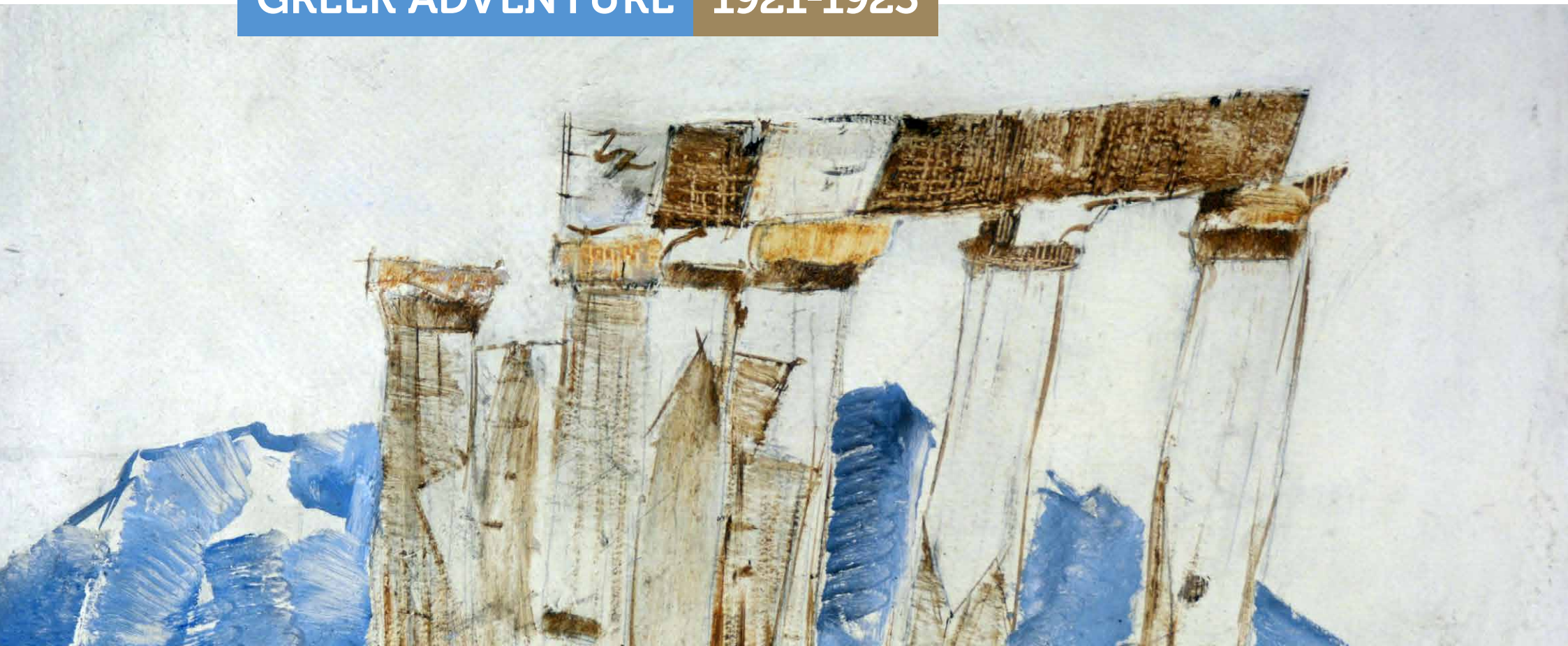


# ALEXIS GRITCHENKO

GREEK ADVENTURE 1921-1923





"From Constantinople,  
Greece

became the launching point  
for a new adventure."<sup>1</sup>

1. "My encounters with French artists" Alexis Critchenko, 1968



"Foreseeing Gritchenko's path upon departing Turkey is a task of ease. As he ventures out of Constantinople, the very air becomes infused with the captivating aroma of Hellas. It is at Kahrié-Djami that he truly experiences the brilliance of Byzantine Greece."<sup>2</sup>

The Greek adventure of Alexis Gritchenko began in Constantinople.

