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The dialogue between the classical Greek heritage
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Exhibitions from the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection
as cultural diplomacy

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Abstract

The Art Collection belonging to the Hellenic Parliament consists primarily of works of Modern Greek art (19th century on), but also includes works of art by European artists on Greek themes, i.e. representations of Greek mythology and history, as well as depictions of historic Greek sites and monuments. The works in this latter category provided the material for the two recent exhibitions, different but related, presented by the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection and curated by the undersigned.

During the first six months of 2014, when Greece held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the exhibition “Hellas: genius loci” was presented in two neoclassical palaces, the Hellenic Parliament Building and the Zappeion Hall. Through paintings and other works of visual art, including illustrated books, the exhibition showed how Hellenic antiquity was visualized in modern times (from 17th century to the present) by European artists, as well as by contemporary Greek artists.

As a continuation of this exhibition, another is currently being held (September 2015 - October 2016) entitled “Strolling through the Athens of Travelers (17th–19th c.)”, at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. Here, the city of Athens is depicted by European travelers in various versions; the resulting image of the city was diffused through modern European civilization as a cultural model. Sculptures are also exhibited here, from the collections of the National Archaeological Museum, which came to light during excavations on the sites depicted in the works of art and illustrated books in the exhibition.

Both these exhibitions feature works belonging to the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection in the context of a dialogue between the ancient and the modern, Greece and Europe, East and West. This dialogue helps raise public awareness of the common cultural (and therefore political) foundation on which the structure of Europe has been built.

Key words

Greece, antiquity, modernity, visual culture, Hellenic Parliament

*I woke up with this marble head in my hands;
it tires my arms and I don't know where to put it*
George Seferis, Mythistorema C, 1935

The discordant relationship of modern Greece with both Hellenic Antiquity and European modernity

Since 2009, when the new Acropolis Museum was inaugurated, official guests visiting Greece have usually been taken on a tour of the country's great new museum. This tactic, if viewed as cultural diplomacy – a sphere which has not been as well developed by the Greek state as one might have expected¹ – is predictable in a country that takes great pride in its ancient classical legacy and hopes to associate modern democracy with the values of Pericles' democratic Athens.

The modern Greek state, since its establishment after the War of Independence in 1821, has always wanted to be associated officially with the ideology of Greek antiquity, having selected it, rather than the more recent Byzantine and post-Byzantine (i.e. Ottoman) periods, as the focal point of the national organization, identity and culture. This choice had already been determined in the second half of the 18th century, by the Greek scholars who adopted the western European ideology, expressing the radical Enlightenment, in the nature of a modernizing and immediate demand for the liberation of the Greek people from Ottoman rule, as their right, as an “ancient” nation with a historic heritage, a model for all European nations.

Moreover, the choice of Antiquity, rather than the Middle Ages, was made by European civilization in early modern times during the Renaissance (from the 15th century on), and was reconfirmed by the Enlightenment in the 18th century², on the theoretical level – corresponding to Neoclassicism on the artistic level – when European liberalism drew political and ethical models from the civilizations of antiquity (Athens, Sparta and Rome), in order to forge the concept of the modern citizen. The model of antiquity took on a specific, tangible form through its material remains, monuments and portable antiquities. Regarding Greece, the study of its antiquities by European antiquarians was systematized at the end of the 17th century, and passed on to the broader public through the publications of travelers and the activity of collectors. The archaeological approach to the Greek heritage determined the self-image of the modern Greeks as its lawful heirs, while at the same time promulgating the Europeans' image of the modern Greeks as a nation that must regain its freedom and become part of the European family. This ideological position contributed decisively to Philhellenism and the Greek War of Independence in 1821, resulting in the creation of the modern Greek state.

The corresponding Greek perception of European modernity also includes “management” of the ancient heritage, on the practical, as well as on the symbolic and ideological level³. The Greek choice of antiquity, however, is also a “burden” on modern Greeks – as expressed characteristically by Seferis – in the sense of a competitive and binding model that leaves little room for developing an equally valuable contemporary culture. On the other hand, choosing the European identity has proven to be equally problematic in some respects, as the modern Greek state is a special case that cannot be fully incorporated into the western European canon.

