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Topic: National identity against imperialism in Greek pop art during the *Junta* regime (1967-1974).

Thesis Statement: “Greek pop artists reference their national identity and pop art to satirise Papadopoulos’ military government during the years of the Greek *Junta* (1967-1974).”

## **Declaration of Originality**

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire, in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Art (DL827). It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

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Your name Stefanos Leader

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This research prompted me to dive into my place of origin (Greece) and the deep division in still experience to this day. I was lucky enough to be educated and enlightened by my secondary school art teacher, Dimitris Ioannou, son of one of the pioneering artists of the Greek pop art movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Giorgos Ioannou: 1926-2017) (Kalfayan Galleries, 2017). Ioannou really pushed me to further investigate and research artistic culture in many different fields of the visual arts.

Secondly, my grandfather Antonis Kontopoulos, who provided personal experience from his time as a political prisoner during the *junta* regime. He was one of the first medics who was at the student uprising in November 1973 at the Polytechnic University in Athens. The first casualty and death of the violent uprising was 21-year-old Diomidis Komninos, a Cypriot student at the polytechnic university, who died in the hands of my grandfather after he was shot outside the building on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1973.

Thirdly, I want to honour the National Gallery of Greece, which served as the primary source of visual information for this research. The exhibition “Democracy” (July 2024-February 2025) commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of democracy in Greece after the dissolution of the *junta* government in 1974. In this exhibition, they showcase and honour Greek artists who either lived and experienced the harsh regime between 1967 and 1974 or lived abroad in Europe.

## ABSTRACT:

Nationalism in the visual arts challenges the ethics and morals of using ethnicity as a way to critique countries and cultures as a whole. Both nationalism & imperialism have been synonymous with some of the most controversial dictatorial regimes in recent history, including the Greek *junta* between 1967 and 1974. For example, Greek pop art referenced ancient history, Greek classics, western imperialism, and comic books to comment on the social and political climate in the 60s and 70s during Giorgos Papadopoulos' regime. The younger generation of Greek artists like Giannis Gaitis, Alexis Akrihakis and Giorgos Ioannou used their national identity as a tool for a unified front for those who went up against imperialism.

This dissertation focuses on the political and cultural context of Greece during the *junta* government and the impact it had on reflecting the younger generation. The highlight of the *junta*'s violent nature was on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, a mass protest outside the Polytechnic University of Athens in 1973. The casualties were mainly younger Greek citizens who hoped for a brighter future at a time of oppression in political and cultural freedom. That specific date would later become a key moment in remembering the lives of those who protested for democracy. The combination of playful imagery with traumatised intent presents the cultural impact of the West in Greece at a time of fear and oppression.

In my opinion, this research is relevant in today's use of national symbols in the context of contemporary art and politics. There's a debate on the use of manipulating or altering the meaning of anything that is sacred to a nation's identity, for example, flags. Flags are flown around protests that aim to make people feel recognised and encourage unity. However, this dissertation aims to discuss their symbolic value in Greek pop art.

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## INTRODUCTION:

Some writers like George Orwell (1903-1950) have discussed the concept of ‘nationalism versus patriotism’ in the wider context of the ‘post-war’ period and how these terms clash with each other. To put it simply, Orwell discusses that the concept of nationalism is a “toxic obsession” where an individual preoccupies their desire for a country that is either part of the past or just a fantasy. Patriotism, on the other hand, focuses on the fondness of a nation, where not a single person but a collective aims for prosperity (usually) within a domestic area (Orwell, 2021, p. 177-183). These two concepts, however, are often confused with one another, especially in the age of mass media and art and especially in fragile countries where history runs deep in their everyday culture. Greece, in my opinion, is a prime example of where that confusion lies within its population when the topic of national importance comes into question.

In Greece, religion, customs, and traditions are very important in people’s sense of national identity. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has not been favourable to Greece’s economy or infrastructure compared to the high standards of other European states like France, Italy or Germany. The topic of nationality is a very complex one as it challenged the boundaries of ethnic pride, politics and visual arts from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century until the 2020s. Especially when there’s been a great outburst of nationalist pride in Greece, where division in politics is a part of the norm. The rise of nationalism has alarmed loads of European countries, including the Greeks, who were already very divided on that matter both ideologically and politically since the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

People’s trust and sense of reliability in Greek politics were evident in major unresolved tragedies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for example, the Tempi train crash. On the night of February 28<sup>th</sup> 2023, the entire Greek population mourned 57 deaths when two opposite trains crashed into each other on the same train track in Tempi, Greece. Two years have passed, and the families of the casualties are left with no clear answers as to what actually caused the trains to crash into each other. Greek public

opinion and opposition leaders are accusing the leading neo-liberal party of Greece, *New Democracy* (under Kyriakos Mitsotakis) made no efforts to research or discover the reason as to why this tragedy even happened in the first place. This led to massive public discontent with the current Greek government when around hundreds of thousands of Greek people protested in the centre of Athens on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025 (Human Rights Watch, 2025). This protest also happened in many other major cities in Greece and around the world, putting the Greek government in the spotlight for justice for the 57 deaths in the Tempi train crash.

This research was partially inspired by New Democracy's ignorance during the Tempi crash in 2023 and its connection to the colonels' regime between 1967 and 1974. Specifically, the similarities in the growing discontent and fear that came with the oppressive nature of the *junta* government, and the *New Democracy* party under Greek prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. Depending on what perspective people have on Mitsotakis's leadership of the Greek state, his time in office is synonymous with controversies.

A lot of visual material from the 1960s and 70s Greek artists captured the common Greek person's experience during the colonels' regime that could also tie with the current discontent of the *New Democracy* party. Both of these governmental periods share the same idea that Greeks in some way feel betrayal from its political representatives. In the case of the colonels' regime or the *junta*, Greek pop art became one of the main movements that critiqued the political and cultural status of the country in the 1960s and 70s. The Greek pop art movement captured the emotional and political side of modern Greek art and featured in one of the Greek national gallery's temporary exhibitions called "Democracy" (July 2024-February 2025). The exhibition was a celebration of Greece's restoration of democracy following the dissolution of the colonels' regime 50 years before the show's opening.

This research focuses on the aesthetics of Western pop art in accordance with the context of the authoritarian *junta* in Greece. The pop art movement in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century reflects the rapid economic development of the Western world under mass-production and the capitalist system. To contextualise the rise of pop art in Greece in the 1960s and 70s, it is important to recognise the motives behind the artworks in that movement. The imperial and political character of the West prompted the rise of the *colonels' regime* from 1967 until 1974, ultimately creating a deep division between the Greek Beat artists of that time. Pop art in Greece in the 60s and 70s toyed with the principles of the West under mass surveillance while also satirically challenging the leading authoritarian government, who were themselves very nationalistic.

The first chapter discusses the tension among the Greeks during the 1960s and the transition from democracy to a military dictatorship. The *junta* government under colonel Georgios Papadopoulos (1919-1999) becomes the focal point of this chapter, and how he staged a military coup in 1967 to obtain total control of Greece under a new pro-NATO agenda. The art that was produced before the *junta* regime gives an insight into the events that would eventually characterise the suppression of freedom for the youth, left-wing politicians and artists who lived in Greece during the 1960s and early 1970s. The second chapter builds on the foundation of pop art, specifically its sarcastic nature, to critique the influence of the West in the international context of the 1960s. National symbols became a common topic in pop art, such as the work of American painter Jasper Johns and Finnish artist Reimo Reinikainen, who both referenced America but on different ideological bases. The third chapter of this research ties in both the context of the *junta* regime and the use of national symbols in Greek pop art. The last chapter includes examples of some of the artworks that may have been influenced by American culture. Artists like Giorgos Ioannou referenced comic books and Greek surrealism in his style of painting, commenting on the 1960s and 70s under the *junta* through sarcasm, politics, and references to Greek identity.

# Chapter 1

## 1.1 THE 60S IN GREECE: CULTURAL SHIFTS AND POLITICAL TRAUMA.

Over half a century ago, Greece transitioned its political structural model from a pro-NATO and authoritarian regime to democracy, which became known as the “metapolitefsi” period. The historical term “metapolitefsi” from Greek to English loosely translates to the “post-political change” era that followed after the dissolution of the colonels’ regime in July 1974 (Tsiara, 2024, p. 40). The exhibition “Democracy” in the National Gallery of Greece presented a collection of artworks that were made by an international body of artists who responded to the authoritarian/ dictatorial governments of Greece, Portugal and Spain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The exhibition catalogue for “Democracy”, it features a wide collection of multi-disciplinary works that represent the artists’ responses to radical political transformation in their respective countries and how that trauma is reflected in their artistic practice. The 60s and 70s, in particular, are the decades that highlighted the periods of dictatorial power in the case of Greece during the colonels' regime under the leadership of Georgios Papadopoulos (1919-1999).

Greece or the Hellenic Republic was formed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (1821) when it fought for its independence from the Ottoman Empire in its 9-year effort in self-governance (Greek Revolution: 1821-1830) (Kornetis, K 2013, p. 77). By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Greece found itself in several international and domestic conflicts, two of them being world wars and a bitter civil war (1944-1949) between the EAM (National Liberation Front / communist partisans) and nationalist EDES (Nationalist Democratic army) (Kornetis, K 2013, p.10).



