Estate and Collection of George and Ursula Andreas

FIDELIO

The National Herald

NOVEMBER 13, 2010
www.thenationalherald.com
An inspiration to all

I am thankful to have been given the opportunity to publish this special section for a number of reasons:

First, because "Fidelio" is one of the finest examples of the taste and the achievements this community is capable of.

Second, because the elegance of the residence and the masterpieces of art in it are an inspiration and an example for other Greeks as well.

And third because George and Ursula Andreas so richly deserve it.

George Andreas, an elite officer in the Greek army, left Greece when the junta took over in 1967. His free, uncompromising spirit could not accept the restrictions imposed by a dictatorial regime. After working as an engineer in New York, Mr. Andreas took over a car dealership, and along with his wife Ursula grew it into one of the largest car dealerships in the country.

Above everything else however, he is a noted artist, profiled in some of the best art magazines, as the paintings on the following pages illustrate.
In 2002 George and Ursula Andreas purchased a 61-acre estate in Fauquier County near Middleburg, Virginia. They made renovations to the Italian-style main house, built a detached studio to use as an office for Andreas Enterprises, Inc. and Andreas Studio and to provide a studio for George Andreas’ art, and then brought their extensive art collection to its new home. That collection contains paintings and sculptures by a number of major artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including many of George Andreas’ own works. They named the estate Fidelio after Beethoven’s only opera of the same name.

As Beethoven’s opera was a continually evolving work, so is the estate a work in progress. These pages provide a visual tour of a remarkable home and the artworks it houses.
The architecture and landscape of Fidelio create a home equal to the intensity of the works of art it houses.

When Ludwig van Beethoven composed the opera Fidelio, it involved a great deal of struggle, followed by a decade's worth of revisions. It was performed in three different versions over the course of nine years, and in spite of its evolution, Beethoven never believed the piece to be completely finalized. His attitude towards Fidelio—a continuous work in progress, a work that is constantly developing and unfolding, almost to the degree of becoming a living organism—is one of an ever-evolving artist. The landscape, architecture, and artwork of Fidelio evoke this same theatricality, with layers of complexity that can be peeled back to reveal the drama within.
The landscape of Fidelio, with its seasonal changes, suggests a direct connection to the ebbs and flows of music and intensity in Beethoven's opera. Nature is simultaneously wild and tame here—the hand of man is evident, yet not overbearing. Old stone walls and well-aged trees help to create a barrier against the outside world, whose only breach is a driveway that directs the visitor to a place of invention and revelation.

Fidelio's architecture succeeds in creating a sense of timelessness to match the story of Fidelio. The main house and the additional buildings on the estate were designed in a Tuscan style, combined with some Spanish elements. The particulars of the structures themselves range from a fifteenth-century fireplace from the south of France to twenty-first century limestone masonry local to Middleburg, Virginia. There are several fireplaces throughout the house and other buildings, all of which are antique European. The paintings by Vieri Vagnetti in the dining room are nicely complimented by the fireplace, which is seventeenth-century French and was taken from a monastic structure. The Great Room of the house taps into religious history, similar to the dining room, with its fifteenth-century fireplace mantel taken from a convent from the south of France.

The bar in the Great Room is also an interesting and unique feature. While its construction is simple—the design was conceived by George Andreas and installed locally—the decorative panels on the front of the bar are antique Chinese painted panels found by Lou Shield, an antique dealer local to Middleburg, Virginia. Other elements of the architecture that were completed locally include the carved limestone staircases in the main house, as well as all of the stone walls and arches found around the entire estate, some of which were George Andreas designed. The ceiling murals in the
library were also designed and painted locally. The wood floors throughout the main house and the other buildings on the estate are antique oak floorboards obtained from farmhouses in upstate New York. There are also several antique painted doors throughout the main house which are seventeenth-century French and were obtained from various municipal buildings in France.

Fidelio is maintained as the perfect home for the works by a number of important twentieth-century artists, including: Alexander Calder, Carlo Coene, Primo Conti, Salvatore Fiume, Lorenzo Fonda, Gigi Guadagnucci, Joan Miro, Pablo Picasso, Auguste Rodin, and Vieri Vagnetti. Even more distinct contributors to the collection at Fidelio are its owners, George and Ursula Andreas, who have created their estate to be a living homage to the theatre.

While the name Fidelio may simply seem to be a reference to the dramatic grandeur of the opera, the significance of such a name can be better understood upon viewing the artistic objects within. From surreal subjects to ostentatious brushstrokes, vivid color to alluring storytelling, the artists lend themselves and their styles to a flare for the dramatic. Upon delving into the background of these artists and their careers, however, this conclusion is by no
means surprising. Several of them found their beginnings in theatre and opera through stage design and scenography, while others created commentaries on controversial issues and philosophical theories through artwork by adhering to unconventional materials and subjects that are larger than life. The scenography backgrounds of several of the following artists are, no doubt, a great influence on their directions toward experimentation and the avant-garde throughout their careers. It lends a sense of mystery and fantasy to the pieces, adding heightened intensity to the visual experience.