During the present economic crisis, modern Greek identity issues have de facto come to the fore. Discussion of the topic is certainly interesting and necessary, with regard to the Greek people's historic past (i.e. antiquity) as well as their present and future orientation (i.e. European). What is certain is that this dual relationship of the modern Greeks with Hellenic antiquity and European modernity has its roots in history. A tangible proof is the Hellenic Parliament Building itself.

The Hellenic Parliament Building is one of the most significant examples of Athenian Neoclassicism, from the historical and artistic viewpoint alike. It was built according to blueprints drawn up by German architect Friedrich von Gärtner (1791-1847) – director of the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and court architect for King Ludwig of Bavaria – between 1836 and 1843 as the palace of Otto of Bavaria, the first king of the newly constituted Greek state (1832). In 1929, the decision was made to house the Hellenic Parliament in it, necessitating a number of modifications to accommodate its new functions. Today, it is the most recognizable landmark in the city of Athens, after the Acropolis, and a point of reference in both the political and social life of the Greek capital. The Doric porch of its monumental façade “converses” with the Parthenon of Pericles on the Acropolis, thus underscoring the bond between modern and ancient democracy.

The Hellenic Parliament Art Collection: formation, role, development

In 1995, the Hellenic Parliament decided to begin systematically creating an Art Collection. Up to that time, two series of formal portraits had been painted, one depicting the country's Prime Ministers, the other its Speakers of the House. In addition to these, Parliament likewise had in its possession a number of random, unplanned works of art. By the 1995 decision, and under the authority of a special Committee for Art and Culture – with members *ex officio*, museum

directors and university professors – works of all types of modern art that were of interest to Greece were programmed for collection. A collection was thus put together, mainly through purchases at auctions, but also consisting of commissions and a number of donations, that today (20 years later) numbers 855 works representing all the visual arts: sculpture, painting, drawing, engraving and decorative arts. Works of modern Greek art in particular have been assembled, dating from the early 19th century to the present day. It also includes works by European artists, mainly paintings and engravings, on themes of Greek interest: historical, mythological and philhellenic, as well as Greek landscapes and monuments.

The Hellenic Parliament Art Collection preserves the Greek artistic tradition in its broadest sense (as creations by either Greek artists or foreign artists on Greek themes), a goal that alone vindicates the collection in a country with a rich cultural heritage. It has been incorporated into the Special Collections of the Parliamentary Library and is a collection with a special purpose, since it does not belong to a museum, but to a functional building with a particular, constant and intensive usage.

One of the purposes for which the Collection is used is to achieve the aesthetic upgrading of the Parliament Building, in which these works of art also play a decorative role. The official chambers and offices of the political dignitaries that have been decorated with works of art are now the most attractive areas in the Building, while at the same time inspiring discussions with cultural content. From there on, it is up to each politician to talk about art and culture with their interlocutors. This dialogue can be held, depending on the circumstances, either between ordinary citizens or official guests. Consequently, the works of art by themselves can function at least as occasions for a discussion with the features of cultural diplomacy.

Furthermore, works from the Collection have been presented at periodic exhibitions organized by the Hellenic Parliament on subjects of cultural and historical interest and have also been loaned to museums and cultural institutions. In 2003, an illustrated book was published, in Greek and English, featuring a selection of 144 works from all categories⁴. In 2010 a second edition, revised and enriched, was published, in Greek alone, containing 263 works solely by modern Greek artists, and including an introductory text and documentation of the works⁵.

The exhibition policy of the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection

In 2008, when the collection exceeded 800 works, a museum area was allocated to it in a separate building outside the Parliament, but nearby in the centre of Athens, to operate as a gallery for the Collection and to be open to the public. Because of the anticipated exhibition and in conjunction with the growing need for the more general curation of the now rich collection (documentation, cataloguing, management, enrichment and publication) the position of Curator of the Parliamentary Art Collection was created, and filled by this writer in January of 2009.