1) "Vietnam" (1968) - Vaso Kyriaki  
 Photographic collage, acrylic, spray paint, 100x110cm

Greece in the *post-war* period experienced the effects of Western culture, particularly the political, cultural, economic and social model it had at that time under capitalism. The 60s can be summed up as a period of a new wave of global cultural revolutions after the Second World War, a time when people started to question sociopolitical ideologies and the international effect of mass media and communication. Greece was no different to the United States or the rest of Western Europe (Kornetis, 2013, p.16). Campaigns like the civil rights movement and the black panthers in the United States, the rise of popular culture in the arts, and the Cold War between the capitalist system and the communist one (Kornetis, 2013, p.59). The American intervention during the civil war in Vietnam in the 1960s became a controversial topic on the global stage. The public's discontent had even

reached Greece, as shown in figure 2, *Vietnam* (1968) by Vaso Kyriaki, where she combined collage and spray paint to create an unsettling image of bloodshed and people in visible discontent. While the artist does not explicitly mention the Americans in the specific artwork, she depicts the horrific nature of domestic warfare where the local population are caught under fire due to the ideological differences between capitalist and communist agendas.

While the 60s had an immediate effect in some capitalist countries in the west like the United Kingdom, France, West Germany, Italy and Greece. This allowed Greece to experience the effects of the West, such as the urban expansion and economic rise in the Greek state in the 50s and 60s, with diplomatic support from the US (Miller, JE 2009, p. 66). Greece was exposed to foreign ideals and, most importantly, its culture. Cinema especially had transformed Greece's image, romantic dialogues in beautiful landscapes of the beaches, the emphasis was on the portrayal of the nation through the camera lens and how accessible it was to a young audience growing up in the 1960s (Kornetis, 2013, p.179).

However, the 60s were not looking promising to some Greeks in the younger generation. Despite the cultural impact of the 1960s on Greece's youth, there was growing tension between them and the older generation. Especially when it came to the "Greek left" who rejected US imports, as they rebelled against the then conservative right-wing prime minister of Greece, Kostantinos Karamanlis (Kornetis, 2013, pp. 17-19). In the city of Athens, there was a massive increase in the population, especially amongst the younger generation, when they moved to Athens for their university studies. This exposure to urban life for the youth meant that they became much more engaged with cultural and social activities that revolved around mass media. It was believed, however, according to Kornetis, that despite this increase in the Athenian population, there also should have been a greater increase in productivity and economy through the age of consumerism, just like the US and the West in general. Something that should be discussed is the 'failure' of American appeal to the generation of the Greek who were either born during or after

the 1940s. The same generation also began experiencing one of America's biggest imports apart from its economic assistance, cinema.

The significance of media and art in Greece has not only opened the path for politics, ideology and war to be exposed to an audience of young Greeks. Media and culture have long been at the forefront of Greek culture. Such cultural forms often commented on and expressed political and ideological ideas to a young Greek audience. Films in the 60s and 70s about war, Greeks against the Germans (*OXI*, Dimis Dadiras, 1969), Greeks against the Ottoman empire (*Papaflessas*, Andreou, 1971), are some of the examples that depicted the Greeks as a strong and independent nation, proud of its war efforts against the *foreign enemy*. Greek cinema was considered one of the primary forms of self-education and protest against Western influence in the Greek mainland, something the Americans were relatively uncomfortable with since they had no direct control over it apart from funding Greece's economy and military (Miller, 2009, p. 113).

Generally, since the Greek civil war (1844-1949), there had been tensions between the western-backed monarchy and the communist youth, which led up to a growing sense of resentment against the Americans and the *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation* (NATO) when Greece joined the 'anti-communist' alliance in 1952 (Miller, JE 2009, pp. 37-38).

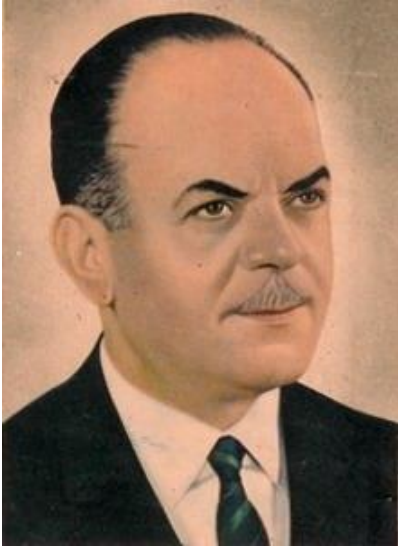
## 1.2 THE REGIME OF THE COLONELS/ GREEK *JUNTA* (*CHOÚNTA*) 1967-1974:

Greece was not far from experiencing the full cultural impact of the 1960s, but a growing suspicion of the democratic government in its 'poor handling' of communism led to ideological and political tensions within the country. This 'anti-American' attitude in media and culture in the 1960s led to the brewing of a small alliance among low-ranking officers in the Greek army. Papadopoulos' loyalty to NATO aimed to help them to contain communism internationally, which prompted

the Greek *junta* (χούντα) or *regime of the colonels* to seize political and military power in the late 1960s.

In the 1960s, Greece was a relatively tense time in the post-war period in terms of politics and its economy. Greece, being the only capitalist country in the Balkans, meant that the West had the only diplomatic and economic ally in that region after the Second World War. Even years after the Greek civil war (1945-1949), there had been a noticeable attitude against Western imperialism, especially when it had to do with a people who suffered casualties on both sides of political ideologies. A small body within the Greek military had grown suspicious of the radical Greek youth, plotting to stage a coup and topple the leader of the centrist party, Georgios Papandreou (1888-1968) (Kornetis, 2013, p.12,14).

The Greek *junta* (χούντα pronounced: *choúnta*) was an authoritarian-led dictatorship imposed by a military coup staged by its chief colonel, Giorgos Papadopoulos, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1967 with the help of other low-ranking military officers in the Greek army. Their justification for their surprise takeover stems from the fear of a communist/ leftist threat to the Greek mainland. This act of aggressive military takeover has not been unique in the slightest in the case of political tension in many countries around the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Spain being a prime example of authoritarianism staged and led by Spanish colonels like general Franco (1892-1975) in the aftermath of the Spanish civil war (1936-1939) against the Spanish communists (Tsiara, 2024, p. 41). The Greek *junta* or *the regime of the colonels* was a crucial moment in modern Greek politics known best for its oppressive, violent and extreme nationalistic character during the post-war period in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.



2) Portrait of Giorgos Papadopoulos 3) The colonels and King Constantine II (1967)

One of their main points addressed when they staged the coup on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967, was that they suspected a communist increase amongst the Greek youth. The Greek youth and left were merged under the same label for Papadopoulos' list of political opponents to his authoritarian regime. Some of those who had experienced the dictatorship described the time period as a "burden". That claim primarily refers to the strictness of the colonels on persecuting those on the Greek left (Kornetis, 2013, p. 102). Papadopoulos' *junta* regime was repressive to the youth and the left, sending them to exile on remote islands across the country as political prisoners (Kornetis, 2013, p. 248). This, in return, created more and more tensions between the colonels and the Greek youth who were becoming more and more paranoid in terms of freedom of expression when it came to discussing politics.

The arts, of course, were no exception when facing censorship. Greek artist Dimosthenis Skoulakis (born 1939) is one example of a person who lived under fear during the *junta* regime with the artwork *Sotiris Petroulas* (1966). Despite the painting being a year before the military coup in '67, it captures the violence and oppression that would follow for the next 7 years in Greece. This painting by Skoulakis shows an example of the hostility against political repression that existed in Greece.



4) *Sotiris Petroulas* (1966) – Dimosthenis Skoulakis

Oil on canvas, 70 x 90 cm

The figure lying on the ground is Sotiris Petroulas (1943-1965), who is placed in the centre of the frame surrounded by a set of people who are facing the dead body in a solid red background that could symbolise both blood and the left. Petroulas was attending political demonstrations to protest against the rise of the right and was ultimately caught up in the violence that erupted on the day of his death (Konstandopoulos, A.G. and Modis, T., 2005). Petroulas' assassination in July 1965 became a major turning point in the radicalization on the Greek left as he was a member of the *Grigoris Lambrakis youth* (left-wing political figure who was assassinated in Thessaloniki in 1963) (Kornetis, 2013, p. 28).

Musicians/composers like Mikis Theodorakis ( and Manos Hatzidakis) are some of the representative voices in the artists' circle, who happen to be in left-wing factions of Greek society (Keridis, 2009). Theodorakis had even composed a song about the

death of Petroulas titled *Sotiris Petroulas* (1970), a tribute to the Greek left. Hence, songs became another form of protest against political repression during the *junta*. The colonels, on the other hand, even the previous authoritarian governments during the Second World War (the Nazi German occupiers) had considered the *rebetiko* music style aligned with resistance against fascism and the right-wing. Soon enough, music, religion, art and theatre would face re-appropriation by Papadopoulos under his strict policies on censorship, a very important characteristic of the regime of the colonels (Kornetis, 2013, p.276).



5) “USA Out, NATO Out” graffiti at the Polytechnic student uprising (17<sup>th</sup> November 1973).



