

Nikos Zias (ed.), *Photis Kondoglou, retrospective exhibit*, 1986. Macedonian Center of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki 1986.

In 1986, during the "KA' Dimitria" session, the Macedonian Center of Contemporary Art, in collaboration with the Municipality of Thessaloniki, organized a retrospective exhibit of one hundred and fourteen paintings by Photis Kondoglou. The exhibit, which was housed in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki was accompanied by a splendid catalogue, with reproductions of all artworks exhibited, four short essays concerning the life and artistic production of the painter and a selection of essays which were written by the artist himself.

The four essays contributed to the catalogue of Photis Kontoglou are entitled "Introduction to the Artistic work of Kondoglou" by Nikos Zias, "Memories of Kondoglou", by Iannis Tsarouhis, "Photis Kondoglou" by Kostis Moskof and "Escape toward the Absolute: Photis Kondoglou" by Kostas Vergopoulos. These titles give clear indication of the four different approaches contained in the catalogue. At the same time each essay is clearly explained and vividly illustrated by the reproduced art works.

The author of the first essay is Nikos Zias, a distinguished scholar with strong background in the history of art, particularly in Byzantine art and archaeology. The essay which he contributes to this catalogue consists, in addition to a very short introduction to the exhibit in general, of a brief survey of the artist's life, a presentation of the major events that shaped his artistic evolution and an explicit analysis of the artist's unique stylistic approach to his subject-matter.

"Kondoglou", writes Nikos Zias, "is an artist with rich and original inspiration, a unique ability to understand the essence, the iconography and the style of the past and, finally, to digest and present them anew as if they originated within himself". With these introductory words, Zias begins the last part of his short essay, where an analysis of the artist's style is attempted. First and foremost Nikos Zias discusses two of Kondoglou's stylistic qualities, his "splendid draftsmanship" and his ability of "colouristic harmony". The largest, however, part of Zias' analysis is dedicated to the artist's "Byzantine" style. The author starts by presenting the different media employed by Kontoglou in his work, eg. fresco, tempera and as Zias puts it "more contemporary materials". Then, he discusses Kondoglou's use of empirical perspective, subsequently his use of light and finally his application of colour. According to Zias, Kondoglou developed his own unique "Byzantine" style in the process of his artistic evolution. The intensity of the artist's brushwork as far as his monumental undertakings were concerned, along with his strained line in his sketches, are two more aspects of Kondoglou's personal «γραφή». In addition to them, Zias sees that plasticity of forms played an important role in the artist's work, that varied according to his subject-matter. His major source of inspiration was the art of the Paleologian and Cretan schools although there are instances, particularly in secular painting and portraiture, where the art of the hellenistic period as well as greek folk art were employed. The last section of Zias' analysis is dedicated to Kondoglou's contribution to the field of iconography. In this section the author discusses the new iconographic themes that the artist employed in his paintings, stressing the artist's lack of any western iconographic influence, and his appreciation and subsequent influence by hellenistic and folk art.

Nikos Zias' essay in the Kondoglou exhibit catalogue is short but well versed in discussing the most important elements concerning the artist's work. "The exhibit" he says "gives the opportunity to the viewer to search some of the characteristic elements that have been mentioned in the work of Kondoglou, an artist who, during the period between the

two World Wars, opened new roads in greek painting and later, after World War II, determined in a decisive way contemporary religious iconography".

There is no other contemporary Greek artist who has the sharpness of spirit and eloquence of Ioannis Tsarouhis. At the same time, there is no other Greek painter who merits the honour of being Kondoglou's favourite assistant and holds with such great pride this title. Tsarouhis' essay is nothing more than a splendid short narration of personal experiences and reminiscences. Yet, it gives the reader another aspect of Kondoglou, not the artist who needs the formal analysis of an art historian, but the artist-human being, his secret thoughts, his sense of humor and his love for mankind.

When two well-known historians such as Kostis Moskof and Kostas Vergopoulos decide to write their personal views of Photis Kondoglou the exhibit catalogue is enriched with two short but enlightening essays which analyze the artist as well as the literate phenomenon that bears the name Kondoglou. Kostis Moskof, a specialist in Modern Greek History and Society, in his essay "Photis Kondoglou" describes the artist, not as the great painter he was, but primarily as a thoughtful writer. The author introduces with his writings a very interesting idea concerning the phenomenon Kondoglou. He presents the artist as the epitome of «Ρομιοσύνη» as the great "Teacher" and finally as the creator of a unique thematic as well as artistic vocabulary. According to Moskof, Kondoglou's life and artistic production was united in an "Act" that epitomizes the essence of the "Greek man".

In a similar manner Kostas Vergopoulos' essay "Escape toward the absolute: Photis Kondoglou" tries to present another aspect of the artist's literary achievements. Namely, Vergopoulos attempts to understand and present to the reader Kondoglou's ideas concerning "the great silence of God". In order to understand the essence of Christianity the painter wandered with «πῦθος» in the areas of the supernatural German expressionism and the writings of the Early Church fathers which finally guided him to the culture of Byzantium and became his ultimate spiritual and philosophical destination.

In addition to the four essays by N. Zias, I. Tsarouhis, K. Moskof and K. Vergopoulos, the Kondoglou exhibition catalogue is enriched with four original essays by the painter-writer. These essays have been chosen very carefully by the editor of the catalogue, Dr. N. Zias. They are entitled "Epilogue [to "Pedro Kazas"] written twenty years afterwards", "The Mystic Sion", "Thessaloniki, its treasures and its monuments" and "Emmanuel Panseinos from Thessaloniki". They all present Kondoglou's philosophical questions about art in general and Byzantine art in particular. The reader is pleasantly surprised with the last two of the four essays which beautifully present the unique role that Thessaloniki played in the development of Byzantine art and Kondoglou's appreciation and understanding of this artistic fact. For the catalogue of an art exhibit that took place in Thessaloniki the inclusion of these two essays shows great sensitivity in the part of the editor, Dr. N. Zias.

The catalogue of the Kondoglou exhibit that took place during the "KA' Dimitria" 1986 session provides a valuable contribution to the study of the artist's achievements, the development of Modern Greek art and the decisive role that the art of Byzantium played in 20th century greek artistic evolution. Apart from the texts contributed by the beforementioned writers and the painter himself, the catalogue includes fine reproductions of all one-hundred and fourteen paintings exhibited, a very comprehensive biographical outline and a selected bibliography. The prospective reader, however should be alert to the printing error in pagination and page lay-out that result from poor copy editing unexpected from this press.