



Αδαμάντιος Διαμαντής, *Φυτεύτριες* (1932-33)

display 1

Χριστίνα Λάμπρου,

Ιστορικός Τέχνης.

A/M 1501 | Αδαμάντιος Διαμαντής, *Φυτεύτριες* (1932-33)

'Born in the city [...] I desired the countryside, the villages and their world',¹

'...drawing with a pencil like a needle...'²

In the summer of 1931, Adamantios Diamantis, his wife Antoinette and their two boys spent two and a half months away from the busy centre of Nicosia in the secluded mountain village of Ayios Theodoros. Lengthy summer vacations spent in the cooler mountain villages were not uncommon among Nicosians, but for Diamantis, who had returned from London some years earlier (1926) and had since been searching for inspiration, this vacation was in his own words, a revelation.

In Ayios Theodoros, he 'comes face to face with a world whose existence he had not previously suspected'.³ He describes this 'discovery'⁴ as a 'real revelation'.⁵ 'After that I saw nothing else in Cyprus that fascinated me so much as the study of the island's people',⁶ he is quoted as saying in one of his numerous references to those summer months in the mountain village that played such a dramatic role in his work. The anthropological enthusiasm so evident will charge his human landscapes.

He returns to Ayios Theodoros the next summer (1932).⁷ He fills two sketchbooks with small-scale quick drawings of the daily village life that he had been so thrilled by in those two summers: 'I could have based an entire life's work on the Ayios Theodoros sketchbooks. The things I put down there with such trepidation, drawing with a pencil like a needle, are my most important works'.⁸

'The Planters', in the form of the oil painting owned by the State Gallery was painted in 1933, in the artists' studio in Nicosia. It is based on those first sketches made from life in Ayios Theodoros in 1931, 'with a pencil like a needle'. The work itself was 'completed in 1933, after various preliminary attempts of which the most important are those of 1931'.⁹

¹ Adamantios Diamantis, *The World of Cyprus, a Narration*. (Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, 1991), p. 60.

² Eleni Nikita, *Adamantios Diamantis, his life and work*, (Cultural Foundation of the Bank of Cyprus, 1998) p. 44.

³ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

⁵ In his 'Notes' in the Catalogue for his retrospective exhibition, 1978, Diamantis writes: 'It was not till 1931 – 32 that I had a real revelation in the village of Ayios Theodoros in the mountains and this was more than enough to make me want to delve deeper into the life of the people, its beauty, its austerity and its reality'.

⁶ Quote from an interview of the artist in the newspaper *Eleftheria* on 8 May 1957, as quoted in Nikita, p. 43.

⁷ He visits the village again and again and finally in 1964 he buys a house there, where he will spend his summers from then on.

⁸ Nikita, p. 44.

⁹ Ibid., p. 44.

The revelation of Ayios Theodoros for Diamantis, is the discovery of what will form the subject matter of his interest(s) from then onward. Having mastered artistic *form* through his training in London, in Agios Theodoros Diamantis discovers the *content* of his work.

In the monograph dedicated to the life and work of Diamantis, Eleni Nikita notes that the stay in Ayios Theodoros opens a new phase in the artist's work: 'After 1931, Diamantis began to introduce the human figure into his paintings, marking the start of his progression toward the formation of his own personal idiom in painting'.¹⁰ For Chrysanthos Christou, 'The Planters' is the first painting from a category where landscape and the human figure are combined: 'In the works of this category, Diamantis manages to give us the *soul of physical space* and simultaneously its connection to man'.¹¹ Christou, notes that the 'magnificent combination of human form and natural space, suggest –among other things– clearly symbolic associations'.¹²

With the introduction of the human figure in his (until then Cezanne-esque) landscapes, Diamantis challenges the fundamental task of the western artist: to depict a figure in space. A master of drawing, Diamantis reverses the simple task and approaches through interpretation. For Diamantis pictorial space comes to stand in for what Marc Auge calls anthropological place (relational, historical and concerned with identity).¹³ The three female figures in 'The Planters', whose symbolism is secured as we do not see their faces, are planting seeds in an ideological projection that is not difficult to imagine in the political climate of the early thirties in Cyprus. In fact, upon returning from Ayios Theodoros in 1931, Diamantis witnesses (some say participates in) the Octovriana, the first anti-colonial riots in Nicosia. Or, according to Christou: 'Diamantis gives us the archetypal content of his subject, the woman planting to ensure continuation of life. She is not planting a specific seed but every seed, in a space that is every space and is expanding'.¹⁴

From 1931 onward, excursions to villages become central in the work of Diamantis. Moving between the city and the countryside, modernity and tradition, periphery and center, colony and metropolis, Diamantis works in the liminal and the interstitial; the in-between space.¹⁵

It is the desire of place that moves Diamantis and places him –the painter– in the anthropological place that he then presents to us in pictorial form. In 'The Planters' the (ideological) desire of place takes the form of the metaphor of the seed planted in the soil. His desire to depict place, becomes the driving force for his journeys between the city and the village. Moved by this desire the painter drives again and again from the city to the village and back, in a repetitive sequence not dissimilar to the movement of a needle stitching together two disparate parts.

¹⁰ Nikita, p. 120.

¹¹ Chrysanthos Christou in the catalogue for Diamantis's exhibition at the State Gallery, 1994, p. 11.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Marc Auge, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. (London & New York: Verso Books, 1995).

¹⁴ Christou, p. 11.

¹⁵ In *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994, p.2, Homi Bhabha elaborates on his concept of in-betweenness: 'It is in the emergence of the interstices –the overlap and displacement of domains of difference– that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are the subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the parts of difference (usually intoned as race / class /gender, etc)?'