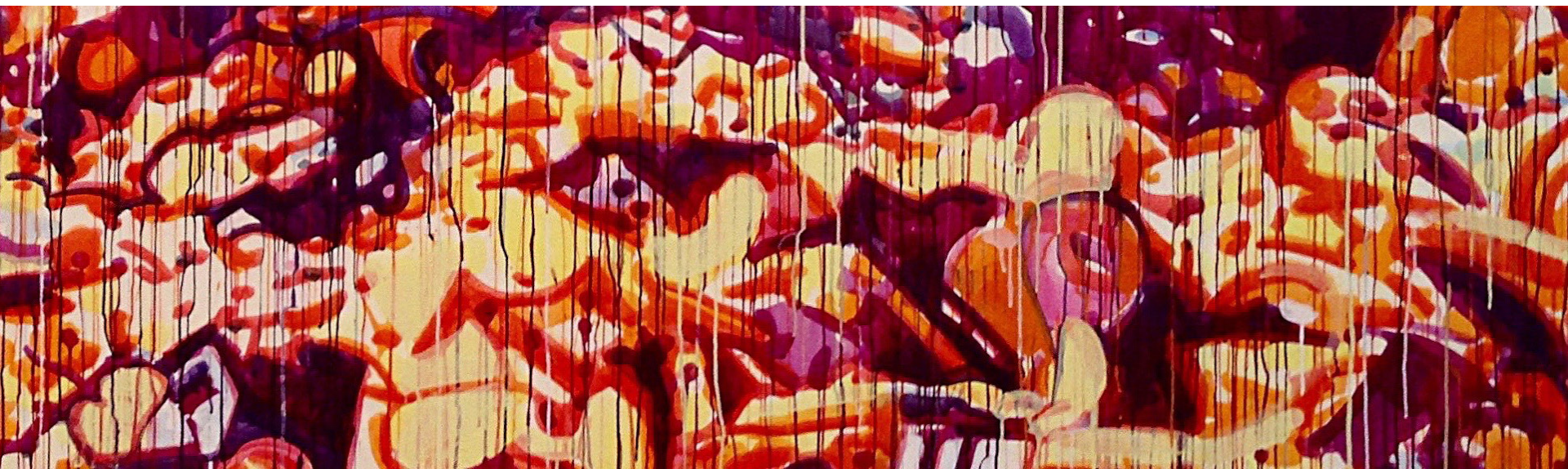


Alex Kritselis

# Paintings of Glow and Sorrow

Groundspace Project <sup>2017</sup>



# Preface

## Curator's Statement

*The body as a stage, the landscape as a stage, and time as a stage are slowly disappearing. The same hold true for public space: the theater of the social and of politics are progressively being reduced to a shapeless, multi headed body. Advertising in its new version is no longer the baroque, Utopian scenario ecstatic over objects and consumption, but rather the effect of the omnipresent visibility of corporations, trademarks, PR men, social dialogue and the virtues of communication. With the disappearance of the public place, advertising invades everything (the street, the monument, the market, the stage, language). ...The public stage, the public place have been replaced by a gigantic circulation, ventilation, and ephemeral connecting space.*

*The Ecstasy of Communication, Jean Baudrillard 1988*

*Artists-as-artists value themselves for what they have gotten rid of and for what they refuse to do.*

*Art-as-Art, Ad Reinhardt 1975*

Alex Kritselis is an artist whose practice I have admired for many years. Creating art that is always a conjunction of awareness, Kritselis captures through his kaleidoscope lens perceptions of his

experience and through those perceptions makes art. No matter the medium, his artwork is always visually rich - but doesn't necessarily yield to interpretation easily. It's slow and primarily non-verbal, even as it flirts with semiotics.

**The Paintings of Glow and Sorrow**, each represent a moment, each painting caught in a metamorphosis from the painter's first act, articulating a subject matter, to his second act, obscuring his subject in veils of translucent, gravity ridden paint. The viewer's participation is in the act of erasure itself, like that moment when the present transforms into the past, a memory soon shrouded in history and myth. These paintings are large scale and epic, almost cinematic in feel.

