

The “in-between” element of the Europa and the Bull myth: responses by contemporary Greek artists (2002–2018) to the myth’s politicisation by the EU¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a tripartite analysis of the political use of the Europa and the Bull myth in pro-European and Eurosceptical representations using the “in-between” concept. The “in-between” has long been used in philosophy and architecture and has been presented by Elizabeth Grosz (2001) within a broader context as an insightful tool for analysis. Here I use it to reveal the inner meanings of the myth and its political uses. First, I analyse how this concept of the “in-between” unfolds in two fundamental ideas of the myth, *transformation* (or *metamorphosis*) and *transition* (or *transportation*), signifying on a symbolic and political level a passage from one place/state of being to another, thus making it instrumental in shaping the political dynamic of the myth in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Secondly, I examine the role of this “in-between” concept in the process of the transformation of the myth from a cultural to a political one and in the use of the myth as such during times of European Union (EU) conflicts. Finally, I present artworks created by contemporary Greek artists in the years 2002–2018 as evidence of the above, setting their work on the international stage of artistic responses within the political arena.

Keywords: Europa and the Bull, The Abduction of Europa, “in-between”, European identity, Europa, Europe, European Union, contemporary Greek art.

Published by



Original research

Challenging Legacies in Post-Colonial and Post-Socialist Notions of Place

Introduction

The myth of Europa and the Bull, well-known in one or another of its versions,² has since antiquity been a popular theme throughout western art, each time with its own symbolic or metaphorical inner meaning.³ In current times, during the formation and transformation of the European Union (EU), there has been a definite emphasis on a political interpretation first by the EU, expressing pro-European sentiments, followed by Eurosceptical reactions. The focus of this article is one of these Eurosceptical reactions, the artistic response by contemporary Greek artists, before and during the Greek crisis (2002-2018), to the adoption of the myth by the EU for political purposes. Crucial to a comprehension of the multifaceted significance of this myth (Christodoulou 2021:192) is, in my opinion, the newly revitalised concept of the “in-between” (Grosz 2001), a valuable tool for the analysis of the myth’s politicisation, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.⁴

Europa ‘becomes a significant part of Europe’s reinvention of itself as the European Union’ after World War II (Morales 2007:6). The symbolic value of this particular myth *vis-à-vis* a united Europe was invoked by writers such as Dennis de Rougemont (*Vingt-huit siècles d’Europe*, 1961), who associated Greek mythology with the beginnings of European history, later to be incorporated by proponents of the formation of the EU, such as Jacques Delors (Swedberg 1994:378-383). Starting around the 1980s, when establishing her official emblems; flag, passport, and so forth (Kaelble 2003:58), the image of Europa and the Bull became a widespread symbol of the EU, most prominent in ‘particularly charged moments’ and places (Morales 2007:6-8). The political entity of the EU is symbolically reinforced, the story now becoming the heroine and her bull. By emphasising the ancient Greek topos, the recurrence of the icon in official media representations⁵ provides ‘reassurance of continuity and of unity’ (Morales 2007:6), endowing all of Europe with an underlying non-divisive foundation; a prestigious shared past. This, furthermore, appealed to an elitist urge to be seen as cultured (Todorov & Bracher 2008:3). Thus, the EU’s wishful narrative of a collective identity, which transcends its actual social fragmentation and cultural diversity, is reinforced (Probst 2003:47). There are, however, many underlying threads of meaning in the EU’s version of the myth which can be profitably explored by analysing its “in-between” element.

Conversely, the “in-between” is also a most significant element in reappraisals of the myth by contemporary Greek artists who express disappointment in the EU’s position on several matters, such as the refugee crisis (Levidis 2020), commercialism

(Gavallas 2021/02/09), and tourism development (Zoumpoulakis 2022), reinforced by the atmosphere of distress and the tensions related to the Greek economic crisis (as part of the Eurozone crisis).⁶

The “in-between” as an important constituent of Europa’s transformation from mythological to political

The “in-between” (realm) is a term first used by Aldo Van Eyck in 1959 in the theory of architecture, borrowed from the philosopher and theologian Martin Buber (Teyssot 2011:51-52), and was used by various architects since then to refer to a transitional intermediate space/structure/mode/pattern between opposite elements.⁷ As a philosophical idea it has also been referred to under divergent terms (*difference*, *iteration*, *third space*, to name a few) by contemporary thinkers⁸ who have argued that the “in-between” is a very important constituent of human thought, related as well to the *imaginary*,⁹ in how we form a sense of identity, both individual and collective (Grosz 2001:92-93). Its discussion has extended beyond architecture and philosophy to the realm of politics and culture, since it has come to define the intermediate space between and around identities which ‘lacking itself a fundamental identity facilitates, allows into being, all identities, all matter, all substance’ (Grosz 2001:91). The “in-between” concept is all-encompassing because it relates to how we think about ourselves and others and defines everything that exists beyond the solid. It is the place where communication occurs and connotations flow. It is ‘the site for the contestation of the many binaries and dualisms that dominate Western (sic) knowledge, for the very form of oppositional structure that has defined...ethno-centrism and Eurocentrism’ (Grosz 2001:92-93). The elements of *transition* and *transformation* are integral to the “in-between” concept as it is ‘formed by juxtapositions and experiments,...realignments or new arrangements...to facilitate transformations in the identities that constitute it’ (Grosz 2001:93).