Carlo Coene studied drawing and scenography at the Akadmie der Künste in Berlin before moving into the figurative surrealism that would come to define his oeuvre, while Salvatore Fiume inaugurated his career in theatrical design in 1950 at Milan’s La Scala. Many theatres and opera houses later highlighted Fiume’s work including London’s Covent Garden, the Rome Opera House, and the Massimo of Palermo. And La Scala commissioned Vieri Vagnetti in 1959 to design the set for Puccini’s opera, Gianni Schicchi.

Yet another theme that ties the artists of Fidelio to their home is the desire to progress toward the new—creating and displaying unique works of art and a constant striving toward something different. Many of the artists in this grouping visited and/or resided in Paris at the onset of their careers. During the first half of the twentieth century, while Paris continued to be the epicenter of the art universe, many of these artists experienced continuous exposure to the avant-garde in terms of art, poetry, music, and political and philosophical theories. This exposure seems to have helped to implant the spark of ingenuity that allowed some artists to move beyond the current, the expected, the acceptable and into the realm of artistic dexterity. The desire for distinction is a challenge that George Andreas, the owner of
Fidelio, as well as its home artist, has also embraced throughout his artistic career.

Carlo Coene was highly influenced by the French Symbolist painter Gustave Moreau; and in 1917, Primo Conti was invited to come to Paris by Picasso, who was greatly intrigued by the work of the young artist. Picasso would eventually travel to visit Conti in his studio in Florence. Gigi Guadagnucci moved to Grenoble, France, in 1936 where he helped to co-found an artistic and cultural foundation. He also participated in the Grenoble Symposium in 1967 and has produced many sculptures for cities in France throughout his career. Paul Caranicas and Vieri Vagnetti both studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris at the beginnings of their artistic careers.

The Greek artifacts, even, lend themselves to the theatrical by taking the viewer back to the roots of the play and the birth of comedy and tragedy. In spite of their small size, the Greek pieces display man's desire to capture an image of human emotion and experience, even in the ancient world. This desire has been a driving force behind the writing and performance of operas and plays, as well as the inspiration and motivation of the works of various artists for centuries. The opera Fidelio is a prime example of this as Conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler pointed out in 1948, three years after the end of World War II:

“Now that political events in Germany have restored to the concepts of human dignity and liberty their original significance, this is the opera, which, thanks to the music of Beethoven, gives us comfort and courage...Certainly, Fidelio is
not an opera in the sense we are used to, nor is Beethoven a musician for the theatre, or a dramaturgist. He is quite a bit more, a whole musician, and beyond that, a saint and a visionary. That which disturbs us is not a material effect, nor the fact of the ‘imprisonment’; any film could create the same effect. No, it is the music, it is Beethoven himself. It is the ‘nostalgia of liberty’ he feels, or better, makes us feel; this is what moves us to tears. His Fidelio has more the Mass than of the Opera to it; the sentiments it expresses comes from the sphere of the sacred, and preach a ‘religion of humanity’ which we never found so beautiful or necessary as we do today, after all we have lived through. Herein lies the singular power of this unique opera…Independent of any historical consideration…the flaming message of Fidelio touches deeply.”

Conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler’s words allow one to comprehend the transcendental qualities and significance of the opera Fidelio, and, in turn, understand the impact of this title as the name for the artistic world the Andreases have created. While the works of art and the physical presence of Fidelio may seem incongruous at times, there are subtle elements of theme and influence that tie them together to create an artistic environment that is nothing short of masterful. The architecture and landscape of Fidelio create a home equal to the intensity of the works of art it houses. Architecture, landscape, artworks: it is all, like its Beethoven namesake, a work in progress. It is also fundamentally a home where new merges with old, modern with traditional, beauty with function, life with preservation. This is Fidelio.
George Andreas
*Antiphysis II*
1993
Oil on Canvas
80 x 100
A conversation with the painter George Andreas

You know, the first stage (of life) is birth, the second stage is going out into the society, you live together with other groups and begin to feel secure.

Now, here is the philosophy in it. You have to leave the warmness of the nest. Here is socialism or capitalism... all these things make you part of a group. Now, you begin to get out of this group by having your own ideas about things. In the abstract form you don't have that. So that period is the conclusive period. This conclusive period is what Kazantzakis says is ascetism. Askitiki. It is exactly that particular period.

