

Christoforos Savva (1924-1968)¹

“[Savva] enters into the most progressive movements, he [then] transcends them, and he creates himself. What he makes, are very personal things”
[Adamantios Diamantis].²

Christoforos Savva is a unique case in recent Cypriot culture. Many factors contribute in pronouncing him the most important creator in modern Cypriot art. It was he who introduced contemporary artistic trends, which he brought into a creative dialogue with local traditions; thus he became the link between the first two generations of artists, functioning, at the same time, as a reference point for younger ones. Moreover, he was among the pioneers of the modernisation of the local cultural scene, by rallying together creators from various fields into associations, and by establishing spaces that housed important (often avant-garde) activities.

Savva was born in 1924, in the Marathovounos village of the Mesaoria plain – the second of six children of a peasant family.³ Like the vast majority of children in rural areas, he only attended primary school, after which he was occupied with his family’s farming activities. Just how a village child that grew up in a colony, would come to be a great modern artist – the most important one in the newly independent republic – constitutes one of the fascinating “enigmas” of his myth. The scant evidence about his childhood does not indicate any noteworthy interest in art, on his behalf.⁴ In the years 1943-46, during which he served in the Cyprus Regiment (of the British Army), he probably had his first substantial contact with art, via either museum visits (mostly in Italy, where he was stationed after a time in Egypt) or slide projections, or

¹ Many thanks to Costas Economou, who generously put at my disposal all of his archival (visual and other) material, concerning Christoforos Savva. Equally important has been the material of the Iridanos Gallery’s archive, to which I was given full access by Demos Protopapas and Pola Hadjipapa – I thank them both. A large part of the photographic material was derived from the archive of the Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation (special thanks to its director, Lefki Michaelidou). Finally, some material was derived for the archive of the State Gallery of Contemporary Cypriot Art (my thanks to Sophia Mourouti, Ursula Savvopoulou and Aliko Savva, for their help), and from the archive of the Art Galleries of the Makarios III Foundation (my thanks to Ioannis Eliades).

All translations from Greek are mine.

² From an interview by Adamantios Diamantis to Demos Protopapas. *Apophysis* documentary [in Greek] (Iridanos, 1988).

³ On Savva, see *Christoforos Savva: his life and work* [in Greek and English] (Nicosia: Cultural Service, Ministry of Education, 1988) – texts by Christine Savva-Duroe (“Christoforos Savva, as I knew him”) and Costas Economou (“The work of Christoforos Savva”); Eleni S. Nikita, *Christoforos Savva (1924-1968): the beginning of a new era in Cypriot art* [in Greek] (Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, 2008). See, also, Exhibition catalogue, *Christoforos Savva* [in Greek] (Nicosia: Cultural Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993).

⁴ See Costas Economou in *Christoforos Savva* (1988), op. cit., p. 65 (note 3). Cf. interview by Andreas Zambas to Demos Protopapas, *Apophysis* documentary, op. cit.

even, through drawing classes, which were common in the British Army.⁵ In any case, whatever Savva's early interests might have been, his flight to England in 1947 (taking advantage of the immigration opportunities offered to army veterans), had probably more to do with a desire to escape the suffocatingly small Cypriot environment, rather than with a passion for art.

Initially, Savva took classes at St. Martin's School of Art and at Central School of Art, in London. His more regular studies began in 1948, after enrolling in Heatherley's School of Fine Arts, which he attended until 1953 or '54.⁶ Unfortunately, too few of Savva's early works are known to us, in order to define accurately an initial style of his art. The earliest ones [figs. 1, 2, 3⁷] indicate a range of influences, derived from French modernism from the late 19th and early 20th centuries – mostly from Paul Cézanne and from the Fauves, especially, Henri Matisse. They manifest, additionally, a seemingly naïf style, such as in the painting shown in a photo of Savva (in his room?), from the period of his English studies [fig. 1]. In some other works of the time, we see the beginnings of a cubist tendency, in the organisation of the painting's space [fig. 4].⁸ Such characteristics were part of English art, as early as the second decade of the 20th century: influences from French modernism (especially, Cézanne, Matisse and Georges Braque, as well as Cubism) met with trends of a more local character, resulting in a particularly English modern art or rather, in several modernisms developing in parallel.

⁵ From interviews by Telemachos Kanthos and Diamantis to Demos Protopapas, *Apophysis* documentary, op. cit.

⁶ See Costas Economou in *Christoforos Savva* (1988), op. cit., p. 65 (note 7), and Nikita (2008), op. cit., p. 18.

⁷ As indicated by his exhibition brochures, as well as by other sources, Savva always gave titles to his works. Matching the works with titles is now rather difficult, however, apart from a limited number of cases, for which we have enough information for the titles he gave himself (unlike others that were given later by commentators on his work) – though at times, Savva changed a work's title from an exhibition to the next. For these reasons, the works mentioned in the present text (illustrated, with captions, in a separate document) are given titles only when we can be certain enough that these are the original ones given by Savva – in some instances, I arrived at the names through examining and comparing photographs of the period, exhibition brochures and references in articles, letters and elsewhere. In all other cases, the works are given with an “unknown title” indication, followed (in parentheses) by the name that was given and/or has become common after Savva's death. To the work in figure 2, I gave the (possible) title *The Joy of Life* (instead of *Harvest*, that is given in Nikita [2008], p. 202), because it has strong similarities with the homonymous painting (see photos from the Ledra Palace exhibition in December 1955), which was given as a wedding present by Savva to his brother.

⁸ The “cubist influence” is something that has been elaborated on by all commentators on Savva's oeuvre – with regard to some works from his English studies period and, consequently, those from 1954-55 in Cyprus, as well as, especially, the ones from the following years in France. It should be noted, however, that this influence does not concern the “dominant” (historiographically or otherwise) version of “analytic” and “synthetic” Cubism, mostly from the second decade of the 20th century, as seen in the work of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque; but rather, it refers to an eclectic use of cubist elements, both by Picasso and Braque from the interwar period, as well as by the group of artists that were actually labelled as “Cubists” (in which neither of two older artists belonged).

In the 1930s and 1940s, influences from non-representational (abstract) art were added, and for a while (during WWII), England became the centre of Constructivism.⁹ Nevertheless, London remained, until the late 1950s and early 1960s, an artistic “periphery” vis-à-vis international art centres – mostly Paris, and then, New York. This state of affairs, however, contributed to the creation of an artistic milieu that was characterised by a wide range of tendencies and manifestations, without any of them dominating. This was perhaps the ideal environment for the education of a new generation of Cypriot artists – most prominent among them was Savva – who succeeded the earlier generation (of Adamantios Diamantis, Telemachos Kanthos, George Pol. Georghiou et al.), and who would bring, in the 1960s, Cypriot art in contact with current, international movements.

This modernisation of local art was still about a decade away, when in the summer of 1954 Savva finished his first period of studies and returned to Cyprus, along with his good friend and fellow student Roddy Maude-Roxby (b. 1930). In November (18-24) of that year, before Maude-Roxby returned to the UK, they had an exhibition (which is conventionally regarded as Savva’s first “solo” show), at the British Council in Nicosia. Most, if not all of the paintings had been made during the few months of their stay on the island, the nature and the people of which were their main subject matter. *Kypriaka Grammata* journal mentioned, some months later, that Savva showed fifteen pictures,¹⁰ while fellow artist Costas Economou remembers that the exhibition included landscapes and still lifes in oil, rendered in a “cubist tendency”¹¹ [fig. 5¹²].