In this paper it is used in Grosz’s more metaphorical and broader sense of a *transitional realm* with no fixed identities where all beings, having the ability to change, are constantly becoming. Examining the Europa and the Bull story it can be seen that this “in-between” concept acts on diverse intertwined levels: first it can be seen in the mythical constituents’ inherent openness to interpretation due to their ‘quality of polyvalency’ (Wintle 2009:150). Imaginary beings who are between identities, with their various transformations, their otherness, are no strangers to ancient Greek mythology. This myth, particularly, is based on the existence of beings that move between identities and travel between worlds, starting with the most obvious one, Zeus, and his transformative capacity to become an animal, then moving to Europa who shapes a new identity via her passage across the sea,

a threshold between East and West.

The “in-between” element of the myth can be found in connotations which devolve from the main action, Europa riding the Bull in the open sea.¹⁰ Further narratives which emerge from this basic topos have been interpolated (Ziolkowski 2008:27-30). Europa simultaneously exemplifies many entities and undergoes different states of being: girl-woman, innocent-erotic, alluring-seduced, consenting-abducted, frightened-challenged, princess-queen, virgin-mother, easterner-westerner. Zeus-Bull similarly is animal-god, fearsome-tamed, powerful-serving, imposing-submissive; he rides and is ridden by Europa. The variety of interpretations underlines the element of difference, of transition, of the intermediate.

Tyre is a port, a borderline between land and sea, and as such a point of departure to other places. Europa’s life-changing moment occurs when the Bull leaps into the sea; the intermediate space which spans the place of origin and the place of landing. Therefore, the sea is an integral part of the myth. The Aegean is an inter-temporal nexus of cultural osmosis: it signifies, in its wider maritime character, movement and travel of ideas, of goods, of people, continually changing places, sceneries and perceptions. The sea, due to its fluidity, offers itself to multiple interpretations, thus becoming a versatile symbol.¹¹ As Marie Beaulieu (2016:10,18,36,93,110,116,136-137,153,167-168,178,191-192) notices, the sea is often connected in Greek mythology with the concept of transition, either to another world or another state of being, a concept also applied by Judith Barringer (1991:657,662,666) in her analysis of Europa’s sea voyage as a transition from maidenhood to womanhood and ‘a metaphorical passage from life to death to (sic) rebirth’.

This movement from place A (Tyre) to B (Crete) enables the new identities of Europa to come into being. It is this place A and/or B and their connection through the sea which allows either side to identify with the myth. It is Europa’s sea voyage which connects both sides, in this way providing them with a point of reference to each other. Therefore, the seascape is integral to the EU appropriation of the myth, being the focal “in-between” space where Europa from a distant “other” becomes a near “ours”, in this case European, insinuating that any cultural ‘heterotopia’ (Foucault & Miskowiec 1986:3-9) can be integrated into a larger whole. Thus, the rich and complex imaginary of this myth in offering the first level identification (the narrative) in turn leads to the next two senses of the imaginary related to the “in-between”, namely the individual and the collective.

Personal identification processes, primarily the ones related to the way in which an inhabitant defines himself/herself personally as a citizen of a “state” and by

extension a “supra-state”, can be grounded in the “in-between” element of the myth. The myth of Europa integrates many individual identities, transcending the eastern-western binary approach as it suggests a fluid and multifaceted identity that simultaneously encompasses varying self-images. It is therefore inclusive, fitting equally into diverse categories. The “in-between” can be also identified in the social imaginary. The imaginary institution of Europa/Europe can extend into the social world, attributing meaning to people’s relationships and their articulation into groups, as in the formation of the EU, as well as the extent to which each collective identity relates to the EU and its premises, here in connection with the foundation myth of Europa and the Bull. Within this social imaginary, the myth’s in-betweenness is activated to different degrees in its continued use in various elaborate constructions of Europeanness, either ‘hetero-instituted’ or ‘auto-instituting’ (Bottici & Challand 2013:67), as further discussed below.

The EU aspires to create an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983:49), an artificial supra-national entity within which diversity is embraced but not dwelled upon. Europe is conceived of as a “superior” continent with a long cultural history. The EU, appropriating this assumed superiority, considers that nations would be flattered to become members. The EU governing authority proceeds by attempting to subsume the other identities within this shared culturally based framework (Hall 2003:35-45). The idea of Europa as a noble progenitor, built upon a well-established cultural and historical basis, is associated with Europe, and by extension the EU. In this hetero-instituted use of the myth the “in-between” quality is, purposefully, not explicitly manifest, but remains nonetheless latently omnipresent.