6) *Polytechnic University of Athens (1975)* – Marios Vatzias  
 Oil on canvas, 194.6 x 194.8 cm, © National Gallery

The Greek *junta* is also infamously known for its aggressive military clamp down a student-led protest in the Polytechnic (*polytechneio*=*πολυτεχνείο*) school of Athens in mid-November 1973. The growing discontent of the younger generation, especially university students, organised a squat in the polytechnic campus on Patision street, which led to an anti-*junta* demonstration from the 15<sup>th</sup> until the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 1973. Marios Vatzias, in figure 5, *Polytechnic University of Athens (1975)*, depicts three panels in vertical order of the university campus during the events of the student uprising. Starting from the two top panels of the painting, where

the university campus becomes the centre of attention. The building is depicted twice in two different environments, where colour becomes the artist's way of contrasting the symbolic value of the Polytechnic University in the context of political freedom. The presence of angel-like figures holding a white banner with "Bread, Education, Freedom" written on the panel could suggest the artist's moral beliefs on the student protest in 1973. By the time the painting was created in 1975, the iconic slogan on the banner had become synonymous with the cause for political reform in Greece during the *junta* regime. Figures 6 and 7 show the crowd of demonstrators outside the university campus in protest against the imperial *junta* government. The aftermath of this violent crackdown led to the killings of around 21 people, inside and outside of the university, an event that would ultimately change the fate of the *junta* government.

Less than a year later, in April 1974, the Turkish military invaded the northern part of Cyprus, a very close ally to the Greek state, according to the colonels. However, the colonels did not react to Turkey's invasion of another country, which resulted in a lot of the military staff and cabinet not following Papadopoulos' orders anymore, highlighting his unpopular reputation amongst the Greeks (Bratis, 2010, p.191). What followed was a total collapse for the colonels, and they were put on trial a couple of months after the dissolution of the *junta* government, marking the end of the regime in 1974, paving the way to the period of *metapolitefsi*. The modern Greek state recognises the 17<sup>th</sup> of November as a nationwide school and university annual holiday on the day of the civil unrest caused by the colonels in 1973.

## Chapter 2

### 2.1 POP ART'S SARCASTIC NATURE:

This chapter covers pop art as an art term in the context of its sarcastic nature in critiquing traditions and politics. Specifically, how Pop Art, as an art movement, captured the rise of American dominance in international art and also imperialism. Pop art became popular in the 1950s and 60s through the rise of consumerism and pop culture in Western democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom and France. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a rise in conceptual/ intellectual approaches to artistic culture with movements like *post-modernism*, promoting creative expression through emotion, symbolism, and an 'anti-establishment' attitude towards traditional artistic practice. The periodic term *post-modernism* is a larger umbrella of specific art movements that arose during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of pop art's most notable aims was to let go of traditional art practises and embrace a more innovative aesthetic that responded to contemporary culture under capitalism and mass production. This section brings discussions from art historians who present their own understanding of pop art and how it came to influence the Greeks to create work that responded to the same topics.

Firstly, an art movement that has a common basis on critiquing the social, cultural and political is the *Dada* movement. The *dada* movement arose in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, before *post-modernism* shared some of the aspects that are relevant to the foundation of pop art's critical way of responding to visual arts and politics (Jones, 2006, p. 260). The *Dada* movement came from Switzerland in 1916 by a group of international artists, with its central philosophy linked to responding to the horrors of the First World War in Europe (1914-1918). Dada also made art to challenge what they considered the "conservative" artistic culture of Europe, pushing boundaries in visual art with texts, using flat imagery, pioneering collage as a practice and aiming to convey an abstract political language. The *dadaists* focused on irony, humour, anti-war messages and sarcasm. (Jones, 2006, pp.94-116).

An important reason why the *Dada* movement should be discussed in this chapter is because of its strong visual narrative that also appears in much later art movements of post-modernism, like pop art. Dadaists and the later pop artists share many common elements in their work in terms of using sarcasm to heavily critique the context in which they find themselves. One example of an artist responding with sarcasm is Marcel Duchamp and his artwork *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919), a collage depicting the famous Mona Lisa with a moustache.



7) *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919) - Marcel Duchamp  
Pencil on Print, 19.7 x 12.4 cm, © MoMA

In *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919) (figure 8) by Duchamp the famous creation by Leonardo, being manipulated by a single pencil drawing of a moustache and goatee on the person's face, possibly suggesting a humorous approach to the famous painting. The anti-art attitude of the *Dadaist* artists was very critical of the art world, not complying with

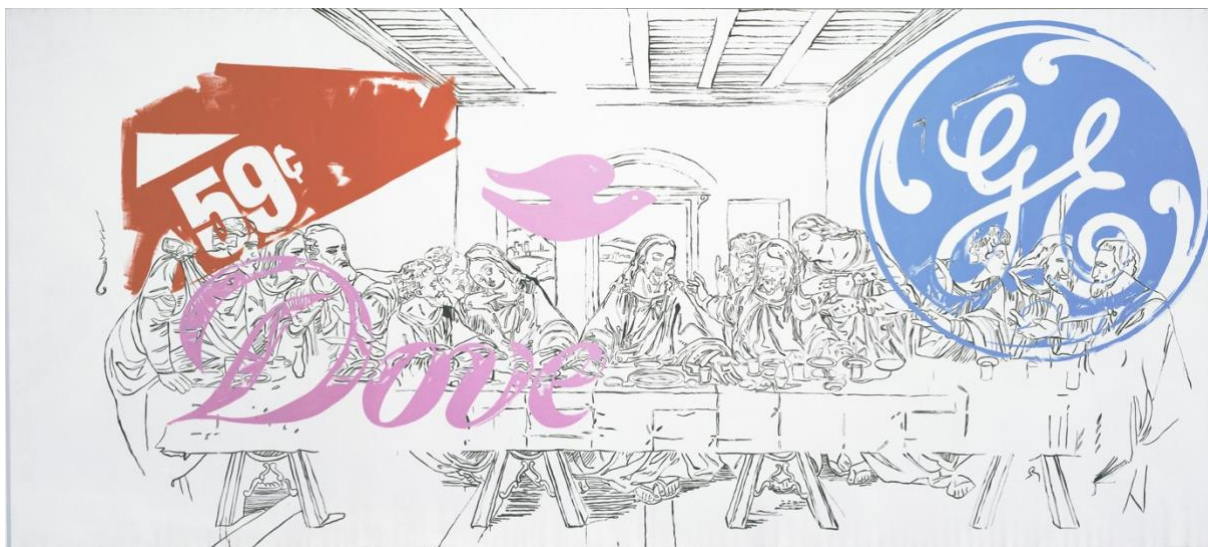
the norms or rules of it in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The *Dada* movement faced a lot of controversy, daring to challenge the authority of art by making fun of it through their artistic practice. According to the writer Arnold Hauser in *The Sociology of Art* (2011), “Every artistic experience—whether creative or receptive—has its roots as to both its origin and its effect in a community, if not necessarily in the consciousness of a community” (Hauser, A 2011, *The Sociology of Art*, p.473). Taking this statement into consideration, we understand that the dadaists had created a certain visual language that responded to the political and cultural effects of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in their practice. Hence, dada and pop art combine visual culture and politics engaged with one another to create a visual response to the historical context of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Pop art, as Sylvia Harrison writes in *Pop Art and the Origins of Post-Modernism* (2001), is the “de-definition of art”, a reaction to the rapid rise of consumerist culture in the post-war period (Harrison, S 2001, p.37). Pop art merged the “post-modernist thought” of rejecting modernism, all the while endorsing a more consumerist character in accordance with the rapid-industrialisation of American and British pop culture in visual media and music. Harrison references art historian and curator Lawrence Alloway in his book *American Pop Art* (1973); pop art “proposes a field of exchangeable and repeatable imagery” (Harrison, S 2001, p.40).

Pop art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century aimed at challenging the relationship between consumerism, mass media, and imperialism by merging them into its artistic practice to critique the age of capitalism. Some of the leading figures of the pop art movement include artists like Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Roy Liechtenstein. Their work is in the definition of the pop art bubble according to Alloway, based on their creative response to the 1950s and 60s commercial/ pop culture in the United States (Harrison, S 2001, p.41).

Another example of Leonardo da Vinci’s famous masterpieces being reissued is in Andy Warhol’s version of *The Last Supper* (1986) in figure 9, incorporating a

contemporary and consumerist twist to the masterpiece. With famous western brands like *Dove* and a price tag, changing the definition of the artwork from a wall-painted piece into an ad of some sort through Warhol's use of universally recognised symbols of capitalism in the West. Despite the depiction of the famous Jesus Christ with his students in the original artwork in Italy by Leonardo, the capitalist meaning in Warhol's version created a new narrative in the composition, instantly recognisable to the West.



8) *The Last Supper* (1986) – Andy Warhol, Encaustic,

Oil and collage on plywood, 302.9 x 668.7 cm © MoMA

The absence of colour in Leonardo's composition makes a massive contrast with the vibrant colours of Warhol's screen prints on the surface of the print. American art historian Harold Rosenberg says that Warhol's practice focused on the concept of mass production and the industrial environment from the 1960s onwards. Rosenberg discusses that the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century was the "age of reproduction" (Harrison, S 2001, p.68), meaning that apart from the rise of material production, also came the age of art and media being reproduced on a global scale. This is evident in Warhol's response in using symbols of famous brands along with a very well-known painting of Leonardo da Vinci, depicting Jesus Christ.

The flatness of the screen prints of the brands could remind people of the products that they buy as mass consumers in the age of capitalism (Harrison, S 2001, p.39). Warhol's use of these recognised images and logos in his practice works well with the concept of familiarity in what people see in their everyday lives. The use of recognised imagery is effective in Warhol's approach to attracting the audience with it, much like Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919) with his rendition of the famous "Mona Lisa" painting by da Vinci. Both Warhol and Duchamp reference something that has either existed or exists in their respective context.