It is interesting to examine the (albeit few) examples of the reception with which Savva’s work was met. The local art and culture scene, though limited at the time, seems to have been well informed of developments in Europe, elements from which were already being incorporated in the production of some fields, such as literature. With regard to Savva’s and Maude-Roxby’s exhibition, whatever modernism characterised their works did not seem odd or unknown. Indicative of this familiarity is the reference in the English-language newspaper *Cyprus Mail*: “Both have remarkable

⁹ Among various sources, see Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900* (Thames and Hudson, 1986), especially, chapters 2-8.

¹⁰ The information is given in a very brief note on “Christos Savva”, *Kypriaka Grammata*, no. 237 (March 1955), p. 105. On page 106, one of Savva’s still lifes is shown, possibly from the 1954 exhibition.

¹¹ Handwritten notes, archive of Costas Economou.

¹² This painting and two others have repeatedly been published as *Marathovounos* (I, II and III). In her recent monograph on Savva, Eleni Nikita changed their title to *Aghia Napa* [Nikita (2008), op. cit., p. 43, note 43].

powers of composition and sense of colour, and noteworthy in each case is the ability to paint in either brilliant or subdued colours. People in Cyprus should by now be getting used to the ‘modern’ idiom in painting, and if they visit this exhibition they will find much they have never before noticed in the life and landscape of the country, depicted in a thoughtful, imaginative and colourful manner”.¹³ In the above-mentioned note in *Kypriaka Grammata*, it was noted that the work by Savva is “characterised by great ability in composition, refined taste in colour and wonderful originality”.¹⁴ Such comments constitute the first indications for the positive, in the most part, reception of Savva’s oeuvre by (as well as of his wider range of activities within) the Cypriot cultural environment, throughout his course, in spite of the constant innovations, originality and the occasional “unorthodox” manifestations of his work.¹⁵ An example of this acceptance is the commission Savva received from the Shell oil company in 1955 [fig. 6]. This work incorporates all the hitherto main aspects of his painting: a naïf style, with regard to drawing and to the use of mostly clear and strong colours, which alludes both to early European modernism (especially, to Matisse), as well as to Cypriot vernacular art. At the same time, the entire composition is characterised by a cubist-like arrangement of the colour areas, and of the dark and light contrasts.

This combination is also characteristic of the works Savva showed in December of 1955, at his second exhibition, this time at the Ledra Palace Hotel [fig. 7]. Among them were the *Self-portrait* [fig. 8], various still lifes [fig. 9] and, possibly, the *Female Portrait* [fig. 10], a variation of which appears in the background of the *Self-portrait*. “[Cyprus] is well ahead for its size of most of its neighbours in the fields of talent and imagination. Here is young Christophoros Savvas [sic] to prove it: with his exhibition at the Ledra Palace, Nicosia, he shows he has joined that small group of Cypriot artists – led in painting by G. Pol. Georghiou and in music by Solon Michaelides – who are marking a name for Cyprus in the European art world. Savvas is ‘modern’ – very ‘modern’ some will say. He is young, and still exploring the expanses of his imaginings and of his medium: but he has an exciting passion for colour and instinct for design that

¹³ R. P., “Paintings of Cyprus: English and Cypriot artists”, *Cyprus Mail*, 18/11/1954, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Kypriaka Grammata* (March 1955), op. cit. As Costas Economou mentions, “when Chr. Savva appears with his first exhibition in 1954, the artistic environment was ready for change, even if at first [his work] seemed strange to the general public” [*Christoforos Savva* (1988), op. cit., p. 37].

¹⁵ Even the negative, for the most part, reaction of fellow artist Stass Paraskos in a letter to the press, was an informed critique, probably written under the ideology for a “socially responsible” art – something largely related, around the middle of the century, with a realist idiom. See, S. P., “The painting exhibition of Chr. Savva and R. Roxby” [in Greek], *Empros* newspaper, 25/11/1954, p. 2.

could arouse envy in many a salon of Paris or London”.¹⁶ So went one newspaper article, while another noted: “Chr. Savva does not copy, he creates. Even what he takes from others, especially Matisse, he assimilates excellently. [...] In general, the exhibition was satisfactory. [He] is a conscientious artist, who has already taken a special place among our island’s artists”.¹⁷ The Ledra Palace exhibition was also mentioned by Diamantis in an article from early 1956, while, generally on Savva, he commented that, “newly-arrived from London, where he studied, he brings with him those progressive trends that render things with great reduction and with emphasis on composition, in contrasting tones and colours, but without abandoning [the representation of] life and the world”. And he perceptively adds: “I am certain that Cyprus will be good for him”.¹⁸

In the meanwhile, Savva began to get involved in the local arts scene. Most importantly, he instigated the establishment of the Pancyprrian Union of Art Votaries, in December 1955 or January 1956, which included young artists, writers and others from the realm of cultural production. It was at the Union’s building that Savva held his third solo show, which opened on March 29, 1956. Among his works at the time was *Deposition* [fig. 11], possibly inspired by the variations on this subject by Pol. Georghiou that were painted between 1952 and ’53 or ’54, as well as by the latter’s larger work, *Christ rises in Cyprus* (c. 1955, in the collection of Rhodes Municipal Gallery). In Savva’s painting, the figures embody elements of locality and contemporaneity, in parallel to Georghiou’s works, but without the emphasis on Cypriot identity in the latter’s villagers.¹⁹ Any allusions Savva makes to “Cypriotness”, are more of an indirect, painterly nature, rather than immediately thematic: the seeming naivety of the drawing, the rounded forms of the bodies and the clear, flat colours, the stylised facial features, and the vertical development of the composition (any sense of depth is absent), are all elements that, besides their roots in early European modernism, point to vernacular and Byzantine art. Another of his works from these years is *Demonstration*

¹⁶ Anonymous note (with photos from the exhibition’s opening), “Savvas, the painter with a passion for colour [...]”, *Times of Cyprus* newspaper, December 1955 [photocopy in the archive of Iridanos Gallery].

¹⁷ Anonymous article, “The painting exhibition of Christoforos Savva” [in Greek], *Ethnos* newspaper, 29/12/1955 [photocopy in the archive of Costas Economou].

¹⁸ A. Diamantis, “Art in Cyprus” [in Greek], *Kypriaka Grammata*, nos. 247-252 (January-July 1956), p. 206.

¹⁹ In Georghiou’s paintings, the Cypriot peasants are the protagonists of the religious drama, so that its perennial character is imbued with a “local” quality, which is strongly ideological: the episodes of the Crucifixion (along with the Deposition) and of the Resurrection stand as symbolic references to Cyprus’ anti-colonial struggle.