However, identities are diversely contested by various participants of the EU, especially in times of crises, employing the myth as metaphor. Here the “in-between” element of the myth becomes potently active. Different communities within the EU negotiate the meaning of the myth by focusing on various “in-between” elements (see the feminist focus on a violently assaulted Europa and the resulting disparagement of the EU in its use of this myth). The EU version could translate in Luisa Passerini’s (2003:25) terms into *continuity in time* (a diachronic albeit rigid representation imposed from above), whereas opposing uses of the myth employ fluid and alternative motifs to signify *continuity in space*, a shared territory where the extent and the ways one identifies as European are rethought and reclaimed. Passerini (2003:27) writes: ‘the new investment in Europeanness does not claim an immediate right to self-recognition but rather proposes – and awaits from exchange with others – recognition of what is specific and what is shared’. This ideological tendency accords with postcolonial cultural and linguistic studies that regard such discourse as ‘the result of the meeting of two cultures which merge

or “hybridise” without giving up or neglecting their own specific cultural features, but which emphasise, rather, the various perspectives that converge in the translation product’ (Wolf 2000:131). In this case the translation product is the European identity within the EU which is being shaped in the ‘third space’ (Bhabha 1994:36-39, 217-218), the transitional space of cultural dialogue where the myth’s inherent in-betweenness acts as a point of departure to negotiate existing cultural and political differences.

In this “third space” a deconstructive (in our context also decolonial) dimension is added to the myth in times of crises, when the EU’s assertiveness falls under attack and, according to Daniela Chalániová (2013:38-42), its hard-won integration is being undermined. Within this dimension all traditions, ideas, values and stereotypes embedded in the myth are rendered open to critical analysis and ‘to context-dependent reappropriation and renegotiation’ reactivating ‘sensitive perceptions of different common objects of reference (e.g. “Europe”, “nation-state” and relations between them)’ (Triandafyllidou, Wodak & Krzyżanowski 2009:6).

The reappropriation of the myth by contemporary Greek artists in the years 2002-2018

The monumental sculpture entitled *The Abduction of Europa* (Figure 1), created by Nikos and Pantelis Sotiriadis in 2002 and donated by the City Council of Agios Nikolaos and the Region of Crete, was placed in front of the European Parliament in Strasbourg in 2005. It was an example of cultural diplomacy which sought to both continue the relationship with the EU and promote Cretan culture, invoking a domestic and European cultural kinship by emphasising the symbolic prestige of ancient Greece (Στο Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο το Άγαλμα για την “Άρπαγή της Ευρώπης” 2005). This kinship was reinforced by an explicit inaugural address (Myth and meaning, the unveiling of a statue at the EU Parliament 2005). In this diplomatic context Europa, consensual and riding freely, is particularly appropriate (Manners 2010:78).

This sculpture is made of three distinct materials: copper for Europa, a shining material referring to her regal origins and, possibly, indicating a Mediterranean skin tone.¹² The body of the bull is made of forged stainless steel with the exception of its hindquarters, which are constructed of glass, a material that characterises the work of the Sotiriadis brothers, here representing the sea from which they are emerging (Πρώιμος [Sa]). A repeated semi-cylindrical pattern of protrusions and recesses gives a sense of movement and fluidity, a reference to water, as well as



FIGURE **Nº 1**



Nikos and Pantelis Sotiriadis. *The Abduction of Europa*. 2002 (installation date: 2005). European Parliament, Strasbourg, France. Contemporary Art Collection of European Parliament. Stainless steel, bronze, glass. 400 x 150 x 360 cm. Geoffrey Taunton (photographer), Alamy Stock Photo.

creating a contrast with the smooth materials. Although a solid unit, the inclusion of the element of water underlines the sea as transition between geographical locations while symbolically referring to the transformative process of Europa to a noble progenitor (and, by extension, to Europe, and the EU) (European Parliament, Art Collection [Sa]).

This artwork stresses a time-space connotation as an essential element of its iconography: the patterned glass embedded into the back of the bull symbolises the (ancient Greek) past, while the (European) present is manifest in the front of the bull, made of irregular segments, polished and reflective. Although the use of segments may be due to its construction, it could also symbolically represent diverse identities encapsulated in one body. Europa's posture indicates that she is the mediator between past and present: she is astride the bull, sitting backwards, with her pelvis and thighs facing both the tail and the sea from which she has come. Her hair recalls the banded structure of the glass/sea. Her upper body swivels

slightly towards the bull's head and her arms stretch out for balance, simultaneously embracing what is happening. The bull's tail points phallically towards Europa, who represents the balancing power uniting the back (namely the past) with the front (namely the present) through a line of continuity created by the bull's tail and her outstretched arms, echoed emphatically by the upward thrust of the bull's horns.

