Once upon a time all art was a collaborative process. No painting by Michelangelo, or Rubens, or Rembrandt was ever the sole product of the artists who bore those names. They were each helped by studio assistants, many of whom had great skill and talent. These assistants did more than simply grind the paint and hold the brushes. Often they helped to paint some of the great masterpieces of western art, including such wonders as the Sistine Chapel ceiling. As Jerry Brotton states in his book The Renaissance Bazaar, published by Oxford University Press, works like the Sistine Chapel ceiling were group efforts rather than the creation of an individual man. In modern times too artworks we think of as being by one sculptor were in fact made by a group of people. August Rodin used many studio assistants; including Antoine Bourdelle, Camille Claudel and Francois Pompon. The same is true of Henry Moore, despite his stated belief in the importance of sculptors carving their own work. In fact Moore's assistants included some of the most well-regarded sculptors of the twentieth century, including Reg Butler, Anthony Caro and Phillip King. They were not his students, they were his assistants, and each played a part in the creation of Moore's artworks.

In the collaboration between Stass Paraskos and Stelios Votsis we see a similar phenomenon. The paintings they make together are a group effort, albeit a group of two. Yet there is a crucial difference between their way of working and that of the Old or Modern Maters. In the case of Michelangelo, Rodin and Moore, the studio assistants were required to suppress their own individuality and be guided by their master. The role of the master was to act almost like the director of a play or the conductor of an orchestra, and the studio assistants were required to do exactly what he said. The master then gave his name to the artwork that was produced. However, Paraskos is not the 'studio assistant' of Votsis, and Votsis is not the 'studio assistant' of Paraskos. Their group is egalitarian and each contributes to the making of these paintings in equal measure. Of course other artists do collaborate in producing their work. Last year the Cyprus College of Art was fortunate in having the British sculptors Eve Bennett and Chris Rutter as artists-in-residence, and it was possible to see at first hand how two people can combine to produce a single work of art. Similarly, amongst the current younger generation of artists, the example of the English-Cypriots Jake and Dinos Chapman is perhaps one of the most well-known. Yet there is still a major difference between their working methods and those of Paraskos and Votsis. With Rutter and Bennett you could not say which part of their work was made by Rutter and which by Bennett, just as there is no way of telling which idea in the work of the Chapmans came from Jake and which from Dinos. In the paintings of Paraskos and Votsis, however, there is no attempt made to merge their separate ways of working into a single style. Paraskos remains Paraskos, Votsis remains Votsis, and you can point out their individual contributions to each painting very easily.

Both artist know that such a working method is very dangerous. Although a painting can tell a story, or symbolize an emotional state, or comment on social and political life, the primary purpose of all painting is to define or open up a believable sense of space. It is this creation of space that allows an arena in which to explore stories, or emotions, or ideological beliefs. Of course the space that an artist opens up on the canvas is not necessarily like the space we occupy in our everyday lives. In fact it can be a very different type of space, as in an abstract painting or a church icon. But it does have to be believable if the viewer is to be convinced by it. The viewer has to be persuaded to allow what is called the 'suspension of disbelief'. Fail to open up a believable space and you could have the world's greatest story, or emotional epiphany, or political manifesto to convey, but no one will believe it because the space in which it is set is unbelievable. The way to create believable space in a painting is through

coherency. This means that all the elements in a painting must be related to each other through a coherent system, which is sometimes called rhythm. To understand this one can think about the way our universe is governed by the series of laws we call the laws of physics. These laws encompass many different things, but together they form the coherent framework in which we live. We might call this framework the 'rhythm of physics'. In painting, however, the artist can discard the standard laws of physics and establish their own laws. These artistic laws then also form a framework or rhythm for the painting. Once that rhythm is established then all the elements of the picture must relate to it, and as long as this happens the painting will be coherent the believable no matter what it shows. The danger with the collaborative working method of Paraskos and Votsis is that Paraskos could work to one rhythm and Votsis to another. If universe in their paintings, but a clashing set of rhythms that fails to persuade their viewers to suspend disbelief.

According to Paraskos and Votsis their collaboration is an experiment, and as in scientific experiments the outcome is not always successful.

Undoubtedly some of their early collaborative works have not cohered, and have not created a believable pictorial universe. Those painting and drawings have been discarded along the way, and do not appear in this exhibition. Instead, what we see here is a collection of artworks in which a remarkable thing has happened. Two artists with very different working methods and style have produced a series of works that do cohere, and which do so with an increasing level of sophistication. In their early works the Paraskos part of the painting tended to be very separate from the Votsis part of the painting, causing some of them to appear almost like two paintings on one canvas. Now, however, the lines, colours, forms and narratives that are started by one artist are picked up by the other, who will then develop them further before handing them back. This process of alternation can be repeated several time, making the whole process organic and evolutionary. In a very real way, it is less like traditional painting than the way a group of jazz musicians will each play a series of individual solos within a single set, often picking up on what has been played before, but moving it into a new direction.

Like jazz, such co-operation is inherently democratic and undermines the autocracy of the single point of view. It topples a dictatorship. That dictator was an artist who forced his views on to his studio assistants, and forced his views on to the canvas, and forced his views on to the spectator. He was a tyrant, a caliph and a tsar, and we can only wonder at how so much beauty could come from so much despotism. Here, Paraskos and Votsis do something wholly different and extraordinary. It is something so shocking that it offends six-hundred years of artistic tradition. In their work they have not only opened up space, but they dare to share that space and leave it open to dialogues that often evolve in surprising and unexpected ways. In place of dictatorship, this revolution has turned the painted space into an anarchist commune in which two, or three, or perhaps even an infinite number of artists can negotiate the rhythms of space, or the primary laws of a painting's existence.

This is very exciting new development in painting, and the fact that it comes from two artists living in Cyprus today is proof of a claim once made by Herbert Read that artistic revolutions never start in the main cultural centres, but always at the edges. That this revolution is at the hands of two artists in their seventies also show that it is not always (or even very often) the case that the most interesting cultural developments come from the young. Long live the anarchist revolution!

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