TO BHMA
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The Price of a Good Time Keeps Going Up

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

By Katherine Sayre, Anne Steele and Rachel Bachman

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Andrea Rojas and Carlos Ramon saved for more than a year for their trip to see the World Cup.

But the married Virginia couple weren't prepared for the bill: nearly $10,000 to travel to and see games in Boston, New Jersey and Miami. That was more than double what they paid for a similar trip to the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. Tickets? $800 apiece on FIFA's official resale site before the team schedules were announced. Forget trying to see their favorite squads.

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Airlines' New Luxury Seats Await Approval

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

By Alison Sider and Benjamin Katz

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Dutch airline KLM has been preparing for a new and more-luxe business-class experience, featuring 34 lie-flat seats equipped with privacy doors and 19-inch touch screens. But there's a problem. The seats, which the carrier is marketing to high-end fliers on a brand new long-haul jet, haven't yet been certified by aviation authorities. So when it launches its inaugural flight featuring the seats in September, they will be empty.

Lufthansa has had a similar problem. So does Singapore Airlines. A number of carriers, including United and American, have debuted new business-class suites with their doors locked open, awaiting approval.

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JEFF VANDERPOOL

Fellows of the Gennadius Library studying.

TO BHMA International edition

100 Years of Greek Cultural Memory

By George Gilson

The celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Gennadius Library in Athens, marked by a splendid exhibition showcasing many of its prize possessions, is occasion to remember the remarkable contribution of the Greek diplomat Joannes Gennadius to our understanding of the continuity of the Greek nation.

It was built in memory of his illustrious father Georgios, an important figure in Greek education who had also served as director of the Greek National Library.

A passionate book collector whose 25,000-volume collection constituted the foundation on which today's 145,000-volume collection was built, Gennadius bequeathed his library to the American School of Classical Studies in Athens - which he admired, just as he deeply respected the accomplishment of American universities and academia - rather than to his own compatriots, to a Greek institution like the National Library.

Over the last century, the American School has remained faithful to Gennadius' vision and mission – to demonstrate the continuity of Greek culture from antiquity all the way through to Byzantium and the Modern Greek era.

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TO BHMA International edition

Three Thousand Years of Memory and Hollywood Still Got It Wrong

By Maria Katopodi

Homer's epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, have served as a source of inspiration for Hollywood for decades. The American film industry has produced a series of blockbuster adaptations, drawing millions of moviegoers eager to see the legendary heroes of ancient Greece brought to life on the big screen. The latest such undertaking is Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey*. The question, however, is this: to what extent should filmmakers be allowed to alter or reinterpret timeless masterpieces such as Homer's epics in the name of "creative freedom"?

3,000 years on, the debate continues

At a time when self-proclaimed Western intellectuals and filmmakers proudly advocate for inclusion, respect, and the accurate representation of cultural heritage in adaptations of historical literature, shouldn't those same principles apply to Greek cultural heritage, as well? Or is it somehow the exception?

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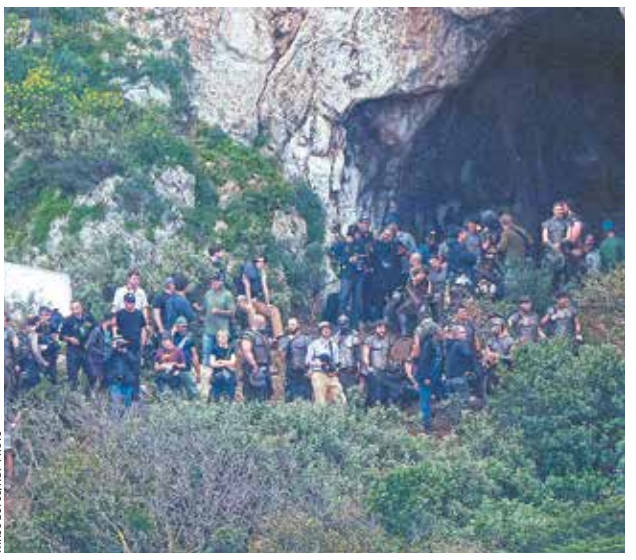

NIKOS ZOTOS/NDP PHOTO

Crew working on Christopher Nolan's "The Odyssey" in Pylos, Greece.

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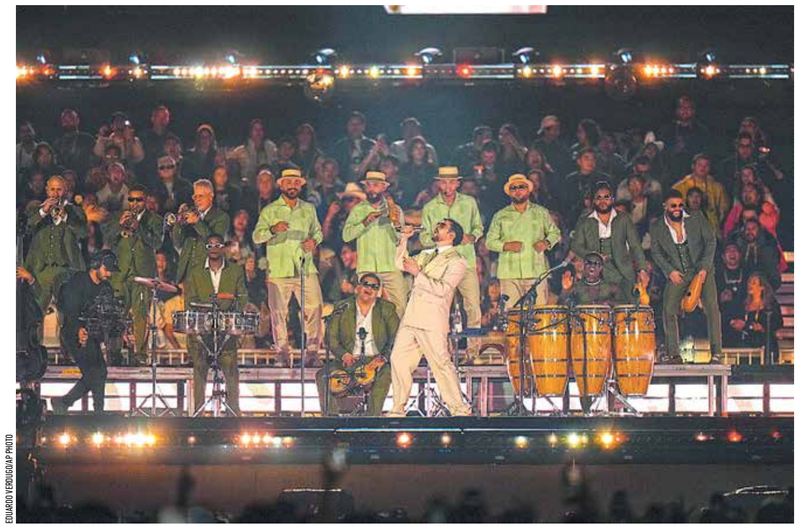
When Did Having Fun Get So Expensive? The Summer When 'Funflation' Went Wild

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

From World Cup matches to concert tickets, live entertainment is testing household budgets. Fans are dipping into savings and taking on debt, while the industry finds new ways to cash in.



EDUARDO VERDUGO/AP PHOTO

Puerto Rican musician Bad Bunny performs in concert during his "DeBI TiRAR MaS FOToS" tour in Mexico City, on December 10, 2025.

Continued from Page One

Game day parking? $175 at Gillette Stadium outside Boston and $150 outside Miami. Car rental, hotel, $98 commuter-train tickets in New York and air fare further drove up their bill.

If she and her husband weren't such big fans, Rojas said, "I would boycott FIFA because of what they're doing" with ticket prices. "It's basically turning into a Super Bowl – for people who have the means or are willing to get into crazy debt."

