

Theologian Painter Yannis Tsarouchis

Theological Approaches in his Life and Work

By Argyrios Oikonomou*

*“It is easy to praise as our only value what we excel at.
It is not difficult and much more efficient
to respect the faith of the other as something equally sacred as our faith.
But in order to respect the faith of the other, you must have faith yourself ...”*
[Yannis Tsarouchis]

Introduction

Yannis Tsarouchis is one of the most important figures in the field of painting and not only. Known not only as a painter but also as a director, costume designer, author and translator of ancient tragedies. His work left its mark on the Greek art of the 20th century in such a way, that one cannot refer to these years without including his name. A mature man, with deep wisdom and humanity, Greek education and respect that he exuded in every interaction.

He was not a simple artist or thinker but a spiritual man whose personality radiated Greece and Byzantium. His profound interest in everything Greek was clearly evident in his work, which, however, was not limited there, since his preoccupation with the ancient Greek and Byzantine civilization is known worldwide.

The figure of Yannis Tsarouchis is understood through his artistic carrier and personality, as it is reflected both in his paintings and in the various texts that he wrote, “the little gems of conciseness and

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dense wisdom”¹, resulting from an ascetic stance of life of the artist and continuous search for the essential and the timeless, thus demonstrating the stable relationship that this artist had with Orthodoxy and the Church, a relationship that had a catalytic effect on the depiction of his forms and perceptions of the great existential issues of man.

The Life and Times of Yannis Tsarouchis

The references to the life of the painter Yannis Tsarouchis are many and varied, although the most valid can be considered the autobiographical information that the painter himself cites, both in his writings and his personal interviews², that reflect in a comprehensible way his artistic career and importance, not only as a painter, but also as person. Unknown aspects of his life, that are enriched with personal experiences, compose a peculiar personality with a profound mind and critical thought, both in issues of art and culture as well as philosophical and theological issues that concerned him throughout his life³.

The painter was born in 1910 in Pasalimani, Piraeus⁴ in a typical⁵ neoclassical house on Luka Ralli and Vasilaeos Georgiou Street⁶, while

1. K. Io. Kleftogiannis, *Ο Γιάννης Τσαρούχης του Κώστα Ί. Κλεφτογιάννη*, P. Gravvalos (ed.), Municipality of Amarousion Publications, Athens 2002, p. 15.

2. *Μονόγραμμα/Monogramma, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης/Yannis Tsarouchis* (parts 1-2) (ERT Documentary Archive). A short biographical chronicle: 1910-1989, from an oral interview with Yannis Tsarouchis, is presented in: Eirini Florou, *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης: Η ζωγραφική και η εποχή του – Ο Τσαρούχης ζωγράφισε την μητέρα μου το 1936*, Nea Synora – Livanis Publications, Athens 1999, pp. XXIII-XXXVI, also in: Niki Grypari, Marina Geroulanou, T. Sakellaropoulos (ed.), *Yannis Tsarouchis, 1910-1989, Exhibition Catalogue*, Benaki Museum Publications, Athens 2009, pp. 378-404.

3. V. Stavrakas (ed.), *Ζωγράφοι της γενιάς του '30 (Μόραλης, Χατζηκυριάκος-Γκίκας, Διαμαντόπουλος, Τσαρούχης)*, «Έπτά Ημέρες/Hepta Himeres», *Η Καθημερινή/Hi Kathimerini*, Athens 1996, pp. 147-150.

4. See *Έδω γεννήθηκε η Εύρώπη, Ο Πειραιάς του Τσαρούχη* (ERT Documentary Archive). It is a journey through Piraeus of Y. Tsarouchis' childhood with him as a guide.

5. See «Ο Γιάννης Τσαρούχης και ο Πειραιάς», in: https://mlp-blo-g-spot.blogspot.com/2012/12/blog-post_4.html. There are references to the house he was born in the Metaxa house [29.12.2023].

6. See Eirini Florou, *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. XXII.

in 1925 he moved with his parents to Ermou Street, near Monastiraki. In 1928, he completed his high school studies at the 1st Gymnasium in Plaka, while from 1928 to 1934 he attended lessons at the National School of Fine Arts. Alongside his School, he studied under Photis Kontoglou, who taught him the technique of fresco, and tempera, letters, poetry as well as Byzantine music⁷. Close to him he learned that the popular is not folkloric, but search for color and design⁸.

In 1932 he enrolled in the workshop of Kostis Parthenis, at the urging of the architect Dimitrios Pikionis. There he also met the painter Diamantis Diamantopoulos, with whom he developed an intense friendly relationship and who made references to him about modern art, as well as about Matisse. At the end of 1935 he left for Paris⁹, where he travelled for the first time, in order, to come into contact with the works of contemporary European painters, some of whom (such as Laurens, Matisse, Giacometti), he met personally¹⁰. He visited various museums and came into contact with creations of the Renaissance and Impressionism, as well as with the modern artistic movements of his time.

7. See L. Angelopoulos, «Ένας λάτρης της βυζαντινής μουσικής», in: Al. Savvakis (ed), *Ὡσεὶ Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης 1910-1989*, Kastaniotis Publications, Athens 1998, pp. 25-26.

8. As he characteristically mentions in his «Ἀπολογία»: “From 1930 to 1934 I became a student and assistant of Kontoglou, in order to learn as much as I could about Byzantine painting. For that time, it is the only solution, since I want to combine the timeless Greek drawing with the pure color the fast and free creative process, the shading that starts from the Hellenistic tradition and is reincarnated with the painting of the Renaissance. As it is known, the Cretans and the Ionian Islands wanted to identify, both in poetry and in painting, the Renaissance with the Hellenistic tradition...”. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἀνάμεσα σὲ Ἀνατολή καὶ Δύση. Πέντε κείμενα*, Agra Publications, Athens 2000, p. 10.

9. In the early 70s, he becomes a “[...] hermit in a village in northern France 60 kilometers away from Paris”. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ [sic] πτωχὸς καὶ πένης*, Kastaniotis Publications, Athens 1988, p. 80. The artist himself confesses the following about the hut he lived in: “In my hut in Northern France where I live and work my wilderness leads me to work and enthusiasm. Christ stands by me...”. See Al. Savvakis, *Ἰωάννης Τσαρούχης*, Kastaniotis Publications, Athens 1993, p. 360.

10. See Niki Grypari, Marina Geroulanou, T. Sakellariopoulos (eds.), *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης..., op.cit.*, p. 384.

In 1938, two years after his return to Greece, he held his first solo exhibition at the shop of Alexopoulou on Nikis Street in Athens, with works, of special painting conception, something that was praised by the then art critics Papantoniou and Kapetanakis¹¹.