However, the global economic crisis – as manifested in the financial system as early as 2008 – had a decisive influence on the Greek economy, and consequently, on the budget of the Hellenic Parliament, so the plan to give the Collection its own gallery was shelved. In addition, funding for the collection was drastically reduced, with the result that the aforementioned revised publication of 2010 did not appear in English, and from the second half of 2009 on, the Collection stopped being enriched by purchases.

The opportunities for presenting the Collection to the public, which would have been ensured by the operation of its own gallery, no longer existed. To avoid canceling the notion of promoting and utilizing the Collection as the Parliament's framework for cultural policy, the decision was made to exhibit part of it in the Parliament Building. Thus, in the second half of 2009, 150 works were selected, mostly oil paintings and a few sculptures, which were placed, using museological criteria, on special panels on the ground floor and the two upper floors of the Parliament Building. The works selected for each panel reflect their similar thematic, chronological or stylistic features. In this way, aesthetic nodes were created at regular intervals along the broad corridors of the building, which now resemble galleries. This quasi-permanent exhibition of the Collection is in place to this day, with some changes, of course, having now become fully accepted aesthetically.

The works chosen for exhibition were primarily modern Greek works of art, whose selection was dictated for specific reasons: a) most of the oil paintings in the Collection, which are also relatively large in size, therefore appropriate for this particular form of presentation, were painted by modern Greek artists, b) the presentation of modern Greek art was preferred, as being both more familiar to regular visitors to the Hellenic Parliament (Greek citizens), but also because it introduces the hundreds of pupils on guided educational tours of the Parliament Building to modern Greek art and culture.

In all the above efforts, regarding both the enrichment of the Collection and its promotion through publications and the presentation in the Parliament Building, modern Greek art is paramount. European works play a minor role. Meanwhile, the financial crisis inevitably evolved into a political discussion about the place of Greece within the European Union. To a very significant degree, the question of this relationship between Greece and Europe is certainly also, if not primarily, cultural.

To the extent that one can reply to what could be called existential issues through art, culture and knowledge, as well as through cultural diplomacy, the goal was set by me of promoting the European works of art on Greek themes that belong to the Parliament's Collection, as documentation in themselves of the European nature of Greek culture. It is moreover characteristic that the last work to be purchased separately, before the limited fiscal policy was implemented in 2009, was a view of Athens – unique in its monumentality, size, precision and detail – by the French artist and traveler Louis-François Cassas, about which a special essay, as a proposal, was written by this writer. This work was emblematic, in one sense, in terms of the subsequent targeting of the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection's exhibition policy on the theme of the European view of the Greek cultural legacy, within a context of well-defined

cultural policy and diplomacy. The European works of Greek interest in the Collection have been the primary exhibits in two exhibitions that have functioned as communicating vessels, depicting the indissoluble relationship between the modern European visual culture and the ancient Greek classical heritage. These periodical exhibitions were the first ones by the Hellenic Parliament to be based on its Art Collection and, vice versa, the first exhibitions of the Art Collection in which works were presented in a planned, documented and targeted manner.

The exhibition “Hellas: genius loci” (January-June 2014)

In the first six months of 2014, Greece undertook the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Hellenic Parliament was to host a large number of diplomatic missions and related activities, while the main proceedings of the Presidency, under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were to take place in Zappeion Hall, a neoclassical exhibition building in the centre of Athens, near the Parliament Building. In March 2013, I submitted a documented proposal suggesting that the opportunity could be used for the Hellenic Parliament to exercise cultural diplomacy through an art exhibition entitled “Hellas: genius loci”.

The concept of the exhibition was to present Hellenic antiquity through works of art and in particular the sites of myth and history, as well as the monuments of Greece as they were represented – either realistically or imaginatively – in modern times (from the 17th century on) by Europeans but also by Greek artists, and as a consequence, how the cultural values of the classical heritage inspired and continue to inspire the modern European civilization, and by extension, contemporary Europe.