But so it goes in the modern era of high-end live entertainment, where people are willing to spend vast pools of money and go into debt to attend once-in-a-lifetime events. Those at the top of the economic ladder spend lavishly without breaking a sweat. But such events are also drawing the working and middle classes, who bust open savings and borrow money to afford spiraling prices.

From the World Cup, to the NBA Finals, to concerts by chart-topping artists such as Olivia Rodrigo and Harry Styles, to boomer-friendly megatours by Rush and AC/DC, there seems to be no limit to what some are willing to pay.

For ardent fans, budgetary concerns are no match for the fear of missing out in a you-only-live-once economy.

"Worth every penny," said Kenzie Doctor, an Edinburgh gym worker who withdrew 3,000 pounds (nearly $4,000) from a government savings program to offset the nearly $9,000 it cost him to see Scotland play in the World Cup. "When you had the national anthem at the game, it was so sentimental, there were tears running down my face."

A FIFA official said it has offered a range of ticket prices and that World Cup proceeds help run the nonprofit's global development projects.

Resale tickets on SeatGeek for World Cup matches have averaged about $1,084 each, with later-round matches going for more. Tickets to the NBA Finals between the New York Knicks and San Antonio Spurs fetched an average of $4,100, while seats at Madison Square Garden were going for as much as $9,000 on average.

A constellation of entertainment companies, leagues, payments companies and hospitality groups are enjoying the bounty.

The frothy ticketing environment has been a boon to "buy now, pay later" companies like Affirm and Klarna that help fans pay for pricier seats than they otherwise might not buy.

Knicks owner Madison Square Garden Sports stock is up roughly 88% over the last year, while shares in Ticketmaster parent Live Nation are up more than 20%.

Those who are flush have no problem shelling out. For the working and middle classes, changing economic realities such as stubbornly high mortgage rates have led to a new calculus. If the typical status symbols of buying a single-family house is out of reach, maybe spending hundreds of dollars to see Metallica at Las Vegas' Sphere doesn't sound so outrageous.

To understand how we got here, go back to the pandemic.

The economic phenomenon known as "funflation" bloomed as venues reopened following months of closures driven by fear of the virus, which canceled tours, forced sports leagues to play games in front of empty seats and hammered restaurants and movie theaters. Once live music, theater and sports returned, vaccines proliferated and public health restrictions eased, people rushed back to be entertained in big crowds.

A public tired of hoarding toilet paper in isolation lived it up. Enter megatours by artists such as Taylor Swift and Beyonce, whose multigenerational appeal helped break sales records.

They contributed to a new standard of elaborate, hours-long concerts with more emphasis on choreography, pyrotechnics, costume changes and technology to wow audiences.

That wave of concerts also normalized the idea of concert tourism — traveling across state or international borders for a unique experience. Bank accounts were flush from the Covid era of staying home and families and friends were ready to party.

Since the transition of the recorded music industry from album sales to subscription-based streaming services, artists have relied much more heavily on touring for their income in recent decades. Decades-old bands playing on nostalgia and newly minted podcasting stars added to the craze.

Years of stock-market gains have supercharged the spending power of older households—especially Baby Boomers. The No. 4 touring act for the first half of this year is AC/DC, according to Pollstar, coming in behind Bad Bunny, Lady Gaga and BTS in worldwide ticket sales.

"The affluent are spending and spending with abandon," said Diane Swonk, chief economist for KPMG. "That's bidding up the cost of things for the bottom 80%, where wages and incomes haven't kept up with inflation."

But the costs of touring have increased with inflation, driving up base ticket prices. Increasingly sophisticated bots are quick to snap up blocks of seats and flip them for a profit.

And the concert industry deploys tactics to maximize revenue such as releasing blocks of tickets in waves to increase scarcity and implementing so-called dynamic pricing, raising prices in response to high demand.

The cost burdens for consumers are causing some people to get choosier about how they spend their money, often splurging on a show or two rather than going to many events throughout the year.

Tiffanie Williams, a 42-year-old who lives in Sebring, Florida, used to get out to live music and comedy shows weekly, pinging between Los Angeles, San Diego and Ontario, Calif. In the past year, she's been to one concert—Post Malone, for which she paid $178.

LINDSEY WASSON/AP PHOTO

Stephanie Wu, left, and Charlotte Nip of Vancouver pose for a video in front of the BC Place Stadium during Taylor Swift's "The Eras Tour" in Vancouver, British Columbia, on December 6, 2024.

LINDSEY WASSON/AP PHOTO

Taylor Swift performs during "The Eras Tour" in Vancouver, British Columbia, on December 6, 2024.

"If you're wanting to get out, it's too expensive," she said.

For Veterans Day weekend she gave her fiance a choice between taking a cruise or seeing his favorite band, Rush. He chose the prog rock heroes. After searching for tickets at three different locations—and passing on $500 for nosebleeds—this week she landed on a pair for a Tampa show for $978. She signed up for Afterpay and is on a payment plan for $93 a month.

Public outrage over the costs of concertgoing helped lead to a blockbuster Justice Department antitrust lawsuit against Live Nation, the world's largest concert promoter, accusing it of overcharging fans and pressuring venues to use its Ticketmaster platform. Though the federal government settled its case, a collection of state attorneys general carried on and won a jury verdict against Live Nation.

Live Nation has denied that it is an illegal monopoly and said claims about its power in the market are overblown, saying that artists set the prices, not venues or promoters. The states are seeking to have Live Nation and Ticketmaster broken up. The remedial portion of the case is pending.

There are signs that the high costs might be putting pressure on demand for shows that don't quite hit the bucket-list threshold. Music fans online in recent months discussed what became known as "blue dot fever" referring to the blue circles showing unsold, face-value seats available for a show at a concert venue. Some artists have canceled shows due to softer than expected sales.

Live Nation says less than 1% of shows on the books this year have been canceled.

Shows for the top 100 tours in North America grossed a total of $1.9 billion, the same as last year, according to Pollstar. SeatGeek's average resale price has remained essentially flat at $203 in the year ending June 23, compared to $206 the same period a year earlier, while sales volume was up 20%.

"As long as you're somebody's favorite artist, the touring market is really good," said Nathan Hubbard, chief executive of music management firm Firebird Music Holdings. "If there aren't fans that are putting tattoos of your lyrics on their body, you might be having a problem."

Executives say the post-pandemic demand hasn't waned, though some acknowledge a pullback in spending from lower-income households for shows in smaller venues. Overall, people are waiting until closer to the concert date to buy tickets while considering how to spend their money.