I am very happy to host Alex Kritselis' second solo exhibition at **Groundspace Project**. The first, also a large scale installation, **Imperial Eden/After the Dissent**, was held in 2013.

**Groundspace Project** is an artist-run, alternative exhibition space near the Artist District in downtown Los Angeles, located in a warehouse building first developed as artists' live/work studios in the 1980's

**Groundspace Project** was conceived on a whim, you could say on a night of serious drinking, as a place for artists whose work is not necessarily commercial, to realize their vision. As opposed to a virtual space, a real space - ground space, where we could see the material, surface and scale, and talk about it. To this end, I never want artists to have to install and retrieve their work on the same day. Or for their hard work to be the wall paper for another event. Or the window dressing for a building for sale. This is a project with no budget, no titles, and no committees.

Susan Joseph

# Betty Ann Brown, Alex Kritselis Glow and Sorrow

When the first humans ground colored earth into a fine powder, suspended it in animal fat, and used it to paint bison on the cave wall, they performed the crucial act that would come to define their species: translating the always changing, three dimensional world into a fixed, flat image that viewers would use to co-create meaning. The image of the bison could be deployed to hold all of the multiple interpretations viewers projected onto it, from stories of the hunt in this world, to our mythic descent from and ongoing relationship to beasts, to the ever-present quest for redemption the spiritual world. Today, we call images like the paleolithic bison “objective correlatives,” that is, symbols that represent and evoke certain emotions as well as the experiences related to them.

Alexander Kritselis continues the artistic project initiated by the cave painters. He identifies resonant images from our contemporary mass media world that can hold dense clusters of meaning, then paints them on flat surfaces (often huge sheets of paper, alternatively canvas or wood panel.) He employs a loose, gestural style of painting that allows the medium to exercise its full range of liquid potential. The acrylic paint drips and splatters that span Kritselis’s aesthetic fields echo the Early Modern styles of Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) and Emil Nolde (1867-1956). Both the Dutch-born

Post Impressionist Van Gogh and the German-born Die Brücke artist Nolde were considered Expressionists. That is, they sought to represent the world from a profoundly subjective perspective, distorting color and form in order to convey the essence of emotional experiences, rather than depicting a disinterested, externalized view of the physical world.

Almost a century after his Northern European predecessors, Kritselis extends their practice, identifying potent symbols in order to explore their emotive charges and the range of viewer projections they can reflect. His current body of work, “Sorrow and Glow,” ranges from horrific depictions of bound feet to iconic movie stills, from Ancient Greek battles to the ruins of Hiroshima.





Paintings of Glow and Sorrow

Greek images are especially meaningful to Kritselis. The artist was born and educated in Athens, receiving his degree in sculpture and drawing from the Academy of Athens in 1970. He did graduate work at the Hornsey College of Art in London and post-graduate work at the Academia della Belli Arti in Florence. Kritselis came to the United States in 1974 to marry the woman who became his first wife. He accompanied her when she returned to Smith College to finish her art history degree, and took a one-semester teaching job there. 1975 saw the young couple in Texas, where Kritselis was teaching at Texas University in San Marcos, a job he kept for ten years.

While in Texas, Kritselis met the artist who would become his second wife and the mother of his daughter Sophia. The two artists came to California in 1984, where Kritselis re-connected with Roland Reiss, whom he had met in Texas. Reiss hired him to teach part-time at the Claremont Graduate University. Kritselis also taught at Otis College of Art and Design before he settled in 1987 into what would become his primary

career position, at Pasadena City College (PCC). The artist taught at PCC for almost 30 years, creating a highly acclaimed art program, and becoming Dean in the process. Although he continued making and exhibiting work while at PCC, his administrative position was quite time-consuming. So it was not until he retired that he could embrace art production full-time again.