Europa's gaze is turned towards the outside world, away from the closed scheme of the sculpture. In this, one can read a positive assertiveness as she neither looks



FIGURE **Nº 2**



Petros Zoumpoulakis. *The Abduction of Europa*. 2012. Mixed media. Three distinct panels vertically attached to each other (top to bottom): 30 (height) x 60 (width) cm, 70 x 43 cm & 20 x 30 cm, with a protruding cardboard cutout figure (70 cm height) attached to the upper two and exceeding the top frame. Artist's collection. Courtesy of the artist.

back nor directly at the bull, but has her eyes and her mind set elsewhere. She is alive and triumphant. She and the bull are partners and equally delighted midway through their journey. Their future will ultimately be determined and fulfilled by the EU citizens. Despite the power of the bull, the emphasis of the statue is definitely placed on an emancipated, forceful, and triumphant Europa. The incorporation of the sea indicates a determination to include this “in-between” element and points out the importance of Europa’s passage, traveling in time from the past to the future as well as to a promised land, in this case Europe. This transformative journey, in its universality, could be a reference to inclusivity. Embraced by the European Parliament a year after the Eastern Enlargement of 2004, this interpretation of the myth is particularly relevant.

In the following contemporary Greek paintings of Europa and the Bull the “in-between” elements of the myth present an opportunity for critique. The main narrative, the abduction, remains, but the other elements of the story, especially the landscape, offer a platform for personal interpretations of the myth in the artists’ attempt to ‘call into question their own institution, their representation of the world, their social imaginary significations’ (Castoriadis cited by Bottici & Challand 2013:67). In short, the artists institute new imaginaries to react agonistically to the EU’s imposed iconic images.

In Petros Zoumpoulakis’ painting (Figure 2) a bemused Europa rides a wildly galloping bull over a Mediterranean seascape.¹³ Now a nudist tourist wearing only sunglasses, she returns to ‘live her myth in Greece’.¹⁴ The Mediterranean seascape has become a tourist resort. Underlying the iconography is a disappointment in Europe’s policies: it is a response to the social disarray of the postindustrial consumer environment and the invasive and corruptive modernisation within the service sector. The myth’s place of origin is here commodified to meet the western originary projections and the quest for a “pure, vernacular utopia”. Myrto Stenou (2019:1657) remarks that ‘the consolidation of a national (Greek) self-image was realized along-side with tourism’s (sic) development’. The nation’s construction of a dominant identity was focused in the nineteenth century on its classical past and in the 1930s also on its vernacular present, exemplified accordingly by the ancient landmarks and the Cycladic landscape, reflecting a western view (Stenou 2019:1640-1658). Zoumpoulakis’ painting combines these two pillars of Greek identity with a critical depiction of Europa as a western tourist, stereotypically represented here with a pale complexion and red hair, neither a “classical beauty” nor characteristically Mediterranean. In a satirical manner he reverses previous interpretations by making Greece the promised land which Europa, now a pale skinned European, gleefully visits. A long accepted and internalised perception of a glorified Greece as the cradle of European civilisation has, in his view, been greatly abased.



FIGURE **Nº 3**



Nikos Gavallas. *The Abduction of Europa*. 2012. Oil on canvas. 105 x 160 cm. Artist's collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Nikos Gavallas' *Abduction of Europa*¹⁵ (Figure 3) is a clear reference to the Minoan bull leaping fresco (Figure 4). Gavallas juxtaposes the Minoan bull with the contemporary logo of Red Bull, an international energy drink, which also appears as a semi-crushed can hovering over the first. His horns pierce a Mercedes Benz logo which, according to the company (The Mercedes-Benz Logo Explained 2021), represents their drive towards universal coverage of land, sea, and air (the three points of the logo, symbolising the company's plan for "world domination"). Other symbols of international companies, such as a Siemens logo, fill the surrounding space of the painting, replacing the natural scenery of the Minoan fresco. In Gavallas' words (2021/02/09): 'The 4.900-year-old bull faces the 29-year-old bull of modern Europe, the bull of consumerism, of economics,¹⁶ of acquired ephemeral power, which tries as an equal to plunder the Europe of Greek wisdom, personified by the weeping dancer who unwillingly lands on the red bull's back, distorting its essence (Europe of Greek wisdom), while garbage and other merchandise enter from the North'. The arena of Minoan civilisation has become that of western consumerism, a sad commentary on the role of 'Europeanisation as a mediator and transformative power during a shift to a global ethnoscape' (Λιάκος 2019:511-512).



FIGURE **Nº 4**



Bull-Leaping Fresco. Knossos Palace. 1500-1400 BC. Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Heraklion, Crete.