Ascetism is does not mean necessarily that you go to a mountain and become a monk. Ascetism means that you are independent thinker. You think on your own. You have your own ideas about things. Wrong or right. But you don't have to have a reference or anything. It is very hard. When I do my work – especially my latest work – conclude work, I have to have great knowledge of art history and I have to be conscious that I don't duplicate ideas, that I don't take ideas from modern art.

That's why I deliberately work in isolation. I don't want to see other artists and what they do. It's the same thing when you want to write a book. You can go and read a bunch of other books, then you can go sit home and write... It takes time – training time to go and try to do something totally original... You know artists smash the system. I have a similar set up... consciously I change. I say this as an example. Now, the idea is that the conclusive period has a lot of interesting things. For example, I organize the 18 paintings, which they called the monographic paintings (capitalism and schizophrenia, capitalism and ochlocracy... that was the title)... these 18 paintings have been developed from 1984 until 1999 so now these paintings include a period of about 8 paintings, you know the preparation of the idea on ochlocracy - which is a non-anarchism, a different name for anarchism, and also capitalism - I say imperialistic capitalism to differentiate it from capitalism. I say the accumulation of capital is capitalism but the excess accumulation of capital is imperialistic capitalism. So in other words, in that thesis we examine imperialistic capitalism and the heretical ochlocracy which means that after the war the anarchists started from the non-existence period and philosophically they went to elimination, but this happens from a 19th century philosopher LaSalle, who created a theory which says midenism - no values, zero values in government - then they took it and became the yparxistes of the 50's and 60's, and then later on, especially in the late 60's the midenism and zero values in society and everything had been organized politically.

So now we had the anarchists, and I say heretical anarchists or heretical ochlocracy which is the same to differentiate for the philosophical thing anarchism. We examine the theoretical aspect when the anarchists gained political power, when the anarchists got organized politically. And this happens in the late 60's. In one painting we have Oedipus with the big building... and this is an examination of that thesis... imperialistic capitalism. Then you have the destruction of imperialism... you have all this moving around... then you have resurrection of capitalism in a different form... then you have heretical ochlocracy. In the end what's happening is that heretical ochlocracy and imperialistic capitalism somehow comes and connects together. In other words, this is an opinion which goes from the preparation of the thesis, with the original thinking of the conflict... beyond asceticism. And then the three poems, and then it goes to the division of the imperialistic capitalism and then the hardcore heretical ochlocracy which is totally opposite and then starts the destruction of the ochlocracy, of the capitalism, of the imperialism... and then starts to get more political and then at the end they are both matching up. It's my imagination... how I imagined the thesis...

In other words, in the future, the imperialistic elements of the capitalism loses steam and the extreme ochlocracy/anarchism of the other side loses steam and break down all the units and groups which are not going to have any sense in the future because everyone has his own idea about things. Ideology is not going to exist.
George Andreas
Delphians
1996
Oil on Canvas
80 x 80
You are not going to have a lot of groups who are going to be tied to that ideology… it's going to be totally individualistic.

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Artists are not supposed to go and determine what the political phenomenon happens to be now and transfer it… art is supposed to be eternal, immaterial. It's the process of thinking and how you determine what you're doing… I don't examine the correctness of what I'm doing. I'm saying this strictly based on the evolution of how I think. Now, if someone comes and tells me and magically projects the image… fine that doesn't bother me. If someone says it's a lot of crap, that's fine too. The idea is to evaluate the art from the originality and how original the art is.

Originality is the most important thing in work. There are very few artists who are totally original.

Q: Who are some original painters that you recognize from the past?
A: Painters that have movement. Mureau, Picasso, Artis, Jackson Pollack, Roger Burke … those artists are very, very original. Now there are a lot of other artists who take a little from here and a little from there.

Q: To become an original figure in the art world… is it a question of education, character, experiences? What makes somebody reach your level?
A: Good question. First of all, you have to be comfortable with yourself. There are a lot of people – especially artists – that have difficulty being by themselves without any other people around so they need a lot of people. So first you have to feel comfortable with yourself, and also have the intellectual capacity to know that the dependency of the manner or whatever else… and then you look forward to eliminate all the influences because it's not possible to live in total isolation. You go places, to museums… and see things around… but you have to have the ability to eliminate those influences or references that you have. I choose conceptual art, but with a concept, no story or anything. My work is mixed media, not only in painting, but in poetry, philosophy, psychology… in all those things there is mixed media in those paintings, which is really different. It's not the usual way of doing paintings. Usually when you do paintings you use mostly materials and everything, techniques and that type of things. So in that sense it was easy, because nobody is doing the kind of things that I'm doing.

Antonis H. Diamataris