It was on a 2002 flight from Athens back to Los Angeles that Kritselis met Joey Forsyte, the film and video artist who became his third wife. As their relationship developed, Kritselis began working with Forsyte on large-scale video installations. Their first collaboration was “Don’t Blow It/Rising Tide” (December 2009), an arrangement of thirteen projections positioned in storefronts around the One Colorado Plaza in downtown Pasadena. Images of flooding water, young swimmers, and environmental distress surged around holiday shoppers, poetically reminding them of the potential distress caused by excessive seasonal consumption. “Picasso’s Dilemma” (2011), another video-based collaboration, interrogated the Spanish master’s assertion that “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist as one grows up.” Over sixty artists, from “first grade to museum grade” were interviewed as they painted and drew on glass, creating photographs for the couple’s cameras.

Kritselis returned to painting soon after his 2011 retirement. He began with a series of small panels that soon began to coalesce into large grids, juxtaposing diverse, often apparently unrelated images. Viewers were forced to consider the relationships between and around the images, their responses engaging the very human process of creating meaning. In order to apprehend the significance of Kritselis’s large, multi-panel compositions, viewers must grapple with the way images function today, and throughout history.

In 2014, at his “Transmissions/Prometheus Deconstructed” at Long Beach City College Art Gallery, the Kritselis covered two facing walls with wood and metal panels, the two walls becoming two “deconstructed” aspects of a single powerful image of Prometheus, the deity who stole fire from Mount Olympus and gave it to humans. On the wall between the two halves of the painting were four small video diptychs, each pairing two moving images that--like the painted images--suggested meaning but insisted that the viewer participate in co-creating that meaning.

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American art critic Arthur C. Danto wrote a work of art is something that it projects a point of view by means of a gap or absence, which he calls a “rhetorical ellipsis.” It is precisely that ellipsis which

engages audience/viewer participation in completing the artwork by filling in what is missing. By resisting the seductive pull to spell everything out for the viewer, by insisting that viewers are participants in the creative process, Kritselis firmly situates his oeuvre into the long tradition echoing all the way back to the caves. (Indeed, as he fills the walls with painted and videotaped images--as he did at Long Beach--he builds a cave-like interior for his works.)

For “Glow and Sorrow,” Kritselis has identified several powerful images that function as key symbols for the hope and violence of our era. These are painted in large, lush compositions that attract with their saturated color and rhythmic gestures--but unsettle with their often-disturbing content. “Epitaphios in Aleppo” (2016) is taken from an ancient Cypriot grave relief, found near Klazomenaia in an Ancient Greek site on the west coast of Asia Minor. It depicts darkly silhouetted warriors doing battle around a blood red explosion in the center of the composition. The conflation of ancient (Cyprus) and modern (Aleppo) conflicts reminds us that areas of the

planet have been scarred by warfare for centuries. “Ineffaceable” pairs an image of astronaut Neil Armstrong's footstep on the moon (surely a depiction of the wonders of scientific advances) with the bloody devastation of Hiroshima, site of the 1945 atomic bomb explosion (sadly the result of scientific and humanitarian horrors).

“The \$250,000 Gun That Killed Trayvon Martin” (2016) juxtaposes an image of a hoodie-wearing man with a five-foot tall image of a Kel-Tec PF-9 handgun. Policeman George Zimmerman, who was accused of killing Martin but acquitted of the crime, sold the gun for \$250,000. (The going price for such a weapon was \$350 at the time, confirming that the notoriety increased its value exorbitantly.) The beautiful surfaces of the paintings, with their luxuriant reds, yellows, blues, and greens, are so appealing...but that colorful appeal is countered by the disgust and dismay many feel about the death of Martin and the way his killer profited. Not all of Kritselis's new paintings address the dark side--the “Sorrow”--of human experience. “The Big Kiss” is taken from a scene in the 1953 Hollywood film “From Here to Eternity.” Actors Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr embrace on a beach, kissing as the tide pours over them. It is a (heterosexual) romantic fantasy, writ large

on the big screen. It is also a scene from a film about the same war that ended in the destruction of Hiroshima. The expanding circles of meaning overlap in Kritselis's paintings, nudging viewers into wider and deeper purviews for increasingly significant understandings of the wounds that cover our planet and our psyches. The great American author James Baldwin wrote in 1962:

“The precise role of the artist, then, is to illuminate that darkness, blaze roads through that vast forest, so that we will not, in all our doing, lose sight of its purpose, which is, after all, to make the world a more human dwelling place.”