(c. 1955 [fig. 12]) – one of the few that make direct references to the political conditions of the time. Instead of the mostly curvilinear, chromatically-based arrangement of the *Deposition*, here there exists a more geometric composition, with diagonal axes and straight lines, and with colour tonalities, which result in the rendering of an atmosphere of tension and conflict.²⁰ In both of the above paintings, in spite of any symbolisms and ideological content, his main interests are more of a painterly nature. It is this element that was probably seen as a shortcoming, by A. Nicos in an article in *Haravghi* newspaper, on Savva's latest exhibition. In particular reference to the *Demonstration*, he writes that, "it does not communicate any of the collective truth of the protest. [...] Today, Cypriot people live in a very troubled atmosphere, and in real life the demonstrations are not the silent, sensuous women marching in front of two figures that look anything but military".²¹ It is doubtful whether such "critical" responses to his work had any real influence on Savva's decision of leave Cyprus again – most possibly, it was his desire to find himself once again in a major artistic centre, and to escape from the island's provincial world.

Thus, in April 1956 he returned to London, where he stayed for a few months, before ending up in Paris, in June. "I am working at the atelier of a great art critic – his name is André Lhote. He has written several books on art, and he is a friend and coeval of Picasso, Braque et al. With regard to technical issues, I will benefit greatly".²² Lhote's influence on Savva's work has been extensively commented upon by all writers on the Cypriot artist.²³ At the Académie Montparnasse, the dominant trend was a late cubist idiom, which Savva probably assimilated easily, since there already were cubist elements in his painting, both in the earlier works, as well as in some he made in late 1955 and early 1956, before going to Paris. Such examples are the two pictures entitled *Couple* from 1955 [fig. 13],²⁴ which make apparent his awareness of

²⁰ See, also, Costas Economou in *Christoforos Savva* (1988), op. cit., p. 44.

²¹ *Haravghi*, 4/04/1956, p. 2. This critique may be placed within the wider framework of the time's leftist ideology in Cyprus: it demanded a "committed" art, which in Western Europe had manifested itself in the guise of "social realism" (in the interwar years and during WWII), while in Eastern Europe it continued its existence as "socialist (or Soviet) realism".

²² Letter of Savva to Pantelis Mechanicos, dated June 25 [1956] [in Greek; photocopy in the archive of Costas Economou].

²³ André Lhote (1885-1965) was more important as a writer and critic on art, and as a teacher (at his own school, the Académie Montparnasse, which opened in 1922, and was attended by both French and foreign students), rather than as an artist in his own right. His early work was influenced mostly by Fauvism, but from 1911 onwards, he adopted stylistic traits from Cubism.

²⁴ Chrysanthos Christou writes that "stylistically it seems almost impossible" for the *Couple* to have been painted before 1955, that is, before Savva found himself in Lhote's school in Paris [see Chrysanthos Christou, "Christoforos Savva", in Exhibition catalogue, *Christoforos Savva* (1993), op. cit., p. 24, note 5].

cubist idioms.²⁵ Lhote placed great emphasis on the composition of the picture as a reduction of figures to basic geometric shapes, and in which colour functions as the element that connects and incorporates separate forms into a unified whole.²⁶ In the late '50s, when Savva attended the French artist's school, the teaching and painting methods there constituted a dated and academic mannerism. For Savva, however, this period was possibly necessary, not so much as a stage in the development of his work in terms of technical skills, but more as a psychological boost vis-à-vis any insecurities he probably felt, coming from an artistically backward province to one of the major centres of art. "One reason why I continue [working] at the Atelier Lhote is that he is the only person in art who's got discipline".²⁷ At the same time, he seemed aware of the importance of being in contact with the tradition of art ("the artistic achievements of generations and of centuries are always respected by, and useful to the real artists, who then add to, perfect and exalt [this tradition]"²⁸), as well as of the need for systematic study and work. He managed to distinguish himself in the Academy: "Among sixty students in my school, I'll be representing them with two works, at an exhibition called 'New Talents'".²⁹

Lhote's influence is apparent in the works that Savva showed in three solo exhibitions in Cyprus, where he returned (via London and Venice) in July 1957, and stayed until March '58. In December 1957, at Ledra Palace, he presented twenty nine works – landscapes, still lifes and "nudes". Judging by the paintings' titles, most of them must have been made in Cyprus, after his return. The "presence" of the French Cubist is particularly obvious in the "nudes" [fig. 14] and in some of the landscapes

Besides Costas Economou's testimony (which Christou could have easily got, had he asked for it), namely, that the painting was given to him and his wife as their wedding present in October 1955, whatever the cubist character of this work is, it has little to do with Lhote's style. For a point of reference, we should look to Picasso (especially his interwar painting) – whose work Savva already knew well from exhibitions in London, and from reproductions in magazines and elsewhere. [The other *Couple* (collection of Maroula Mechanicos) is pictured in Nikita (2008), op. cit., p. 222].

²⁵ Here in particular, with an aspect of Picasso's work from the interwar period: an interesting comparison can be made with the latter's *Two Women at a Window* from 1927 (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas).

²⁶ Lhote developed a specific formula of arranging the picture plane, where a grid of diagonal lines functions as the base of the composition, the rectangles of which repeat the ratio of the canvas' dimensions. The figures and their surrounding space are placed on this grid, volumetrically modelled, with their contours having been simplified into straight and curved lines.

²⁷ Letter of Savva to Adamantios Diamantis, undated (early 1959 [in Greek; photocopy in the archive of Costas Economou]). See Exhibition catalogue, *Christoforos Savva* (1993), op. cit., n. p.

²⁸ Ibid. Savva quotes a French critic's "answer" to the rhetoric of the US avant-garde, regarding the "tearing down" of [European] tradition.

²⁹ Letter of Savva to Mechanicos from Paris, dated 21/11/1956 [in Greek; photocopy in the archive of Costas Economou].

(such as, *Bathers at Kyrenia* [fig. 15]). Such pictures constitute, one could say, Savva's most "academic", conservative work, even if their style was a new element in Cypriot art at the time. "One could light-heartedly characterise as new demons, the elements that Savva is introducing into the limited territory of Cypriot painting. Elements that may be routine in art centres abroad, yet they still puzzle the 'average' art lover on our island. Nevertheless, Mr. Savva's work contains much worthwhile material, valued in its originality and honesty".³⁰ "The paintings by Chr. Savva are obviously well composed [...]. There is a variety of colour, including complementary ones, which produces an impressive and harmonious result".³¹ Finally, in another note in the daily press, Savva's exhibition is declared as "noteworthy, by a sincere artist".³²

In some of the works at the 1957 exhibition (many of which were then shown at Famagusta and Limassol), Savva merges Lhote's strict cubist formula with colouristic and drawing elements from Fauvism [fig. 16]. His truly novel and "revolutionary" work, however, was not produced until he escaped the dated mannerism of his French teacher, as well as the rest of early-20th century French modernism's residue. One of the new directions toward which his work would proceed was that of non-representational (abstract) art. Some intentions of the kind were already apparent in some of the 1957 works. In *Boat Builders* (1957) [fig. 17],³³ the earlier, cubist-inclined organisation of the picture has given way to a more emphatically flat arrangement (no indications of depth, volume or other element of the third dimension remains), while the only allusions to the work's title are the hints to sails and masts, which are embedded in the colour

³⁰ Leonidas Malenis, "Christoforos Savva" [in Greek], *Times of Cyprus* magazine, v. 2, no. 14 (31/12/1957), pp. 27-28.