The exhibition was organized on the basis of six themes embodying separate motifs:

A) Imaginary Antiquity (Colossus of Rhodes, Temple of Aphrodite, Labyrinth of Crete).

Many ancient Greek monuments and places cited in myths are known to us solely through literature, from their descriptions by ancient authors. By following the information thus provided, travelers have endeavoured to identify the precise locations and to imagine the form, for example, of the Colossus of Rhodes, the Temple of Aphrodite on the island of Kythera, and the Labyrinth of Crete, which was erroneously identified with a cave near the ruins of the archaeological site of Gortyn. These images of an imaginary antiquity create a frequently obstructive but nonetheless interesting impression of Greek past.

B) Homeric Antiquity (Ithaca, Homer’s School, Mycenae).

The Homeric epics provided the foundation on which ancient Greek myths were disseminated over time in Greek and Latin literature, as well as by authors in modern European languages. The identification of sites related to the Homeric accounts led to a topographical game. On the island of Ithaca, visitors searched for the palace of Odysseus, the spring of Arethousa and Homer’s school, while the latter has also been found on the island of Chios, another candidate for his homeland. At the same time, Mycenae offers more tangible evidence of the world related to Homeric antiquity.

C) Paths of the Gods (Parnassus, Olympus).

Mounts Olympus and Parnassus, in Thessaly and central Greece respectively, are not merely imposing landmarks. Olympus, home of the ancient gods, and Parnassus, home of the Muses, symbolise the ancient Greek mythological tradition. Following the paths of the gods, viewers perceive the lyricism of the landscape in the land of Greece that conforms to the idyllic world of myth and is animated by its instructive stories.

D) Paths of Heroes (Marathon, Thermopylae).

The battlefields of Thermopylae and Marathon are the supreme symbols of the struggle for freedom and democracy and against tyranny in every age and in all its form. The noble physiognomy of the landscape on these two historic sites underscores the high morale of those who were killed fighting for the ideals that imbue and motivate free human beings and responsible citizens. Owing to the historically charged site, this quality is felt and understood by the visitor who follows the paths of heroes.

E) The Great Sanctuaries (Aegina, Corinth, Delos, Delphi, Olympia, Sounion).

The marble temples and major sanctuaries found throughout the land of Greece are the most palpable witnesses of the ancient Greek world, its relationship with religious feeling and the metaphysical element, rendered in the most artistic manner. Individual temples, such as those of Sounion, Corinth and Aegina, but especially the archaeological sites of the sanctuaries, invariably attract the interest of visitors. Whether they have always been visible and accessible, such as the archaeological site on Delos, or were once buried and waiting to be discovered and excavated, such as Olympia and Delphi, the ruins of the sanctuaries have always attracted visitor’s interest with their columns and statues standing as silent guardians of bygone greatness.

F) The Grandeur of Athens (Views, Monuments, Acropolis).

Greek monumental antiquity is represented pre-eminently by the city of Athens. Its many sublime monuments that are known through the literature and define the city topographically, have constituted over time the most remarkable evidence of the grandeur of the Attic capital. The ancient metropolis of Greek culture has recaptured this role through the eyes of its modern visitors. Taken together, the Acropolis with the Parthenon, its scattered monuments, and the city as a whole bathed in the Attic light, create a glorious image and model of Greek antiquity. Numerous and varied depictions, realistic and/or imaginary, remind us of the magnificence of Athens, as the emblematic sum total of the art and intellectual spirit of the ancient Hellenic world.

These exhibition themes were presented more fully, and included the illustrated travelers’ books in the Special Collections of the Parliamentary Library, while twenty works of art and one rare edition were borrowed from the Museum of the City of Athens.

Given the two exhibition venues, two units of a chronological nature were planned. Thus, the Parliament Building housed the unit entitled “The Classicist Visual Approach to Monumental Hellenic Antiquity”, with works of art and books produced by European artists between the late 17th and early 20th century, as well as by Greek artists of the 19th and early 20th century. The unit entitled “Contemporary Greek Painting Inspired by the Classical Tradition”, was shown in Zappeion Hall and included paintings by contemporary Greek artists, created during the late 20th and early 21st century.