Alexander Kritselis illuminates the darkness that we must all face. And as he does so, as he invites us to reconsider and recreate meaning in all phases of our collective experiences, he makes our world “a more human dwelling place.”

Betty Ann Brown  
Pasadena 2017



THE BIG KISS/TRAVELERS OF GLOW AND SORROW, 2016, 60"X120",  
Acrylic Paint On Arches Paper



DOUBLE PORTRAIT OF A KILLER/TRAVELERS OF GLOW AND SORROW, 2016, 60"X80",  
Acrylic paint on Arches paper



EPITAPHIOS IN ALEPO 2016/TRAVELERS OF GLOW AND SORROW, 72"X 280",  
Acrylic Paint On Velum Paper

## Alexander Kritselis. “On the dialectic of blood and light.”

... this dialectic of blood and light  
which is the history of your people ...  
Sherrard to Seferis, 20 March 1950

“... Just think of those cords that bind man and the elements of nature together, this tragedy which is at once natural and human, this intimacy. Just think how the light of day and man’s blood are one and the same thing.”

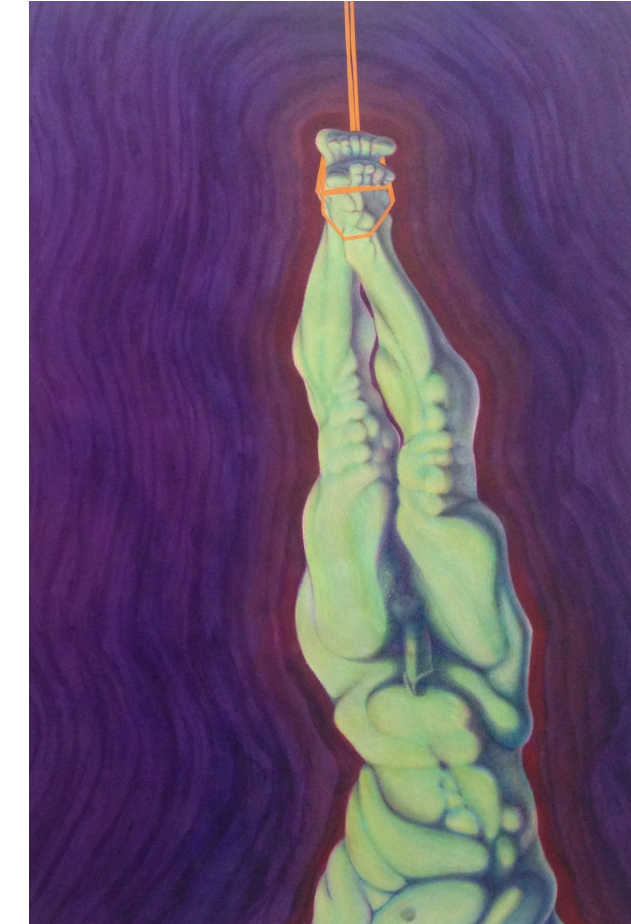
George Seferis, 1950

Poet George Seferis was awarded in 1963 the first Greek Nobel Prize in Literature for his ‘eminent lyrical writing, inspired by a deep feeling for the Hellenic world of culture.’ Seferis’ words quite eloquently encapsulate the ethos of Alexander Kritselis’ oeuvre, especially salient in his two most recent series of paintings, Places of Glow and Sorrow and Travelers of Glow and Sorrow.

Alexander Kritselis was born and raised in Athens, Greece, and educated at the undergraduate and graduate levels respectively at the Athens Academy of Fine Arts (in Sculpture), the Hornsey College of Art in London, England (in Sculpture and Painting), and the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence, Italy (in Sculpture). He moved to

the United States in the mid-seventies both for conjugal reasons and to further explore and fully engage in the visual arts contemporary discourse.