The genesis of his Greek expedition is indebted to the fortuitous meeting with Thomas Whittemore, a preeminent Byzantinist, who contributed to the establishment of the esteemed Saint Sophia Museum in Constantinople.

It was in a room at the Pera Palace Hotel where the painter arranged his collection of watercolours upon

**Hookah Smoker,  
Istanbul**

1921

Tempera & gouache  
on cardboard  
34 x 32,5 cm

a red floor. It underwent an immediate metamorphosis, assuming the appearance of a Persian carpet which Professor Whittemore meticulously examined from every angle.

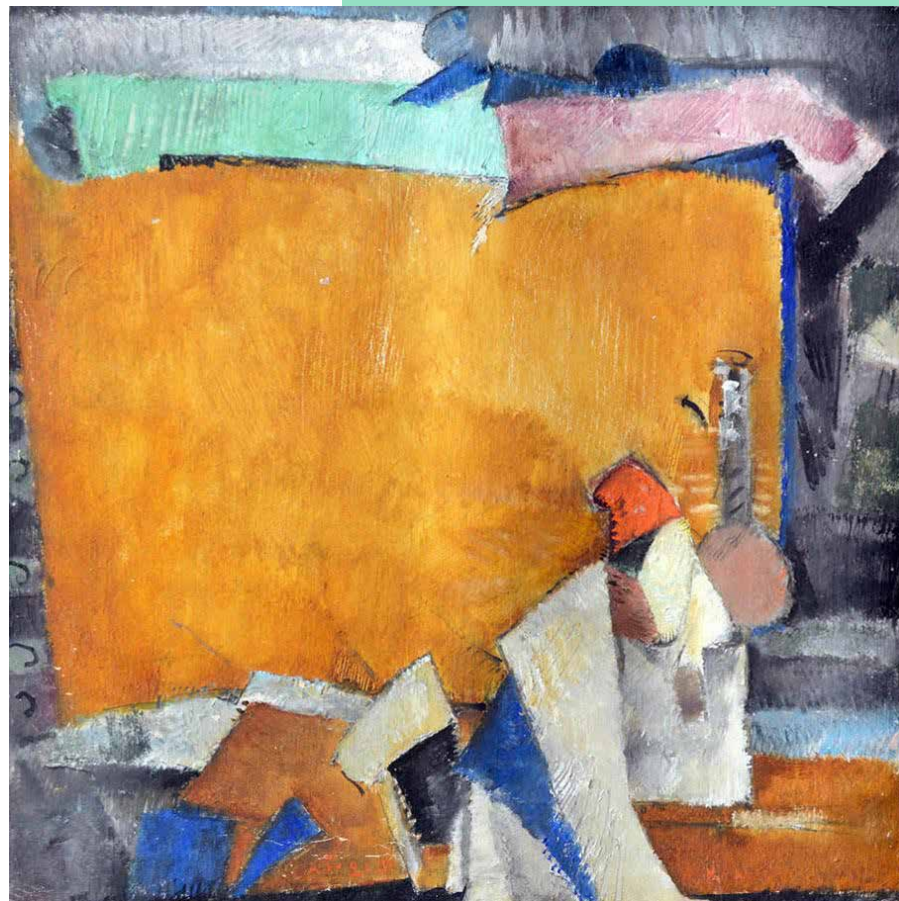
Professor Whittemore purchased twenty of the watercolours and inquired about the artist's aspirations and forthcoming projects.

"I confessed to him that I wished to go to Greece and to work in the enigmatic world of Mystras."<sup>3</sup>

"Get a visa," he replied. "I shall cover your travel expenses and purchase the ticket for your voyage across."<sup>3</sup>

So, it was done.

Departure for Athens on April 1, 1921.



2. "My encounters with French artists", Alexis Gritchenko, 1968

3. "Gritchenko", Pavel Kovjoun, Lviv 1934 p.38.