FIGURE **Nº 5**



Alekos Levidis, *The Abduction of Europa*, 2015-2018. Acrylic and oil on wood. 36 x 36 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

In Alekos Levidis' *Abduction of Europa* (Figure 5) Europe's rigid construction via the western gaze is challenged by the emergence of a multicultural universe. Within a complex iconography, Levidis (2020) comments on the contemporary refugee crisis and 'the role of a Europe that closes its borders'. Since the artist denies us a detailed account of his iconography insisting on leaving it to the viewer, I offer the following interpretation: all the images, excepting the refugee and the *karaghiozis* figure,¹⁷ have been appropriated from famous western European artists. Diagonally dominating the composition is Félix Vallotton's *Europa* (Figure 6), here represented as turning her back to the refugee as well as to us, the viewers. The *karaghiozis* figure is bisected, her head in the left top corner across from *Europa* and her legs above *Europa*'s head to the right. Below the *karaghiozis* figure's head is a winged figure and a Corinthian column, details from Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* (Ματθιόπουλος 2020:15-16), which immediately bring to mind the relationship between the Renaissance and Antiquity. Levidis also gives a wink to Giotto, with the image of the crying child (from the *Renunciation of Worldly Goods* in the Bardi chapel) below the angel. Both references to western religious iconography could be regarded as a hint to the past 'identification of Europe with Christendom' (Hall 2003:40-41). Using a complex system of diagonal and horizontal axes the painter unites all these symbols: the total effect of this juxtaposition of the mutilated *karaghiozis* figure with long-admired western art creates a poignant awareness of this "superior" continent's current morally questionable refusal to accept refugees.

Vallotton's sea and sky becomes a continuous sea; the lower part a deep blue and the upper part greenish and with increased movement. The changes in the sea, rejecting Vallotton's calm blue sea (and with that Europe's idyllic image), probably represent a chronotope through which the artist criticises the new Europe and its stance towards the current turbulent situation in the Aegean. The forms are "drowning"; at the junction of the two seas Giotto's child stretches his hand out of the water in supplication. An in-betweenness concerning the sea element of the myth is visually manifest here: the Aegean Sea is both a place of auspicious exchanges and of anguished fatalities. Thus, the Greece-Europe relationship is presented dialectically in the binary schemes of east-west and past-present, focusing on the refugee crisis in the Aegean Sea and Europe's stance towards this.

Michael Odysseus Yakoumakis (2020/06/10) has explicitly described his painting *Europa Secretly Dreams of Zeus Abducting her Again* (Figure 7):

The myth of the Rape of Europa is a critique of the EU. The Mediterranean and Greek Europa does not accept her induction into the money-driven, anti-erotic, anti-fantasy, unfree and uninteresting Protestant northern European narrative, and dreams of Zeus re-kidnapping her, making her



FIGURE **N° 6**



Félix Vallotton. *The Abduction of Europa*. 1908. Oil on canvas. 130 x 162 cm. Kunstmuseum Bern (File: Felix Vallotton The Rape of Europa.jpg - Wikimedia Commons, 2022).



FIGURE **N° 7**



Michael Odysseus Yakoumakis. *Europa Secretly Dreams of Zeus Abducting her Again*. 2014. Oil on canvas. 160 x 80 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

feel like a woman again and returning her to her Mediterranean home. Europa is transported from a northern European landscape of exploitation and rape of nature, symbolised on the right by an abandoned lignite mine in Ruhr, Germany (with the inscription Arbeit Macht Frei, a clear reference to Europe's fascist past), to her beloved, ancient, sunny Mediterranean home, in harmony with nature, symbolised on the left by the traditional windmills of La Mancha in Spain.

Yakoumakis' artwork emphasises the heavily loaded axis of difference within the EU: the North and the South, as Europa and the Bull have been placed in-between the two, within a landscape clearly distinguishing the areas. The bull turns his back on the first and heads for the second, while a dark-haired Europa riding underneath him struggles to hold on as she is dragged over the rocky arid landscape towards an idealistic "Don Quixote" setting. The painter's focus is on this Mediterranean eutopia. Perhaps he aspires to remind the viewer that in the ancient Greek world the Mediterranean, 'manifesting a maritime space that contained a complex network of connections, encompassing Greeks and non-Greeks alike' (Gottesman 2013:261), was considered a safe and friendly environment which fostered Greek civilisation and transcended divisions. The painter expresses his disillusionment with a nostalgic wish for a return to that lost world of harmony.

Three works by Haris Tsekoura (Figures 8, 9 and 10) epitomise the enchantment and disenchantment the artist feels for the EU's motto *United in Diversity* (2000) (European Union motto [Sa]) which, in her opinion (Tsekoura 2021), collapsed due to an EU failure in defending human rights. According to the artist, the EU betrayed its declared values and ideals in order to serve its financial and political interests. The artist moves from the representation of the encounter, with Europa depicted in full colour next to a white/grey Bull (Figure 8), to the moment of sexual seduction in an idyllic spot (Figure 9), both symbolising the enchantment period, to an image that fills us with a deep feeling of disenchantment (Figure 10) where a corpulent Europa and Zeus take up the left part of the painting (in other words, the west) leaving a dark space on the right (in other words, eastern civilisation), depicting only the phrase '3.500 years after the Abduction'. The space may be empty but is not void. It is full of meaning, representing a point of no return. The bull has become a 'butcher' (Tsekoura 2021), the only reminiscence of his past being a printed bull's head on his T-shirt. Europa, recognisable by her ancient Greek hairstyle, accepts her subordination to this man-bull who places his elbow in ownership on her shoulder. The painter alludes to European patriarchal hegemony, stressing the transformation from a sexual encounter to political and economic violence. Europa and the Bull bear no resemblance to their classical past, beyond a superficial



FIGURE **N° 8**



Haris Tsekoura. *Europa and the Bull*. 2014. Oil on canvas. 60 x 86 cm. Artist's collection. Courtesy of the artist.