Driven by traditional narratives and contemporary digital video imagery, Kritselis identifies, decodes and interprets image clues to examine local and world occurrences, political and economic quandaries and perpetual conflicts, and the behavioral patterns they generate. He provides a fresh and idiosyncratic read at mythological and historical events and figures that have impacted change. The artist often adopts fragmentation as his operating compositional framework, combining small-scale paintings on wood panels and video shorts that merge into single collectives. Kritselis delves into questions touching hope and longing, memory and understanding, exploring the mechanics of memory and perception through time and space.



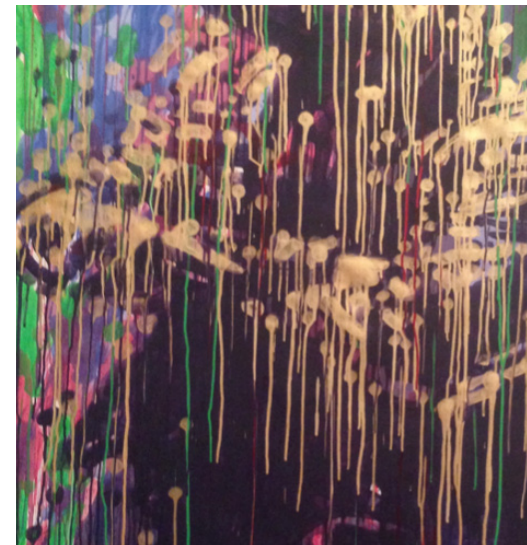


In his most recent, ongoing body of work begun in 2015, *Places of Glow and Sorrow* and *Travelers of Glow and Sorrow*, Kritselis engages with key wide-ranging national and international events, global environmental phenomena, and iconic cultural symbols of the past fifty years that resonate with, and have marked our collective psyche. These include, among others, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Neil Armstrong and the Moon landing, Syria's civil war and resulting refugee crisis, the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, and the waning Chinese foot binding tradition.

Kritselis' large-scale paintings on paper are vibrant and visually compelling multihued lyrical compositions. They expose a style *épuré*, a pared-down, laid bare artistic vocabulary where the artist has eschewed the inessential, embracing a more traditional medium of paint and paper. In these recent series, he has also adopted a drip-style painting technique. The dripping effect of the paint results in the increased expressive character of the images. These powerful images—the artist's most immediate and personal to date—are infused with a beauty and light that paradoxically coexist with the

adversity, and, at times, the tragedy depicted. *Epitaphios in Aleppo* (2016), from *Travelers of Glow and Sorrow*, is one of the most poignant and visually arresting works in the series, that addresses the devastation and human tragedy of the current Syrian conflict. The painting's frieze composition of an extensive scale (six feet high by about twenty feet long) depicts a battle scene of epic proportions silhouetted against a gold-hued background, foot soldiers clashing over fallen warriors in the center of the picture, with chariots and winged figures anchoring either side.

An Ancient Greek sixth century B.C. painted terracotta sarcophagus found in Klazomenai especially resonated with Kritselis and provided the inspiration for this work, which undeniably evokes the Trojan War and Homeric poems. The picture's backdrop hue alludes to the gold death masks of the Mycenaean kings and pharaohs, as well as to Byzantine icons.



Lotus isn't a Flower (2016), from Travelers of Glow and Sorrow regards the tradition of female foot binding in Chinese culture, a practice widespread for nearly a thousand years until it was outlawed in 1912. For centuries, successive generations of Chinese women experienced a brutal practice when, as children, their feet were systematically crushed, bound, and shaped into tiny hooves called 'lotus' feet, which caused severe lasting pain, and presented major health risks and lifelong disabilities for most of its subjects. Adopted as a symbol of beauty and as a crucial way for women to advance their status and wealth standing, the tradition of foot binding in effect restricted their mobility and ability to perform physical tasks, effecting economic hardship and dependence on the male community, and eventually deepening female subjugation.