In 1940, he was mobilized to fight on the front of Albania¹², where he served as soldier of the Engineer. Very characteristic is the icon of our most holy Lady Virgin and Child that he painted for the Battalion, which commissioned him an icon of our most holy, Lady, Virgin Mary, on a lid of a box of herrings, in order to be placed in the church built by the soldiers. As the painter¹³, himself points out, it was a modification of a rectangle ruined mill into a church. This icon was destined for the sanctuary of the small church, that was built in the place where our most holy Lady Virgin Mary was appeared and announced that on Easter the soldiers would be their home¹⁴.

In 1950, he went anew to Paris, where a year later, in 1951, he exhibited for the first time in Paris, at «*Art du Faubourg de St. Honoré*» gallery, 42 of his works, of the years 1936-1939 and of '48. Along with painting Yannis Tsarouchis was also involved in theater directing¹⁵ since 1928. In 1977 he staged *Τρωάδες* of Euripides himself, in his own modern Greek version, teaching and scenography¹⁶.

11. See Eirini Florou, *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, pp. XXIII-XXXVI.

12. Y. Tsarouchis, *Μάτην ώνείδισαν τήν ψυχήν μου*, Kastaniotis Publications, Athens 21993, p. 149.

13. *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης (1910-1989) Ζωγραφική/Yannis Tsarouchis (1910-1989) Painting*, Gannis Tsarouchis Foundation, Athens 1990, pp. 41, 44.

14. Y. Tsarouchis, *Μάτην ώνείδισαν τήν ψυχήν μου*, *op.cit.*, p. 145.

15. *Τσαρούχης, Ένας στοχαστής τής Έλληνικότητας* (ERT Documentary Archive). It is a documentary-tribute to the painter, set designer and thinker Yannis Tsarouchis, where among other things there is an extensive reference to his scenic work in the theater, as well as and to his views on the revival of ancient drama.

16. *Euripides Τρωάδες*, transl. Y. Tsarouchis, Hodos Panos Publications, Athens 1995. Characteristic and particularly interesting is a rare audio-document, with Yannis Tsarouchis reading and acting excerpts from the *Τρωάδες* of Euripides, that he staged in 1977 at the open-air theater on Kaplanon Street, in his own translation and direction. Giorgos Chronas (poet and publisher of the magazine *Όδός Πανός/Hodos Panos*), who recorded Tsarouchis in July 1976 playing the roles of *Τρωάδων*, remembers that the painter "hated the stentorian voice of Epidauros, as it had become known from the performances of the National Theater – an imitation of the German way of staging the tragedy. He reads Euripides as the great Chinese and Japanese actors read their parts,

All the above indicative elements of his life, composed his personality¹⁷ and shaped his artistic idiom, which, depending on his intense experiences, which were reflected in different phases of his life, expressed his aspects and problematic about everything that concerned him¹⁸. The desire that he had from a young age to become painter¹⁹ a good was fulfilled during his life²⁰ but mainly after death²¹, as his fame spread to

softly so that the ancient word prevails”. That is why he decided to direct Euripides himself. He mentions characteristically: “...I got the courage as a complaining amateur spectator. I have always tried with the means given to me by nature and study to show what I would like other artists to do who I believe have more studiousness and diligence than me. So, I am rather critical at the end who, however, criticizes by examples in practice. I think this is necessary so that one does not ask others for things that cannot be done but also to convince himself that he is right...”. See *‘Ο Γιάννης Τσαρούχης διαβάζει και παίζει Τρωάδες του Εὐριπίδη*, in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EosYmYWNjg> [29.12.2023].

17. Athena Schina, Professor of Art History, realistically outlines his multifaceted personality. She mentions characteristically: “Lonely and extrovert at the same time, ascetic with his painting and sociable with the people around him, he resembled a coin with one side turned to the past and the other to modern everyday life. He observed the world with clear-sightedness, remembered past times with nostalgia, commented with a playful mood, did not easily miss the artificial and real, but above all he had an immediacy with the environment, kept his mind and his senses alive and what interested him was to transmit sensitiveness to his forms, that were a product of the web of reasoning, of his memory, pragmatistic conception and his imagination...”. See Athena Schina, *Τσαρούχης – Πολλαπλᾶ 1936-1989 – Συλλογή Δημήτρη Τσίτουρα*, Militos Publications, Athens ²2005, pp. 16-17.

18. In his article titled «Ἡ ἱστορία μιᾶς κατσαρίδας» he will state: “I do not like any painter at all, because the dream that is called painting can be realized by anyone who loves and believes in painting, and therefore I too. All of us gold-diggers do what we can to find specks of gold. Some call me a teacher. It is natural for me to like painters who would modestly call me: ‘my classmate’”. The Gospel says: “There is no teacher except God alone...”. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἀνάμεσα σὲ Ἀνατολή και Δύση...*, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

19. From young age, as he confesses, he wanted to become a good painter, however, he was aware of his weaknesses. In fact, he severely criticized the great painters, by distinguishing them into natural and non-natural (Tsarouchis, *Ζυγός/Zygos*, Athens 1978, p. 9.)

20. “Everything I did for learning is necessary and difficult but the right to dare to be an artist is granted by your respect and admiration without limits of life. Life, which is such a wonderful thing so that its value is the mystery of death”. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἀνάμεσα σὲ Ἀνατολή και Δύση...*, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

21. “On the afternoon of 20th July, 1989, the Greek Yannis Tsarouchis passed from the temporary to the eternal, leaving only good traces of his passage”. See Al. Savvakis

the world artistic firmament and his painting idiom²² and style are still a source of inspiration for younger painters.

Religious Influences on his Life and Artistic Work

The artistic influences that the painter Yannis Tsarouchis received were varied, however, there were certain people and situations that determined his later painting and writing development and shaped the peculiarity of his painting style. As the artist himself narrates, seeing a reproduction of Turner in 1920, he found that this was a natural painting that he could do more easily. However, his visit to the Monastery of Daphni²³ in the same year and his contact with mosaics made him realize that there is another world of painting²⁴, realizing that there are not only two paintings but also two worlds: East and West²⁵.

The penetration of Tsarouchis into ancient, Byzantine and modern Greek issues of art and culture is profound and parallel to a systematic study of the western tradition, modern and old. This is also the reason why in his entire work he follows an intermediate path, between

(ed.), *Ὡσεὶ Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 369. "During the occupation years, his health deteriorated, he became a dragging, sad little man, but his spirit remains vigorous, as it was evident through his muffled, faint voice. On Thursday, July 20, Yannis Tsarouchis breathed his last at the General State Hospital of Athens...". See Fr. Heliadis, *Ὁ Τσαρούχης μου εἶπε – Μὲ τέσσερα ἄγνωστα ἔργα του*, Z. Kyriakou (ed.), Smyrniotakis Publications, Athens 1990, p. 38.