An exhibition catalogue was published in English⁶ and structured into three basic parts:

- a) Introductory essay⁷, in which the theme is analyzed using selective references to illustrations and items in the exhibition, but also more broadly: the concept of *genius loci* is discussed, as are those of the “rebirth of antiquity” and of the visual culture, the role played by travelers in highlighting the Greek monuments, the phenomena of antiquarianism, classicism and the “Greek Revival”, Athens as an iconic cultural model, and finally the postmodern version of the classical.
- b) Brief explanatory texts on the thematic units of the exhibition⁸, with indicative illustrations for each part.
- c) Documentation of all the exhibits⁹, with entries and illustrations, in each category: illustrated books, works by European artists and works by Greek artists.

In addition to the works borrowed from the Museum of the City of Athens and the illustrated books from the Parliamentary Library’s Special Collections, 62 works from the Parliamentary Art Collection were exhibited and published, most of them for the first time. The highlight of the exhibition and catalogue cover was the aforementioned monumental view of Athens by Louis-François Cassas.

The exhibition at Zappeion Hall was presented in a spacious hall that served as a lounge for participants in the official discussions held in the rooms adjoining the exhibition. It is worth noting that in the other areas of the same building, works from other Athenian museums and cultural institutions were displayed, but solely as decoration. The Parliament’s thematic exhibition in Zappeion Hall operated independently and distinctively, suggesting its concept to visitors (i.e. diplomats and officers) and encouraging them to visit the main part of the exhibition in the Parliament Building.

The main exhibition in the Parliament Building was presented in an area called the Peristyle, a large hall right outside the Debating Chamber. It was thus located at the most central point in the Parliament Building, which meant that all regular visitors to the Parliament (politicians, journalists, employees, citizens), had access to the exhibition. In addition, some guided tours were arranged for visiting foreign diplomatic missions¹⁰, whose members were presented with the exhibition catalogue as a gift.

In addition to scholarly documentation, the exhibition catalogue was preceded by a message of greeting from the Speaker of the House, Mr. Evangelos Meimarakis, in which among other things, he speaks of¹¹:

- a) “the fundamental contribution of Greek culture over the centuries to shaping the current cultural identity of Europe”,
- b) “the Greek dimension of contemporary European civilization”,
- c) “the relationship of modern democracy with that of classical antiquity”, and
- d) “the spirit of Greece [...] as a reference point for Europe and inextricably linked with its universal values of liberty and democracy”.

The Speaker of the House closed his greeting with the thought that the classical Greek heritage, as intellectual content and life values, can and must be the goal of modern Europe as well. In his own words: “We believe that the timeless Hellenic culture, as a measure of beauty and humanism, can and must be a source of fresh inspiration for 21st-century Europe and that its human-centered character constitutes a primary demand by the people of Europe”.

From all viewpoints, regarding both the formal presentation (exhibition and catalogue), and its political management using the logic of cultural diplomacy (visit by the desired target group and utilization by the Speaker of the House), the exhibition achieved its goals.

The exhibition “Strolling through the Athens of Travelers” (September 2015-October 2016)

One disadvantage of the exhibition “Hellas: *genius loci*” was its limited access by the public at large, restricted in the Parliament Building and non-existent in Zappeion Hall¹². In any event, this disadvantage was known in advance and accepted, since it was above all an exhibition with a special purpose, targeted at a specific group for the purpose of exercising cultural diplomacy.

After it was over, and because of its theme, a proposal was made to present the exhibition in whole or in part at the National Archaeological Museum, the country’s largest and most important museum. This proposal gave the exhibition a “second life”. But, instead of presenting it exactly as it had been, the decision was made to present a new exhibition and in combination with exhibits from the National Archaeological Museum as well. Collaboration was deemed preferable, as it had functioned successfully before, when the Parliamentary Art Collection collaborated with the Museum of the City of Athens, in the loan of exhibits, and with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, regarding the section of the exhibition at Zappeion Hall.