# Athens



"The Piraeus. It is the port of Athens, towards which the capital is rapidly extending its tentacles, along the electric rails where soon houses and factories will hide this wide ribbon of dusty Attica. A misty atmosphere of the bustling ports, forest of farmhouses and chimneys... A 'metro' station for Athens."<sup>4</sup>

"All of a sudden, as you reached another bend along the picturesque avenue lined with lampposts, there it is, the Acropolis... Although you mentally prepare yourself for amazement, the initial impression falls short of your imagination's grandeur."

## Acropolis, Athens

1922

Tempera & gouache on cardboard  
42 x 66 cm



## Acropolis

1921

Watercolour on paper

19 x 25 cm

"Some may think, 'Is that all?' while others exclaim, 'Ah, it is even more beautiful than I imagined!' Shall I confess that at first, I experienced a confusing mixture of emotions? Thus, in its millennia-long quest to rise beyond itself and pursue the principles of reason and balance that govern it, poor mankind has succeeded in achieving this. This is the pinnacle of its creation, the epitome of its success! These fragmented columns upon this tiny hill are its masterpiece! And indeed, it was the most beautiful, the purest thing in the world, but what I felt at that moment was its pathetic humility, almost its misery. With another turn of the road, the Acropolis vanished."<sup>5</sup>



# Athens



# Mistra



## Mistra

1921

Tempera & gouache on cardboard

40 x 65,5 cm

"Gritchenko retired to Mistra, a notable artistic hub and the birthplace of the first humanism, immediately after classical Athens. Embracing a solitary existence, he immersed himself in the ruins, replete with poignant memories, surrounded by the serene beauty of the Spartan valley and the awe-inspiring slopes of the majestic Taygetos Mountains.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "Gritchenko", P. Kovjun, Lviv 1934, p.38



# Mistra

Enshrouded by a tapestry of brambles, ivy, and thistles, the debris veiled and consumed all, save for the commanding castle atop the summit, the palaces that retained their resplendent grandeur, and the miraculously preserved churches.<sup>6</sup>

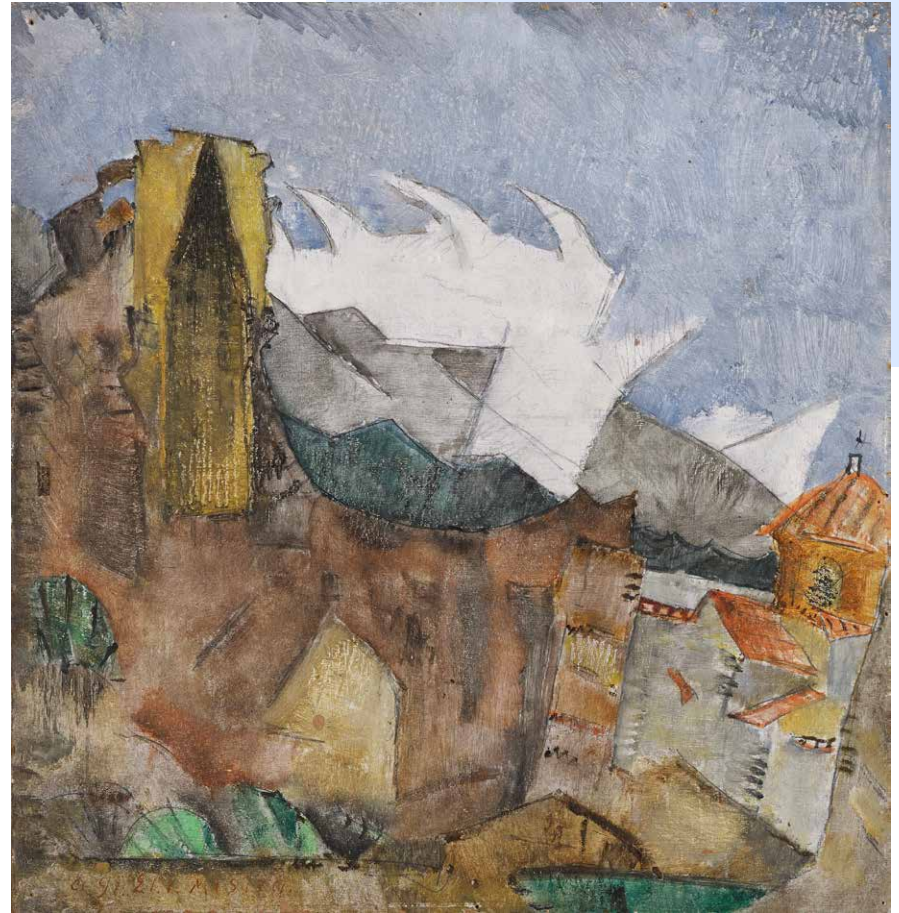
"Even in their current state of disrepair, Mystras' ruins—a vast museum of architecture—remain a testament to the city's former glory. The churches, which provide a rich and varied documentation of the final rebirth of Byzantine art in the 14th and 15th centuries, were mostly spared by the iron, fire, and earthquakes."<sup>7</sup>