³¹ K. Ledraios, "Weekly Cultural Review" [in Greek], *Kypriaki* newspaper, 10/12/1957, p. 4.

³² From a review of the arts scene in 1957 ("A year to remember in Cyprus art"), *Times of Cyprus*, 1/01/1958 [photocopy in the archive of Iridanos Gallery]. In a rare and admirable gesture of promoting public discussion on art, Savva reprinted in the brochure of his exhibition at the Limassol Municipal Hall, in 1958 (late February or March), an excerpt of M. Floros' critique in *Haravghi*, 29/12/1957 [in Greek]. Coming from the ideological viewpoint of an art "committed" to the good of humanity, Floros writes that "the truth of our [capitalist] social system", namely, that "misery will never end" (quoting van Gogh's phrase, which had been included in the December exhibition's brochure), is not apparent in Savva's paintings. "If this truth moves the artist", he continues, "then, what has he done to utilise it, to spread it around, and to contribute with his art toward the uprising of human consciousness against misery?". [From the brochure of Savva's exhibition (in which he included works that had also been shown at Ledra Palace in December 1957), at the Limassol Municipal Hall in 1958 {archive of Costas Economou}].

³³ In the brochure of Savva's May 1968 retrospective exhibition at the Goethe Institute in Nicosia, the work *Boat builders* ("paintings" no. 3, dated 1957) is included. By juxtaposing the list of titles and exhibition photos, it can easily be identified. A picture with a corresponding title (in French) – *Le chantier naval* (*Shipyards*) – was included in the exhibition by Savva, Glyn Hughes and Simone Burdeau in Beirut, in December 1960 [see article in the magazine *Revue du Liban*, 31/12/1960 {Nikita (2008), op. cit., p. 28}]. *Boat builders* was also shown at Ledra Palace, in December 1959.

areas. A schematically rendered human figure is the only recognisable element in this dynamic, vertically developed cluster of geometric shapes and bright colours.

Savva's exhibition in December 1957 was probably the reason for his inclusion in a report from Nicosia, on the present state of Cypriot art, which was published in the *New York Times* in May 1958. The author calls him the most interesting among the younger painters, and he notes the influence of Lhote in his more recent works, which he finds promising, even though he thinks that Savva "has not yet found himself".³⁴ He also mentions that at the time, the artist was in Paris. Indeed, in March 1958 Savva returned to Lhote's atelier, while in the summer he travelled to the south of France, where he painted several landscapes in gouache and oil. In a letter from Clioucat (Lhote's village), he wrote that he changed his plans about returning to Cyprus, due to the political troubles on the island. At the same time, his stay in the countryside was a solution to his financial hardship.³⁵ While the works from southern France reflect, in general, Lhote's style, the political conditions in Cyprus led him to more interesting creations. In September, he wrote to Costas Economou that he was working on "subjects taken from the events in Cyprus", and that he has already exhibited five such works, in "a good gallery here, with three other artists – we are supposed to be the best of the Academy – under the title *Le massacrer de Kionele* [sic]".³⁶

After returning to Paris from the south at the end of the summer of 1958, he considered leaving France due to the local political conditions (the events of May and the victory of Charles de Gaulle's party in the parliamentary elections in June). At the end of September, he left for the UK, but in the following months he would be back in Paris, where he had the chance to visit several exhibitions: by Marc Chagall, of Byzantine art, by Picasso and by Lhote.³⁷ With regard to the latter's exhibition, in a letter to Diamantis from early 1959, he wrote of his disappointment ("his best ones were

³⁴ Lord Strabolgh, "Art in Cyprus Today: Local Painters Thrive Despite Stormy Political Situation on Island", *New York Times*, 4/05/1958 [photocopy in the archive of Costas Economou].

³⁵ Letter by Savva to Achilleas Pylotis, dated 25/07/1958 [in Greek; photocopy in the archive of Iridanos Gallery]. In the letter, it becomes apparent that Savva is closely following politics, in both Cyprus and the rest of the world.

³⁶ Letter by Savva to Costas Economou, dated 29/09/1958 [in Greek; archive of Costas Economou]. The exhibition took place in July, in "Mariac" gallery. These works constitute Savva's response to the slaughter of people from Kontemenos village by Turks, at Guenyeli in June 1958. A painting with such title [fig. 18] was shown in December 1959 at Ledra Palace in Nicosia, when Savva had by then returned permanently to Cyprus.

³⁷ See letter by Savva to Costas Economou, dated 29/09/1958, op. cit., and letter by Savva to Diamantis, op. cit.

some landscapes from his fauve period”).³⁸ However, while the process of distancing himself from his French teacher was by now complete (even though he didn’t omit praising the latter’s “discipline”), Savva was not yet ready to converse with the most contemporary artistic trends, at least, not on an intellectual level. He commented on Greek artist Thanasis Tsingos (who painted in an abstract expressionist manner), that “looking at his pictures, you feel like throwing up”! At the same time, he was rather puzzled when faced with the art of the American Abstract Expressionists, at an exhibition at the Musée National d’art moderne in Paris. He was unable to “analyse” it, so he proceeded instead to “criticise” their manifesto – essentially, repeating Lhote’s convictions. Nevertheless, he must have been intrigued enough by the works, so as to make drawings of some of them, with which he “illustrated” the letter to Diamantis.³⁹ In this letter, Savva expressed also his wish to remain in Paris – “better to be unknown here, than being known among the Ledra Palace’s crowd”; but even though in May of 1959 he exhibited there with a group of young artists, in the summer he returned permanently back to Cyprus. Savva’s return signalled a new era in the art of Cyprus, at a time when the island was also about to embark on its course as an independent state in the modern world.

At the end of the year, he held a new solo exhibition (26-30 December) at Ledra Palace in Nicosia. It included works which were examples of both his hitherto course, as well as of the new directions toward which his art was moving. Among the latter, there was *Massacre at Guenyeli* [fig. 18] – an important example of the new trends in his work: strong colours (among which red dominates), expressionistic drawing, and several symbolisms, existing on the edge of representational and abstract art. Several of the other pictures must have also been within abstraction, since K. Ledraios wrote that “most works belong completely within abstract art, thus it would have been better if titles had been avoided, because they force [upon the viewer] a thematic prejudice”.⁴⁰ Some of the other exhibits were among the first examples of Savva’s engagement with “unorthodox” materials and new techniques. Among them was *Basketball* [fig. 19], the first of his

³⁸ Letter by Savva to Diamantis, op. cit. The exhibition with works by American artists that Savva writes that it had opened recently, took place early in 1959 – thus the indication for the letter’s dating.

³⁹ In the letter, Savva drew four works (labelling the coloured areas). He identified two, attributing one of them (correctly) to Jackson Pollock (one of his “drip paintings”); the other was (wrongly) attributed to Sam Francis – it is actually by Mark Rothko. The third is probably by Arshille Gorky, while the fourth is undoubtedly by Barnett Newman (possibly, *Vir heroicus sublimis* from 1950-51).