In the end, it was decided to present that part of the previous exhibition related to the city of Athens, for three main reasons: a) this section was the exhibition’s richest and most representative in relation to its concept, b) the National Archaeological Museum has many Athenian antiquities, c) the Archaeological Museum, albeit National, is an Athenian museum located in the heart of the city’s historic centre. Therefore, in collaboration with Dr. Maria

Lagogianni-Georgakarakos, Directress of the National Archaeological Museum, and her associates¹³, we worked on the idea of “dialogues” between the representations of Athens depicted in modern times (from the late 17th up to and including the 19th century) by European artists and the antiquities that have come to light on these Athenian sites.

In November of 2014, a museological concept was drawn up combining the antiquarian zeal of the European travelers – who, within the context of broader European classicism, either visited Athens themselves or used other travelers’ depictions of it – with the science of archaeology. As a result, from September 2015 and for the following year, the exhibition “*A dream among splendid ruins...*”, Strolling through the Athens of Travelers, 17th-19th century” is being presented at the National Archaeological Museum. It includes 33 sculptures (statues, busts and reliefs) from the National Archaeological Museum, 14 works of art (oil paintings, watercolours and engravings) from the Parliamentary Art Collection and 22 illustrated books from the Special Collections of the Parliamentary Library.

The exhibition is organized into eight thematic sections and sub-sections:

- A) “Introduction”, in which the earliest item in the exhibition is presented, together with its concept.
- B) “Athens in the European Imagination”: imaginary views (*capricci*) of ancient Athens.
- C) “Re-introducing Athens to Europe”: an anthology of travel publications, through which the broad European public acquired some visual and textual knowledge of modern Athens and its monuments.
- D) “Strolling through the Athens of another era”: A virtual tour of Athens, through a combination of its modern images and its antiquities, to the main sites and most significant Athenian monuments visited by travelers. Specifically: D1 – Northwest of the Acropolis (Theseion, Ancient Agora, Roman Agora, Pnyx), D2 – The Acropolis (Propylaea, Parthenon, Erechtheion), D3 – South of the Acropolis (Hill of the Muses, Street of the Tripods, south slope of the Acropolis), D4 – East of the Acropolis (Hadrian’s Gate, the Temple of Olympian Zeus, nearby sanctuaries, the Stadium),
- E) “Collections & Museums”, in which the collecting activity of antiquarians is presented together with the gradual evolution of archaeological science and museum practice, leading, among other things, to the founding of the National Archaeological Museum.

In correlation with the last thematic unit, the exhibition also functions as a prelude to the National Archaeological Museum’s 150th anniversary in 2016, when it will be celebrating its founding in 1865. It was precisely the antiquarianism of the European classicists – who visited Athens and, guided by the ancient literature, searched for traces of its monumental past, and then commissioned or themselves depicted and published its images – that would lead the newly constituted Greek state to take care of its ancient heritage and take action by adopting the cultural policy of Europe.

The bilingual Greek-English catalogue of the exhibition¹⁴ includes 13 explanatory essays, in which every aspect of the exhibition is examined, followed by a catalogue of the exhibits.

Regarding in particular the 14 pieces from the Art Collection of the Hellenic Parliament, they were all included in the previous exhibition “Hellas: genius loci”. The most emblematic were selected for the theme, so as to “converse” on an equal basis with the classical antiquities. Among them, once again, the highlight is the monumental view of Athens by Louis-François Cassas. In the exhibition catalogue, the works were documented anew and became a point of reference in many essays, including an introductory essay by this writer¹⁵. In it, reference was also made to many works in the previous exhibition – which have not been included in the new one – in an effort to interpret the city of Athens as a whole and over time, as the model and symbolic icon of the classical roots of the modern European visual culture as a whole, from the Renaissance on. Consequently many of the works from the first exhibition were presented, directly or indirectly, in the second exhibition and in its catalogue. Altogether, the significance of the exhibition “Hellas: genius loci” has been consolidated and increased by the current exhibition “Strolling through the Athens of Travelers” since it is referred to as a point of departure with frequent references to it.

