From 1917 onward, Greek artists began to take an interest in Soviet art, initially called proletarian art, then socialist realism from 1932. The social messages of the October Revolution and the images of workers’ battles, social revolutions, demonstrations, strikes, and more generally the life of workers and farmers provided inspiration for many artists and students of the Athens School of Fine Arts throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The advocates of proletarian and communist art at that time primarily used engraving, which was considered to be the best propaganda medium for socialist ideas and also the most accessible medium—they thus picked up on an insight found in the USSR and elsewhere in communist Europe. Not until a few years into the 1930s did proletarian artists stop portraying just what was happening in the USSR and turn to the social and political reality in Greece—an evolution that is evident in the reproductions found in their review entitled Neoi Protoporoi (The new avant-gardists), where they published articles and reproductions, in particular engravings. The proletarian artists did not manage to exhibit their work until 1932 onward, but the installation of the Metaxas dictatorship in 1936 seriously limited their opportunities, and these artists resorted to genre and landscape paintings.
The emergence of Soviet art caused a deep divide in the world of the avant-garde between, on the one hand, those who were enthusiastic about the Soviet cause (about thirty or so artists in Athens) and, on the other hand, the “bourgeois” avant-garde. The former wanted to follow—sometimes to the point of fanaticism—the ideology and aesthetic of the “major socialist party,” whereas the latter looked toward Paris, which remained in their eyes the place where the most interesting artistic creations were appearing and where the repertoire of forms continued to develop. In both cases, the idea of creating “truly Greek” art had no place—their objective was to be part of what was happening in Moscow or in Paris.

So what did Greek artists know about Soviet art? The decisive event in the history of socialist realism in Greece was the exhibition of Soviet engravings in Athens in 1934. This was the key moment of confrontation with Soviet art. The works exhibited defined for everyone what is known as Soviet socialist realism, whether it be revered or rejected. This is the art that was henceforth called socialist realism.

The socialist realism of the end of the 1940s was, in reality, the continuation of the art created during the fight against fascist Italy in the northwest of the country (October 1940–April 1941) and during the Nazi occupation (April 1941–October 1944).

Socialist realism appeared to be quite suited to accompany the patriotic and victorious war against the Italians, in which all social classes took part. And as a result, the artists that were formerly bourgeois reclaimed socialist realism in order to galvanize the people and the soldiers. The engravings of the most prominent proletarian artists (Tassos, Grammatopoulos, Katraki, Dimou, and Velissaridis) were reproduced on posters and in newspapers.

During the occupation of the country by the Nazi army, the number of socialist realist images fell sharply. The conditions for creating such works were, of course, much more difficult. But what is more, this art seemed to be less suited to portraying the sufferings of this period, the famines of 1941 and 1942, the destruction of hundreds of villages, summary executions—in short, the violence of the occupation of which we now know the full extent. The style of socialist realism and its fanatical optimism did not correspond, in the eyes of many people, to the demands of the time. This is why a great many artists moved toward expressionism, as is demonstrated by the en-
gravings of former socialist realists, such as Kefallinos, Korogiannakis, and Kanellis. Nonetheless, socialist realism survived among certain artists who were directly involved in the secret armed resistance. Indeed, dozens of artists were members of secret resistance organizations: Megalidis, Semertzidis, Maggiorou, Fertis, Katsikogianni, Gioldasis, Makris, etc. Many works and secret newspapers contained engravings inspired by the resistance. Once again, the use of socialist realism was for artists with differing political opinions. And from 1943 and the end of the Battle of Stalingrad, the victories of the Red Army provided a large number of artistic themes, some of which were neither communist nor pro-Soviet. The form of socialist realism was being used more than ever before for its capacity to translate a militant and revolutionary spirit.