Kritselis used an X-ray rendering of a pair of 'lotus' feet as the source of his image placed to the left of the painting composition, adjacent to a depiction of a highly embellished 'lotus' shoe set in a seductive palette of yellows, oranges, reds, blues and purples. The artist opted for a deeper and more subdued range of pinks and purples for his depiction of the 'lotus' feet that could easily be mistaken for a depiction of a couple of birds captured in mid-flight. As the few remaining members

and survivors of the last generation partaking in the foot binding practice pass away, marking the end of an enduring institution, Kritselis reflects on this peculiar and momentous tradition and its far-reaching ramifications.

The Glow and Sorrow body of work is a humanistic tale that exposes the artist's profound engagement with the human experience, the extension of his personal sensibility with its strata of registers informed by the heritage of the millennial historical and cultural legacy of Ancient Greece, and the resonance of the tumultuous historical vicissitudes of Greek modern times. It reveals a unifying strand of humanism in a gradually shrinking world, a trans-historical and trans-national ethos that espouses the affirmation of the human spirit and shared humanity. The duality of light and blood epitomizes what it is to be truly human.

Throughout his career, Kritselis' conceptual painting and video work have re-examined myth, the persistence of memory, and the relationship between traditional storytelling and contemporary media distribution strategies, and one's ability to create meaning out of fragmented narratives. The artist's mixed media site-specific installations, often immersive in nature, deconstructed and explored the dynamic relationships between the historical record and contemporary interpretations of storytelling and emblematic ancient mythos.

Through his artistic practice, multidisciplinary in content and form, Kritselis expresses a consciousness, an ethos in continuity with those all-encompassing ideals echoing the past, in search of a greater awareness of knowledge.

Ariadni A. Liokatis  
Los Angeles, 2017

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<sup>1</sup> Denise Sherrard (ed.), *This Dialectic of Blood and Light*. George Seferis-Philip Sherrard. An Exchange: 1946-1971 (Limni (Greece): Denise Harvey (Publisher), 2015), p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> Denise Sherrard (ed.), *This Dialectic of Blood and Light*. George Seferis-Philip Sherrard. An Exchange: 1946-1971 (Limni (Greece): Denise Harvey (Publisher), 2015), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Nobel Prize Award Ceremony Speech by Anders Österling, 1963, accessed 9 January 2017, [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1963/press.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1963/press.html).

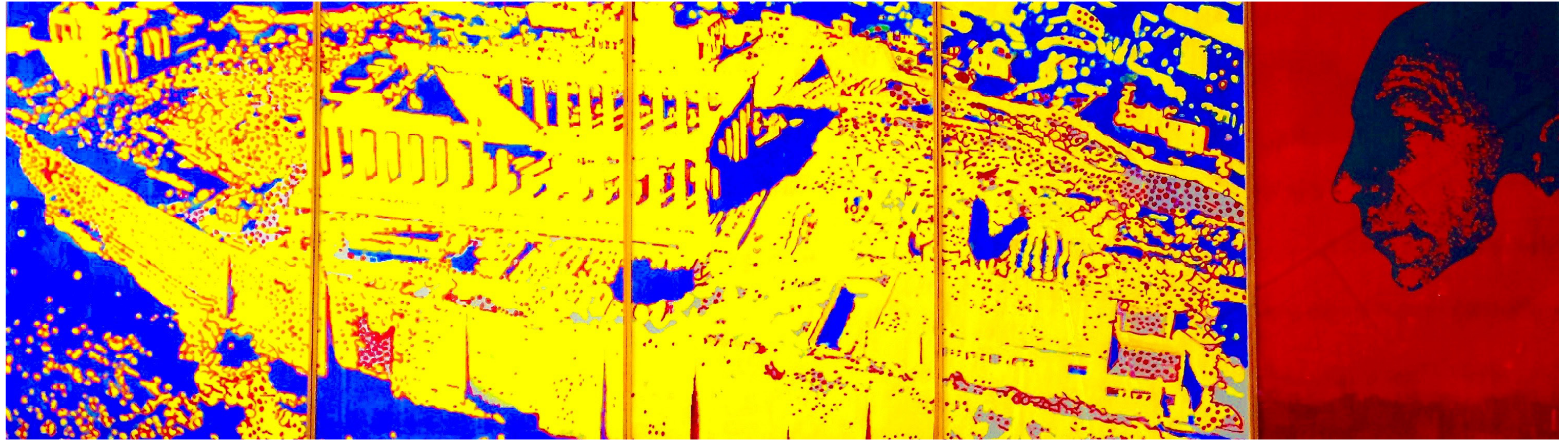
<sup>4</sup> A significant number of terracotta sarcophagi were found on East Greek sites on the west coast of Asia Minor, such as Klazomenai and Old Smyrna, from where Kritselis' mother's family hailed from.