Music fans want an experience, fueling demand for upgraded and VIP options such as skip-the-line entry or access to more exclusive viewing areas, said Bryan Perez, chief executive of AXS, the ticketing service owned by sports and live music giant Anschutz Entertainment Group.

"People are deciding how they want to spend their entertainment dollars," Perez said.

Earlier this year, Karen Datangel and a friend logged onto Ticketmaster, hoping to score tickets to a Olivia Rodrigo concert in December at the Oakland Arena.

Datangel, a 37-year-old government communications employee and devoted pop music fan who has seen stars like Taylor Swift and Sabrina Carpenter, got stuck in the online queue. Her friend, though, found two seats, far from the stage, at $261 each.

The friend opted out, but Datangel didn't give up: She ultimately decided to pay $400 for a spot in a suite reserved by another friend.

She said the price is worth it: "Concerts have made up some of the greatest experiences and memories that I've had in my life."

Airlines Are Installing New Luxury Seats, but No One Is Allowed to Sit in Them

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Lie-flat seats in private pods face long waits for safety certifications

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Airlines are in an amenities arms race to stand apart and fly passengers in comfort and style. Seats are at the forefront, with private pods kitted out with extra storage space, wireless charging, ottomans and retractable privacy dividers. U.S. and European aviation safety authorities are saying not so fast.

Seats are often the last things installed on a new plane. In some cases, the lengthy process left plane makers with jets they can't yet deliver to airlines.

"We have airplanes sitting for customers, completely done, waiting for seat certifications," Boeing Chief Executive Kelly Ortberg said last month.

Everything from seatbelt buckle mechanisms to door latches could change how passengers might evacuate in an emergency, or how they are protected in a crash, Federal Aviation Administration chief Bryan Bedford told reporters last month.

"You don't usually think of seats as novel technology," Bedford said. "We see seats, suites, especially in the premium section of the airplane, that just don't pass our human factors tests for impact."

The testing isn't new. But more complex, customized seat designs and new materials are raising new questions for regulators, said Gary Weissel, a consultant who has assisted airlines in developing, certifying and installing new interiors.

When seats are installed at an angle, like the herringbone configuration airlines have used to fit more flatbed seats, passengers can experience different types of injuries in a crash, compared with the forward-facing seats that have populated coach cabins for decades. Roomier pods and other spacious premium seats allow bodies to go flailing in unusual ways.

"Even when we're changing the placement of the passenger a little bit, even when we're changing the material to be sleeker looking, we still need to make sure that it meets all of those critical criteria," said Caitlin Locke, the FAA's safety chief.

Cabin safety improvements are one reason that passengers can walk away from accidents today that would have been fatal decades ago, Locke said at a conference this month.

Crash tests and dummies

New seats are run through a gantlet of tests to prove that they're safe for passengers.

They are mounted on sleds and fired down a track to make sure they remain structurally sound when subjected to 16 times the force of gravity. Crash dummies are evaluated for injuries. New lightweight materials must pass flame tests to make sure they won't ignite and spread fire throughout a cabin.

Coming up with fixes can be time consuming, and delays are costing airlines.

When Lufthansa's new Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners started flying last year, only four of the 28 business-class seats were available to book, with the rest blocked off. It flew that way until mid-March, after the FAA approved most of them—though three seats in the second row are still blocked.

That set back Lufthansa's plan to upsell customers on five different seating options within its business-class cabins on the Dreamliner.

JOANNA PLUCINSKA/REUTERS

A view of a plane's interior is displayed as Lufthansa presents its new first class and business class Allegris cabin in Munich, Germany, September 29, 2025.

Singapore Airlines has pushed back the launch of its first retrofitted Airbus A350-900 long-haul plane to early next year, citing delays in certification of one of the seats, along with industrywide supply-chain constraints.

Even though Air France KLM's sister airline, has business-class seats similar to those KLM installed on its Airbus A350, a spokesperson for the European Union Aviation Safety Agency said KLM's new business-class design includes more rows and different angles. That requires additional safety testing.

Delta Air Lines had new Airbus A321neo planes in storage waiting for new lie-flat seats to be approved. But certification could stretch into 2028, and Delta is weighing whether to go with another supplier. Meanwhile, Delta temporarily installed 44 of its less-luxe first-class recliners on seven of those planes for cross-country flights.

Safran the manufacturer of Delta's new lie-flat seats, said certification—especially for business-class seats—has become more complex over the years, given new designs and features as well as technology that enables better understanding of passenger safety. The company said it is working with Delta to address the latest requirements.

Seat selection

The FAA said it is working with the industry to communicate and catch issues earlier in the development process, and avoid pitfalls.

Riyadh Air in early 2023 placed an order for a fleet of Boeing long-haul jets, aiming to challenge the dominance of rivals in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar while supercharging Saudi Arabia's connectivity. It targeted the first half of 2025 for its first commercial flights, giving the carrier two years to get its new cabin and seats certified.

That proved too tight a deadline.

Riyadh Air was able to get over the finish line a year behind schedule with tweaks to its seat design. It was a relative victory compared with the yearslong battles competitors are still fighting to get theirs flying.

"I could write a Ph.D. on this subject, believe me," said Tony Douglas, Riyadh Air's CEO, in an interview earlier this month, shortly after the airline's first commercial flight landed at London Heathrow airport.

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100th Anniversary: Rediscovering the Gennadius Library

Sustaining the vision of the Gennadius Library's founder 100 years on

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His vantage point was in no way obvious. From the 19th century into the 20th, Western historiography had been influenced by the racialist, genetic theory of a Bavarian gymnasium professor named Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer. He viewed peoples primarily as biologically distinct groups and maintained that the modern Greeks have no Hellenic blood. Although he could not but acknowledge the obvious continuity of the Greek language, and certain cultural vestiges preserved through Byzantium, the thrust of his thesis—and the part from which he gained fame — was race-based.

Critically, Fallmerayer's book was published in 1830, the very year of the establishment of the Greek state and of the start of the effort to establish a Modern Greek identity. A key part of that effort was the creation of a new form of the Greek language called "katharevousa" (puristic Greek) which was based on the Attic Greek dialect, the language of Plato and Aristotle. This move had been proposed by the towering Greek intellectual Adamantios Korais, who was much influenced by European Enlightenment ideas and who first argued for the cultural continuity of the Greeks.

It was not until the 1860s-1870s that the founder of Modern Greek historiography, Constantine Paparrigopoulos, established the continuity of the Greek people from antiquity until his day, in his monumental six-volume History of the Hellenic Nation. Therein, he debunked Edward Gibbon's theory that Byzantium (or more properly the Eastern Roman Empire) was a 1,000-year period of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

JEFF VANDERPOOL

Gennadius fellows study in the library.