⁴⁰ K. Ledraios, in an overview of the artistic scene of 1959 [in Greek], *Kairoi tis Kyprou* newspaper, vol. 6, no. 65 (8/01/1960), p. 29.

“*yfasmatografies*” (appliqués or patchworks), as well as his probably first wire sculpture [*Don Quixote*⁴¹], while another work included pieces of burnt matches. With this exhibition, Savva introduced into Cypriot art a range of novel elements – a process that would continue in the following years. In his new exhibition at Ledra Palace in April 1960, linotypes and monotypes were included, some first examples of which had been shown in his previous exhibition, in December 1959. Moreover, he now showed oils, drawings, watercolours, some sculptures in stone, and three collages [possibly among them, fig. 20]. The “unorthodox” materials of the latter, made one commentator talk of “sloppiness”, while among the works he approved of was *Victim of Agadir* [fig. 21⁴²], “which transcends the specific event, and acquires an ecumenical character, as an expression of horror for any devastation”⁴³ – words that betray a specific ideological approach towards art.

Savva was not alone in the effort to introduce new vocabularies into Cypriot art. About two weeks before his Ledra Palace exhibition in December 1959, Welsh artist Glyn Hughes (b. 1931), who had settled in Cyprus in 1956, had his first show on the island, at the same space. He brought with him the most recent stage in English abstract art, which had developed under the influence of US Abstract Expressionism and of the European trends of Tachisme and “art informel”. Savva probably saw some kind of “kinship” between Hughes’s work and his own, so he chose his Welsh colleague, rather than one of the Cypriots, as his partner for one of the most important ventures in the modern cultural history of Cyprus – the establishment of *Apophysis* [Decision] Gallery. The same need for interaction and dialogue among members of the country’s cultural scene that some years earlier had led to the founding of the Pancyprian Union of Art Votaries, led also to the creation of “*Apophysis*” in May 1960. At first, it was housed in the two friends’ living quarters, on Sophocleous Street; soon it moved to a new place on Apollo Street. It was the only independent, professional gallery in Nicosia in the 1960s, and it was also the epicentre of cultural activity, with the organisation and the hosting of

⁴¹ Most possibly it is the work pictured in a photograph of the yard of *Apophysis* Gallery, from the early ’60s [see Nikita (2008), op. cit., p. 167]. The article by J. A., “The Savva Exhibition: Spot the burnt matches in a gay show”, *Times of Cyprus*, December 1959 [photocopy in the archive of Iridanos Gallery], includes a mention of *Nude in the street* [whereabouts unknown] – a true novelty of a work in Cypriot art, since it was a collage made of cine film pieces, post-office franking stamps and paper, covered by Perspex, which was pinned to the picture by brass studs, and it was “surrounded by a frame of fat blue brush strokes”.

⁴² Also known as *Woman of Agadir*.

⁴³ “Art Lover”, “From the exhibition by Christoforos Savva” [in Greek], *Nea Epochi* journal, v. 2, no. 15 (May 1960), p. 26.

exhibitions, lectures, plays and film screenings, with local and foreign creators.⁴⁴ After “*Apophysis*” moved to Apollo Street, Savva gradually took over its entire responsibility, while in 1961, he opened a tavern under the same name, which also became a meeting place for the arts and culture crowd.

Meanwhile, Savva’s art continued to develop rapidly, through an impressively large output. His exhibition at “*Apophysis*” in November 1961 is a landmark in his oeuvre: along with twenty works in gouache and two drawings, he exhibited thirteen “*yfasmatoğrafies*” – a term that was his own invention (it was included in the exhibition’s brochure, while the invitation had referred to “tapestries”⁴⁵). If Savva, by engaging creatively with various artistic traditions and by introducing contemporary trends into Cyprus, became the bridge between older and younger artists, his “*yfasmatoğrafies*” probably constitute the nodal point of this encounter. The exhibition was opened by Telemachos Kanthos – a prominent member of modern Cypriot art’s first generation –, who said, in his address: “Out of [Savva’s] new directions and pursuits, arises suddenly a bright, rich and opulent world, which is manifestly rooted in the great heritage of Cyprus [...]. If the deep, human, clear and plastic element that is found in our vernacular sculpture, and which survives in Byzantine painting, in weaving, in knitting and in the decorative arts, as well as in cloth-making, in sowing, in woodcarving and in pottery, if this Cypriot trait grew strong and survived in spite of all adversities, then Savva is by heritage its agent, consciously or subconsciously.”⁴⁶ N. Vokos, who had previously been critical of Savva’s work, wrote: “His *yfasmatoğrafies* are truly shattering. He is introducing an expressive medium that (at least, for Cyprus) is novel, and he is using it in a masterful way, offering proof that in the hands of a true creator, any means can be transformed into art. We would not be exaggerating if we claimed that with his *yfasmatoğrafies*, Mr Savva has showed us his very best”.⁴⁷ A few months later, Stelios Votsis (an artist of Savva’s generation) wrote that “the

⁴⁴ Among the various events, one should note the first exhibition by naïf artist Michael Kashalos (in 1961), the first common exhibition with Greek and Turkish Cypriot artists (autumn of 1961), performances of plays by Eugene Ionesco (starting with *The Bald Soprano*, directed by Evis Gabrielides, in 1960), Samuel Beckett, et al., shadow theatre (*Karaghiozis*) performances, a discussion with Russian film director and actor, Sergei Bondarchuk, a tribute to vernacular poet Pavlos Liasides (October 1961), and others.

⁴⁵ The term “tapestry” was also used for the first “*yfasmatoğrafia*” he showed [fig. 19], in December 1959. Elsewhere, Savva called these works “carpets” (in a letter by Savva to Costas Economou, dated 20/03/1962 – in Greek; archive of Costas Economou).

⁴⁶ Kanthos’ comments from 1961 were printed in the brochure of Savva’s exhibition at “*Apophysis*”, in June 1962 [in Greek; archive of Costas Economou].

⁴⁷ N. Vokos, “Savva renewed” [in Greek], *Haravghi*, 23/11/1961, p. 5.

yfasmatoğrafies were undoubtedly a revelation and a milestone in the Cypriot artistic scene. This material, which matched the painter's idiosyncrasy, greatly expressed the vernacular spirit, and it promoted our folk tradition in new ways".⁴⁸

Like so many novel developments in art, Savva's systematic use of cloth originated out of practical exigencies – the low cost. The “experiment” apparently worked, thus cloth was turned into a main compositional and expressive medium, in place of paint. Some of the works [figs. 22, 23] continued being based on a cubist-like organisation. Others, however, which are made of large decorative areas put together in naively-“drawn” representational subjects, manifest simultaneous influences from Matisse, from naïf art and from Cypriot vernacular tradition [figs. 24, 25]. They therefore allude to some of his paintings from the mid-1950s, such as the *Deposition* – a variation on the subject of which (as *Crucifixion*), Savva created into a huge “*yfasmatoğrafia*” [fig. 26], with which, in 1967 he participated at an auction in New York, that aimed at raising money for a peace centre at Bellapais, in Cyprus. Moreover, some “*yfasmatoğrafies*” embody references to antiquity, at times only in their titles (e.g. *Pipes Player* [fig. 22], *Kouros* [fig. 25]), but elsewhere via more direct formalistic borrowings, such as in *Daisy* [fig. 27], the “prototype” for which was a female figure on a Cypro-Mycenaean vase.⁴⁹ Savva continued making “*yfasmatoğrafies*” over the next years, in parallel with the rest of his work, at times enriching them with additional materials [fig. 28], or producing non-representational compositions [fig. 29].⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Stelios Votsis, “Painting exhibition by Christoforos Savva (thoughts on his present and previous work)” [in Greek], *Pnevmatiki Kypros* journal, vol. 2, nos. 22-23 (July-August 1962), pp. 414-15.