The realism of battle was at the fore of the artistic scene as soon as the Nazi occupiers retreated in October 1944. Works that had been clandestine during the occupation were then quickly shown. Several images inspired by the resistance were reproduced in left-wing newspapers, such as Rizospastis (Radical), Eleftheri Ellada (Free Greece—the official newspaper of the Greek Communist Party) and Elefthera Grammata (Free letters). In 1945, the engraver A. Tassos portrayed the episode of Gorgopotamos, where in 1943 the Greek resistance blew up a railway line leading to Athens; the wood engraving was supposed to be similar to a wood engraving by the Soviet artist Alexander Kratschenko entitled To the Barricades. The majority of these works belonged from a stylistic point of view to the socialist realist style and were heavily influenced by the Soviet art shown in 1934. But it must be noted that what the Greek artists proclaimed to be Soviet art after 1944 bears in reality little resemblance to what was being done in the USSR during the same period, at the time of triumphant Zhdanovism.

Following the bloody clashes in the streets of Athens in December 1944 between the people and the government army supported by the English forces, the art of the resistance—which had previously risen above ideological or party divisions—became increasingly engaged in serving the political program of the Communist Party. This style became the marker of party affiliation. This was the paradox: socialist realism was widely used when the battle went beyond the communist context (in 1940–44) and it was weakened when the battle became a truly communist battle. But socialist realism be-
Part II · Moving Objects

came partially nationalized—the engravings that A. Tassos dedicated to the funeral march of the people of Athens following the massacres of December 1944 multiplied the national Greek symbols.

An examination of the thirty exhibitions organized in Athens during the period 1945–47 reveals five major tendencies in the artistic world of the time. The first tendency was the continuation of academic realism, which took its cue from the Munich School of the late nineteenth century. The second claimed to be inspired by popular art and the Byzantine style and wanted to create an art that picked up on such “traditions,” that is to say, to create an authentically Greek art, a relatively new approach in the artistic landscape.

Figure 15.1.
Alebisos Tassos, Gorgopotamos, 1945, woodcut, 24.5×19 cm.
Thirdly, we find the artists who were faithful to Soviet socialist realism—the majority were members of the Communist Party and of the E.A.M. resistance group (National Liberation Front). The fourth group consisted of artists who were known as modernist and bourgeois and who looked to Western Europe. The fifth group brought together those who saw their place in the communist ideology and in the image of the engaged artist (and who were often former members of the anti-Nazi resistance), but who refused to follow the path of socialist realism and instead followed the path of modern art. Many artists who belonged to the Communist Party did not follow the artistic orders of the Greek Communist Party (formulated by Secretary-General Zachariadis in January 1947) or the views of Zhdanov that were published then.

The division of the exhibitions between the five groups shows the predominance, in terms of quantity and quality, of the latter two groups and their modernist works. For example, at the exhibition organized by the French Institute of Athens in June 1946, the works that characterized the contemporaries the most were those by artists who were ideologically on the left but who borrowed the stylistic viewpoint of the modernist paths. The socialist re-

Figure 15.2.
Georges Dimou, *Makronisos*, no date, drawing, 11.7×48.1 cm.
alists (Fertis, Theodoridis, Ferentinos, Apergis, Kontopoulos, Kanas, Zepos, and Katraki, etc.) were marginalized. The art critic Al. Xydis, who was of a socialist leaning, launched an attack against these artists, who, in his view, were placing their art in the service of political ends.

The number of communist artists—whether socialist realists or modernists—reduced considerably between 1947 and 1949. Conditions became increasingly difficult. Measures targeting communists (arrests, expulsions, sometimes even executions) increased in number following Law 509 of 1947, which outlawed the Communist Party and the left-wing anti-Nazi resistance organizations. In *Makronisos*, G. Dimou portrayed the repression suffered by the communists on the island of Makronisos, the main center of detention and torture for the communists. In these conditions, many artists abandoned the communist cause. These are the reasons why they abandoned the dream of a revolutionary transformation of Greek society and resigned themselves to compromises—both political and artistic—with the new pictorial movements. Former leftists joined the bourgeois and took part alongside them in art exhibitions. In reality, very few artists remained faithful to the socialist realist style, then known as the “Moscow School.”

Migrations, most often forced, also contributed to the profound changes in the intellectual landscape and in the balance between artistic tendencies. The youngest and the most modernist artists chose exile in France and Paris, often with the help of the French Institute in Athens. The realists mostly chose to settle in people’s democracies. The painter and engraver Georges Dimou settled in Bucharest in 1948. The sculptor Memos Makris migrated to Budapest. His capacity to adapt expressionism to the context of socialist realism made him one of the most celebrated sculptors of the Hungarian regime. In 1959, he was given the task of creating a monument dedicated to the Hungarian Republic of Councils of March–August 1919. He was also tasked in 1964 with creating a monument at the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria to commemorate the suffering of the Hungarian deportees.