Greek was adopted as the primary language of state administration in the early seventh century, and remained the language of the empire until its fall in 1453.

Gennadius' motives: his father and the continuity of Hellenism

In an exclusive interview with *TO BHMA International Edition,* Dr. Maria Georgopoulou, who has served as director of the library for over two decades, offers rare insight into what led a Greek diplomat and passionate bibliophile to undertake a project of such national significance, and why he entrusted it to the Americans, rather than to his own compatriots.

Gennadius' initial motive was a visceral one, the desire to keep alive the memory of his father, whom he lost at the tender age of 10, and to uphold values he believed would have made him proud.

"This impulse shaped not only his life, but also his collecting vision. For Gennadius, books were not simply objects of scholarship or beauty. They were witnesses to the continuous history of Hellenism, from antiquity through Byzantium and into the modern era. Documenting and preserving that continuity became something close to a personal mission," Georgopoulou says.

In England, Gennadius encountered the outlook prevailing among cultured Westerners throughout the continent as well: Adoration of the ancient Greeks and their accomplishments in all fields, but disinterest and complete ignorance of Hellenic culture beyond that.

"This realization profoundly affected him. Through journalism, essays, lectures, and above all through the books he collected, he sought to demonstrate that Greece had never ceased contributing to the intellectual and cultural life of the world. His library became, in many ways, an argument in material form. It was intended to offer proof that Greek civilization did not end in antiquity, but continued to evolve and shape history across the centuries," Georgopoulou notes.

Gennadius' dismissal from the diplomatic corps

The financial collapse of Greece in 1893 and his dismissal from the diplomatic service seem to have played a role in Gennadius' decision to bequeath his library to an American scholarly institution that he trusted and held in high esteem.

In the speech he delivered at the inauguration of the Gennadius Library, on April 23, 1926, he spoke warmly of America and of the young American universities, whose energy, idealism, and intellectual ambition he deeply respected.

"I believe it was precisely this spirit—the optimism and dynamism of American academic life—that convinced him that his collection would find a secure and meaningful future there," the library's director suggests.

As befits an edifice dedicated to the diachronic impact of Hellenism, the library, constructed between 1924 and 1926 by the New York architectural firm of Van Pelt and Thompson, the original building is one of the most important neoclassical structures in Athens.

The Greek government donated the land in the early 1920s, and the building was constructed with the then astronomical grant of $250,000 ($5.3mn in purchasing power today) from the Carnegie Corporation, which supported libraries around the world as a means to advance society.

GENNADIUS LIBRARY

Archival photo of the Gennadius Library opening on April 23, 1926.

GENNADIUS LIBRARY

A cutout figure of an Ottoman-era librarian set up in front of the Gennadius Library.

The aim of reaching younger generations

Georgopoulou reflects on the joys and challenges of leading an institution of such cultural importance.

"The centennial inevitably turns one's thoughts toward the future—and for me, that future lies above all in reaching younger generations and ensuring that the library continues to speak meaningfully to them," she says, noting that enriching collections is a top priority.

"Every important acquisition—whether a rare book, a map, a painting, or an archival document— brings with it a deep sense of fulfillment, because one feels entrusted, however briefly, with adding another layer to the library's living history. Some acquisitions carry a particularly personal resonance. One that meant a great deal to me was a map of Venetian Crete depicting the Ottoman siege of Candia (Heraklion) in 1669, a subject closely connected to my own doctoral research."

More fellowships, more fresh research

Over the last six years, the library has increased the number of research fellowships from one to seven, allowing more young scholars to engage with the library's rich collections in order to advance and complement existing scholarship.

"Watching these fellows engage with the treasures of the library and transform them into fresh scholarship has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my tenure. It has also strengthened the Gennadius Library's role, not simply as a repository of books and archives, but as a true center of intellectual life and academic exchange," Georgopoulou says.

Exhibitions as narrative, digitalization

Special exhibitions have been important in drawing in a wider public.

"Exhibitions have been especially important to me, perhaps because of my own background as an art historian. I have always believed that exhibitions are far more than displays of objects. They are narratives in space, and a powerful way of telling stories and connecting audiences emotionally and intellectually with the past. Through exhibitions, the library has been able to reach audiences well beyond the academic world and invite them into conversation with history, literature, art, and memory," she underlines.

Georgopoulou stresses that a top priority now is to achieve a digital expansion that will make the library's riches accessible internationally, through "the creation of platforms and tools that are elegant, intuitive, and welcoming to users, rather than cumbersome or opaque."

"If the Gennadius Library is to remain vital in the century ahead, it must continue to preserve the past, while also finding new ways to communicate it to future generations."

Attracting a wider public beyond scholars

A core commitment of the library, Georgopoulou maintains, has always been to ensure that it serves not only scholars, but the wider public as well. A number of visitors come to utilize the rich 19th and 20th century materials to research the history of their families, villages or surrounding regions.

The opportunity of the Gennadius library to connect with a broader audience was much enhanced by the addition of the Cotsen Hall auditorium at the American School.

It was fully equipped for the development of a dynamic program of lectures, symposia, concerts, theatrical performances, and public events that opened the collections of the library to audiences far beyond the traditional academic world.

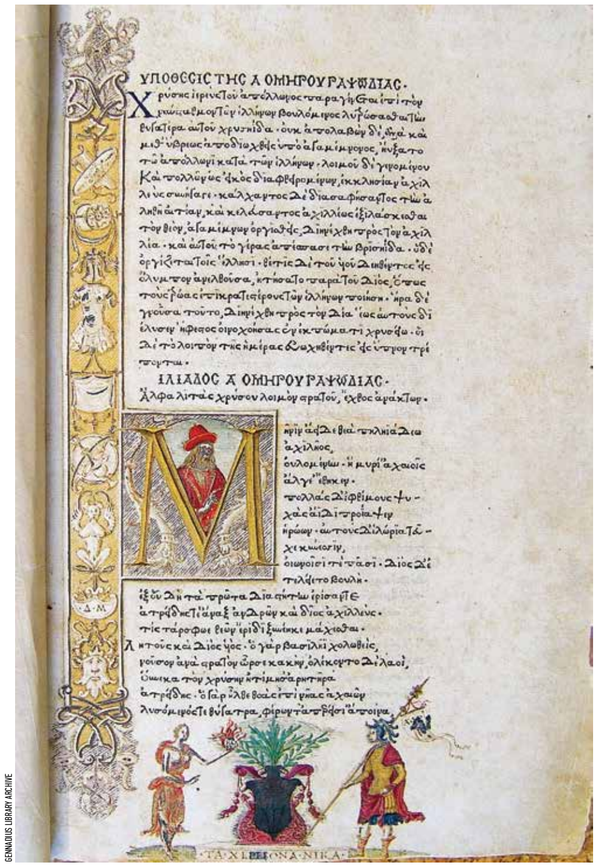
"Through these programs, we have tried to communicate not only the richness of the library's materials, but also their broader educational and cultural value to people who might never otherwise enter a research library," the director notes.