⁴⁹ From Curium, now in the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia. It is pictured in *Christoforos Savva* (1988), op. cit., p. 56, and in Nikita (2008), op. cit., p. 158. It is interesting to juxtapose the above works with some by other artists, which also contain references to Greek antiquity, such as the “*Korai*” by Diamantis: here, form functions as a reinforcement of the symbolic and ideological parameters of the works. On the contrary, the archaically-“inspired” figures in Savva’s “*yfasmatoğrafies*”, function “autonomously” on a compositional and formalistic level, independent of whatever thematic allusions they contain. [See, Antonis Danos, “Archetype and agent of tradition, formalist element, and material presence in space: the female figure in works by Adamantios Diamantis, Christoforos Savva and Dimitris Constantinou” [in Greek and English], *Artion* magazine, vol. 1 (Nicosia: E.KA.TE., 2006), pp. 20-22. [Unfortunately, in the English edition of the magazine, the article’s translation – which was neither checked nor approved by the author – is highly problematic].

⁵⁰ Besides its role as a meeting point of aspects of tradition and contemporary trends in art, as well as of ideological and aesthetic manifestations, perhaps the greatest importance of this unit of his work, concerns its place within a framework that is wider than that of Cypriot art. With the “*yfasmatoğrafies*”, Savva appropriates a tradition that refers to the space of vernacular, home economy (of weaving, needlework, etc.), to crafts (vis-à-vis the fine arts), and most importantly, to a realm that has largely been “reserved” for women. This tradition was a main source for a certain aspect of western, post-modern art, in the 1960s and 1970s, which brought to the foreground areas of culture that had not been included in the West’s “canon” of (“high”) art, in the post-Renaissance era. Feminist artists, in particular, promoted a more “feminine” production, and generally aimed at kinds of creative output which does away with distinctions between “high” and “popular”, and between art and craft (thus reacting, at the same time, against the

With regard to Savva's entire oeuvre, one can only be impressed by its great volume in a relatively short time span, as well as by its rapid development and wide variety – characteristics that are simultaneously found in the work of no other Cypriot artist. Only five months after his exhibition at “*Apophysis*”, he held a new one (in April 1962, at Paphos' Municipal Hall), in which, along with works (in gouache and “*yfasmatografies*”) from the previous show, there were new ones, including some abstracts, made with new materials and techniques. Such creations were the main body of his next exhibition, in June 1962 at “*Apophysis*”, under the overall title “New Work”. Oil co-exists with sand, plaster and sack-cloth, in works such as *The Poet's Tomb*, *Winter Landscape* [figs. 30, 31], *Jardin à Nicosie*, *Journée chaude*, *Athlete* et al. The experimentation with media was seen with interest within the art world, even if the works' abstraction disappointed the advocates of representational art.⁵¹ In a more neutral critique, Votsis saw in Savva's works, the expression of the subconscious and of existential anxieties. “The overall characteristic of his latest painting is despair along, however, with faith in himself, without which there can be no inner balance. [...] What subconsciously tortures him is ‘existence’ – a trait of the post-war generation”.⁵²

Votsis' comments are essentially referring to the philosophical and artistic climate that developed in continental Europe, after the Second World War. An important artistic outcome of this climate was “*art informel*” (“formless art”), the most prominent examples of which, in the 1950s, were the creations by the Catalan Antoni Tàpies and the Italian Alberto Burri. Even though Savva must have known the two artists' work from those years, as well as “*art informel*” in general,⁵³ he was not then ready to “converse” with the most recent trends in art. It was only after his return to

dominant ideology at the height of modernism, especially as propounded by American theorist Clement Greenberg). The fact that Savva created work, which was a priori “responding” to these later demands of a strand of the avant-garde, only goes to demonstrate the importance of this production, even if it did not consciously derive from a corresponding ideological base.

⁵¹ *Nea Epochi* journal noted: “though we basically disagree with abstract painting, we must nevertheless admit that Savva's work carries his personal style, via the perfect colour harmonies and the plasticity of form. We are certain that his wandering in the realm of abstraction is not a permanent state of affairs. To this effect, we have his wonderful “*yfasmatografies*”, which manifest the artist's inner need to express himself through realist painting” (“New work by Chr. Savva” [in Greek], *Nea Epochi*, July 1962, p. 31. More negative was N. Vokos' criticism: “we have to admit that Mr Savva's regression to abstract painting came as a surprise. [...] Abstract painting constitutes the artist's distancing from life, and a tendency to escape life's urgent problems. [...] Therefore, we think that any effort by Mr Savva to that direction amounts to a contradiction to himself.” (N. V., “The painting exhibitions of L. Economou and Chr. Savva” [in Greek], *Haravghi*, June 1962 [photocopy in the archive of Iridanos Gallery]).

⁵² Stelios Votsis, “Painting exhibition by Christoforos Savva”, op. cit.

⁵³ Tàpies represented Spain at the Venice Biennale in 1954 and 1958, and Burri took part in 1956, while his work was exhibited, at the time, in France as well.

Cyprus, when he soon rid himself of the former French influences, and where he began to experiment with “unorthodox” materials (most important outcome of which were his “*yfasmatografies*”), as well as after he [re]established links with English modernism, that he was ready for breakthroughs.⁵⁴ But even if Savva moved to “*art informel*” because of a “direct” contact with the work of Burri and Tápies, it is highly doubtful that his intentions and his approach to the new media coincided with theirs. They (as well as Jean Fautrier, Jean Dubuffet, Pierre Soulages, Georges Mathieu et al.) produced works that are agents of philosophical and social associations, which do not seem to exist in Savva’s, in which the use of new materials serves largely compositional, technical, as well as practical needs and expediencies. In this respect, Savva is closer to his English contemporaries who, even though were influenced by their continental European colleagues (as well as by the US Abstract Expressionists), produced work in which no equivalent philosophical-ideological basis exists. These creations by Savva [figs. 30-32] are governed by such intention for visual and aesthetic balance, that neither the “unorthodox” materials can stand “autonomously” nor can the entire work emerge as a “self-sufficient” material presence.