22. G. Mavroidis, «Τὸ σπάνιο τοῦ Τσαρούχη», *Ἡ λέξη/Hi lexi* 73 (1988/Τσαρούχης Ἀφιέρωμα), pp. 188-190.

23. He remembers that: "...we went by horse-drawn carriage, in 1920 to celebrate the church service, because Daphni was officiating then. We took the priest with us by carriage". See *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης (1910-1989) Ζωγραφική*, *op.cit.*, p. 21 and D. Triantaphyllopoulos, «Ένας Έλληνας μπροστὰ στὸ Βυζάντιο: Ἡ πάλι ἀνάμεσα στίς πνευματώδεις "γήμενες τροφές" καὶ στὴν πνευματικὴ κάθαρση τῶν παθῶν», in: Al. Savvakis (ed.), *Ὡσεὶ Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 551.

24. Eirini Florou, *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 4-5 and *Ζυγός/Zygos*, 1978, p. 9.

25. The artist himself confesses that: "I had to demolish the provincial enthusiasms of the frivolous who admired the West and get to know the true face of the West and the true history of our relations with it...". See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἀνάμεσα σὲ Ἀνατολὴ καὶ Δύση...*, *op.cit.*, p. 25. Perhaps the same should be done in the relations between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics.

tradition and cosmopolitanism, East and West²⁶. As Athena Schina characteristically points out: “...in the mosaics of the Monastery of Daphni and in the frescoes of other churches, he distinguishes the characteristics of Pompeian painting, in which he is guided, as well as in the vivid narrative of the works of the Hellenistic period. In a way he adopts their realism more, the varieties of the color chart and their delicate design...”²⁷.

The “wound”²⁸ he received from Daphni was renewed as he met Photis Kontoglou, of whom he became a student in 1931. He went to his studio impressed by his sermon on the Byzantine Orthodox tradition. The reason he turned to him was his desire to learn as much as possible about Byzantine painting, which seemed to be the only possible combination of eastern pure color and Hellenistic tonal design, that interested and concerned him at that time.

In Kontoglou’s studio, he learned both the technique of fresco and the egg tempera technique, as well as Byzantine letters, poetry and music²⁹. As he characteristically confesses³⁰, he had a deep appreciation for Kontoglou’s personality, but this did not prevent him from disagreeing with him and condemning some of his actions³¹. However, he had conveyed to him the best thing he had: “the courage and love of freedom”³².

26. Eirini Florou, *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 115-116. The painter will argue in his article in: «Νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ ἢ ποτὲ πιά», that: “The true work of the artist is to stand out, to absorb, to defend, to elevate the freedom that is crushed every now and then by unbearable rivalries...”. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἀνάμεσα σὲ Ἀνατολὴ καὶ Δύση...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 34-35.

27. Athena Schina, *Τσαρούχης-Πολλαπλᾶ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

28. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἀνάμεσα σὲ Ἀνατολὴ καὶ Δύση...*, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

29. Eirini Florou, *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 16-18.

30. Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἀγαθὸν τὸ ἐξομολογεῖσθαι*, Kastaniotis Publications, Athens 1986, pp. 229-231.

31. In his interview he will declare: “I believe that I –if I may– christianized Kontoglou, I made him a Christian because until the time I met him he was interested in the aesthetics of the Church...”. See Y. Tsarouchis, «Ὅταν εἶσαι ἀνώνυμος παραμένεις ὁ ἑαυτὸς σου», in: *Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ πτωχὸς καὶ πέννης*, *op.cit.*, p. 231.

32. See Niki Grypari, Lili Pezanou (ed.), *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης. Εἰκονογράφηση μιᾶς αὐτοπροσωπογραφίας, κατάλογος ἐκθεσης*, Benaki Museum Publications, Gannis Tsarouchis Foundation, Athens 2017, p. 60.

The period during which he was involved in hagiography³³ was short but the Byzantine influences he received from his teacher Kontoglou³⁴ would follow him in many of his other painting compositions, rendered in his own painting style³⁵. Thus, his religious subject matter includes his work “Saint Demetrius”, which is rendered in silkscreen, which is a banner that depicts Saint Demetrius³⁶, “Saint Menas and Christ” (copy of a Coptic icon of the Louvre) and the “vision of David”, which bears on the left side a passage from the book of *Psalms* («Ὁ Θεὸς ὁ Θεός μου, πρὸς σὲ ὀρθρίζω...»³⁷), that serves as a personal prayer probably related to the «ὅτι ἐνεφράγη στόμα λαλούντων ἄδικα», that is the Psalm that is cited³⁸. Orthodox art, he declared, “no matter how many defects it has –and often has– possesses the secret that makes you unable to take it away, nor to get board of it...”³⁹.

Therefore, what one sees and observes in the work of Yannis Tsarouchis is that it mainly expresses the joy and miracle of life⁴⁰, trying

33. Several of his icons and many models have been found, such as for Saint Paraskevi which was commissioned by Tériade himself to Y. Tsarouchis. See Athena Schina, *Τσαρούχης-Πολλαπλᾶ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 233.

34. “Byzantium is the ancient world as it was saved with the wounds of fate”, he will write in 1964 in *Ἐπιθεώρηση Τέχνης/Epitheorisi Texnis*. See Athena Schina, *Τσαρούχης-Πολλαπλᾶ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

35. See D. Triantaphyllopoulos, «Ἕνας Ἕλληνας μπροστὰ στὸ Βυζάντιο...», *op.cit.*, pp. 523-556.

36. It is remarkable the freedom he takes, in order to illustrate the sitting posture of the saint on his red horse. See Athena Schina, *Τσαρούχης-Πολλαπλᾶ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 233.

37. See *Psalms* 62, 2-12.

38. Eirini Florou, *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 198.

39. Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἐγὼ εἶμι πτωχὸς καὶ πένης*, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

40. He mentioned: “I do not know what to say about myself. I have as much conscience as it is necessary so that I can work. I am too close to what I am doing to be able to judge it. In moments of euphoria, I think that I know how to build like a swallow. And I thank God. But the moments when I do not know or think about anything are more...”. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἀνάμεσα σὲ Ἀνατολὴ καὶ Δύση...*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

to balance the great traditions⁴¹ and capture the eternal artistic values⁴². His paintings enclose assimilated many popular and folklore elements⁴³, while the characteristic features of the characters he depicts include immobility and the “simplistic” expression, lack of communication, nudity⁴⁴, realistic anatomy and the different way of perspective and rendering⁴⁵.

41. “Tsarouchis was not Greek because he painted sailors and soldiers dancing zeybekiko on remote beaches and mysterious cafes. But because he had deeply contemplated what is called Greece [...]. He gave value to despised forms of tradition and recognized with his intuition their ancient origin and their great importance...”. See Maria Karavia, *Ὁ στοχαστής τοῦ Μαρουσιού: συνεντεύξεις μὲ τὸν Γιάννη Τσαρούχη καὶ ἄρθρα*, Kastaniotis Publications, Athens ²1989, p. 33.