Programs to attract school students

One of the library's most important goals in recent years has been to reach younger audiences, particularly school students, by creating programs designed for them.

A recent competition based on possessions of the library drew entries from students at schools around the country. They were invited to create a work inspired by the history and culture of their own region - whether in the form of an essay, a poem, a video, or a work of art. There were 45 entries.

"For us, this initiative represents something of a pioneering project. It was an attempt to encourage young people to engage creatively with history, memory, and local identity through the collections of the library. That, perhaps more than anything else, gives us hope for the future. It strengthens the sense that the Gennadius Library can continue to inspire new generations and remain a living presence far beyond its walls," Georgopoulou underlines.



GENNADIUS LIBRARY ARCHIVE

First edition of Homer's *Iliad*, one of the many treasures housed in the library's archives.

Archives: a treasure trove of literature, recent history

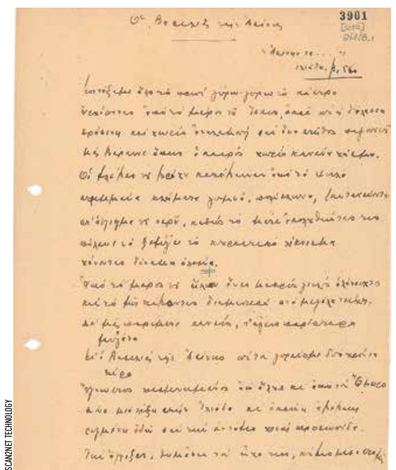
Since Gennadius' death in 1932, over time the focus of the library's acquisitions gradually shifted from the past to the present and future. This transformation is illustrated by the donation of major literary and political figures' archives, which constitute one of the most important and indeed unique treasures of the library.

These include the archive of Heinrich Schliemann, who famously excavated at Mycenae and Troy, and the papers of Nobel Prize-winning poets George Seferis, and Odysseas Elytis. The library is also home to the archives of important political figures, including Emmanuel Tsouderos, who served as prime minister of the Greek government-in-exile during WWII, and Constantine Tsatsos, a scholar, intellectual, and later the first president of the post-junta Hellenic Republic.

Continued expansion of collections

Aside from topics of particular interest to Gennadius himself—the Eastern Question, the place of Hellenism within the Eastern Mediterranean, and Greece's relationship with the wider world—the collections continue to expand in areas such as 20th century political history—including the Greek Civil War and the history of Cyprus—and the cultural and literary production of Modern Greece.

"In recent years, the library has continued to acquire the archives of major contemporary writers, including Vassilis Vassilikos, Angelis Raptopoulos, and of Margarita Lymberaki and members of her literary circle. Of course, there are also music archives, including those of maestro Dimitri Mitropoulos [one of the greatest, internationally renowned conductors of the 20th century], as well as the archive of folklorist Elias Petropoulos, which includes the baglama of [pioneering rebetiko music masters] Vasilis Tsitsanis and Yorgos Mpatis," Georgopoulou says.



SCANCHET TECHNOLOGY

A page of Odysseas Elytis' book housed in the library's archives.

Strong link to American School

As the library remains part of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, it also maintains a strong commitment to the modern history of archaeology itself—including the preservation, restoration, and interpretation of monuments and archaeological sites.

"In this way, the library continues to bridge the worlds of history, literature, politics, archaeology, and cultural memory across the centuries," Georgopoulou notes.

Digitization of collections: Opportunities, challenges

Digitization is considered one of the great opportunities—but also one of the great challenges—facing research libraries today.

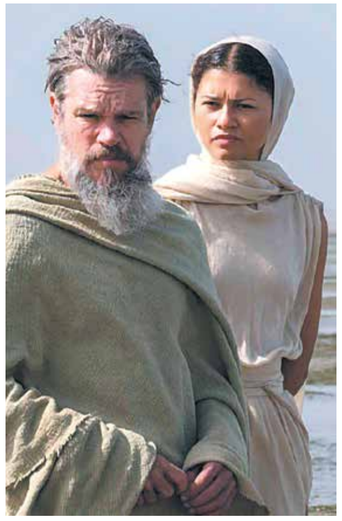
"People often imagine that digitization simply means scanning an object, but actually it is a far more demanding and expensive undertaking. For such a project to have real value, every item must be carefully catalogued, documented, and integrated into a system that allows researchers and the wider public to understand and navigate the material meaningfully," the library's director underlines.

"At the Gennadius Library, we have approached digitization very consciously as a way of preserving and sharing unique cultural material. Since the first grant we received from European Union funds in 2007, our strategy has been to focus primarily on materials that exist nowhere else - manuscripts, archives, hand-drawn maps, personal papers, works of art, and fragile documentary collections that are difficult to access in their original form."

Creating platforms for democratic access to knowledge

Beyond the painstaking task of digitizing materials, the library's policy has been to place them online, so that the broader public can freely access them.

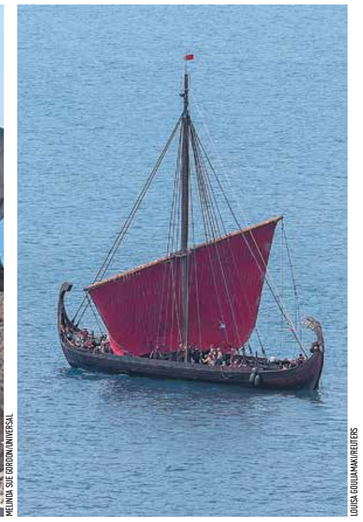
"Ultimately, digitization is not simply about technology. It is about democratizing access to knowledge and ensuring that the collections of the Gennadius Library can continue to inspire researchers, students, and readers far beyond the walls of the institution itself," Georgopoulou stresses.



Matt Damon and Zendaya, as Odysseus and Athena, in a still released from *The Odyssey* earlier this year.

MELINDA SUE GORDON/UNIVERSAL

Anne Hathaway as Penelope in a scene with Tom Holland, who plays Telemachus.