"Thus, the Byzantine Empire sank. But the long night of the centuries that followed, the Hellenic conscience remained always awake. Nestled on the slopes of Taygetos, the most magnificent of mountains, a benevolent giant overlooking the Spartan plain, Mystras, reconquered and transformed into a beacon of civilization, stood as the sentinel guarding the grand hope of redemption..."<sup>8</sup>

## Mistra

1921

Tempera & gouache  
on cardboard  
36 x 35 cm



## Bird (Mistra)

1921

Pencil  
on paper  
30 x 20 cm



6. "Gritchenko", P. Kovjun, Lviv 1934, p.38

7. "Mistra", F. Perilla, ed. Perilla Athens 1930, p.157

8. "Mistra", F. Perilla, ed. Perilla Athens 1930, p.38



### **Mistra, the Fortress**

1921

Tempera & gouache

on cardboard

36 x 35 cm



### **Mistra**

1921

Tempera & gouache

on cardboard

33,5 x 35,5 cm

# Mistra

"The fortress. Ascending the steep slopes for half an hour from the despot's palace leads to the summit of the hill where the imposing fortress stands, with its walls and towering structures that still exude an aura of intimidation. Further on, at the highest point, one reaches the citadel, where little remains from the Frankish era: a few walls and a small walkway, as the rest has been modified, like everywhere else, by the Byzantines, Turks, or Venetians. This section tightly hugs the edge of the ravine. Ruined homes surround the courtyard where the Frankish knights and their horses once resided."<sup>9</sup>