Savva’s connection to contemporary English art, and especially with the work of Alan Davie, was possibly the main influence behind some other creations from around the middle of the decade. In these largely abstract expressionist compositions, recognisable and decorative elements have been integrated, which function either symbolically or semiotically, as allusions to landscapes or concepts [figs. 33, 34].⁵⁵ It is not known whether any such works were shown at Savva’s exhibition in October 1965, at Nicosia’s Municipal Hall. Filmed scenes from the opening⁵⁶ show another group of

⁵⁴ Savva’s friendship with Glyn Hughes probably contributed to the new directions toward which his work proceeded, while the exhibition by eight contemporary English artists (Sandra Blow, Alan Davie, Terry Frost, Adrian Heath, Roger Hilton, Peter Lanyon, William Scott and Bryan Wynter) at the British Council in Nicosia, in December 1961, may have been a catalyst to the same effect. [This exhibition’s possible importance is emphasised also by Nikita (2008, op. cit., pp. 145-46)]. Glyn Hughes related to me that in the early 1960s, he began using materials such as sand in his painting, in parallel to Savva. Among his influences in this direction, he includes Burri – an exhibition by whom, Hughes had attended recently – and Sandra Blow, who, he noted, “was in vogue, at the time”. (From a conversation between the writer and Glyn Hughes, Nicosia, 9/05/2008). Possibly, Savva had used such materials as early as 1959! An article for the December exhibition at Ledra Palace (J. A., “The Savva Exhibition: Spot the burnt matches in a gay show», op. cit.), notes the use of sand (as well as wire and paper) in some of his works, such as *Eve* (no. 17, in the brochure).

⁵⁵ The connection between these works by Savva with corresponding ones by Davie, is stressed also by Nikita (2008, op. cit., pp. 151-53), particularly, with regard to the latter’s *Entrance for a Red Temple* (1960, Tate Gallery, London). Davie incorporated into his painting a series of influences from African sculpture, Paul Klee, Picasso and Surrealism, as well as, the early works by the Abstract Expressionists, and the expressionist style of the Cobra group [see, also, Spalding, *British Art Since 1900*, op. cit., pp. 175-76].

⁵⁶ *Apophysis* documentary, op. cit.

his paintings, purely abstract, dating also from the mid-1960s [figs. 35, 36]. Their sole medium is oil, the physical presence of which is as much emphasised as was the presence of sand and sack cloth. However, just like in the earlier creations, despite the abundance of the material – thick layers of paint, which at places are “inscribed” with “primitive” motifs (symbols?) – its material “autonomy” is undermined by the aestheticising character of the works, especially, with regard to the colour harmonies and the balance of the composition.⁵⁷ In an article on the above exhibition, fellow-artist Andreas Chrysochos noted with regard to the paintings, a tendency “toward removing all symbolism [...]. The interchanging colour surfaces in each work are bound together compositionally. The title may mean nothing, or it may simply introduce the painterly issue at hand”.⁵⁸ It was in this direction that the last episode in Savva’s painting oeuvre developed.

A product of the new phase of his painting was the exhibition “New Shapes and Colours”, in Nicosia’s Hilton Hotel, in May 1967. The earlier expressionistic tendencies, and the emphasis on the presence and the sensuality of the materials gave way to more “cerebral”, geometric compositions of flat colour surfaces. In some of the exhibits, both the forms and the titles vaguely alluded to recognisable figures, such as in *Bystander* [fig. 37] and *Sibyl*, while others were pure compositions of geometric forms and clear colours [figs. 38, 39]. It is worth noting the positive commentary in publications that in the past had adversely criticised his abstract output. *Nea Epochi* noted: “Savva’s new revolutionary work is the natural continuation of his previous creations. He breaks up and does away with the figure, his colour is more bright and strong, and it renders the movement of the planes through its contrasts and its dynamism”.⁵⁹ *Haravghi* emphasised that, “Savva’s colour compositions strongly impress one, as elements of a dense, original and sincere expression”.⁶⁰ Such remarks are indicative of a wider, by now, acceptance of newer directions – at least, of abstraction – in art. We have moved into the second half of the sixties, during which, a group of artists of Savva’s and Hughe’s generation, as well as younger ones (among them, Chrysochos, Votsis, Andreas Ladomatos, Andreas Savvidis, Dimitris Constantinou,

⁵⁷ These works demonstrate strong similarities to the “abstract” Cornwall landscapes by English painter Paul Feiler, from 1953-54. Feiler was not among the artists at the 1961 Nicosia exhibition, but Savva probably knew these paintings, from the period of his studies.

⁵⁸ A. Chrysochos, “Painting and sculpture exhibition by Christoforos Savva” [in Greek], *Pnevmatiki Kypros*, vol. 6, no. 63 (December 1965), pp. 84-85.

⁵⁹ M., “Arts scene – painting” [in Greek], *Nea Epochi*, vol. 1, no. 74 (July 1967), p. 25.

⁶⁰ Art-lover, “‘New shapes and colours’ by Christoforos Savva” [in Greek], *Haravghi*, 18/05/1967, p. 4.

and Vera Hadjida, Nicos Kouroussis and others), adopted various contemporary trends in both painting and sculpture, especially, geometric abstraction, “hard-edge” painting and Minimalism. Among their main interests were issues of “structure”, such as the concept of the “basic design”, that derived from Bauhaus and Constructivism.

Even though in Savva’s works from the 1967 exhibition, there seems at least a superficial relation to the geometric abstraction of the above artists, the technical issues that preoccupied him here were more of a painterly character – mostly, colour explorations – rather than structural or theoretical. In general, these creations appear rather uncertain, with regard to intentions or direction, a fact that some commentators at the time, probably sensed: “Is his latest work on a par with his previous one? Or is it announcing the end of Savva’s painting?”, asked Maria Pylidou, only to add that it was probably just a “break”, before he sets on a new beginning in painting.⁶¹ Even if this exhibition was indeed a “break”, Savva’s new beginning would not be in painting, but in completely new media and techniques. After all, such experimentations were on going over the years.

As already mentioned, in this Ledra Palace 1959 exhibition, apart from his first “*yfasmatografia*”, he showed his first collage works, as well as wire sculptures. In his spring 1960 exhibition, there were some stone sculptures and two mixed media “reliefs” on the subject of Crucifixion, one of which [fig. 40] included a fork in its materials! Sporadically, he continued producing three-dimensional wire creations, in the form of which the surrounding space is integrated; some of them are “hanging”, posing as some sort of “kinetic” works [fig. 41], which allude to the “mobiles” by American sculptor Alexander Calder, from earlier in the century. In the 1965 exhibition, there was a group of “relief” works (Chrysochos referred to them as “painting reliefs”⁶²), made of cement, tesserae, glass and mirrors. Savva used the same materials for a series of other sculptures (that constituted a large part of the exhibition), which were placed in the garden of the Municipal Hall. In contrast to the light forms of the wire sculptures, here the volume and the presence of the material dominate, “undermined” however by openings and by decorative surface elements, which (along with the playful titles – *The Honest One, The Religious One, The Queen*, etc.) impart a “post-modern”, eclectic character, to the modern, geometrically clear forms of the works [fig. 42].

⁶¹ Maria Pylidou, “Painting exhibition by Christoforos Savva” [in Greek], *Pnevmatiki Kypros*, vol. 7, no. 81 (June 1967), p. 272.

⁶² A. Chrysochos, “Painting and sculpture exhibition by Christoforos Savva”, op. cit.