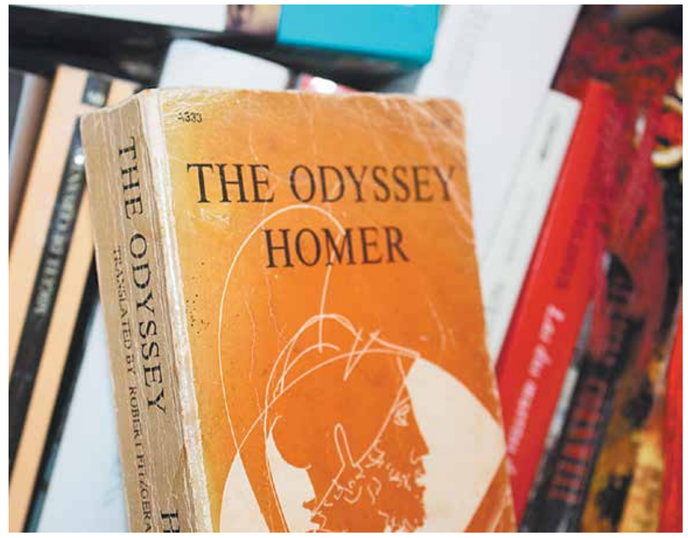


LOUISA GOULIAMAKI/REUTERS

A replica of an ancient warship during filming in the town of Pylos, Greece.

KOTSIARIS NIKITAS/NYTIMES NEWS

Behind the scenes of *The Odyssey* in the Messina region, Greece.



The internet is divided on whether Homer's description of Helen in the book clearly determines her ethnicity.

The Odyssey: Three Thousand Years of Memory and Hollywood Still Got It Wrong

From the beaches of Messinia to the battlegrounds of social media, Nolan's Odyssey is sparking a reckoning over creative freedom and cultural respect

Continued from Page One

Now these questions—and several others—have sparked an "epic" controversy focused on the upcoming adaptation of *The Odyssey* by world-renowned director Christopher Nolan.

NIKOS ZOTOS/NDP PHOTO AGENCY

Behind the scenes photo taken during filming of Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* in Pylos, Greece.

From Cinecittà to Christopher Nolan

The Odyssey returned to the screen recently with Uberto Pasolini's *The Return* (2024), an adaptation of the final book of Homer's epic that shifts the focus from adventure to Odysseus' long-awaited homecoming.

Earlier screen versions were captivated by the hero's legendary journey, rather than his return to Ithaca. In the summer of 1997, one of Athens' major cultural events was the premiere at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus of Andrei Konchalovsky's American television miniseries *The Odyssey*, starring Puerto Rican actor Armand Assante. The production highlights Odysseus' encounters with the Cyclops, Aeolus, Circe, and Calypso, racing through the epic's most celebrated adventures in the style of a lavishly illustrated retelling.

More than four decades earlier, Kirk Douglas had portrayed the King of Ithaca in *Ulysses*, directed by Mario Camerini. Produced during the golden age of Rome's Cinecittà Studios—the "Hollywood on the Tiber" era—the film embraced myth and fantasy through visual effects that amazed audiences at the time and now exude a distinctly charming artificiality.

Nolan's $250 million production began filming in Greece in early March 2025, following the arrival of Matt Damon, who portrays Odysseus. On-location shooting took place across several iconic Greek sites, including Acrocorinth and the Messinia region—Almyrolakka beach, historic Methoni castle, and the famously scenic Voidokilia bay.

It was also reported that the Greek state contributed €6.5 million in public funding to the production—a figure accessible on the Diavgeia transparency portal. In other words, Greek taxpayers helped finance a film rooted in their own cultural heritage and shot on their own soil, but paradoxically featuring not a single Greek actor.

The diaspora speaks

Since the production released its first trailers and announced its cast, a wave of reactions has swept across social media platforms and YouTube, with audiences from around the world expressing their fury in what has become an unprecedented backlash.

Amid this global outcry, members of the Greek Diaspora took a collective stand for the first time—not as scattered voices on social media, but as a unified front. In May 2025, *The Greek City Times* published an open letter to Christopher Nolan on their behalf: "We did not vanish!" they declared.

The letter traces more than 3,000 years of Greek identity, arguing that it has endured not by remaining static, but by continuously adapting—from the Mycenaean world and the Homeric epics, through the Classical and Hellenistic eras, the Roman and Byzantine periods, and the centuries of Ottoman rule through to the modern Greek state as part of Europe and the wider world. Throughout all of this, the Greeks emphasized, "something essential remained unbroken: language, memory, and cultural continuity."

'Playing *Ulysses* was the role of my Life'

Thanos Veremis, a Greek historian and emeritus professor at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens with a deep knowledge of Homeric literature, shared his views with *TO BHMA International Edition*—on the upcoming film, but also on how Hollywood filmmakers broadly understand and approach ancient Greek literature.

On the subject of casting, Veremis notes that there are several Greek actors who could have been included. "It's a pity they didn't include Greek actors," he says, adding that he finds the omission very strange. He also expresses reservations about Matt Damon in the role of Odysseus, arguing that his Anglo-Saxon appearance fails to convey the quintessentially Greek cunning and intelligence that define the character. For him, Kirk Douglas's portrayal in the celebrated 1950s adaptation remains the finest embodiment of Odysseus' spirit. Having had the rare opportunity to meet the Hollywood legend in person, he recalls Douglas saying that "*playing* Ulysses *(Odysseus) was the role of his lifetime*"—the performance he truly cherished.

Where artistic freedom meets cultural responsibility

The professor speaks of the profound importance of the Homeric epics: "They are not a piece of mythology, as some people think. They are remarkable and delve into the nature of things. They are fantastic, and to distort them is a crime." For this reason, he firmly disagrees with the idea that filmmakers should enjoy complete creative freedom when adapting works such as *The Odyssey* or *The Iliad*.

"I think there should be a very definite line which separates the content of the story from fiction," he argues. Respect for the culture from which a story originates is essential. Given that Hollywood adaptations reach a global audience, there is a real risk of ancient Greek culture being refracted through a modern artistic lens—one that distorts the reality of the ancient world and leaves audiences with a fundamentally misleading impression of who the ancient Greeks were.