42. The reference and description made about the artist by a great poet Odysseas Elytis is remarkable and especially interesting, which gives the artistic peculiarity of the artist. Among other things, therefore, the poet mentions about the painter that: “Without focusing on the picturesque or turning into an anthology of national resonances, Tsarouchis, perhaps unconsciously obeying a humanitarian function that exists in the Greek light, embraced the human body and with it proceeded to find its final expression...”. See Chr. P. Garouphalis, «Μνήμη Γιάννη Τσαρούχη (†20 Ιουλίου 1989)», in: *Ἰδιωτικὴ Ὁδός/Idiotiki Hodos*, <http://panagiotisandriopoulos.blogspot.com/2015/07/20-1989.html> [29.12.2023].

43. According to Nikos-Gabriel Pentzikis: “The populism of Tsarouchis is not just a simple pose, but feeling and understanding, a parallelism of his unformed and painful but also strangely beautiful and brave proud soul...”. See N. G. Pentzikis, «Γιάννης Τσαρούχης», in: Al. Savvakis (ed.), *Ὡσεὶ Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης..., op.cit.*, p. 444.

44. In his text “For Zeybekiko”, the artist himself justifies the reason why he prefers to paint nudes. “I like to paint nudes, because in this way one can understand the psychic geometry of man. With fear of God with faith and love. One must treat the body as the work of the good Father God, and not of Satan, as the cursed enemies of the Church, the Monophysites, believed. In order for there to be bridegroom, there must also be marriage, and we must find out who marries whom [...]. The perishable body marries the immortal soul and that is why the bridal chamber of the Church is adorned...”. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἀγαθὸν τὸ ἐξομολογεῖσθαι, op.cit.*, p. 271.

45. The composer Manos Hadjidakis in his speech at a tribute ceremony in honor of the painter present, among others, he uttered the following: “Tsarouchis was and still is a great director of his painting. He directed every detail of posture, seat, gaze, scenery and all to reveal the essence and spirit of a personal painting, that tried to illustrate this “peculiarly attractive folk” person and environment [...]. He directed also his life with a similar knowledge and bravery. Because he knew how to live subtle shades and occult details, invisible to the uninitiated and many. His heathen idolatrous body, dressed in a Byzantine cloak, cultivated the concept of the picturesque, the traditional, the neoclassic, while at the same time imposing-dictating his aesthetic choices [...]. And

Making a special reference to the nude, he mentions that “it is the most ungrateful and difficult subject [...]. The ancient Greeks found two ways that transform the nude into a source of joy [...] on the one hand the acceptance of perspective, and on the other hand the acceptance of love as a collaborator. That is why a statue means that which gives joy...”. And he concludes by stating that “...one must overcome the shame of primitive people to see the body as the best work of God⁴⁶...”⁴⁷, because the world must be seen exactly as it is, and not to seek to prettify and flatter it in vain⁴⁸.

Noteworthy and quite original in his works are the compositions of nude or semi-naked figures, on the backs of which are placed butterfly

he triumphantly achieved both in his Life and in his Art the genuinely Greek! [...] A necessary direction of Life, in order for his resistance to be able to withstand the death-filled climate of that time [...]. Tsarouchis could not only be a painter [...]. He painted to express himself, to learn his Art and to comment on what was happening around him. And the miracle happened [...] a brave resistant fighter was revealed from the beginning [...] resistance fighter to decay and lies as a genuine bearer of ethos, culture and endless talent...”. Indicatively, quoted passages from the speech delivered by Manos Hadjidakis in honor of the painter Yannis Tsarouchis at a tribute ceremony in Amarousion that is published in the work of Kostas Kleftogiannis, see K. Io. Kleftogiannis, *‘Ο Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...’, op.cit.*, pp. 25-35.

46. The painter himself also renders the different artistic perception of the Western and the Orthodox. Among other things he points out the following: “The triumphant Christ of the Western who is redeemed from his body, that is symbolized by the tomb, reminds us of the thoughts of the Gnostics who consider the body the work of Devil, who is called by them ‘creator’. The Lord’s prayer, however, does not curse the earth, but asks God for His kingdom to come ‘on earth as in heaven’. Humiliation, love for man, the awareness that we are dust, the coincidence of the word soul with the word life, which is valid to this day, all these show a different perception of the divine from Orthodoxy, whose churches, whatever their design symbolize the descend of heaven on earth. While in Western art the ideal is to flee from the earth and the arrows of their bell-towers, which rise threateningly, aim either at the seventh heaven of the Monophysites or prophetically in space for new attacks against the earth...”. See «Σκόρπιες σκέψεις για την τέχνη και την Ανάσταση», in: Y. Tsarouchis, *‘Εγώ είμι πτωχός και πένης’, op.cit.*, p. 115.

47. See Y. Tsarouchis, *‘Εγώ είμι πτωχός και πένης’, op.cit.*, p. 149.

48. See “When you are anonymous you remain yourself”, in: Y. Tsarouchis, *‘Εγώ είμι πτωχός και πένης’, op.cit.*, p. 211. The poet Odysseas Elytis will state: “Honor to Yannis Tsarouchis for teaching us both Earth and Heaven with gratitude...”. See «‘Ο Όδυσσεύς Έλύτης για τον Γιάννη Τσαρούχη», in: http://endotopos.blogspot.com/2018/11/blog-post_9.html [29.12.2023].

wings, which create a new figure, of the man-butterfly⁴⁹. Until recently, wings transformed his models initially into Eros and later into allegorical figures from ancient Greek iconography, such as spirits, wings, season⁵⁰ and months⁵¹.

According to Marios Ploritis, Tsarouchis “like few artists, «ἐφιλοκάλει μετ’ εὐτελείας» and in both parts of the phrase: He loved and worked beauty exquisitely, but also with the most exquisite simplicity and austerity [...] for him, beautiful was only (or above all) the austere, and luxury, complexity was a sign of artistic poverty and ostentation”⁵², while Dionysis Fotopoulos remembers some morning hours when he walked with the artist, who characteristically told him: “In order to find your ‘ego’ you have to deny it completely”, while he did not forget and the hours he worked “singing opera or ecclesiastical hymns or muttering phrases from the Gospel such as: «...λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες,

49. Butterfly is a favorite symbol of Tsarouchis, associated with Buddhism, which he greatly respects as a philosophical view of life. Characteristic is his written reference to an “aquarelle” where under a butterfly he writes in capital letters: “Thank you butterflies, because you are my teachers. You taught me more than all the scriptures of theologians”. This saying, which belongs to Buddah, seems to have impressed the painter quite a lot when he read it in a Brahmanic text, since the transformations of the butterfly from a nymph to a complete insect and its death symbolize the initiatory evolutionary stages of human life, including death, with the departure of the butterfly-soul from the body. He usually wore these wings on his models, which he first photographed, and then painted. See *Ἡ ἐλληνικὴ τέχνη τοῦ 20οῦ αἰῶνα, Ζωγραφικὴ – Γλυπτικὴ*, Vanias Publications, Thessaloniki 2006, p. 136.