Pop art was not based in one sole country, but it started off and was a creation of the west according to the historian Alloway. The United States and the United Kingdom were two of the main pop art hubs of the early 1960s, but one of them in particular had a much larger impact on a global scale. The United States of America, in particular, had a more impactful effect on the wider scale of everyday life, especially in capitalist societies in the aftermath of the Second World War. Especially when they were one of two global powers like their ideological opponent, the Soviet Union, which also aimed to expand its sphere of influence in the wider hemisphere (Doss, 2002, p. 123).

## 2.2 NATIONALISM AND POP ART:

During the mid-1950s, when pop art started to gain more global attraction, for example, American pop artist Jasper Johns (b. 1930). Johns' use of "identifiable entities" shaped his visual language of depicting his intent through "man-made" symbols and objects. For example, figure 9, Johns' *Flag* painting from the mid-1950s, painting the American flag using oil paint on canvas (1954-55) (Doss, 2002, p. 143).



9) *Flag* (1954-55) – Jasper Johns  
Oil on canvas, 107.3 x 153.8 cm © MoMA

The subject matter is simple: an American flag, a symbol of the capitalist West. Johns captures the essence of America through their national flag, a simple yet effective visual language of his which can be read and understood by the world. Clement Greenburg discusses it as “literal irony” (Harrison, S 2001, p.104) for John’s *Flag*, depicting as something genuine, an image that has no purpose to represent anything else. The “irony” that Greenburg suggests is the notion of Johns artwork not having a deeper meaning behind the subject matter of the *Flag* (1954-55). Johns became a staple artist in the pop art movement as someone who understood the semiotics of “the literal” as an art form, something so shallow in its meaning yet so recognisable. The reproduction of the American flag in Johns’ artwork directly relates to the concept of the consumer being able to see an image and instantly recognise it through its iconic “national” status.

What is interesting about John's "Flag" (1954-55) was his approach to make himself, the artist, anonymous to the work (Harrison, S 2001, p.150). The American flag is abstract in its visual structure by itself, only depicting the red and white stripes as seen in Johns' version of the painting. The context of it also could support its strong visual status if you consider that the 1950s were the start of a very tense ideological war between the capitalist United States and the communist Soviet Union. Johns was an American, meaning that his "Flag" was the representation of his home nation.

The flatness of the flag's design creates this illusion of looking at a billboard, an advertisement or a reproduced image of the American flag on the surface of the wall. What is interesting about this specific artwork is the medium, which is oil paint on canvas. The medium suggests the human interaction between the image of the American flag and Johns' painting skills(Doss, 2002, p. 142). If you come close to the painting itself, you can see the human presence in the brush strokes from the different shades of red, white and blue which make up the design of the American flag. *Flag* (1954-55) as an artwork is interesting in discussing the historical context of its creation, especially during the 50s when mass-produced images were all over the United States.



10) Detail of *Flag* (1954-55) - Jasper Johns

© MoMA

The presence of national identity, making it the central theme of an artwork like *Flag* (1954-55), reminds me of early American propaganda posters during the two World Wars. Something is fascinating and influential about using a country's flag, as it creates this sense of unity for a nation while also creating a barrier between other nations. American nationalism especially maintained this notion of a unifying cause by using its flag in motivational mass-produced posters.

Apart from the simple imagery of using the design for the American flag, there is room for reconsideration of its significance. The context varies depending on the way people interpret the American flag, especially for a native who comes from the States, who may feel neutral when seeing the American flag. Perhaps John's intent was not to give any deeper meaning when he was conceptualising the artwork, however it does make room for further interpretation. The *Flag* could suggest multiple sides to how it should be approached, depending on how the US fits into the world of art. Is it possible that Johns' aim was to boost American pride through the iconic flag design, or does he criticise it?



11) *United We Win* (1943) Photograph by Alexander Liberman

National Archives

This pattern of including signs and symbols of a nation, in this case American, has appeared in earlier creative projects for posters and flyers during wars. The design

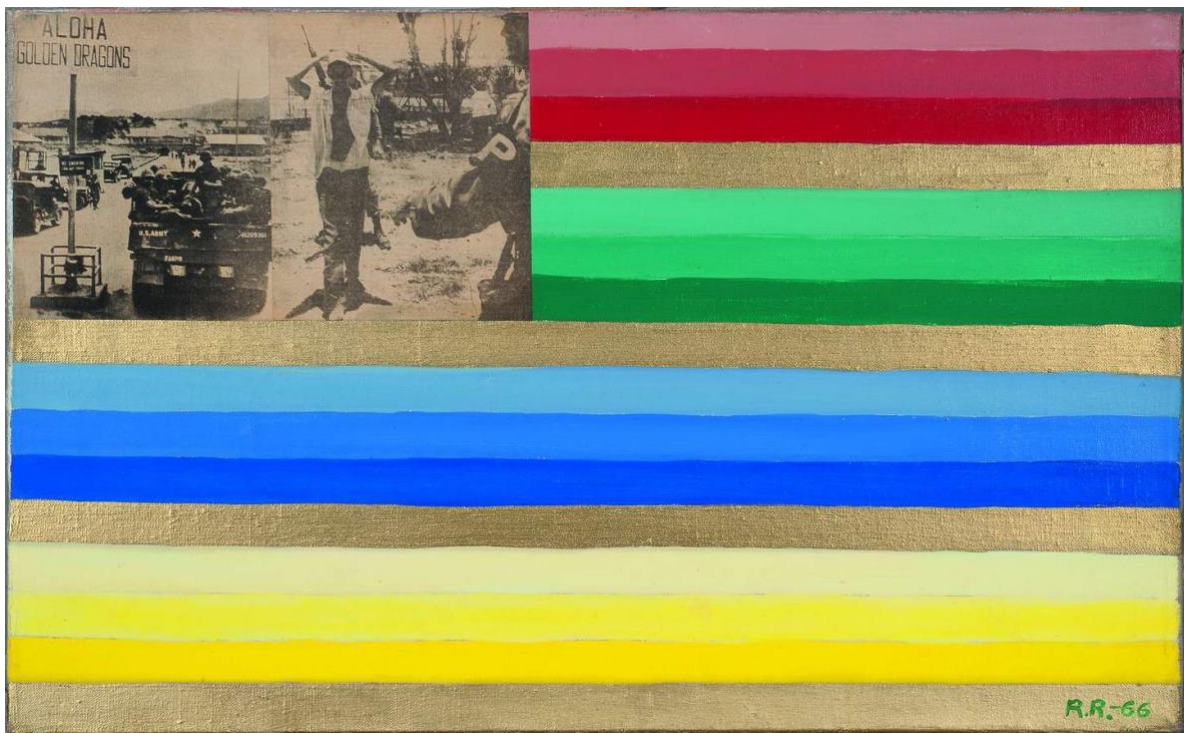
and colours of the American flag appear in the example I have picked for this argument, *United We Win* (1943), an American propaganda poster that was made to boost American morale during the Second World War (1939-1945). This poster became a very popular method of making propaganda accessible to the general public across the US, going back to Lawrence Alloway's critique on "repeated imagery" (Harrison, S 2001, p. 41). The "American-ness" of these posters use the element of nation as part of their intent, to unite a people by reminding them of their nationality through repeated images of the flag or the classic *red-white-blue* colour motifs.

To conclude this analysis of the American flag in the fine art context, specifically pop art, there are a number of things to consider. What does the American flag represent? Does it represent freedom, liberty, justice, capitalism, free markets or power? What could the American flag mean to those who are not from the United States when they lay their eyes upon that image? Johns may have used the American flag to remind its citizens of what America stood for in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Johns re-examined the imagery and symbolic value of his nation's flag in a cultural/ pop art context and made the American flag a statement.

## 2.3 ANTI-IMPERIAL POP ART IN EUROPE:

By the mid-twentieth century, with the age of reproduction and accessibility becoming much easier for other countries, people became aware of Johns' work,

following the artist's remake of the (American) *Flag* (1954-1955). Overseas, Europe was experiencing this wave of American influence with pop art reaching the continent in the late 50s and early 60s. Pop art in the US had developed the consumerist/ mass-produced character most of us think of today when discussing pop art. Europe, on the other hand, had extended the ideals of what pop art is; in fact was more critical of the influence the US has had on the global stage in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tate (n.d.). *Think You Know Pop Art? – Look Closer*. [online] ).



12) Sketch 4 for the US Flag (1966) - Reimo Reinikainen

Oil and collage, 36cm x 65 cm, © MoMA

For example, in the 1960s, Finnish pop artist Reimo Reinikainen became critical of American influence not only in terms of its international cultural and economic exports, but also in its imperialistic effect in geopolitical affairs across the globe. Figure 12, *Sketch 4 for the US Flag* (1966) is one of many artworks by Reinikainen that criticise US intervention in conflicts far away from American soil. In an interview with Tate Modern, he stated:

“Did your work engage with current events in the 1960s and early 1970s?”

“The sketches for the US flag of course arose from the war the US was waging in Vietnam. I was appalled at how the richest country on the planet was trying to ravage one of the world’s poorest countries. I was conflicted because I, like other Finnish pop artists, admired American pop art. At the same time, I was angered by the war the bigwigs in the US were waging against Vietnam, so I wanted to express my opposition to it. These four paintings were my protest against the war, but they were interpreted politically. Then again, war is very much a political event.”

(Tate Modern, London, 2016)

Reinikainen’s adaptation of the US flag was made out of spite of America’s invasion of South Vietnam to tackle the communist regime in northern Vietnam, something which he felt was very controversial. In *Sketch 4 for the US Flag* (1966), it follows the same format of the American flag, replacing the traditional colour palette and the top left section of the original with a cut-out image of the American military in foreign soil, most possibly an attack against American interference in other conflicts that threatened their political and even cultural influence externally.

