

40 ART SCENE By Melissa Hekkers



Stelios Votsis 1929-2012

Highly regarded local artist will be remembered for both his work and his influence in shaping the art scene in Cyprus

Most people familiar with the local art scene and many from the wider international art world would have been saddened last Friday morning when receiving the news that Stelios Votsis had passed away at the age of 83.

Votsis was widely known for his abstract expression and geometric shapes and was a significant figure in contemporary art in Cyprus. Born in Larnaca in 1929, Votsis studied painting at Saint Martin's School of Art, at the Sir John Cass College of Art and at the Royal Academy in London.

He eventually graduated from the Slade School of Art, University of London in 1955.

Having played a substantial role in the development and establishment of the Cypriot art scene, Votsis showcased his work in numerous solo exhibitions in Cyprus but also in Greece, England, Italy (Biennale Venice), The Netherlands and elsewhere. He spearheaded the establishment of the Cyprus Chamber of Fine Arts (E.K.A.T.E) and simultaneously represented the generation of Cypriot artists who emerged after the declaration of Cyprus' Independence.

Through the clarity of his work, his teachings and achievements in international art, he guided the Cypriot art scene while never abiding by the current established values both locally and internationally.

As an announcement from the Ministry of Education and Culture noted, "A restless spirit in constant search, Stelios Votsis seldom limited his activities purely to artistic creation.

"From the ramparts of the Chamber of Fine Arts, of which he was president for several years, he fought to raise awareness of the wider community with regards to the value of artistic creation."

Taking into consideration Votsis' long



and multifaceted contribution to modern Cypriot culture, the Ministry of Education and Culture honoured him with the Annual Honorary Grant.

Votsis' approach resulted in work that was often subtle and even modest, by contemporary standards.

"His minimal choice of colours and themes by which he represents recurring motifs of lovers, cyclists and windmills has been reported as "hiding in them a slight feeling of isolation and melancholy, perhaps due to the effect of British art schools".

Through his originality, professionalism and poetic stance, Votsis "uses the language of European modernism with great skill, without belonging to a particular group of artists.

"He was not interested in manifestos and theoretical sermons. He uses visual ideas and new technologies without dogmatism that lead to dead ends," men-

tioned a local newspaper report on the artist.

"Votsis reflects ideas with the innocence of a child. He does not refer to events seen, as naturalist painters do, but to events that he remembers. He makes quick and decisive choices and simplifications which reminisce folk art", it added. Local artist Katerina Attalidou, had the privilege of spending time with Votsis in his studio this spring.

"His energy was that of a young man. Playful and inquisitive, he shared all his knowledge with me, showing me his painting methods, his material, spoke to me about his symbols and his transcendental images that can capture the essence of the being and the universe and at the same time be understood by every viewer.

"From the first day we met he asked to visit my studio and looked at my work for a long time, giving me direct and truth-

ful opinions and advice on what he saw. The simplicity and the sense of sharing/giving of this great artist was unique and precious. In our discussions I was thrilled by the clarity of his thoughts and his perception of the arts.

"He often repeated that he believes that the future of the arts is in collaboration. A true humanist, a free spirit, a great artist."

Votsis' work, as well as his persona, both as an artist and an individual devoted to the arts will be missed but his influence will prevail. As the founder of the Cyprus College of Art, Stass Paraschos stated: "For me there is no greater pleasure than the talks I have about art with Votsi.

"Our friendship has a 60 year history and at some point we worked together on the same canvas. It was a valuable experience that influenced both of our art work."