50. In the allegorical works of Y. Tsarouchis is included one of his most emblematic works, «Οἱ Τέσσερις Ἐποχές». This work is a synthesis of Eastern and Western, old and modern elements with an emphasis on the “old”. See *Ἱστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἔθνους/Historia tou Hellinikou Ethnous*, vol. Θ’, Ekdotiki Athinon Publications, Athens 1974, p. 573.

51. See Eirini Florou, *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 159. The «Δώδεκα μῆνες» was made by the artist at his own request when he saw the drawings of Kontoglou for the illustration of the fairy-tale «Οἱ Δώδεκα Μῆνες», from the anthology of, *Τὰ ἐλληνικὰ παραμύθια*. From the depicted figures that represent a month, the most representative is the figure of the artist himself, who chose to place himself in the month of “December”. See Eirini Florou, *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 183, 185.

52. See *Φιλοκαλοῦμεν μετ’ εὐτελείας, ἐνθυμήματα ἀπὸ τὸν Γιάννη Τσαρούχη τῆς Συλλογῆς τοῦ Διονύση Φωτόπουλου*, Adams Editions, Athens 1991, p. 8.

εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας ἐγένετο»⁵³. Thus, the artist became “a researcher lord of the invisible”⁵⁴.

The composer Manos Hadjidakis, informs us about another aspect of the painter’s religiosity. He mentions characteristically: “when he was chanting in the Metochi of the Holy Sepulcher during Holy Week⁵⁵, as a left cantor, with young chanters around him Nikos Georgiadis, Christos Vlachiotis, Ianis Xenakis, his brother Kosmas and many others [...] we all ran to see him and listen to him. He implemented a modern Greek education but he was also mocked by the many as well as all the worthy people of his time...”⁵⁶.

The relationship that he had with Mount Athos was also special, which he visited during Holy Week⁵⁷, particularly in the last years of his life. There “[...] he was truer than in the world⁵⁸ and became simple as a child”⁵⁹.

He loved the blessed silence of the monks, the “fruitful solitude”⁶⁰, the simplicity of life, that is limited to the necessary and essential, the liberation from every unnecessary and false freedom⁶¹, the deprivation

53. *Op.cit.*, p. 47.

54. *Op.cit.*, p. 50.

55. His participation in the services of Great Lent, of the Akathist Hymn, and the Holy Week at Hagia Eirini on Aioulou Street was frequent and regular. See L. Angelopoulos, «Ένας λάτρης τῆς βυζαντινῆς μουσικῆς», *op.cit.*, p. 26.

56. K. Io. Kleftogiannis, *Ὁ Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

57. Archim. Vasileios Iviritis remembers the visits of the artist to Mount Athos, stating that: “He was a mature man, with deep wisdom and humanity, that you can only truly reach by having suffered profoundly and being grateful for that. He had within him clarity and boldness, that resembled the clarity and boldness of Mount Athos...”. See Vasileios Iviritis (Archim.), in: Al. Savvakis (ed.), *Ὡσεὶ Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

58. “He worshiped the icons with the reverence that distinguishes people with awareness” the monk Hierotheos points out when he met him on Mount Athos. See Hierotheos Monk, «Νοσταλγικὸς προσκυνητὴς τοῦ Ἁθῶ», in: Al. Savvakis (ed.), *Ὡσεὶ Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

59. See Al. Savvakis, *Ὡάννης Τσαρούχης*, *op.cit.*, p. 320.

60. Chr. Petikas, «Στρουθίον μονάζον», in: Al. Savvakis (ed.), *Ὡσεὶ Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 446. «Ἡ μοναξιά γι’ αὐτὸν ποὺ ἀγαπάει τὸν κόσμον καὶ θέλει νὰ τὸν ὠφελήσει εἶναι τὸ καλύτερο μέρος γιὰ νὰ ἐκφράσει τὴν ἀγάπη του...», he will state in an oral interview. See *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης. Σπουδὴ γιὰ πορτραῖτο. 1981*, https://www.lifo.gr/videos/lifo_picks_arts/175112 [29.12.2023].

61. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ὡς στρουθίον μονάζον ἐπὶ δώματος*, Kastaniotis Publications,

“[...] of so many joys for the great joy that Christ gives and the faith in the Holy Spirit...”⁶². According to the composer Manos Hadjidakis: Tsarouchis is a Christian, not because he goes to church, but because he knows how to stand in it, with the ease of a priest and with the holiness of a small child, remaining “deeply Heathen and Christian at the same time”⁶³, a “unique bearer of genuine Christian ethos...”⁶⁴.

Being now sick and confined to his home in Marousi, the artist⁶⁵ painted his last work, the «Ἀγιασμός», in which the basic Sacred Vessels required for the celebration of the service of the Sanctification⁶⁶, are represented, with dominant the Table Cross, which holds a special place in the composition⁶⁷, this work also inspired by ecclesiastical life, closing a painting circle in the same way that he has opened it in his childhood, by painting the icons of the saints.

A few months after his death, the modest magazine of Mount Athos *Πρωτᾶτον/Protaton* wrote about his passing: “The great Greek painter

Athens 1990, pp. 91-92.

62. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ὡς στρουθίον μονάζον ἐπὶ δώματος*, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

63. See M. Hadjidakis, «Ὁ ἥρωας ἐνὸς ἐλληνικοῦ μύθου», in: Al. Savvakis (ed.), *Ὡσεὶ Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 625-626.

64. See Phil. Pharos (Archim.), «Μοναδικὸς φορέας γνησίου χριστιανικοῦ ἡθους», in: Al. Savvakis (ed.), *Ὡσεὶ Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 573-575.

65. The “will” is death, he said. Although in his last days he struggled intensely with diabetes and Parkinson’s and he was weak in body, he was radiant in spirit. The isolation that had been imposed on him, shortly before the end, by the doctors and nurses, made him sad, because it deprive him of the meaning that life had for him. He used to answer them: “So, not to live, in order to live?”. See K. Io. Kleftogiannis, *Ὁ Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 49. Characteristic is the fact that: “in his last days he had the service of the trisagion for the departed read to him every morning, so that he would have a nice day...”. See Vasileios Iviritis (Archim.), *op.cit.*, p. 24.

Two days before his death, Kostas Kleftogiannis, who often visits the artist, recounts the last experience he had with the painter, which is similar to the blessing given by Patriarch Jacob to his children. Characteristically he mentions: “We visited him with Atalanta [artist] and found him sick in bed. As soon as he sees us, he automatically says: “I will die bend down to bless you”. He tries and gets up on his bed as little as his limited strength allowed, he forms with his fingers the shape of the cross like a priest and blessed us saying words that we could not understand [...]. I have not experienced such holiness and devotedness in my life...”. See K. Io. Kleftogiannis, *Ὁ Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

66. D. Triantaphyllopoulos, «Ἐνας Ἕλληνας μπροστὰ στὸ Βυζάντιο...», *op.cit.*, p. 554.

67. Eirini Florou, *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 210.

Yannis Tsarouchis, who had been a friend of Mount Athos and around the end had asked to take monastic orders, a wish that he did not manage to fulfill...”⁶⁸.