Using *Troy* (2004) as an example, Veremis argues that Brad Pitt's portrayal of Achilles was excellent—"it couldn't have been better"—but that Menelaus and Agamemnon were, by contrast, "ridiculed,"in the film. He points out the internal contradiction: "Helen, who was the most beautiful woman of her time, chose Menelaus among all the young men available to her." He could not, therefore, have been the ugly, stupid, or roguish caricature depicted in the film. "In fact, he was a very good-looking man. He was brave. He fought with Paris and bested him, forcing Paris to beg Hector for help." Such distortions, Veremis warns, offer a deeply skewed picture to a global audience with little prior knowledge of ancient Greek culture. "Menelaus was an admirable character," he insists.

The casting controversy

The casting controversy has taken on an additional dimension with the reported casting of Lupita Nyong'o—a woman of African descent and a vocal advocate for authentic cultural representation—in the dual roles of Helen of Troy and her sister Clytemnestra. In a 2018 BBC interview, Nyong'o stated firmly that African or Black people should be cast when the storytelling concerns African culture. Authenticity and fidelity to heritage, she argued then, should be non-negotiable in Hollywood. Yet in a more recent interview, following the disclosure of her casting, she appeared to shift her position, suggesting that *The Odyssey* is "just mythology" and that questions of authenticity do not therefore apply in the same way.

More than myth

Veremis takes issue with this reasoning. Mythology, he argues, is far from trivial: "In fact, it is a kind of religion. Most ancient Greeks had read the two epics—they were the equivalent for Christians having read the Gospels. These two epics are the epitome of our collective memory." To diminish them, he says, is a serious mistake. "People in antiquity who read *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* believed what they read—they did not think of it as mythology. Alexander the Great was brought up on these texts. He considered Achilles a role model and felt compelled to live up to him." Veremis adds pointedly: "And he was no ordinary individual—he was a man who had Aristotle as his teacher. Greek mythology is very wise. It is not a stupid story a granny tells her grandchildren. It is not a fairy tale."

MARIO ANZUONI/REUTERS

Lupita Nyong'o has received intense backlash after being cast as Helen of Troy in Nolan's film.

Ithaca beyond the silver screen

The myths, wisdom, and values at the core of Homer's epics remain deeply embedded in contemporary Greece. On the island of Ithaca—legendary home of the ingenious Odysseus—*The Odyssey* continues to serve as a central pillar of cultural life and an enduring source of artistic inspiration, as reflected in the island's annual theater festival. Athena Arseni, a municipal official and the festival's Artistic Director, reminds us that *The Odyssey* is a work of global cultural heritage with Greek roots, and that it would certainly be an honor to see more Greek actors participating in a major production such as Nolan's film. Greece, she notes, is home to artists of international caliber, and the presence of Greek talent in works inspired by Greek heritage is always welcome and deeply symbolic.

That said, Arseni is careful to draw a distinction. Every creator who engages with *The Odyssey* brings their own artistic vision to it, and a historical documentary—which seeks to present documented facts—is a fundamentally different enterprise from a feature film that draws on Homer's work to craft a new narrative. After all, she observes, that is the very essence of art: to find inspiration in a great work and approach it through a fresh creative perspective.

As for Ithaca itself, Arseni is unequivocal: the island does not need a film production to secure its place on the world cultural map. For thousands of years, it has stood as a universal symbol of homecoming, hope, patience, and the human capacity to endure in the face of adversity.

And it will continue to do so long after the credits roll.

Tassos Mantzavinos: ‘Painting helped me survive.’

The painter speaks with *TO BHMA International Edition* about memory, loss, Karagiozis, the sea that turned into trauma, and art that cannot exist without lived experience.

By Panos Kougias

Tassos Mantzavinos’ studio has little in common with those meticulously untidy spaces one often encounters in artists’ ateliers. There is nothing staged for the visitor’s gaze. Wood, paints, constructions, figures that are awaiting completion or have seemingly run their course—all coexist without vying for the spotlight. It is a space that seems inhabited more by memories than by objects.

He speaks the way he paints. There are no straight lines here. He starts with a memory, moves on to a painter he loved, returns to his childhood, pauses a while on Karagiozis, recalls his father, laughs, falls silent, then continues. His speech is associative but not chaotic. His meanderings circle a constant axis: the effort to understand where the images he paints come from. “You have to be a bit of a worldly monk,” he remarks at one point. And perhaps this phrase sums up not just his own journey, but an entire way of viewing art.

I get the feeling that painting was your way of coping with life. Was it?

Absolutely. If it weren’t for painting, I don’t know where I would have ended up. It helped me survive. And I don’t mean that metaphorically. When I lost my father, I was still very young. That event defined my entire life. Loss and loneliness became experiences I carried around without knowing it. Later, I realized that everything I painted was bound up with that trauma. Painting doesn’t heal in the sense of removing the pain. But it allows you to turn the pain into something else. To give it shape. To confront it head-on. That’s what it did for me.

When I was painting, it was like I was putting the things within me in order—things that were in a state of total confusion. That is why I believe a painter cannot create with technique alone. They must have lived. They must have experienced rejection and sorrow, loss and love, joy. If they haven’t been through all that, what will they paint? Picasso used to say, “First I live, then I paint.” I agree completely. Lived experience comes first. Painting comes afterwards.

Still, you studied under two great masters: Yannis Moralis and Dimitris Mytaras. How can someone find their own voice after being exposed to such powerful influences?