9. "Mistra", F. Perilla, ed. Perilla Athens 1930, p.174

**Mistra,  
the Fortress**

1921

Tempera  
& gouache  
on cardboard  
36 x 35 cm



**Mistra**

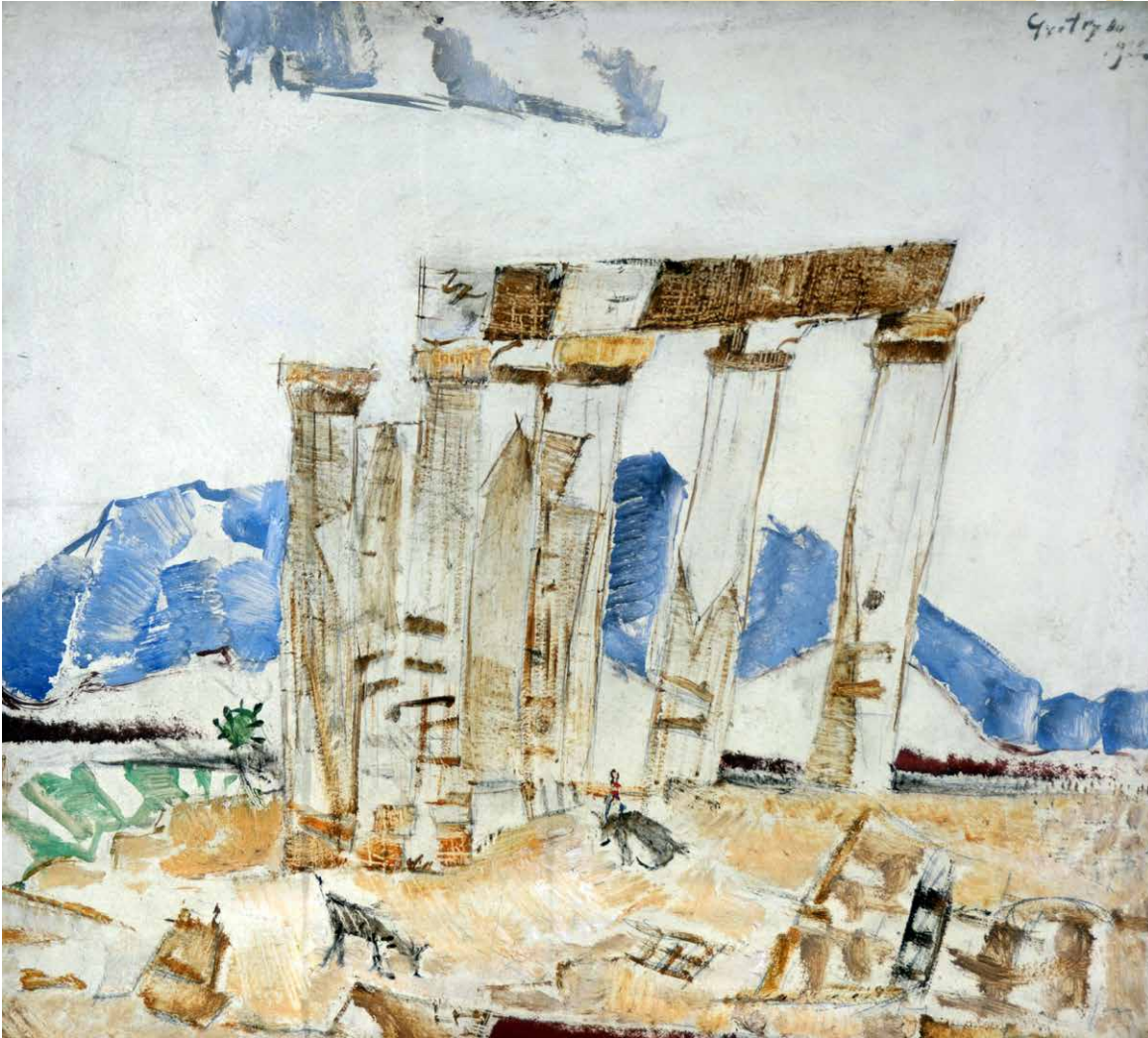
1922

Watercolour  
on paper  
24 x 17,5 cm

Mistra\_



# Peloponnese



**Temple  
of Zeus**  
1922  
Tempera  
& gouache  
on cardboard  
39,5 x 44 cm

"The white roads of Delphi, Mount Olympus, that tall peak of the gods, Epidaurus, not to mention Mycenae and Corinth, were just a few of the places I visited while working and travelling throughout Greece. I ventured into the Peloponnese..."