The Theologian Yannis Tsarouchis Indicative Approach to his Theological Sayings

“Tsarouchis was not a simple artist or thinker. We have many of them. He was a spiritual man⁶⁹ in the true sense of the word”⁷⁰. The search and the rendering of the divine was one of the most intense desires and basic pursuits of the artist, as it is clearly demonstrated both in his painting and writing work⁷¹. Of particular interest is the way in which he expresses his views⁷², both on issues of faith and on issues of ecclesiastical reality, something that makes him theologian, “although he himself did not study theology”⁷³.

68. See *Πρωτάτον/Protaton*, September – October 1989, p. 187.

69. Cf. V. Kaloutsis, «Ένας κατ’ ἐξοχήν πνευματικός άνθρωπος», in: Al. Savvakis (ed.), *Ώσεί Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 124-125.

70. V. Iviritis (Archim.), «Έπί τὴν ἡλίου δύσιν», in: Al. Savvakis (ed.), *Ώσεί Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 21. Ὁ ἴδιος δὴλῳνε πῶς: «δὲν εἶμαι θρησκόληπτος, εἶμαι βαθιὰ θρησκευόμενος...». See K. Tzimoulis (ed.), *Τὰ γνωμικὰ τοῦ Τσαρούχη*, Vourkariani Publications, Vourkariani Keas 41992, p. 116.

71. “He often transubstantiated into art the emotion that he felt from nature by painting the first flowers and fruits that he considered divine things with a deeply theological perception. Because Tsarouchis was theologizing when he revealed the presence of God in the humble...”, Al. Savvakis, *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης*, *op.cit.*, pp. 41-42.

72. His most representative works, which are entitled with excerpts from the *Psalms* of David and which contain a plethora of references by the painter on issues of faith and ecclesiastical reality, are the following: Y. Tsarouchis, *Άγαθὸν τὸ ἐξομολογεῖσθαι...*, *op.cit.*; Y. Tsarouchis, *Εγὼ εἰμὶ πτωχὸς καὶ πέννης*, *op.cit.*; Y. Tsarouchis, *Λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες*, Kastaniotis Publications, Athens 1989; Y. Tsarouchis, *Ὡς στρουθίον μονάζον ἐπὶ δώματος*, *op.cit.*; Y. Tsarouchis, *Μάτην ὠνεῖδισαν τὴν ψυχὴν μου*, *op.cit.*

73. “I have not studied Theology but I know how to read the icons of the Byzantines, even the post-Byzantine ones until 1800. Painters and sculptors have always been great Theologians and only the wiseacre mock them [...] art is something sacred.... See «Ἀναστάσιμη συνομιλία», in: Y. Tsarouchis, *Ὡς στρουθίον μονάζον ἐπὶ δώματος*, *op.cit.*, p. 93.

“If as theology we consider the bad sermons delivered by mediocre preachers, interrupting the harmony of the services, then theology is a formal thing without importance. But if we consider theology as a search for the divine wherever it exists, then good painters are among the greatest theologians who teach us, as far as is humanly possible, that perishable man⁷⁴ participate in the divine nature⁷⁵. The victory over death is at the same time a victory over the doubt that our nature is divine...”⁷⁶.

His references to Christ were frequent, and as he stated he followed faithfully, the Gospel⁷⁷, as much as he could. Interesting, however, are also the things that he mentions about faith. “Man has a faith when he is born. Rationalism and certain events make his faith to atrophy. Faith is the ability of man to believe whatever he will judge. It is a possibility for man to be able to believe. If he cannot believe in something he is like a sick person... Faith is linked to the previous faith of people. To

74. “They are wrong to think that painters are copying the perishable body. Even the most realist painters, if they are good, cannot stand unless they are deeply moved by the miracle of the incarnation: “σκύμνοι ὠρυόμενοι τοῦ ἀρπάσαι καὶ ζητῆσαι παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ βρώσιν αὐτοῖς” (Psalm 103, 21). Within the most ferocious creature of nature there is harmony of the divine will and the good painters know that who try to see the world divine justice, as much as possible...”. See «Σκόρπιες σκέψεις γιὰ τὴν τέχνη καὶ τὴν Ἀνάσταση», in: Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ πτωχὸς καὶ πένης*, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

75. The painter, in this case, obviously means the participation in the uncreated divine energies as these are perceived according to the degree of participation of the created beings. The one energy is singularly multiplied and is divided indivisibly. See Ireneus Boulovich (Bishop of Batska), *Τὸ μυστήριον τῆς ἐν τῇ Ἀγίᾳ Τριάδι διακρίσεως τῆς θείας οὐσίας καὶ ἐνεργείας κατὰ τὸν ἅγιον Μάρκον Ἐφέσου τὸν Εὐγενικόν*, Patriarchal Foundation for Patristic Studies Publications, Thessaloniki 1983, pp. 124-139, 469.

76. «Σκόρπιες σκέψεις γιὰ τὴν τέχνη καὶ τὴν Ἀνάσταση», in: Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ πτωχὸς καὶ πένης*, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

77. “I faithfully follow the Gospel as much as I can. When I approach it, the people get angry. That’s how I have been since I was a little child. When an aunt of mine died, I begged God to give me tears, just like other children. And God did not give them to me. I preferred to stay true [...]. Many times, I want to be like the rest of the world. But that does not last long. I would rather be myself...”. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες*, *op.cit.*, p. 201. “It reaches the limits of madness to wait for people you do not appreciate to value you in order to get money...” he stated in an oral interview. See Γιάννης Τσαρούχης. *Σπουδὴ γιὰ πορτραῖτο. 1981*, in: https://www.lifo.gr/videos/lifo_picks_arts/175112 [29.12.2023].

traditions and the hope for a better future. Faith makes life double, which, linked to tradition asks from the artist and man not to leave anything lost from the past. Because otherwise his life will be shortened and man will be left alone with himself...”⁷⁸.

According to the theater critic Kostas Georgousopoulos, “Yannis Tsarouchis was an ascetic, simple and wise man. He taught even in silence⁷⁹ without having anything scholastic. And this is because he had that catalytic humor, the self-sarcasm and the demolishing irony. Tsarouchis was a modern Diogenes who, instead of a lantern, held a paint-brush⁸⁰ and searched in the colors for the authentic man⁸¹, the familiar gesture the inner beauty [...]. Everything that Tsarouchis said, did and designed is valuable because it was a quintessence of experience and friction with the things of art and life...”⁸².

The poet Nikos Gatsos, referring to the sayings of Tsarouchis⁸³, he characteristically mentioned that: “Every word of him, every discussion,

78. See «Εἶναι μιὰ δυνατότητα νὰ μπορεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ πιστεύει», in: Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ πτωχὸς καὶ πέννης*, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

79. He was distinguished by the “eloquent silence” («εὐλαλὸς σιωπή»), that one experiences intensely in devout environments like the one of Mount Athos, and elsewhere. See Moses Monk of Mount Athos, *Ἡ εὐλαλή σιωπή*, En Plo Publications, Athens 2006.