The colours of the artwork are different to the original American flag, replacing them with a wider range of vibrant, “commercially appealing” colours which could suggest the artist’s sarcastic tone against American domination. Reinikainen claims that the pop art movement in the 1960s was “very much a political event”, which he believed commented on politics not only in US soil, but on a much wider scale across the world, including Vietnam. The artist is not American himself, yet he was critical of international affairs that were not directly related to his home nation (Finland), which ironically enough proves how pop art was later used as a tool against the nation it represented.



*13) Sketch 1 for the US Flag (1966) - Reimo Reinikainen,  
Oil and collage, 36 cm x 65, cm, © Helsinki Art Museum*



*14) Sketch 3 for the US Flag - Reimo Reinikainen (1966)  
Oil and collage, 36 cm x 65, cm, © Helsinki Art Museum*

The work of pop artist Reinikainen about America is very intentional in what he aimed to critique. The American flag in this context of the mid-1960s may have caused different reactions to people who were leaning more towards the left-wing or did not approve and support American policies in international affairs, including

Vietnam. Reinikainen admitted that his admiration of American pop art was not going to make him forget some of the aggressive international policies America had caused or assisted in the mid-twentieth century (Tate, 2016). America and imperialism became synonymous after their contribution to the Allied victory in the Second World War. Their interference in international political affairs and armed conflicts outside of the US, however, started to alter their legacy in the eyes of artists like Reinikainen.

By the mid-1960s, politics, warfare, and art started merging together in pop art in other countries that did not relate to the appeal of the United States, especially younger artists of the post-war generation. In the first chapter of this research, there's a mutual level of discontent in the political scene in Greece, which affected the lives of Greek artists who referred to its domestic political violence. Chapter 2 gave some context on how artists like Jasper Johns might have referenced nationality to re-examine the American flag in the context of the 1950s and 60s. The use of satire and sarcasm in response to contemporary politics of that time, along with commercial visual imagery, prompted other countries of the West to also contribute to the pop art movement outside the United States. Some of the topics discussed in this chapter, such as nationalism, American imperialism, and consumerism in pop art, would later inspire artists who would also comment on the influence of the West in Greece during the *junta* years.

## Chapter 3

### 3.1 GREEK ART DURING THE 1960S:

Pop art in the context of Greece arose in the 1960s due to its adoption of Western morals and societal structure after the Second World War. Greece was the only country in the Balkan region that was strategically under the influence of capitalist countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, unlike the rest who were under the Soviet system with communist morals. The political divide amongst Greek society was still present even after the Greek civil war (1944-49) between the EAM (National Liberation Front / communist partisans) and nationalist EDES (National Democratic army). Some historians, as Eleftheria Kosmidou mentions in *European Civil War Films* that the Greek civil war was “an ideological war”, two different political philosophies with both the British and Soviets intervening in the domestic/ Greek conflict (Kosmidou, 2012, pp.117, 125 ).

The aftermath of the Greek civil war led to the “almost total American colonisation of the country” (Kosmidou, 2012, p.117 ). The lack of Soviet and Yugoslavian involvement in aiding the left-wing armed forces led to their demise, and they eventually surrendered to the national forces in 1949. And so, US extensive aid to Greece marked the start of a worldwide ideological crusade’ (Close, 1995, p. 205). Kosmidou mentions the significance of the translation of the term “civil war” in Greek, “εμφύλιος πόλεμος” (pronounced “emfeelios polemos”), which means ‘intra-racial’ ( Kosmidou, 2012, p.125 ), highlighting the bitterness of the conflict within a nation where ideology separated them. The war could be seen as a particularly ‘bitter’ and ‘dark’ moment in Greek society, as the war was between Greeks, leading to feelings of betrayal, sorrow and the feeling of being forced under foreign influence.

Some who lived through the horrors of war, along with developing political trauma and divide, reacted by drawing on what they experienced. Giorgos Ioannou (1926-2017) was one of them, who some consider to be the father of Greek Pop art. Ioannou

started drawing from a young age, what he witnessed in front of him during the civil and Second World War, depicting battlefields, guns and soldiers. In Ioannou's early drawings, he made historical references to the Greek army against the fascist Italian invaders from a young person's point of view, naïve and disturbed by what was happening to his home country from a foreign power. The captions in his drawings help us identify the dates and locations of his early drawings, along with the use of Greek and Italian flags. Ioannou's drawings could resemble cartoons, caricatures and comic books (figure 15).



15) Coloured pencil drawings by Giorgos Ioannou (1940s), Giorgos Ioannou: Retrospective exhibition, Municipal gallery of Athens, 2022-23, Euronews (2023)

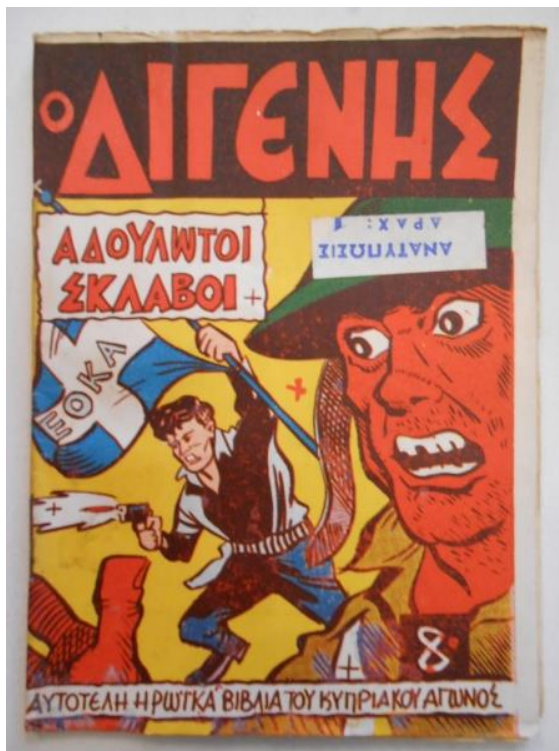
The visual depiction of modern warfare also came in a Greek comic book series around the 1940s, the same time when Ioannou did these drawings, “*Ο Μικρός Ηρώς*” translation: “The Little Hero” by Stelios Anemodouras. The first issue came out much later, in 1953 to be exact, but it shows a significant similarity in its themes about warfare and politics with Ioannou's early drawings (Mikrosiros.gr. (2016). [*Προφίλ.*]).



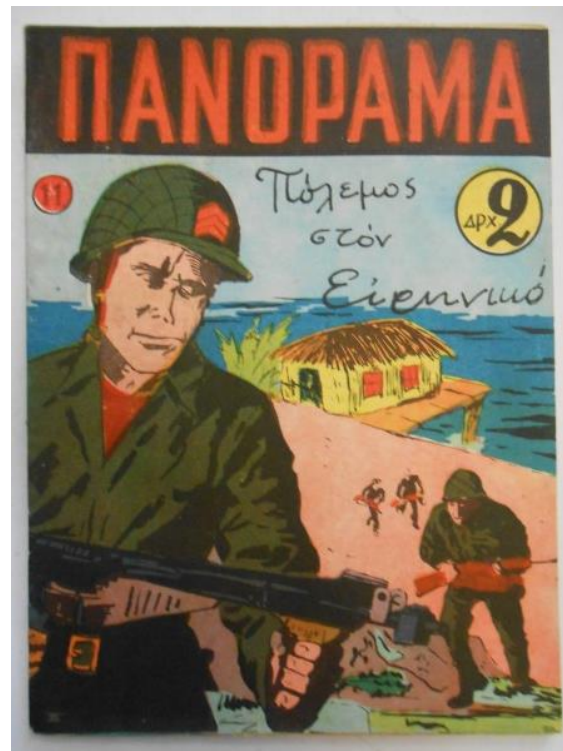
16) "Μικρος Iros" Collection (issue #29)



17) "Μικρος Iros" Collection (issue #11)



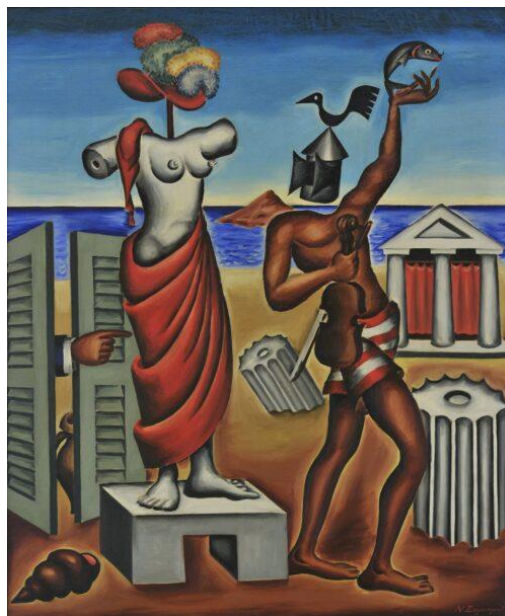
18) "Ο Διγενής" Νο 8.



19) "Εικονογραφημένο Πανόραμα" Νο 11

The early 50s, post-Nazi occupation and civil war, had influenced a lot of Greek comic book franchises that started emerging that decade. For example, *the Little Hero* comic book franchise portrays fictional stories about a group of Greek partisan fighters against the Nazi German forces during the 1941-44 German occupation of Greece during the Second World War. With headings like “Surrender Greeks” by the Nazi soldiers and secret agents like “The Ghost Girl”, the Greeks create a narrative about Greek resistance during the Second World War (figure 18).