**Goat**  
1921  
Pencil on paper  
15,5 x 16,5 cm



# Peloponnese

## Landscape of the Peloponnese

1922

Watercolour on paper

25 x 38,5 cm



## The Peloponnese

1921

Tempera & gouache on cardboard

32,5 x 31,5 cm



**Amphitheatre  
in Epidaurus**

1921  
Tempera  
& gouache  
on cardboard  
36 x 35 cm



**Epidaurus**

1921  
Watercolour  
on paper  
32 x 30 cm

Peloponnese \_



**Taygetos, a view  
from Sparta**

1921

Mixed media  
on cardboard  
24 x 33 cm



**Still Life with Fish  
and Lemon**

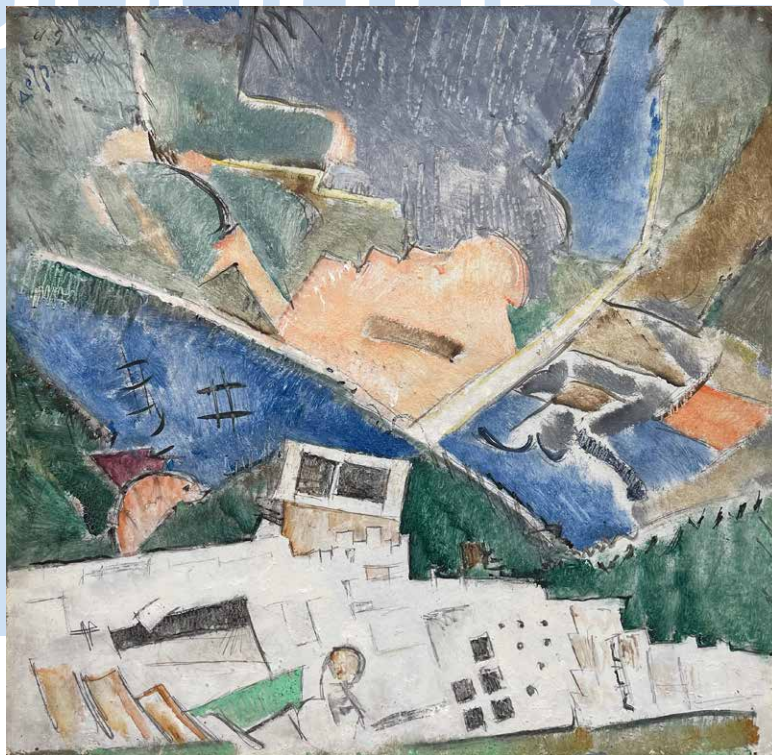
1921

Tempera & gouache  
on cardboard  
36 x 36 cm



Peloponnese

# Peloponnese



## **Delphi**

1921

Tempera and gouache  
on cardboard  
35 x 36 cm



## **Ancient Theater in Delphi**

1923

Watercolour and pencil  
on paper  
32,6 x 35,9 cm



### Rainbow, Milos

1923

Tempera & gouache  
on cardboard  
40 x 50 cm

# The Islands

"I will never forget that wonderful trip on a tiny grimy Greek boat. The sea was fantastic, it evoked vivid memories of Homer's tales that I had eagerly devoured in the past. Crete, adorned with a hundred cities, particularly Heraklion with its renowned museum, unfolded like a Persian carpet against the backdrop of majestic snow-capped mountains. So many islands abound! Milos (home to the Venus de Milo displayed at the Louvre), Andros, and Syros—one elongated and flat, the other resembling a colossal creature emerging from the crimson-hued waters. It was a breathtaking spectacle..."<sup>10</sup>



10. "Lettres to René-Jean", Sylvie Magnan & Jean Bergeron, L'Harmattan 2014, p.18.



**Greece**  
1923  
Tempera & gouache  
on cardboard  
40 x 44,5 cm

# The Islands



**Crete**  
1922  
Watercolour  
on paper  
10 x 19 cm

# The Dancers

"This series of Greek dancers was created during my stays in Greece in 1921 and 1923.

I painted them on-site, amidst my visits to the unforgettable sites of antiquity, purely for my pleasure, driven by my love and passion for ancient dancing. Each piece draws inspiration from vases and bowls of the archaic period, which, in my view, epitomises the pinnacle of Greek artistic splendour.