80. The poet Yannis Ritsos posed the following question: “When we call national poets in this country Solomos, Kalvos, Palamas and Sikelianos why not call without hesitation Yannis Tsarouchis our national painter?”. See K. Io. Kleftogiannis, *Ὁ Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

81. According to Dimitris Arvanitakis, head of the Publications Department of Benaki Museum, “Yannis Tsarouchis was more than an emblematic figure of the Greek twentieth century. He was a great national benefactor of the spirit, a good and at the same time ironic merciful of reality [...] he was demanding, thoughtful and pedagogical at the same time. He did not neglect to take the man by the hand and to talk to him about his course: his life and his work...”; see Niki Grypari, Lili Pezanou (eds.), *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης. Εἰκονογράφηση μιᾶς αὐτοπροσωπογραφίας...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 10-11.

82. K. Io. Kleftogiannis, *Ὁ Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

83. Among his sayings from which a profound theology emerges, are the following: “I do not want to reveal what God kept it a secret...”; “I am not religionist, I am deeply religious...”; “Many things can only be done by faith. Neither science nor anything else can achieve this...”; “Man is born with faith, science abolishes it and that is why he is unhappy...”. See K. Io. Kleftogiannis, *Ὁ Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

all his aphorisms and sayings⁸⁴, no matter how much his cleverness make them appear as spontaneous inspirations are quintessence of a deep thought that determines the level of their quality. Unfortunately, various journalists and secular like-minded individuals, with shallow thought, most often consider them entertaining oddities or scandalous paradoxes, which of course does not concern Tsarouchis, but the level of those who thus shape their judgement. Someone said that without Tsarouchis our spiritual heaven would be poorer by thousand constellations. And he who heard it has born witness...”⁸⁵.

In an Easter conversation and on being asked if he feels the timeliness of Resurrection as a message of renewal and joy, he will state: “I am a vegetarian and for me the Resurrection is not the roast lamb [...]. The Resurrection in me is much more connected with the eternal life of man and with the eternally ageless youth of nature [...]. In order for the Resurrection of Christ and Easter to speak to me again and for me to live up to the expectations of my memories, I need spiritual purity and concentration. However, an artist must always cultivate this purity, as an athlete cultivates his form. The values of Romiosyni inside me, I leave them free to live or die. I give them the best conditions for survival, by trying to be true and substantial. I detest the pharisaic preservation of forms without substance. Nevertheless, I always dye eggs, wherever I am, and generally whatever I can keep [...] when this is done for many centuries acquires value and strength. I make kollyva for the dead, I fast on the big days⁸⁶. All these give good form, without giving them

84. As the art critic Haris Kabouridis characteristically mentions “...in terms of the sayings of Tsarouchis, those that Kabouridis testifies they come to confirm the already formed opinion of all. These are small diamonds of succinctness, of dense wisdom that resulted from an ascetic attitude towards life, from continuous research of the essential and the timeless. The thinker Tsarouchis is a genuine distant descendant of the ancient epigrammatists. A poet before the judgement of Time, apt and disarming. Like a confessor, long ago ready for eternity...”. See K. Io. Kleftogiannis, *Ὁ Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

85. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ πτωχὸς καὶ πέννης*, *op.cit.*, pp. 241-242 and K. Io. Kleftogiannis, *Ὁ Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

86. To the teasing of a friend of his, when he lived in Northern France, that “he has become the secular monk of Mery” he will answer: “And why not and I fast and believe”. See Maria Karavia, *Ὁ στοχαστής τοῦ Μαρουσιῶ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 48. In a statement in an

too much value [...]. I prefer conservatism rather to the vulgarity of the supposedly free thinker. I detest the unnecessary freedoms no matter how great they may be [...]. The joy of Easter has departed with many other joys, driven away by unnecessary annoying freedoms that are known who they benefit...”⁸⁷.

And he continues promoting the beauty of the Church⁸⁸, considering it a means of ennoblement of man and a great “element of culture”⁸⁹. “Not only at Easter, but generally, the whole Church⁹⁰ from small to large services, teaches us how to make a big result with small means”⁹¹. The human body moving, the human voice and the great poetry of course, create amazing impressions beyond any spectacle with complex mechanically-driven means. This excellent voice theater that is the Church⁹² (with the voice as a means of expression) is for me a good example of how to reach stunning results with faith, concentration and devoutness...”⁹³.

oral interview, he mentioned that he went there to become an ascetic and to learn from the earth. See Γιάννης Τσαρούχης. *Σπουδή για πορτραίτο. 1981*, https://www.lifo.gr/videos/lifo_picks_arts/175112 [29.12.2023].

87. «Ἀναστάσιμη συνομιλία», in: Y. Tsarouchis, *Ὡς στρουθίον μονάζον ἐπὶ δώματος*, *op.cit.*, pp. 89-90, 92.

88. “One night, outside of Yannakis, in Panepistimiou and in Syntagma, the Epitaph was passing by with a crowd of people following. As we looked through the windows of the café, Yannis said: “Churches are the only place, where the same play has been played for so many years and they are always crowded...”. See Fr. Heliadis, *Ὁ Τσαρούχης μού εἶπε...*, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

89. See Y. Tsarouchis, *Λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες*, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

90. “The Church is not only an aesthetic event, there is also a content in music, in words, in everything. The content is borrowed from the teaching of Christ. That is where Christians get their content...”. See “Ὅταν εἶσαι ἀνώνυμος παραμένεις ὁ ἑαυτός σου”, in: Y. Tsarouchis, *Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ πτωχὸς καὶ πέννης*, *op.cit.*, p. 231.

91. He recommended that: “The Church or those who believe should, before commissioning the artists known for their fame or value, give with its own radiance the good of faith that is lacking in both artists and non-artists...”. See S. B. Skopelitis, *Ὁ ζωγράφος Γιάννης Τσαρούχης*, Sponsored by Ekter – Hexantas Publications, Athens 1995, pp. 23-24.

92. “This is the revolutionary and serene of Tsarouchis, that he received from the Orthodox Church...”, according to the former Abbot of the H. M. Iviron Archim. Vasileios Gontikakis, who met the artist at an old age in Mount Athos. See Vasileios Ivritis (Archim.), «Ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλίου δύσιν»..., *op.cit.*, p. 21.

93. «Ἀναστάσιμη συνομιλία», in: Y. Tsarouchis, *Ὡς στρουθίον μονάζον ἐπὶ δώματος*,

For him “Orthodoxy is light and a combination of logic with instinctive knowledge⁹⁴. When we say Orthodoxy, we mean today its opposition to Catholicism and Protestantism, while its opposites are some opposites and dangerous [...] the insidious enemy of the Orthodox is Monophysitism. The very incarnation of Christ clearly shows that neither the earth is a cursed work of Satan as the Monophysites believe, nor is the human body a filthy creation of the devil. I paint bodies and people and landscapes of the earth and I cannot imagine that all these are a deception of Satan. Christ called us ‘sons of God’ and himself ‘Son of Man’. He wanted to unite what was previously divided...”⁹⁵.