**LOTUS IN'ST A FLOWER/TRAVELERS OF GLOW AND SORROW**, 2016, 60"X160",  
Acrylic Paint On Arches Paper



**RING MASTER/TRAVELERS OF GLOW AND SORROW**, 2016, 60"X80",  
Acrylic Paint And Pastel On Arches Paper



INDELIBLE/PLACES OF GLOW AND SORROW, 2015-2016, 60"X200",  
Acrylic paint on Arches paper



INEFFACEABLE/PLACES OF GLOW AND SORROW, 2016, 60"X200",  
Acrylic paint on Arches paper



LESBOS 2016/TRAVELERS OF GLOW AND SORROW, 60"X160",  
Acrylic Paint On Arches Paper



**THE VISITOR/TRAVELERS OF GLOW AND SORROW**, 2016, 60"X200",  
Acrylic Paint On Arches Paper



**THE \$250,000 GUN/TRAVELERS OF GLOW AND SORROW**, 2016, 60"X80",  
Acrylic paint on Arches paper



UNALTERABLE/PLACES OF GLOW AND SORROW, 2015-2016, 60"X240",  
Acrylic paint on Arches paper





UNBREATHABLE/PLACES OF GLOW AND SORROW, 2016, 60"X240",  
Acrylic paint on Arches paper

# Artist Statement

It's imperative to examine and understand the past, to remember where we came from and the journey we took to arrive where we are today. Through our work we find the passage that takes us to ourselves. From the beginning the eyes of the child see the world, ineffaceable experiences form the imagination.

My current work continues the ongoing examination of human history's indelible impact and influence on our modern psyche and physical environment. In my work I juxtapose incorporeal fragments of thoughts, memories, and universally recognized symbols of civilization over time into dense, almost pixelated, configurations – In my current process I have moved toward fewer but more expansive panels through which to explore and question the same threads that continue to drive my work: the chronicling of civilizations' historic and current affairs, socioeconomic quagmires, conflicts, and the collective behavioral patterns they generate—ultimately, man's ability to spawn narrative and create meaning from fragments.

## *Biography*

ALEX KRITSELIS is a multidisciplinary artist who grew up in Athens, Greece and received his education in Athens, London and Florence. In the mid seventies, he moved to the United States and since that time, Kritselis has exhibited his artwork and taught on the undergraduate and graduate levels for many private and public institutions in California and Texas, including Otis College of Art and Design, Pomona College, Claremont Graduate University, Texas University and Pasadena City College where he served as Dean of the Visual Arts and Media Studies Division from 2002 to 2012. Kritselis has exhibited nationally and internationally in more than 25 solo and 50 invitational exhibitions. His work has been collected in Greece, England, China, Cyprus and the United States and can be seen at the Voreas Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, Greece, Texas University, San Marcos, Texas, Academy of Fine Arts, Athens, Greece, Museum of California Art, Pasadena, California. Over the past 10 years, along with his paintings and sculptures, he has created numerous private and public site-specific installations, video presentations, and mixed media works, often collaborating with his wife, cinematographer Joey Forsyte.

# Acknowledgments

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