The figurines, which were frequently extremely little, were enlarged to the same proportions in both dimensions (24x26cm) to create a frieze that measured 5 metres."<sup>11</sup>



**Dancer with Raised Arms**

1921

Gouache & pencil on cardboard  
26 x 23 cm



**Two Dancers**

1921

Gouache & pencil on cardboard  
27 x 24,5 cm

11. "Lettres to René-Jean", p.96

# The Dancers

**Dancer and Satyr**  
1921  
Gouache & pencil  
on cardboard  
25,5 x 22 cm



Pavlos Kawadias, the most significant and prominent art critic in Greece, appreciated my work and said of the dancers, "These dancers, although created with complete artistic freedom by a modern artist, convey the impression of an art as powerful and archaic as that of ancient vases."

André Levinson admired them in Paris. "They represent a unique ensemble. The ancient dances, movements, and customs emanate from them with such rhythm and vitality that one can believe they were captured live in full action in a Greek theatre. What a precious testament to Hellenic choreography."<sup>12</sup>

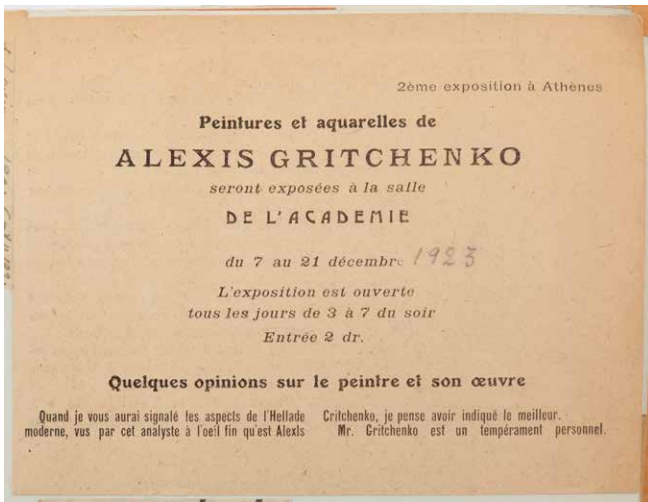
« These paintings (Greek Dancers) were exhibited only once in Athens at the Museum of Byzantine Art (Dr. Adamantios Adamantiou). »<sup>13</sup>

12. "Lettres to René-Jean", p.97

13. Adamantios Adamantiou (1875-1937) was the first director of the Byzantine Art Museum, founded in Athens in 1914.



# Conclusion



Alexis Gritchenko visited Greece twice between 1921 and 1923, with a stopover in Paris in between.

During his time in Greece, two exhibitions were organised to showcase his artwork, including one held at the prestigious Parnassos Society. The success was overwhelming, resulting in the sale of a majority of his paintings.

"The Greek phase of Gritchenko's life holds the potential for a captivating narrative, with the likelihood of uncovering new details. It

is well-documented that he maintained connections with influential figures in the Greek art scene, such as Michalis Oikonomou (1888-1933), Konstantinos Parthenis (1878-1967), and others.

Just as in Istanbul, Gritchenko gave and sold them his works, which may now be held in private collections."<sup>14</sup>

14. "Dynamocolor", Vita Susak, Rodovid Press, 2017, p.131



## In France

After the first journey in Greece, Gritchenko arrived in Paris and made the acquaintance of Paul Guillaume. Upon Guillaume's advice, he entrusted thirty compositions from his Greece cycle to the art dealer Zborowsky. The renowned art collector Dr Albert Barnes attended the exhibition and purchased fourteen artworks, subsequently acquiring three additional pieces.

During that same period, Gritchenko showcased twenty of his watercolours depicting Constantinople at the Salon d'Automne, where they were exhibited alongside the works of Fernand Léger, who served as the chairman of the jury.

When he returned to Paris from his second trip to Greece, he exhibited his Crete, the Land of King Minos at the Dominique Gallery.

