexico's National Autonomous University interprets the last eroded glyphs as



Mayan Indian priests pray during the celebration of the Mayan New Year

maybe saying, "He will descend from the sky."

Spooky, perhaps, but Bernal notes there are other inscriptions at Mayan sites for dates far beyond 2012 - including one that roughly translates into the year 4772.

And anyway, Mayas in the drought-stricken Yucatan peninsula have bigger worries than 2012. "If I went to some Mayan-speaking communities and asked people what is going to happen in 2012, they wouldn't have any idea," said Jose Huchim, a Yucatan

Mayan archaeologist. "That the world is going to end? They wouldn't believe you. We have real concerns these days, like rain."

The Mayan civilization, which reached its height from AD300 to AD900, had a talent for astronomy. Its Long Count calendar begins in 3,114BC, marking time in roughly 394-year periods known as Baktuns. Thirteen was a significant, sacred number for the Mayas, and the 13th Baktun ends around 21 December 2012.