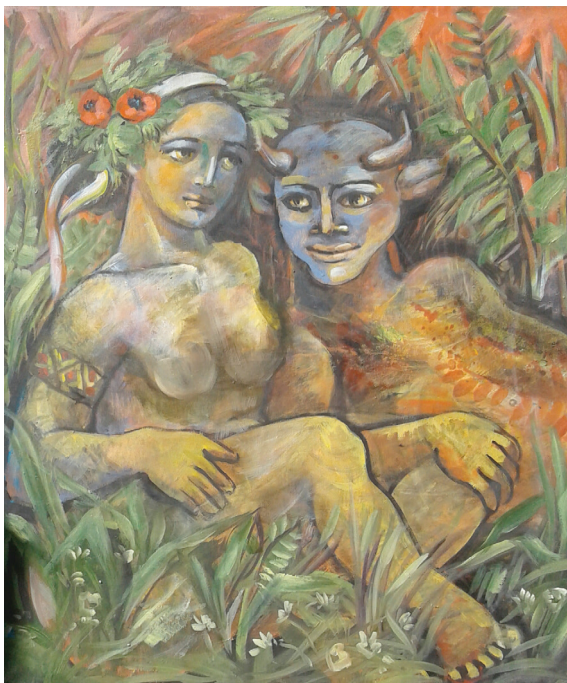


FIGURE **N° 9**



Haris Tsekoura. *Europa and the Bull*. 2014. Oil on canvas. 60 x 80 cm. Artist's collection. Courtesy of the artist.



FIGURE **Nº 10**



Haris Tsekoura. *3.500 years after the Abduction*. 2014. Oil on canvas. 100 x 80cm. Artist's collection. Courtesy of the artist.

commodification of hairstyles and cheap souvenirs. Hence, the alleged, imagined and promised European eutopia turns into a patriarchal and consumeristic atopia, an inhospitable dark place.

In the years of the Greek economic crisis, when the relationship between Europe and Greece was challenged, these Greek artists tried – consciously or unconsciously – to renegotiate what is specific (or theirs) and what is shared in the Europa and the Bull myth, politically reinterpreting it. There is at base an acknowledgment of the European interpretation of the myth: in Levidis' painting this is made clear with the appropriation of western imagery. Tsekoura passes from a more classical approach (Figure 8) to an expressionistic and naive approach, reminiscent of Gauguin, Matisse and Rousseau (Figure 9), ending with a modernist style recalling the work of Fernando Botero (Figure 10). These Greek painters, by referring to Europe's illustrious past, express a disagreement with the EU's appropriation of the myth, which they feel is not in accordance with its real politics. Thus, by reclaiming the myth, they attempt to remind the EU of Europe's noble origins.

The chronotopic difference between an old iconic Europe, representing an ideal, and a new real one, with lost, betrayed or revisited expectations, is either explicitly manifest, as in Gavallas' and Tsekoura's works, or subtly suggested, as in Zoumpoulakis', Levidis' and Yakoumakis' paintings, achieved through the visualisation and accentuation of the "in-between" elements. Europa is either thought of as a westerner, representing the "other", or "them", or as an easterner/Mediterranean, representing the "self" or "us". As a westerner she can be found in Levidis' painting, a modern re-interpretation (Vallotton) of a classical nude removed from vaunted European ideals by turning her back on the refugee crisis. She is also a westerner in Tsekoura's painting, complicit in her own corruption, and in Zoumpoulakis' a complacent vacationer. In Gavallas' and Yakoumakis' paintings Europa is presented as closer to her ancient roots, either betrayed (Gavallas) or in need of salvation (Yakoumakis).

Nevertheless, in each of the paintings there is a transition from what the artist sees as a place of comfort to a place of discomfort (Levidis, Tsekoura, Zoumpoulakis) or vice versa (Yakoumakis), with a dialectical relationship between an idealised past and a dystopian present. Invoking Europa's "pure" past, supposedly "contaminated" by the EU's political exploitation of the myth, might allude to the artists' self-proclaimed roles as rightful descendants of the cultural myth (a belief grounded in an ostensible historical continuum from antiquity to present day Greece), legitimately (re)claiming ownership and recovery. In this way, the highly idealised, and therefore strongly debated notion of Greece as transhistorical, a notion which nurtured the nascent concept of "European civilization" as well as having become a dominant element of modern Greek identity (Marín 2015:A2), is now embraced by these artists, but paradoxically so, as they may not fully accept this premise. However, in their re-appropriations of the myth, which undermine and re-examine established cultural norms, they express a definite disappointment towards the EU while attempting to launch a broader critical discussion.