During the autumn of 1923, Paul Guillaume acquired ten large works from Gritchenko's latest series, Paris. One of them was exhibited at the Salon d'Automne. The esteemed art dealer wrote about it, stating, "His painting is fresh and luxurious. His colours are pure and joyful. His desire splashes in a bright rhythm, full of style and grandeur, love, and possibly humour as well, that particular humour that is located halfway between irony and pain".<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the "great colourist" was recognized in Paris.

# Conclusion

15. "Les arts à Paris, Les peintres dont on parle", 1924

## Eiffel Tower

1922

Oil on cardboard  
55 x 33 cm





# Addition

## Alexis Gritchenko. In Admiration for Colour and Travelling



Alexis (Oleksa) Gritchenko (1883 - 1977) was a Ukrainian-born painter and creator of the art method and theory of Dynamocolor (Tsvetodinos) with a strong focus on colour perception. Early in the twentieth century, Gritchenko made significant contributions to the avant-garde art movement that helped to shape the thriving art scene of the era.

Gritchenko's artistic vision was influenced by his Ukrainian heritage, particularly the Byzantine heritage of Kyivan Rus and the glorious period of the hetmans of the 17 century as well as the colouring of Ukrainian icons.

When Gritchenko first arrived in Paris in 1911, he had a life-changing experience at the Louvre when he encountered Delacroix's artwork. Gritchenko started experimenting with more vivid palettes in his artwork. As he wrote, he gained a greater awareness of "the dynamics of colour" and his approach of "feeling things through colour."

In the summer of 1919, his concept of Dynamocolor was manifested when Gritchenko and his colleague O. Shevchenko held an exhibition Tsvetodinos and Tectonic Primitivism. During the brief period when avant-garde painting flourished in post-revolutionary Moscow, Gritchenko's Dynamocolor was exhibited in exhibitions with Shevchenko's Primitivism, Kandinsky's Expressionism, and Malevich's Suprematism.



Colour remained a key element in Gritchenko's artistic practice throughout his career. His theoretical vision of colours drew from his studies as well as his love for travel and observation of natural landscapes. Not coincidentally, Gritchenko titled his memoirs from his youth, the reflection on his heritage, *Ukraine of My Azure Days*. Gritchenko described himself as a Ukrainian vagabond, having travelled extensively through Europe, Scandinavia and Asia, which heightened his sensitivity to colour in natural settings. His vagabond trajectory from Moscow led him back to Kyiv, from Sebastopol to Constantinople, to numerous cities and islands in Greece, after from Marseilles to Paris, then cities of France, Spain, Italy and Scandinavian countries.

In France Gritchenko established his reputation as an artist, showcasing his works in numerous personal exhibitions held in Paris from the 1920s to the 1960s as well as in Madrid (1934), Barcelona (1935), Stockholm, Göteborg (1937), Limoges (1943, 1944), Strasbourg (1951, 1953, 1955), Cagnes sur Mer (1960), and Toronto (1960). Gritchenko actively engaged with the art community as a member of the Société des Artistes Indépendants and Salon d'automne, and he took part in exhibitions organised by the Association of Independent Ukrainian Artists in Lviv and Paris.

Dynamocolor remained an independent phenomenon in the avant-garde art movement of the early twentieth even a few times Gritchenko's works were intentionally destroyed. Despite his international success, Gritchenko remained relatively unknown in his home

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**Gritchenko's works are also present in numerous renowned museums and art galleries worldwide, solidifying his place in the history of modern art**

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country. However, in 2006, his dream of seeing 70 of his works and his archives transferred to Ukraine was realised when they were acquired by the National Museum of Art of Ukraine in Kyiv. Gritchenko's works are also present in numerous renowned museums and art galleries worldwide, solidifying his place in the history of modern art and his contribution to the understanding of vibrant artistic movements in the early twentieth century.

Malab'Art is dedicated to proudly presenting and promoting the enduring legacy of Alexis Gritchenko. It published the first in-depth monograph *Dynamocolour* (2017) on his body of work and organised exhibitions and presentations in Kyiv, London, and Paris.

# Addition



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