Other art movements that started appearing in post-war Greece, such as surrealism, brought in a contemporary visual narrative to the Greek context.) Greek surrealist painter Nikos Engonopoulos (1907-1985) merged themes such as modernity with ancient Greek/Byzantine iconography, bringing in a Greek tone to his artistic practice. References to Greek culture appear in a lot of Engonopoulos’ work, the classic temple pillars, the ancient marble statues, even Greek flags in a surrealist environment he created through painting (National Gallery, 2022 [online]).



20) *Delos* (1939) – Nikos Engonopoulos,  
Oil on canvas, 120 x 100 cm, Collection of Eleni Engonopoulou.



21) *Cafe, les Pallicares* (1956) - Nikos Engonopoulos

Oil on canvas, 55 x 45 cm. (Artnet.com, 2025)

Engonopoulos' work depicts the Greek lifestyle in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with visual references to Greece. Symbols of traditional Greek culture, for example, the depiction of nude figures from ancient Greek culture, his work bridges between tradition and the contemporary context. There is a possibility that Engonopoulos might have taken a lot of visual inspiration from surrealist painters like Giorgio de

Chirico for his painting style, bringing a lot of references to the ancient classics, especially coming from Greek culture, like the architectural styles and the themes that are presented within these paintings (National Gallery, 2022 [online] ).



22) 215 Three marble relief slabs from the revetment of a pedestal or of an altar. Found at Mantinea, Arkadia, ca. 330-320 BC. Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο n. (n.d.). *Classical Period*. [online]

23) *The Song of Love* (1914) - Giorgio de Chirico, Oil on canvas, 73 x 59.1 cm, MoMA

Engonopoulos' artistic influence might have influenced Ioannou's work in the 1960s. Giorgos Ioannou studied in Athens, then he went to Paris to the Académie Julian in the 1950s, where he was exposed to art movements like surrealism (Giorgos Ioannou. (2011). *Bio*. [online] ). His work in the 60s took a lot of inspiration from 20th-century surrealism in terms of representing Greece, bringing in comic book-style paintings of his time, like *the Little Hero*. Ioannou's work by the mid-1960s was more colourful and more decorative than his pop art paintings.

Ioannou's work in the 1960s focused on urban landscapes, crowds of people dancing, mingling and playing instruments in colourful environments, possibly trying to depict the 1960s culture in Europe. Ioannou's attention to detail makes the audience get the impression that Greece flourished in terms of culture, entertainment and the societal structure in the 1960s. Multicoloured patterns, playing cards, people

dancing and mingling, Ioannou's paintings have a playful tone when it comes to painting crowds of people in public settings.

Ioannou's *Untitled* (1969)/ figure 24 could give the impression that the late 1960s in Greece were a time of cultural and social prosperity despite the regime of the dictatorship. In figure 25, Ioannou depicts both men and women dancing, drinking, wearing flamboyant outfits, playful patterns, and Greek flags to show the social interactions in crowded spaces in Greece. There's probably some sarcasm within this artwork after taking a closer look at the false narrative Ioannou provides the audience when they pay closer attention to the social climate during the *junta* regime.



24) *Untitled* (1969) – Giorgos Ioannou  
Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, © Giorgos Ioannou



25) Untitled (1972) – Giorgos Ioannou  
Oil on canvas, 100x70 cm, © Giorgos Ioannou

The influence of comic books is more evident in his later work, as he started to paint differently from what he produced in the 1960s. Ioannou's work started to take on a surrealist tone, merging with the illustrative style of wartime comic books. In *Untitled (1972)*/ figure 25 by Giorgos Ioannou, the United States is mentioned through their national flag, which symbolises its influence in Ioannou's artistic practice but also criticises its negative influence. Ioannou's artistic work in the early 1970s evolves into using strict outlines, flat colours without tones or shades, a significant shift from his previous work in the late 1960s. Ioannou's paintings from the 1970s start to break down in layers one on top of the other, just like *Untitled (1972)*, where there's no indication of a focal point, breaking down his artworks into comic panels. Figures 15 and 25 share similar topics of depicting warfare through Ioannou's perspective; the only difference between them is the antagonist, from Italian to American.

This pattern of references to American culture resurfaces once again in pop art, this time in Greece through Ioannou's critique of the West. The same intent appeared in the second chapter in Reinikainen's versions of the American flag. He depicts how historical events relevant to his home nation (Greece) intertwine with American values and standards, such as America's imperial and cultural expansion through its powerful military and mass media. The "TV" camera facing a man with a suit with his fist up could suggest the idea that political influence in television, something that some writers like Erika Doss point out in *Twentieth-Century American Art* (2002). Ioannou's shift in the 1970s could remind us of American pop artist Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997).

The use of authoritarian body language of politicians that indicates power, men wearing suits, weaponry and reference to popular culture in the 1960s could indicate the visual resemblance between Roy Lichtenstein and Giorgos Ioannou.



26) *Okay, Hot-Shot, Okay!* (1973) – Roy Lichtenstein, Roy Lichtenstein Catalogue

27) *Finger Pointing* (1973) – Roy Lichtenstein, The New York Collection for Stockholm



28) *Untitled* (1973) - Giorgos Ioannou, Oil on canvas, 100 x 70 cm, © Giorgos Ioannou

29) *Threat on the Road* (1972) – Giorgos Ioannou, Oil on canvas, 100 x 70 cm, © Giorgos Ioannou

Both artists painted in reference to the visual language of comic books. In figures 26, 27, 28 and 29, there's evident similarity in technique through the artists' work, mainly painting scenes of physical violence and warfare. Apart from the visual similarities between Ioannou and Lichtenstein, they both refer to comics that belong in popular culture in the 1960s and 70s. Ioannou's work in figure 29, however, could suggest a deeper political motive because of the *junta*'s intimidating nature against *peace*, referenced by its symbol.

Doss discusses the concept of "American dominance in 20th-century modern art" and how it became one of their most impactful ways of cultural expansion to the Western world, including Greece (Doss E, 2002, p. 139). Doss discusses that the US consumerist culture that began in the 40s also contributed to their cultural influence in the arts. Roy Lichtenstein's work could be considered a product of American culture, for his global status as one of the faces of the pop art movement and did not directly refer to any particular political event (Doss E, 2002, p. 154). Ioannou, on the other hand, despite using the same commercial/ comic book language, seems to dive deeper into his intent as his work commented specifically on Greece's political scene.

The United States, on the one hand, had a much greater imperial and political influence in the aftermath of the Second World War, not just domestically, but globally. America's economic and cultural determination is what made up the 'West' during the post-war period, whereas Greece dealt with more complicated political matters. Greece in the 1950s had a small fraction of the population who had political and cultural sympathy for the Americans, mainly the Greek elites and aristocrats. During the 1950s and 60s the young generation in Greece was experiencing a period of constant political monitoring and policing after the defeat of the Greek communist forces, including those who sympathised with them (Nikolopoulou, 2019, p.102).

## 3.2 GREEK POP ART UNDER THE *JUNTA*:

In the case of some, like Giorgos Ioannou, he was an artist, cautious that what he painted would not undermine the censorship policies of the *junta*. The political ideology in Greece during the *colonels' regime* (1967-1974) promoted a capitalist/pro-NATO agenda under strict censorship and general on-hands on what was being distributed among the Greek people. Artists were more careful with what they produced to avoid censorship.

Greek artists and writers in particular were regularly targeted if they criticised or mentioned anything that did not conform to Greek “nationalistic ideals” (Nikolopoulou, 2019, p. 101). The *junta* government, during its reign in the 60s and 70s, targeted the arts, believing that the post-war Greek generation was becoming radical in the face of capitalism. Any artist who did not comply with the *junta's* cultural policies was placed under the “political prisoner” umbrella, mainly made up of the Greek *left*. Registered Greek communists and socialists were exiled to remote islands, and so were artists who showed or created work that would be censored by the *junta* if it did not get their approval.

Greek author Maria Nikolakopoulou writes: “Culture was one of the very few areas where the Left could exercise any influence, creating its own narrative of national history and the traumatic 1940s and emphasising the experiences silenced by the Right nationalism” (Nikolopoulou, 2019, p.102). Greek artists referenced history, nationalist literature, religion and mythology as key themes to their work, as it was generally accepted within the *junta's* cultural policies. Some Greek artists and writers of the young generation in the late 60s went underground to avoid persecution by the *junta*.

1967 was the year that the Greek colonels staged the coup that established the authoritarian government. Alexis Akrithakis (1939-1994) fled Greece a year earlier, fearing persecution. Akrithakis was a Greek painter and artist who was one leading artists in his generation in the 1960s for his distinct style of painting through vibrant

colours, pattern work and a deep nostalgia for his homeland. In 1966, Akrithakis moved to West Berlin, Germany, working far from home, he painted surrealist landscapes of Greece according to his own personal and political beliefs (Akrithakis Estate, 2026).