As a result, socialist realism had largely disappeared from the artistic landscape by the time the communists laid down their arms in 1949. Those who defended this form of art either rejected it or left Greece. It is important to recall that the most important Greek abstract painter after 1949, Alekos Kontopoulos, started by creating works of socialist realism when he was a communist.
After the wave of terror that followed the civil war, the violence of the measures against socialists and communists abated somewhat. The repression tended to remove the divisions between modernist communists and realist communists. The appearance of the left-wing newspaper *Avgi* (The Dawn) in 1952 and of the journal *Epitheorisi Technis* (Art review) in 1954 provided artists, theoreticians, and art critics who were formerly socialists and communists the opportunity to regain a public voice. The articles and the reproductions printed in the review suggest that there was a degree of popular nostalgia for socialist realism at that time. Also published were articles on artists or art critics living in the USSR or in one of the popular democracies. Inversely, it often judged the art created in Western Europe very severely. The newly founded review entitled *Kainourgia Epochi* (New era) published, in 1956, the translation of a controversy on Soviet art, including opinions (some negative, some positive) on socialist realism. It was an exhibition of art from the people’s democracies that provided the opportunity to discuss this art. An exhibition that took place in Athens in 1960 must be mentioned here, in which forty-two Romanian artists participated, contributing seventy-one works of art. All of these works, in terms of their themes and their style, belonged to socialist realism and received favorable reviews from the art critics at the left-wing newspaper *Avgi*. These few articles must not overshadow the fact that the production of socialist realist works in Greece remained nonexistent. When the sixth national art exhibition was held in 1960, among the 1,084 images exhibited, none could in any way be seen as belonging to socialist realism.

Moreover, these left-wing reviews took a stance—in the same vein as the vast majority of Greek artists and intellectuals—against the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956; even the procommunist review *Epitheorisi Technis* published very critical articles on the subject. The majority of authors welcomed the declaration of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union, but they quickly became disappointed by the implementation of the decisions of the Twentieth Congress, which, in their view, did not bring about any real changes in terms of artistic policy and did not ensure the freedom of artists. In October 1957, however, *Epitheorisi Technis* dedicated an edition to the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution and praised its greatness. This resulted in the review being condemned by the Greek regime for procommunist propa-
ganda. It is important to recall that the other art reviews presented a much more negative image of the October Revolution. At the same time, the right-wing review *Nea Estia* (New Hestia) stated that the revolution had harmed the development of the arts and that the Soviet regime had put an end to the Russian avant-garde.

It should also be pointed out that international meetings were held in Greece, to which artists from the popular democracies were invited. The Fourth International Congress of Aesthetics took place in Athens in September 1960. One notable participant was Chvatik Kvetoslav, a member of the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences in Prague, who spoke of the “aesthetic value and the social function of art.” Another notable attendee was Dostal Vladimir, a member of the same academy, who presented “the founders of the Czech Marxist aesthetic in the face of the modern art issue.” It was likely that the participants from Eastern Europe were able to express themselves more freely on the issue of the Marxist aesthetic than their Greek colleagues.

After 1956, in the context of diplomatic relations between Greece and the Soviet Union, some artistic and cultural exchanges took place. Soviet intellectuals were invited to Greece, such as Ilya Ehrenburg in 1957. During a public interview, Ehrenburg recalled the major axes of communist cultural policy and repeated the attacks against abstract art and modernist art in general, characterizing the paintings of Salvador Dalí as “academic,” for example. In December 1957, on the initiative of the Greek–Soviet organization, an exhibition of Soviet artists took place in Athens presenting watercolors, engravings, and sketches. It was the first Soviet exhibition since 1934. According to Greek art critics, these works were characterized by the socialist realist style, the “academic style,” which nonetheless demonstrated real technical skill and sometimes humor, especially the works of Pimenov, Ratzev, Wereski, Favoriski, and Litvinenko.

