

ARTS

Championing an overlooked art form

A large exhibition at the Municipal Gallery of Athens traces the history of an engraving workshop

An etching by Costas Grammatopoulos from the late 1950s.



An ink and sugar aquatint by Christos Caras, who is better known as a painter.

Dimitra Siaterli's 'The Great Union' (1990, copper, ink and sugar etching).



BY ALEXANDRA KOROXENIDIS

When in 1977 Dimitra Siaterli and her husband Pino Pandolfini founded a workshop for engraving, their purpose was to offer their fellow artists interested in exploring the medium the facilities and know-how that would enable them to do so.

A young graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna, Siaterli joined her husband, also an artist, in a venture that, although well-known in Italy, was new to Greece back then. Their project became the first non-art-school workshop dedicated to engraving, a privately run space that opened up new potential for the art but also provided its founders with the financial means to make a living as artists.

More than 30 years later, the workshop continues to be an active venue for the teaching and practice of engraving.

A large number of works by 61 artists who have made use of the center over all the years are presented in "The Story of a Workshop," an exhibition being held at the Municipal Gallery of Athens and curated by its director Nelli Kyriazi.

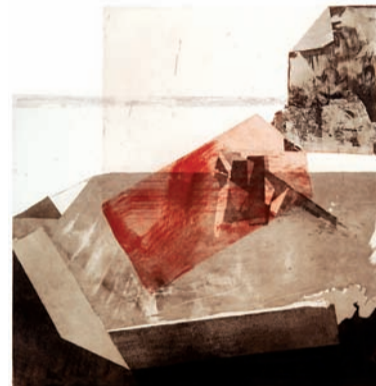
Many of the artists who frequented the workshop were known for their work in media other than engraving, including Yiannis Tsarouchis, Yiannis Spyropoulos, Christos Kapralos, Alekos Fassianos and Vlassis Caniaris, whose works appear in the exhibition.

In fact, one of the workshop's objectives was to encourage artists to experiment in a medium they were not familiar with and to push the strict boundaries that separated the various artistic media. According to Siaterli, during the workshop's early years, this open, flexible approach to art was quite novel for Greece. At the Athens School of Fine Arts, for example, each discipline remained distinct from the others. For any student wanting to study two different media simultaneously, things were not easy.

At the workshop, artists could either learn the new trade of engraving or use the workshop's equipment to make prints from a cast they had already prepared. One of the workshop's principles was not to make reproductions of works that were not engravings. What was produced were all original prints, images that were originally conceived as prints and not as paintings.

The workshop kept a print of anything produced in its archives, thus slowly building up a small collection as well as documenting its activities.

In the warm essay included in the exhibition's catalog, Siaterli writes that



Maria Ziaka's aquatint etching, from 1980.

Experimentation
One of the objectives was to encourage artists to venture into new realms



An etching produced by Thodoros Delis in 1982.



A photoengraving by Vlassis Caniaris (2006).

working with the artists was both a learning and fulfilling experience, not only as regards art but about life and human relationships as well.

Gradually, the workshop developed its own artistic milieu. Evenings

that blended work with leisure brought the artists together in a mood that combined creativity with relaxation.

In the late 1980s, the center began an exhibition exchange program with the Centro Internazionale della Grafica di Venezia. Shortly thereafter, Siaterli and Pandolfini, along with their colleagues Panayiotis Gravalos, Maria Ziaka, Chronis Botsoglou, Tonia Nikolaidou, Roubina Sarelakou and Vassilis Sperantzas, joined forces and established the Engraving Center Group. They organized exhibitions and participated as a group in exhibitions on engraving.

In the 1990s, the center hosted seminars and workshops on different engraving techniques. Both the seminars and the workshops continue today.

In the meantime, other ventures, such as the Greek Printmakers' Association, which was founded in 1987, helped draw more attention to the medium.

Siaterli says that in recent years the art of engraving has become more popular and that an increasing number of artists are experimenting with its various techniques. According to Siaterli, advertising and the digital arts have had a major influence on the way we understand art and consume images and has also helped to break down the boundaries between what is traditionally held as high art and other means of expression.

However, she also says that engraving is not in the high-end niche of the art market and that art galleries rarely host exhibitions featuring the medium.

A bastion of the art of engraving as it struggles to keep pace in the world of contemporary art, the center continues with its various activities.

Scheduled for June and to be held in cooperation with the Greek Printmakers' Association, the center will organize the "Print Festival."

The exhibition at the Municipal Gallery of Athens has already had great attendance and will be also shown on Corfu, Cyprus and possibly in Bulgaria in the near future.

An occasion to learn about the history of the Athens Engraving Center, it also places on view some fine works of art and, indirectly, raises issues on the trends and artistic styles in engraving.

📍 "Athens Engraving Workshop - The Story of a Workshop" at the Municipal Gallery of Athens (51 Pireos, tel 210.323.1841).