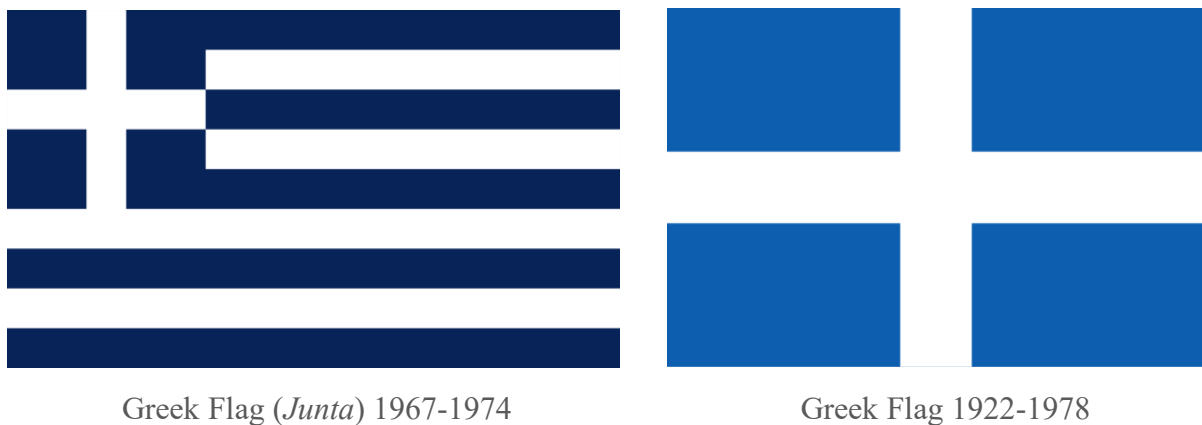
30) *La Grece Originale* (1967) – Alexis Akrithakis,

Tempera and ink on paper, 44 x 70 cm Private Collection Photo Credit: Thanos Kartsoglou

*La Grece Originale* (1967) is perhaps one of the most significant paintings that critiqued the *junta* government when they staged the coup in April 1967. This painting by Akrithakis is very similar in its composition to the landscape as Giorgos Ioannou's *Untitled* (1969) (figure 25) in terms of sharing the same metaphor of division between two different series of events. They share the same symbol, a wall that separates contrasting images between crowds and locations, along with visually stimulating colour patterns in both artworks. Akrithakis, however, uses colour to differentiate the cityscape from its other side of the entrance, depicting the sharp contrast between his brushwork and careful geometric linework and loose organic shapes. The bright colours that are used for painting the gate to the Greek cityscape are seemingly brighter and more playful than the buildings, the boats in the water,

and most importantly, the tanks with smoke coming out of them. Ioannou's *Untitled* (1969)/ figure 25, on the other hand, is consistent in maintaining the brushwork in the specific artwork, as he depicted his own version of what Greek culture was during the *junta* regime.

Akrithakis was living in Germany by the late 1960s. Akkrithakis painted *La Grece Originale* (1967) when he was living abroad out of fear of being targeted by the Greek colonels. Akkrithakis' artistic language is very blunt in *La Grece Originale* (1967) when it comes to the emotional and political motive behind that specific artwork. The symbolism behind Akkrithakis' surrealist Greek imperial landscape could suggest to the audience a unique perspective from a person who does not live there anymore. Two versions of the Greek flag appear on both sides of the corridor, which provides the viewer information about that specific landscape along with the title of the painting on the top of the painting *La Grece Originale*. The flag on the left was the official flag of the Greek Republic during the colonels' regime (1967-1974), and the flag on the right was the previous version before the coup in 1967.



The sarcastic tone in the title of the artwork, the use of national flags, and the sharp contrasts in subject matter provide plenty of information on the artist's intent.

*La Grece Originale* (1967) translates to "The Original Greece" from French to English as it appears in written text by the artist on the surface of the painting. The use of the word "originale" could hint that for some people Greece might be very different to what they imagine, according to the artist who is Greek himself.

Additionally, French is used as the only written form of language in this painting, not Greek or English. However, if someone were to know French or any other Latin language, they would be able to understand what they are meant to be witnessing in *La Grece Originale* (1967). The irony in the word “Originale” challenges Greece’s image in the eyes of a Greek person.

It is a possibility that Akrihakis wanted to showcase the transition of Greece politically and culturally through darker themes, like warfare and chaos. The artist depicts an unsettling image for the audience by showing his own perception of Greece, but at first glance, the painting looks rather joyful and commercial. The flat, vibrant colours in “La Grece Originale” resemble a core element in pop art in the 1960s, including the aesthetic of Giorgos Ioannou’s work. Both Ioannou and Akrihakis share this common pattern of depicting the urban environment and tanks during and after the *junta*.

Their work during the early 70s was directly referencing the militaristic presence within Greek society, as it would become synonymous with the normality of the time. Ioannou was living in *Junta*, Greece, unlike Akrihakis, who was in Berlin, Germany, by the late 1960s (Rock, K, 2021). The intensity in Ioannou’s work was more subtle when it came to making references to the *junta* government, probably because of the very strict censorship laws. Akrihakis, on the other hand, reflected more expressively and bluntly in his paintings, like *The Cannon* (1971) (figure 32).



31) Untitled (1974) – Giorgos Ioannou, Oil on canvas, 70 x 100 cm, © Giorgos Ioannou



32) *The Cannon* (1971) – Alexis Akrihakis, tempera on paper, 100x150cm,  
© Akrihakis Estate

Akrihakis had been more blunt when he was criticising the *junta* government, by making references to Greek unity against the oppressive, militaristic regime.



33) *The 3rd Wedding Wreath*: Book Cover (1968) – Alexis Akritchakis,  
Ink and tempera on paper, 30 x 40 cm, © Invaluable

Akritchakis writes about himself during the mid 1960s in Greece, just before the *junta*:

“Then came my military service. I might say those were two wasted years, if it weren’t for the fact that they helped me to grasp – in a negative way, but never mind – a few more significant aspects of Greek reality”

(Akrihakis, 1971).

In this statement, the artist reflected on his mandatory military service, where he expressed his disappointment in the Greek system, especially when it came to its militaristic shift in 1967, when the *junta* took over. This quote expressed the same level of critique against the *junta* government, just like Akrihakis and Ioannou’s work, when it referenced the military using tanks and warfare. While the military does not refer to or mention Greece in its visual representation, it certainly creates an allegory in the work that was produced around that time.

Kornetis states, “The United States and NATO were largely understood in the left-wing popular mind as the dictators’ major abettors, which fitted perfectly with the anti-imperialistic and *tiermondiste* discourse of the time” (Kornetis, K 2013, p. 70). In this quote, Kornetis places the left wing of Greece under the ‘anti-imperialist’ umbrella, which also believed that the dictatorship’s close alliance with the US and NATO promoted the militaristic agenda in the Greek mainland. Looking back at some of the common themes in American pop art through Roy Lichtenstein and Greek pop art in Ioannou’s artistic work, there’s a direct correlation. Hence, American imperialism in pop art depends on the extent of its influence within a politically unstable country, like Greece.

### 3.3 GREEK POP ART IN RESPONSE TO THE POLYTECHNIC UPRISING 1973

The artists chosen for this research share a common belief that imperialism in Greece was affecting a lot of the population's lives, especially the younger generation. University students, artists, the left-wing and generally any form of threat to the *junta* shared some form of discontent against Western political models, to the point where they would ultimately doubt the role of the *junta* and see them as oppressors (Kornetis, K 2013, p. 70). The appearance of Greek motifs, cultural references, and lifestyle appears to be used in a literal and sarcastic depiction of Greece during the *junta* regime.



34) *The Colonels* (1968) – Giannis Gaitis,

Oil on canvas, 114 x 146 cm, Panos C. Moschandreou Collection

Giannis Gaitis (1923-1984) was another Greek artist from the generation of underground artists in the *junta* regime. In his work, he painted repetitive figures,

surreal landscapes, and in the 1960s, critiqued the Greek state during the time of the colonels.



35) *Old and Young / Les Grands and les Jeunes* (1967) – Giannis Gaitis,

Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm, Irene Panagopoulos collection

Again, the military appears to be the centre of attention for Gaitis. This time, there's a greater and more symbolic portrayal of how aggressive the *junta* regime was for a

lot of Greek pop artists. The painting in figure 33, *The Colonels* (1968), was made in 1968, one year into the junta regime, capturing an early reaction to the oppressive nature of the colonels against 'peace'. The composition consists of two main bodies: the Greek colonels and a dove being held at gunpoint, a direct and metaphorical narrative of the *junta* years. Here, Gaitis uses the dove, a symbol of peace, being confronted and outnumbered by men who are dressed in military uniform, who threaten it by pointing their pistols at the bird: playing into this non-cryptic visual language for the audience to grasp what was the situation for Greece's peace in the *junta* regime. Gaitis also depicted the attempts of the junta to influence the younger generation to join the military coalition, showing how the regime aimed to brainwash the young with nationalistic ideas, as shown in figure 35.

By 1968, the *junta* had already been in power for one year, which means that their strict censorship laws were imposed on the Greek population, including artists like Gaitis, who most probably did not publicly display this artwork due to the direct correlation with the Greek army. The background of "The Colonels" (1968) is a monochrome sea blue, the same shade of blue that appeared on the Greek flag before the 1967 coup, when the colonels changed it to a darker tone. This colour choice is very informative of the "where" in "The Colonels" (1968) as it places the unsettling image within the Greek *junta* context.

Giannis Gaitis and Giorgos Ioannou also share a similarity in their work in terms of depicting the violent nature of the *junta* in the events of the 17<sup>th</sup> of November student uprising in 1973. This is shown in figures 34 and 36. This specific day remembers the civilian casualties in the streets of central Athens against the *junta*, where many remember it as the day when the regime started to crumble. This day became one of the most memorable for most Greek people as it highlighted the essence of the colonels' violent nature against civil rights. The main events of the protest took place in the streets of Patision in central Athens, outside of the university (Kornetis, K 2013, p. 271).