Moreover, Greek artists traveled to the USSR: in 1960, nine Greek engravers and painters, including Katraki, Tassos, Theodoropoulos, Giannakakis, Grammatopoulos, Varlamos, Montesantou, Nicolis, and Konstantinidou, went to Moscow and exhibited their work. Greek socialist realist creations—invisible in Greece—became public once again on this occasion in Soviet territory. In the exhibition catalog, Soviet art critics evaluated these
creations; some artists found their favor (Tassos, Katraki, Grammatopoulos, and Montesantou), whereas others appeared to them to be too far from what they considered to be the goal of art—the “real and profound” portrayal of reality.

From the beginning of the 1960s until the installation of the Colonels’ dictatorship in 1967, socialist realism made a cautious comeback. The political climate was less unfavorable to it, especially after the electoral defeat of the right in 1962. The growing number of demonstrations and strikes provided the material for the images. At the national exhibition of art in 1963, realist works reappeared. But the renaissance was most obvious in the area of intellectual Marxism. Texts were published in Greece that characterized the debates of the time throughout the communist world: an *Aesthetic* treaty published by the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, the writings of Georg Lukács, *The Necessity of Art* by Ernst Fischer and *Realism without Shores* by Roger Garaudy. The review *Epitheorisi Technis* started to take the side of socialist realism increasingly openly. But the main exhibition area remained the Soviet Bloc, with which diplomatic-cultural exchanges became a common occurrence. The painter Semertzidis held no less than twenty-five exhibitions in the Soviet Union in the 1960s.

Young artists were aware of the social problems, but they did not want to become involved in the same way as the older communists. They practiced a style that could be called critical realism. Nonetheless, they most often looked down upon the artists who had remained true to socialist realism, whether they were in exile, in prison or in contact with the socialist camp.

The establishment of the military dictatorship in 1967 marked the return of arrests and exile for left-wing intellectuals. As a result, images of imprisonment and exile, which had been a recurrent theme in the socialist realism of previous years, returned in abundance. The return of socialist realism also owed a great deal to the international situation—to the return of political representation on the one hand, and to social uprisings such as those of May 1968 and the antimilitarist demonstrations in the United States on the other. Older artists—former partisans of socialist realism, such as Tassos, Semertzidis, and Katsikogiannis—revived the militant force of the style and explored the recent history of Greece (the Turkish intervention in Cyprus or the Colonels’ dictatorship), as well as international events, such as the assassination of
Che Guevara or the Vietnam War.

The fall of the military dictatorship in 1974 brought with it a number of changes in the political, social, and cultural life of Greece. The most important of the decisions taken was the authorization—after twenty-seven years underground—of the Greek Communist Party. The communist newspaper *Rizospastis* (The Radical) and the *Communist Review* also reappeared, and several refugees and exiles returned to the country. The old socialist realist artists remained faithful to their habitual style, but the majority of them mixed socialist realism with various modernist styles, without abandoning their political and ideological orientation and their loyalty toward Moscow. One could mention here the revolutionary spirit that several works by the sculptors Apergis, Loukopoulos, and Zoggolopoulos tried to inspire—with the main subject being memories of the resistance. The Greek public was thus able to see these creations that had previously remained underground and unknown: the works were exhibited at the Athens National Gallery, but also in a number of private galleries.

Following the fall of the dictatorship, many exhibitions from socialist countries were shown in Greece. The most important were those held at the Athens National Gallery, such as that dedicated to Romanian art in 1984 and organized in collaboration with the congress of civilization and socialist education and the union of artists of Romania. Two other exhibitions were held at the Athens National Gallery: in 1985, the GDR sent an exhibition of engravings, and in 1986 Yugoslavia showcased contemporary art created in this neighboring but little-known country. Other less prestigious venues also exhibited artists from socialist countries (in 1987, the Municipal Gallery of Athens exhibited the Albanian sculptor Odysseas Paschalis and the Bulgarian painter and engraver Kalin Balev).

But it was in the images sponsored directly by the Greek Communist Party that socialist realist forms remained most visible. The political posters and banners carried by demonstrators on a number of marches that shook Athens and other Greek towns in the 1970s and 1980s were the most important media for the endurance of socialist realism in Greece—proof that this art continues to draw its strength from political activism.