Conclusions

The Europa and the Bull myth, unfolding from the meadow of Tyre to the land of Crete, manifests a constant process of becoming (of an "in-between") which makes the myth open to interpretation and adaptation. The encounter between Europa and Zeus is a life altering experience for the heroine. Focusing on Europa's transitional experience, via the disruptive and transformative power of the bull, simultaneously bovine and divine, and the sea, an element of constant change, the myth signifies

the process of transformation/metamorphosis. This plays a considerable role in the myth's construction and reconstruction as a European one, rendering it open to fit varied identities. When adopted by the EU, this in-betweenness of the myth is manifest by a visual representation of Europa embodying a "transitional" character, such as in the Sotiriades' statue in the European Parliament of Strasbourg. It is not the actual abduction that the EU dwells on but the result that this action brings, namely the heroine's transformation and the birth of a new genealogy.

Moreover, the "in-between" element of the myth, as a rich communication tool, offers a platform for different visual and ideological interpretations of the EU's identity, thus initiating debates on identity-building. In anti-European or Eurosceptical versions the focus is placed on different "in-between" elements with various connotations: the representations which aim to criticise the EU's authoritarianism usually use the bull and/or the seascape/landscape as agents which trap Europa in an inimical setting, resulting in new interpretations (of her, and by extension Europe). In Levidis' painting, while Europa remains Vallotton's, the seascape surrounding her, with its "drowning" cultural symbols and an abandoned refugee figure, transforms the significance of the myth. In Gavallas' work both the dominating bull and the commodified environment evoke new meanings: the leaping dancer, a metonym for Europa, is in tears as she lands on the Red Bull logo. Tsekoura's Europa has been patronised by a patriarchal bull and Zoumpoulakis' Europa is riding a frenetic one across a Mediterranean resort. Thus, by using non canonical versions, the painters bring out nuances of the story which challenge the EU's meaning of the Europa and the Bull myth.

During the recent economic/political crisis, these artists have questioned the unifying rhetoric of the EU and brought the politics at stake to the surface, reversing the political instrumentation of the cultural myth by the EU. Emphasising the "in-between" elements in the visual narrative and simultaneously accommodating the different ideas projected diachronically onto the original myth, they create an unflattering new view of Europe. In this way these artists add a new dimension to the myth, intentionally opening an intertextual dialogue with the past, and constructing revised and critical versions of the myth.

In these contemporary Greek artworks the imagery can only be decoded under these terms; acknowledging that Europa has become identified with the political entity of Europe via authoritarian cultural constructions, and that she now, remorsefully, aspires to become Europa again, only to find that she cannot go back. The innocent era before the myth's politicisation is no more. With their postmodern sense of nostalgia for a return to the unattainable past of the myth they constitute

very poignant responses to the present political situation within the EU. Thus, by reclaiming the myth, the artists initiate a much needed discourse. They have significantly renegotiated their Europeanness and reclaimed power by means of their counter-images, deconstructing the EU's hegemonic role as the appropriator of the myth, and ironically using its chosen symbol to undermine it.

Notes

1. This article is part of my postdoctoral research (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), which is co-financed by Greece and the European Union (European Social Fund-ESF) through the Operational Programme «Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning» in the context of the project 'Reinforcement of Postdoctoral Researchers - 2nd Cycle' (MIS-5033021), implemented by the State Scholarships Foundation (IKY). It is a revised version of a paper that was first presented at the 2021 Annual Conference of the Association for Art History (session: 'Challenging Legacies in Post-Colonial and Post-Socialist Notions of Place' convened by Karen von Veh and Landi Raubenheimer, both of whom I would like to thank for the coordination of this publication). Special thanks to the latter, the anonymous reviewers, and the editors of *Image & Text* for their constructive feedback, as well as to my supervisor, Professor Gregory Paschalidis, for his encouragement and enlightening comments, and to Alexandra Charanis, Art Historian and English Teacher, for her insightful editing remarks. Last but not least, cordial thanks to the artists for their kind permission to include images of their artworks.
2. According to Ovid's (2001:43-45) *Metamorphoses* 1.842-875 and 2.1-4, the most commonly followed source for visual representations, Zeus espied Europa, a Phoenician princess, while she was picking flowers with her friends in a field near Tyre. Zeus, instantly enamoured, transformed himself into a beautiful white bull. At first shy, Europa slowly approached him, petted him and decked him with flowers, eventually climbing onto his back. At this point he leapt into the sea and carried her off to the island of Crete. Other versions (see Athanassakis 2001:287-301 and Reeves 2003:26-44) continue the story: on Crete Zeus reveals himself to Europa and from their union two or perhaps three sons are born. He eventually marries her off to Asterios (or Asterion), king of Crete, who adopts her children. After his death, the throne passes to the first born, Minos. Most versions of the myth do not describe events on Crete, beyond Europa giving birth to a line of kings, thus indicating her impregnation by Zeus (Eaton 2003:161). The word "rape", found in some titles (such as *The Rape of Europa*) – usually in inventories – is derived from the latin "rapere" meaning snatch, seize and take away by force, not including the modern connotations of the word (Online Etymology Dictionary [Sa]). Anne Wescott Eaton (2003) analyses the ethically problematic character of Titian's painting *The Rape of Europa* in terms of the eroticisation of rape. Eaton mentions, however, that Titian did not use the word "rape", a title given in 1626 by Cassiano dal Pozzo, secretary to Cardinal Francesco Barberini (Eaton 2003:179). Xuefei Bai (2010) analyses Titian's artistic intertextual translation of Ovid's story from a feminist perspective emphasising the dimension of rape. For an analysis of mythological subject matter related to rape in visual representations, including the case of Europa, see Brownmiller (1993) and Wolfthal (1999). For a discussion of rape in relation to metamorphosis in classical mythology see Kennely (2015). Certainly, one can see in the abduction of the female entity Europa by the male bull an act normalised by a patriarchal context which favoured the continuation of royal domination and of genealogical, political and national structures that support this. The transformation of a criminal process (abduction) into a civil one (marriage) is connected with the 'archaic definition of "civilisation"' and as such might have tapped into