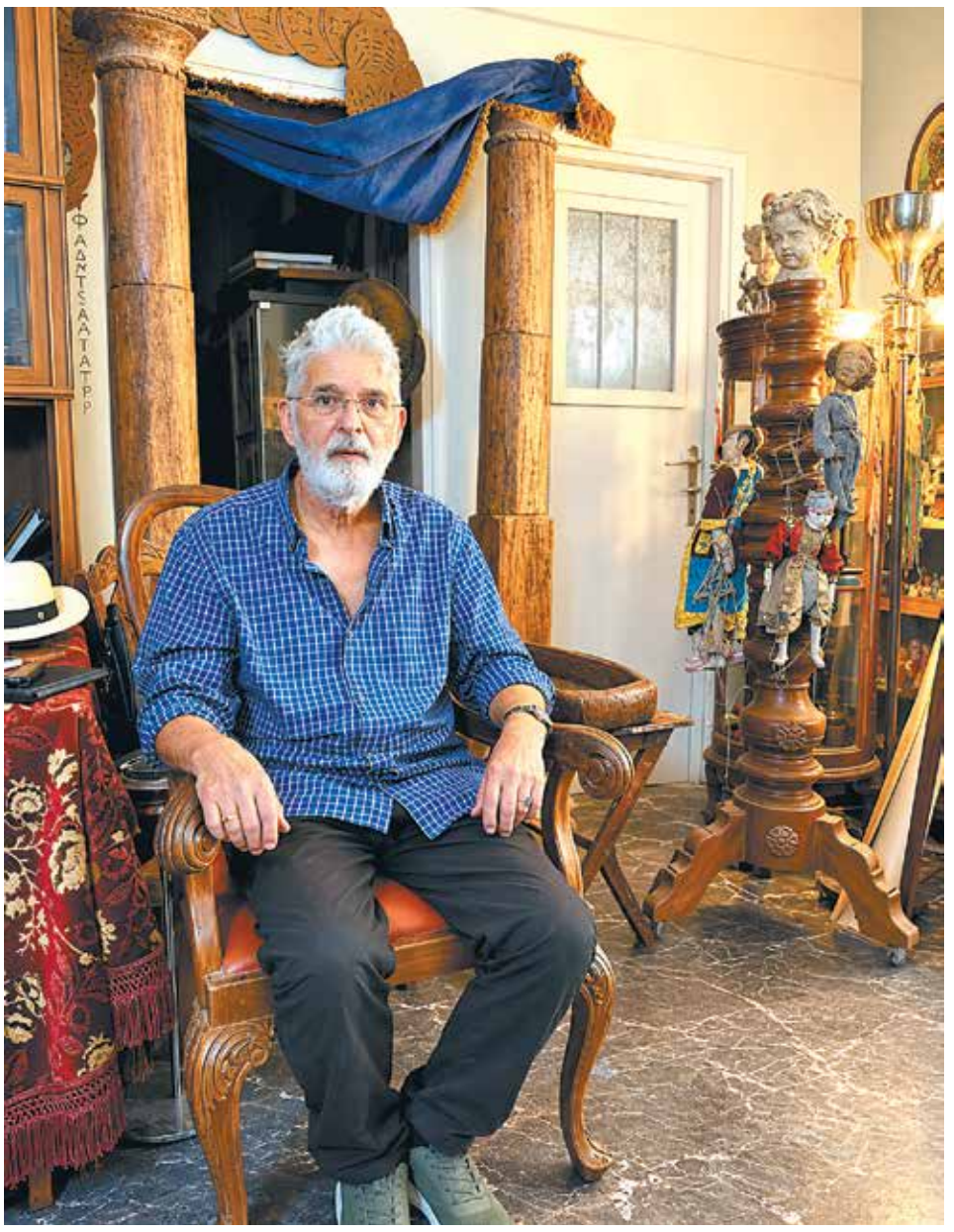
With difficulty. And through a process that feels almost violent. I learned a tremendous amount at the Athens School of Fine Arts. Moralis and Mytaras were exceptional teachers. However, at some point I realized that if I continued to paint solely through what I’d learned, I would never find myself. I had to forget. To discard things. To walk away from the safety of “good painting”. The hard part is recognizing what you need and pursuing that, even if it leads you into a dead end. It’s something every painter has to endure. If they don’t, they’ll remain a good student—nothing more. They never grow into themselves.

Karagiozis appears time and again in your work. What did you find in the shadow puppet theater that you couldn’t find elsewhere?

Karagiozis is one of the greatest visual experiences of my life. I never thought of him as folklore. I was deeply moved by Spatharis, who created an entire world out of almost nothing. With a single nail, a few tools, and his own hands. There is great art in that. I am very interested in this relationship between play and creation. Play is something incredibly serious. If a painter stops playing, if they take themselves too seriously, it’s over for them. They lose their freedom. I think art must retain this child-like spirit—not childishness, but the ability to rediscover the world as if seeing it for the first time. People who create without losing this innocence move me far more than those who rely solely on theory. No matter how much knowledge it requires, painting remains a deeply physical business. It’s in the hands, the body, the material.

The sea, ships, dark forests and large figures feature over and over again in your work. Are they memories or symbols?

They are everything all at once. I don’t sit down and say, “Now I’ll paint this, because it symbolizes that.” Most of it comes from deep within. The sea, for instance, is anything but an idyllic image for me. The house we lived in before my father died was right by the sea. We lost him in a port. So, within me, the sea became linked to death. That is why, even today, I struggle to view it the way most people do. For others, it’s about holidays, feeling carefree. For me, it comes with a different set of memories. You don’t think about these things when you paint. They occur to you later. You see that something keeps on reappearing. And then you realize that the images that live within you are far more powerful than your own decisions. That’s also why I don’t believe a painter is in complete control of their work. The work knows more than they do.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PANOS KOUGIAS/TO BHMA INTL EDITION

Painter Tassos Mantzavinos welcomed *TO BHMA International Edition* into his studio for a one-on-one interview.

Alongside your paintings, you also create wooden constructions. What do you get out of the process?

I don’t think of them as sculptures. They are constructions. They stem from the same need that gives rise to painting, but the craftsman’s hand is more central here. I enjoy cutting, nailing, and assembling things. It is a different kind of joy. And, once again, it involves play. We say we “play a role” in the theater, and we “play music”. Well, the same is true here. If that aspect is lost, if everything is reduced to seriousness and theory, something is badly wrong. I don’t consider myself an art intellectual. I never was. I wasn’t good at school; I didn’t study much. I learned through the work itself. I try to remain humble before painting. The rest is for others to judge.

Today, art seems increasingly bound up with exposure and the market. What’s your take on that?

You cannot ignore reality. We all want to make a living from our work. There’s nothing bad about selling a painting. The point is that it shouldn’t become the reason you paint. Everyone’s in such a rush these days. Young people want to become famous overnight, to sell and gain recognition. But painting requires time. It requires solitude. You need to be able to take rejection. You have to be a bit of a “worldly monk”—to isolate yourself so you can get a feel for who you are. If you go into painting thinking everything’s going to come easily, you’re in for a disappointment. Art’s a journey that requires you to persevere and believe in yourself, even when others can’t see what you’re trying to achieve.

If a young person told you today that they wanted to be a painter, what would the first piece of advice you’d give them?

I would tell them to start by asking themselves if there really isn’t something else they could do. If there isn’t, and their need to paint is that deep-seated, I’d tell them to press on with it. Still, they should know that the road ahead will be full of difficulties, rejection, and doubts. Painting is not a job in the conventional sense. It is a way of life. It takes patience, endurance, and a lot of hard work. Above all, it needs you to remain receptive. To never tell yourself you’ve arrived. I’m still searching. I have obsessions that keep on circling back. Every time I think a cycle has come to an end, I realize a new one is beginning. That’s probably the most beautiful thing about painting: it never ends.

A colorful array of painted sculptures.