In parallel to the large and varied output of his art, over the years Savva continued being involved in the wider cultural scene, beyond the activities of “*Apophasis*”, such as with the establishment of the Chamber of Fine Arts (E.KA.TE.), in 1964. Even more interesting was perhaps his creative interaction with other artists, as well as with the wider social environment. In February 1963, he presented at “*Apophasis*” a series of aquarelles, the starting point of which were poems by Theoklis Kouyialis. They are abstract, expressionistically-inclined compositions that remain, however, within representation, and which function like pages on which the poems have been inscribed [fig. 43].⁶³ Another case of creative collaboration resulted in a unique group of works by Savva – his wall reliefs – which were commissioned by architects (such as Stavros Economou), and were installed in private homes, hotels and elsewhere [figs. 44, 45].⁶⁴ Meanwhile, artistic encounters of a lighter nature were taking place on the walls of the *Apophasis* Tavern, surrounding wine-drinking meetings [fig. 46]. In contrast to the gallery of the same name, which Savva closed in 1965 (after his marriage the previous November, and the imminent birth of his first child), he carried on operating the tavern up to his death.

Savva was in the final year of his life, when he opened a new chapter in his work: the “reliefs in pins” [figs. 47, 48, 49, 50]. As mentioned by Costas Economou, in similar fashion to Savva’s last paintings, these compositions are largely geometric. Often, they are based on the shape and colour of the base (usually a polystyrene plate, layered with cloth or velvet of various colours), which “projects its own presence”, and is “enriched and activated” by the pins, “both via the linear elements they add to it, as well as with the new levels they create”.⁶⁵ In some of these works [fig. 47], additional materials (e.g. buttons) or pieces of cloth, bring to mind his “*yfasmatoğrafies*”, as well as folk art and crafts in general, to which his earlier works had also alluded. In other of these “reliefs”, pins are the dominant technical and formalistic medium, since they usually develop out of a neutral, monochromatic base. It is with the latter that Savva

⁶³ Kouyialis wrote the poems on large paperboards, which were then painted on by Savva. For this very interesting collaboration, see the testimony of the poet himself – “In memory of Christoforos Savva” [in Greek], *Tharos* newspaper, 14/09/2008 [photocopy no. 75, Chr. Savva’s file, Archive of the State Gallery of Contemporary Cypriot Art]. In a reverse course, the poet Kypros Chrysanthis wrote ten poems on a corresponding number of “*yfasmatoğrafies*” by Savva, which he published as *Ten anti-poems on yfasmatoğrafies* [in Greek], in 1966 (Small Editions by *Pnevmatiki Kypros*, Nicosia).

⁶⁴ For a detailed description of their making procedure (some of them are painted over, while in others, the colour – and at times, other materials – has been mixed in advance with cement), see Costas Economou in *Christoforos Savva* (1988), op. cit., pp. 57-58.

⁶⁵ Op. cit., pp. 61-62.

seems to approach artists like Günther Uecker, who had been a member of the ZERO group in the first half of the 1960s. Some of Savva's "reliefs in pins" produce such illusion of motion, due to the entrapment of light within the uneven surface of the work, that the comparison to Uecker seems justified. Such connection, however, must be made cautiously, not because we cannot be sure whether he knew Uecker's work,⁶⁶ but rather, because Savva's aesthetic interests differentiate him from the German artist. The delineated motifs or even "landscapes", which correspond to the titles he gave (*Sphere*, *Pyramid*, *Sunset* [figs. 48, 49, 50], *Nascent forms*⁶⁷, etc.), infuse the works with romantic and decorative qualities, keeping them at a distance from the explorations into optical illusion and movement by the ZERO group.⁶⁸

Savva included fourteen "reliefs in pins" among a total of fifty three works, in his last solo exhibition (put together as a retrospective), at the Goethe Institute in Nicosia, in May 1968. Photos from the show [figs. 51a, 51b] indicate the breadth of his oeuvre, while in the filmed scenes from the opening, the gathered crowd manifests the acclaim accorded to his work by then. If this exhibition is seen as the epilogue of this course, it would only be one half; the other half was his most important international participation – at the 34th Venice Biennale (along with five other artists), in June of that year. Savva showed four "reliefs in pins", which attracted some attention. To what extent he would have explored further this new side of his work,⁶⁹ or toward which new directions he would have developed, have remained unanswered questions, due to his untimely death. Originally he had intended, after leaving Venice, to travel elsewhere in Europe in order to visit some exhibitions (among which, the Documenta in Kassel), before going to the UK to meet with his wife (who was about to give birth to their second child). He felt terribly tired however, so he went directly to England, where he died (of a heart attack) in Sheffield on July 13, at the age of forty four. The news of his

⁶⁶ Uecker and the ZERO group had exhibited such works in 1962 and 1964, in Amsterdam, Düsseldorf and Kassel (at Documenta 3). It is likely that Savva may have seen some of them, since he always tried to be informed of the international developments in the arts.

⁶⁷ These are the four works with which he participated at the 1968 Venice Biennale – see the Biennale catalogue, p. 75 [photocopy in the archive of Costas Economou], where they are listed as, *Tramonto*, *Forme nascenti*, *Piramide* and *Sfera*, and referred to as "rilievo a spilli" (relief in pins), all dated 1968.

⁶⁸ In this regard, Savva's "reliefs in pins" are closer to the "Nailles" (reliefs with nails) by the Canadian sculptor David Partridge – Partridge is mentioned (only in passing) by Costas Economou [in *Christoforos Savva*, op. cit., p. 62].

⁶⁹ An article in *Eleftheria* newspaper ("Chr. Savva died of heart attack. International success at the Biennale" [in Greek; photocopy in the archive of Iridanos Gallery]), dated 16/07/1968, mentions that Savva wanted to integrate a movement mechanism in these works – "three-dimensional works with pins, capable of motion via a motor. With such a work in pyramid shape, the rotation would produce the sensation of a forest...".

death came as a shock to the Cypriot cultural world, and it brought about a large number of press publications – statements, articles and reminiscences. Some of these (as well as others from the following years), along more substantial remarks, inevitably included statements about a “misunderstood” and “underappreciated” artist, who took on the “thankless role of the pioneer”, and whose work was not appreciated enough by the *hoi polloi*, etc. These are of course popular clichés within the art world. The life, the oeuvre and the other activities of Savva, testify to a unique personality, and to an artist who creatively assimilated various artistic traditions, and who instinctively and open-mindedly approached contemporary trends, which he introduced into Cypriot art. They also testify to a man who was among the pioneers of the island’s cultural modernisation. During this course, not only he had not been underappreciated or neglected, but on the contrary, he was respected and admired from early on, by fellow artists of both the earlier and his own generation (and later on, by younger ones), many of whom, together with creators from other fields, gathered around him in a group effort for cultural renewal. In the decades following his death, his work came to be universally acclaimed.

This text began with the words of one of the leading members of Cypriot art’s first generation. It will close with those of another:

“Savva’s death came as a shock to everyone. It was most untimely! It wasn’t his time to die. He left an unfilled space, because Savva was at the peak of his powers”.
[Telemachos Kanthos]⁷⁰

⁷⁰ From an interview by Kanthos, *Apophysis* documentary, op. cit.