long established western presumptions of an eastern barbaric entity which becomes civilised when it is westernised, following ‘the Philosophic (sic) Geography of the Enlightenment which employed “civilisation” as a measure of the coherence of “Western (sic) Europe”’ (Wolff 1994:12-13). Although interesting to explore more fully, the multifaceted ethical considerations of this story must remain outside the focus of this particular paper.

3. For the various uses of the myth from antiquity to the present see Wintle (2009) and Passerini (2002).
4. The sharing of the name *Ευρώπη* (in Greek) for both the mythical figure (Europa) and the geographical entity (Europe) played a definite role in the politicisation of the myth. Her name alone, however, would not have sufficed had this story of migration and cultural interconnection (Athanassakis 2001:288-290, Christodoulou 2021:186) not been adaptable to some political narrative: Europa is an eastern princess who becomes, via divine intervention (Zeus), a western queen and the genitor of a genealogical semi-god line in her new homeland (Crete, part of Europe).
5. For example, a postage stamp issued by Great Britain in 1984 for the second Election to the European Parliament (Barnett 2018), the Greek 2002 2€ coin (European Central Bank-Eurosystem, Greece, 2€ [Sa]), a poster created by the ‘Europe Information’ Service of Finland’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs on the occasion of the 2004 enlargement of the European Union (Veleni 2022), and so forth.
6. The Eurozone crisis is a multi-year financial crisis which started with the collapse of Iceland’s banking system in 2008 and spread by the end of 2009 to other member states such as Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Cyprus (Kenton 2021).
7. For an overview of the “in-between” concept in architecture see Laiprakobsup (2007).
8. For an overview of these philosophical ideas’ relation to the ‘in-between’ concept see Grosz (2001).
9. See Jean Piaget’s ‘mobile equilibrium’ (1975) and Gilbert Durand’s ‘reciprocal genesis’ (1921), both discussed in Durand (1992:41-42).
10. As has been typified in iconography since antiquity, see Αποστολακοπούλου (2009).
11. The sea often has sexual connotations in Greek mythology, evident in the Birth of Venus where the foam was formed by Uranus’ semen (Hansen 2000:2). Often connected with divinity and purification, the sea is also considered an intermediary and ritualistic locus of transformation (Beaulieu 2016:1-2,166). Given the sexual nature of Europa’s abduction it can be seen here as the symbolic birthplace which generates a new Europa and a new semi-divine genealogy.
12. On Europa’s origins see Rice (2003:80-86).
13. The bird’s eye view landscapes are typical of Zoumpoulakis’ style.
14. The well-known motto of the 2005-2006 Hellenic Ministry of Tourism campaign (McCann Athens/GNTO 2005) presenting Greece as a western utopia combining ancient history and natural beauty.
15. The original (Greek) titles of the paintings (*Αρπαγή της Ευρώπης*) could refer to the abduction of the princess, to the abduction of the continent or to both, according to the political connotations of these paintings.

16. A common use of the bull as a symbol of economic power should be considered here, for example the expression 'bull's market' denoting the rising prices of shares and the Wall Street *Charging Bull* statue (1989) by Arturo di Modica.
17. The figure is 'a bourgeois lady of the interwar period' (Levidis 2020) included into the cast of the shadow-puppet theatre *karaghiozis*, as spotted by the artist in the book entitled *The world of Karaghiozis. Figures* by Yayannos, Yayannos, and Diglis (2021:184). The shadow-puppet Karaghiozis, like the refugee, crossed the Aegean from Turkey, in his case successfully merging into the Greek folklore tradition. Levidis pointed out the book to me, and therefore it is likely a conscious inclusion of a parallel figure to the refugee and a counter-icon to Vallotton's Europa.

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