Finishing, along with the world of the Church, the study of its letters and his interest in Orthodoxy, Tsarouchis was fascinated by the Byzantine grandeur of the priestly attire⁹⁶. The persuasiveness with which he rendered the style and the posture of the monks, priests and bishops has been recorded in a plethora of photographs. Shortly before his death, a true hierarch was destined to understand the deep attraction that the space of the Church and its typicon exerted on the artist, by sending him gold-embroidered episcopal vestments as a gift, recognizing even informally, “the servant of God Yannis, the despot of the Orthodox faith...”⁹⁷.

The one who often “rejected himself in order to find himself again [...] the one who tried a lot to reject it, living with sincerity his contradictions being aware⁹⁸ of his faults and his failures, as well as of his great mistakes [...] acquiring however, the conviction that he had been trying all his life

op.cit., p. 91.

94. “One must overcome blind fanaticism and conceive the indestructible elements of Orthodoxy...”. See «Αναστάσιμη συνομιλία», in: Y. Tsarouchis, *Ὡς στρουθίον μονάζον ἐπὶ δώματος*, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

95. «Αναστάσιμη συνομιλία», in: Y. Tsarouchis, *Ὡς στρουθίον μονάζον ἐπὶ δώματος*, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

96. He desired to dress privately in vestments. See D. Triantaphyllopoulos, «Ἐνας Ἕλληνας μπροστὰ στὸ Βυζάντιο...», *op.cit.*, p. 554.

97. S. V. Skopelitis, *Ὁ ζωγράφος Γιάννης Τσαρούχης*, *op.cit.*, p. 174.

98. “His last years, in a brave acceptance of age, and mainly as symbol of inner purification, revealing his entry into higher spheres he had chosen the white color for himself in terms of his clothing ...”. See S. V. Skopelitis, *Ὁ ζωγράφος Γιάννης Τσαρούχης*, *op.cit.*, p. 173.

to tell the truth...’’⁹⁹, the truth¹⁰⁰ that he experienced both in his “fruitful solitude’’¹⁰¹, and in his associations, always with “true justice’’¹⁰², his main concern, he ultimately believed that: “life is so important that its reward is the mystery of death...’’¹⁰³.

Epilogue

The painter Yannis Tsarouchis was a multifarious personality, which is evidenced by his multifaced work in painting, theater, cinema and the writing of texts, with a special writing style, as evidenced by his texts, in which one admires his narrative ability that distinguished him, as well as his folk-philosophical reflection, that are largely linked to his painting.

His biographical and bibliography elements that he uses in his compositions are interwoven to such an extent, that the mark of his painting physiognomy emerges with a continuation of tradition but also with strong elements from post-impressionistic movements that had been assimilated and transformed into the work and the teaching of Parthenis, from whom he was influenced to a certain extent but also the popular Byzantine world of F. Kontoglou which captivated him.

He painted as he spoke and he spoke as he painted, and perhaps that is why many treated him as a complex phenomenon. A phenomenon

99. *Op.cit.*, p. 172.

100. “The truth is something you understand or do not understand. Otherwise, there is no explanation. That is why Pilate was unable to learn it from Christ...”. See S. V. Skopelitis, *Ο ζωγράφος Γιάννης Τσαρούχης*, *op.cit.*, p. 172.

101. Chr. Petikas, «Στρουθίον μονάζον» ..., *op.cit.*, p. 446. “Solitude for the one who loves the world and wants to benefit it is the best place to express his love ...”, he will state in an oral interview. *Γιάννης Τσαρούχης. Σπουδή για πορτραίτο. 1981*, https://www.lifo.gr/videos/lifo_picks_arts/175112 [29.12.2023].

102. He stated: “Most things in my whole life I either feel them very intensely or I do not feel them at all. True justice interests me most of all. Of course, not the justice of the court...”. See «Είναι μιὰ δυνατότητα νὰ μπορεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ πιστεῦει», in: Y. Tsarouchis, *Εγὼ εἰμὶ πτωχὸς καὶ πέννης*, *op.cit.*, p. 156.

103. Th. Niarchos, «Καθάπερ φερομένης βιαίας πνοῆς», in: Al. Savvakis (ed.), *Ὡσεὶ Μύρα, Γιάννης Τσαρούχης...*, *op.cit.*, p. 381.

of endurance, witty sensitivity and incisiveness, who lived to paint and painted to forget death, as he said, painting the surface of things as a “sparrow”/«στρουθίον», and at the same time projecting the depth of their substance¹⁰⁴.

Yannis Tsarouchis was undoubtedly a special case of scholar and artist, whose erudition and involvement in activities other than painting was impressive. He was a writer, poet, translator of ancient tragedies, director, costume and set designer qualities that always made him a clear-sighted observer of the place and man. Moreover, he was an excellent critical writer and commentator on various issues, related to art and culture, as one can see to the various texts that he wrote and which were all published in a series of books, which are in a way standalone feuillets.

The search for and the rendering of the divine in various manifestations and ways of expression had a special place and distinguished role both in the life of the artist and his painting compositions, a fact that demonstrates his deep theological knowledge and his experiential experience in Orthodox faith. Both in his allegorical compositions and his religious issues, one observes what Manos Hadjidakis pointed out very aptly about the artist, “that he is deeply heathen and Christian at the same time, living sincerely his contradictions...”¹⁰⁵.

His writings as well as his statements on the Mysteries of faith, the Resurrection, the Church and Orthodoxy strongly demonstrate that Yannis Tsarouchis was more than an emblematic figure of the Greek twentieth century. He was a leading national benefactor of the spirit and a genuine bearer of Christian ethos, both in words and in deeds until the end of his life, having the desire to take the monastic order as the culmination of true spirituality, which he experienced, but something that he did not realize, since the mystery of death caught up with him.

The spiritual legacy he left, filled with numerous quotations and sayings, many of them of religious nature, attests to his theological reflections in art and life, genuinely and sincerely, revealing his constant participatory relationship with the truth and his conscious faith in

104. See Athena Schina, *Τσαρούχης-Πολλαπλά...*, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

105. Eirini Florou, «Τὸ τριπλὸ νῆμα τῆς ζωγραφικῆς τοῦ Γ. Τσαρούχη», *Ἡ λέξη/Hi Lexi* 73 (1988 / Τσαρούχης Ἀφιέρωμα), pp. 274-279.

the Savior Christ, experiencing the religious perception of life in all its possible expressions¹⁰⁶.



“I am not a religious fanatic; I am deeply religious”
[Y. Tsarouchis]

106. Γιάννης Τσαρούχης. Σπουδή για πορτραίτο. 1981, *op.cit.*