The National Archaeological Museum offers unhindered access to the public. Consequently the works of art belonging to the Hellenic Parliament can potentially be enjoyed here by every Greek citizen, whose taxes have paid for their acquisition. In addition, in this way, and to the degree possible, the Hellenic Parliament is exercising cultural policy and at the same time contributing to cultural tourism in Athens and in the country as a whole, not only for Greek citizens but also for visitors from abroad. The exhibition in the National Archaeological Museum, supported by a number of activities to publicise it, generally demonstrates the direct dialogue of Greek antiquity and the monumental heritage of Athens with the European cultural identity, a critical element linking the present-day relationship between Greece and Europe, at least culturally. In this sense, the collaboration of the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection with the National Archaeological Museum can be regarded as an exercise in cultural diplomacy in the broad sense of the term.

Exhibitions of the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection as cultural diplomacy

The Hellenic Parliament Art Collection is clearly an appropriate instrument for exercising cultural policy and diplomacy. The permanent exhibition of its works of modern Greek art, in the Parliament Building, constitutes one such presentation.

In addition, its two targeted exhibitions, featuring selected European works of art that depict classical Greek antiquity, constitute programmed activities with a clear pro-European orientation. The dual exhibition in 2014 “Hellas: genius loci”, presented in two venues, the Parliament Building and Zappeion Hall, to mark the Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union, visualized and communicated to European diplomatic missions the Greek classical

heritage as the cornerstone and common asset of modern European civilization. In this case, the practice of cultural diplomacy, through the Parliament's Art Collection, was targeted and manifest.

The current (2015-2016) exhibition "Strolling through the Athens of Travelers", in collaboration with and on the premises of the National Archaeological Museum, constitutes an opening by the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection to the broader public as well as an outward-looking expression of a broader cultural policy, aiming at both Greek citizens and visitors from abroad. The exhibition presents Athens – capital city of the Greeks not only administratively, but also historically and culturally over time – as depicted, presented and symbolized for the people of Europe by European travelers and artists in modern times. These images of the Greek capital represents the city of Athens as a European capital of art and culture, and as an iconic city, in both macro-historical and symbolic terms.

The exhibitions of the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection – which are directly inter-linked, as the second can be seen as a continuation of the first – contribute to exploring the modern Greeks' relationship with both Hellenic antiquity and European modernity. The position that is promoted and documented in the presentation of the exhibitions and their accompanying catalogues is that the dialogue between the classical Greek heritage and the modern European structure – as consolidated, at least in the visual culture – was and remains substantial, indissoluble, timeless and fruitful.

From this viewpoint, the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection, through its exhibition activity and the utilization of works of art as historical records, offers a cultural product with a high aesthetic level, highlighting its exhibits¹⁶, while at the same time exercising cultural diplomacy in the context of a fertile dialogue between Greece and Europe, having as common denominator a human-centered civilization and its values as a contemporary desideratum.

Bio-note on the author

Dr. Thodoris Koutsogiannis is an art historian.

He studied archaeology and art history (degree 1996) at the University of Athens. He specialized (master's degree, 2000) in modern art and presented (2008) his doctoral thesis on the subject "The drawings of Cyriacus of Ancona and their influence on antiquarianism and the art of the Renaissance".

He also conducted scholarly research, on fellowships, at universities and research institutes in Italy (Universita La Sapienza, Rome, 1998 and 2000; Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa, 2003; Istituto di Studi Umanistici, Florence, 2005-08), England (Warburg Institute, London 2001-2002), and the United States (Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies, Princeton University, 2011).

He is engaged in studying Western European art in modern times, especially with the perception of antiquity by the visual culture more broadly and with Greek influences on the West, as well as with intercultural relations in the broader Mediterranean region.