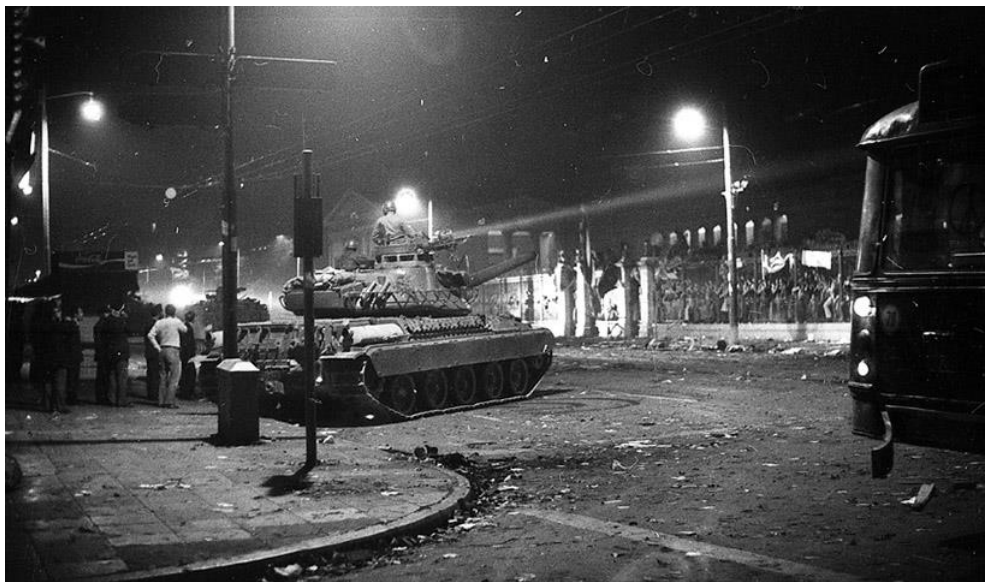


36) *Athens 17/11/73 II* (1973) - Giorgos Ioannou, oil on canvas, 70 x 100 cm,  
 © Giorgos Ioannou

Ioannou once again refers to his strong sarcastic language when he painted “Athens 17/11/73 II”, which references the civil unrest in the horrific events of the Polytechnic student-led protest in 1973 (Kornetis, K 2013, p. 1). The historical significance of this painting by Ioannou captures what is to be considered one of the most crucial dates in Greek modern history. “Athens 17/11/73 II” (1973) depicts a similar setting to Gaitis’ *The Colonels* (1968), where the Greek police and military intervene with the uprising of the 17<sup>th</sup> of November. Ioannou uses his signature ‘comic book’ style of painting to his advantage to capture the violent reality, unlike Gaitis, who refers to symbolism. The artwork *Athens 17/11/73 II* (1973) is legitimate when it comes to presenting the violence and distress of that specific day in Greek history. Tanks shooting their guns, soldiers causing physical violence, ‘Greek’ civilians running away from the scene, crowds of protesters and in the background of the picture shouting. “Athens 17/11/73 II” (1973) causes an honest depiction of the *junta*’s ruthlessness from Ioannou’s perspective.



37) Students and protesters at the Polytechnic Uprising, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1973



38) Greek military tanks outside the Polytechnic University, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1973

Ioannou's direct references to the *polytechnic* uprising are perhaps the defining artwork of this research on Greek pop art and imperialist imagery. The comic book style of the artwork could suggest that what is happening could be based on fiction, but the irony is that it is not. The Greek flag in the artwork falls under the same sarcastic tone as Akrihakis' work, both using the flag to show that these events had to do with the effects of Greek imperialism against their own people.

When assessing the motives behind the artwork, it appears that the narrative had become one-sided in the minds of Greek artists like Ioannou. The narrative is that there are two main groups, the Greeks and the *junta*, and in the artist's story, they are divided not based on ethnicity but based on ideology. The way it's represented, however, through the mentioning of Greek flags in the hands of the protesters, it seems that the *junta* are the aliens in the situation, and they are the villains. What was mentioned about the sarcasm in pop art and the bitter attitude towards the West only intensified the emotional motive to respond to Western imperialism in other countries like Greece. The naïve artistic language of pop art makes it easier for someone who is Greek to relate to what they might have experienced during the colonels' regime.

The chosen artists: Akrihakis, Gaitis and Ioannou all reference in some way their Greek heritage in the work chosen for this contextual research. There's this perception that all these artists share a sense of bitterness in their home nation because of the tense relationship between the military and the regular Greek person. All the chosen artworks mention the junta between 1968 and 1973 and the different ways and techniques these artists use to convey their trauma and fear.

## CONCLUSION:

The final days of the Greek *junta* in July 1974 marked the fall of the military dictatorship in the Hellenic Republic, and the days after marked the new era of democracy. Ironically enough, despite the military having a massive influence on politics, they failed to react to Turkey's invasion of northern Cyprus the same year the *junta* fell (Tsiara, 2024, p. 40). Democracy would replace the single-party rule in the years that followed the 1974 elections. The socialist-centrist party *PA.SO.K.* (*ΠΑ.ΣΟ.Κ.*) won the first elections for the first time since the military coup in April 1967 (Kornetis, 2013, p. 140).

Concluding the final chapter means that the research on this topic has come to an end. This research aimed to contextualise the Greek pop artists on how they used their national identity to protest against Western imperialism under the *junta*. The first chapter presented the relevant historical context of Greece before the *junta* coup in 1967 and then progressed to discussing the tense political environment under the dictatorship. Greek civilians and artists were critical of the *junta*'s strict policies, believing that the United States had influenced them to enforce a nationalistic-militaristic regime. The second chapter discussed sarcasm in pop art in the cultural context of the mid-twentieth century, specifically how international artists responded to the increasing power of the United States across other sovereign countries using their national flag. The chosen topics analysed from the second prompted the third when Greek pop artists referenced their ethnic identity to detach themselves from the *junta*, with whom they shared the same country but clashed in ideology. The chosen artworks for the third chapter aimed to show how Greek comic books about warfare demonstrated the use of national flags, cultural references, and ancient classics, which became some of the key topics in Greek pop art.

The National Gallery of Greece celebrated the 50th anniversary of the restoration of democracy with a retrospective of artists' work made during and after the *junta* dictatorship. The exhibition titled Democracy opened in July 2024 during the second

year of the most recently elected (2023) *New Democracy* liberal-right-wing party (Groupe d'études géopolitiques, 2023).

This research was partially motivated by an artwork by Greek/ American artist Georgia Lale (born 1989) and her artwork *Flag* (2021-2023). In my research on national identity and imperialism, *Flag* (2023) challenges the extent to which artists discuss their home nation, years after the fall of the dictatorial regime of the colonels/ *junta*. The argument arises from the introduction of my research, as the current government of Greece (New Democracy), along with other right-wing political parties of Greece, requested (or better demanded) that Lale's artwork not be showcased in one of her solo exhibitions in New York City (Georgia Lale, 2024, [online]).



39) *Flag* (2021-2023) – Georgia Lale and Greek women

Donated pink bed sheets, 160 x 276 cm, © Georgia Lale

In December of 2023, Georgia Lale had a solo exhibition titled “Neighbourhood guilt”. This specific piece by Lale is a collaborative project between Greek women who have made contributions to “Flag” (2023) by donating bed sheets that were specifically pink to symbolise the feminist motive behind Lale's creation. The

concept behind Lale’s artwork was to critique and discuss the rise of domestic abuse and even the murder of many Greek girlfriends and wives by their partners. The exhibition opened in the general consulate of Greece on December 15<sup>th</sup> 2023, and the next day, one of Greece’s far-right (NIKI) political representatives and member of parliament, Dimitris Natsios, presented Lale’s work to the Greek parliament. Natsios addressed the artwork as “a disgrace to the national symbol”, and on December 18<sup>th</sup> 2023, the *Flag* (2023) was ultimately removed and censored at the request of the Greek government (Georgia Lale, 2024, [online]).



40) The Greek Press on Georgia Lale’s “Flag” © Georgia Lale

Lale’s *Flag* censorship highlighted the extent of power the government had over her work, even if it was not within Greek soil. Lale is one example of how censorship can still occur even to this day, in the age of democracy in Greece. The irony in her work being taken down in New York put the artist in the spotlight, not because of the artwork itself being about the rise of domestic abuse, but the sensitivity of manipulating or using the artist’s national identity as the subject matter. Lale’s symbolism through the Greek flag challenged the concept of using a flag to discuss what goes on in her country. The controversy made national headlines because of the sensitivity of using it in an artistic context.

The Greek pop artists also discussed the domestic issues under the junta by creating visual references to their political crisis during the 1960s and 70s. The Greeks were experiencing the 1960s just as much as any other Western country during that tense decade of American domination in international politics and their undisputed sphere of influence. When I was researching this topic on how the Greek pop artists critiqued the *junta*, I discovered how truly oppressive the regime was and how much it reflected on the work that was produced during the 1960s and 70s. Not just that, but also the extent of the artists' upset reflected on their place of origin. The theatrical representations of Greece through pop art are dynamic in how they blend in Greek references with American-inspired pop art purely for sarcastic purposes.

The 60s in Greece were a particularly tense time for most Greeks, especially for the younger generation who grew up during the years under the Nazi occupation in the Second World War in Greece (1940-1944) and the civil war (1945-1949). Ioannou had been exposed to the harsh reality of conflict, especially when it shifts from an international to a domestic one in his own home country. Ioannou was born in 1926, and Akrihakis in 1939, both artists who were part of this contextual research on the topic. Greek pop art used their national status to both critique and honour their nationality against their country's problems and crises.

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