He has presented papers at international conferences, published essays in collected works and has curated exhibitions of modern European and Greek art.

He has taught as visiting professor at the University of Athens, the University of Thessaly and the Greek Open University.

Since January of 2009, he has been employed as Chief Curator of the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection.

¹ It is indicative that only four monographs have been published in Greek on the theme of Greek cultural diplomacy, on a strictly theoretical level: Giannaras, Christos. 2002. *Cultural diplomacy: preliminary theory of Greek planning*. Athens; Christogiannis, Giorgos. 2002. *Greek cultural diplomacy*. Athens; Tzoumaka, Eleni. 2005. *Cultural diplomacy: international facts and Greek prospects*. Athens; Kosmisou, Zoë. 2000. *Culture as a means of communication to improve international relations and Greek cultural diplomacy*. Athens.

² See indicatively Gay, Peter. 1966. *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, vol. I, The Rise of Modern Paganism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

³ For this topic see especially Hamilakis, Yannis. 2007. *The Nation and its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, especially chapter 3: "From Western to indigenous Hellenism".

⁴ Abadji, Evridiki, ed. 2003. *Works of Art from the Collection of the Hellenic Parliament*. Athens: Hellenic Parliament Foundation.

⁵ Abadji, Evridiki, and Thodoris Koutsogiannis, eds. 2010. *Works of Art from the Collection of the Hellenic Parliament* [in Greek]. Athens: Hellenic Parliament Foundation. It includes an essay by the Academician Chrysanthos Christou (“Modern Greek painting and sculpture from the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection”, pp. 15-75), in which an attempt is made to tell the story of modern Greek art based on the works in the Collection.

⁶ Koutsogiannis, Thodoris. 2014. *Hellas: genius loci*. Athens: Hellenic Parliament Foundation.

⁷ Koutsogiannis 2014, 13-27 (“The Perception of Monumental Hellenic Antiquity by the Modern European Visual Culture”).

⁸ Koutsogiannis 2014, 29-61 (“Themes”).

⁹ Koutsogiannis 2014, 63-191 (“Catalogue”).

¹⁰ I am referring indicatively to the visit by the then European Commissioner for Culture Mrs. Androulla Vassileiou, on 7/3/2014.

¹¹ Meimarakis, Evangelos-Vasileios I. 2014. Greeting to Koutsogiannis 2014, 9.

¹² The reasons were purely practical. Access to Zappeion Hall was limited solely to those accredited for the proceedings of the Council of the European Union. For security reasons, entrance to the Parliament Building is permitted only with special permission. Provision was however made for the public to visit the exhibition in guided tours every Saturday, after declaring participation.

¹³ The working group included archaeologist-museologist Despina Kallesopoulou, archaeologists-collection curators Chrysanthi Tsouli and Maria Salta, and architect Bessy Drougka. Directed by Dr. Maria Lagogianni-Georgakarakos, the work of the group was extremely productive and I would like to express here my thanks for our excellent collaboration.

¹⁴ Lagogianni-Georgakarakos, Maria, and Thodoris Koutsogiannis, eds. 2015. *“A dream among splendid ruins...”: Strolling through the Athens of Travelers, 17th–19th century*. Athens: Archaeological Receipts Fund.

¹⁵ Koutsogiannis, Thodoris. 2015. “The image of Athens in modern European visual culture: Between fantasy and reality – in the shadow of antiquities”, In *“A dream among splendid ruins...”: Strolling through the Athens of Travelers, 17th–19th century*, edited by Maria Lagogianni-Georgakarakos, and Thodoris Koutsogiannis, 56-133. Athens: Archaeological Receipts Fund.

¹⁶ I would like to express my warmest thanks to my valued collaborator Christina Karadima, easel paintings conservator and museologist, who *pro bono* (since she is not a staff member of the Hellenic Parliament) has looked after all the works in the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection since 2009, from the viewpoint of preventive conservation and restoration *in situ*, in the Parliament Building, as well as the conservation and presentation of the works in the aforementioned exhibitions.