



VAROTSOS

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Runner [1994], iron and glass, height 12 m, Athens, Greece



COSTAS VAROTSOS

Costas Varotsos was born in Athens in 1955. He studied painting at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome and continued his studies in architecture at the Arte Scuola di Architettura at the University of Pescara in Italy.

From early on his work crosses the boundaries between painting and sculpture, and demonstrates his interest in transparent materials and in the relationship between the art and the environment. He began to exhibit regularly in leading galleries in Italy and Greece and over his thirty-year career exhibited his work in many solo and group exhibitions throughout the world.

In 1983, with the encouragement and support of mega-collector Dakis Ioannou, Varotsos creates his first monumental public sculpture “Poet”. The 6-meter high glass plate sculpture is placed at the historic relic Famagusta Gate cultural centre in Nicosia. His renowned 8-meter high sculpture “The Runner” is a landmark of central Athens. Over career, Varotsos created and installed sculptures for private collections and public spaces and museums in Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, China, Japan, Egypt, Brazil, the USA, and the UK.

His seemingly magical ability to transform glass, iron, stones and wood into monumental works that testify to the artist's struggle with the fragility his materials, transparency and light, to create a linear elegance and dynamic form with a minimalism and refinement that is a testament to his mastery of his art form.

Varotsos has received numerous awards for his sculptures and his overall work. He received the best sculpture prize by “The Year in Review 2004” for the work Contiguous Currents in Palm Beach, Florida, USA, the 2005 Street Trend Award for the work Untitled in Bützberg, Switzerland, an award for best artwork in public space in 2014 by SRF3 for his 140 meter sculpture Tension-Energy in Lucerne, Switzerland. He received the Segno D’Oro award in Italy for his overall contribution to sculpture, the Cavaliere dell’Ordine della Stella Solidarietà Italiana by the President of the Italian Republic and the Medal of Commander of the Order of Merit by the President of the Greek Republic.

He is a member of the Academie Engelberg since 2000, and since 1999 a professor at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki at the School of Architecture.

Tension-Energy [2011], concrete and steel, 28x140 m, Lucerne Switzerland



Public Installations

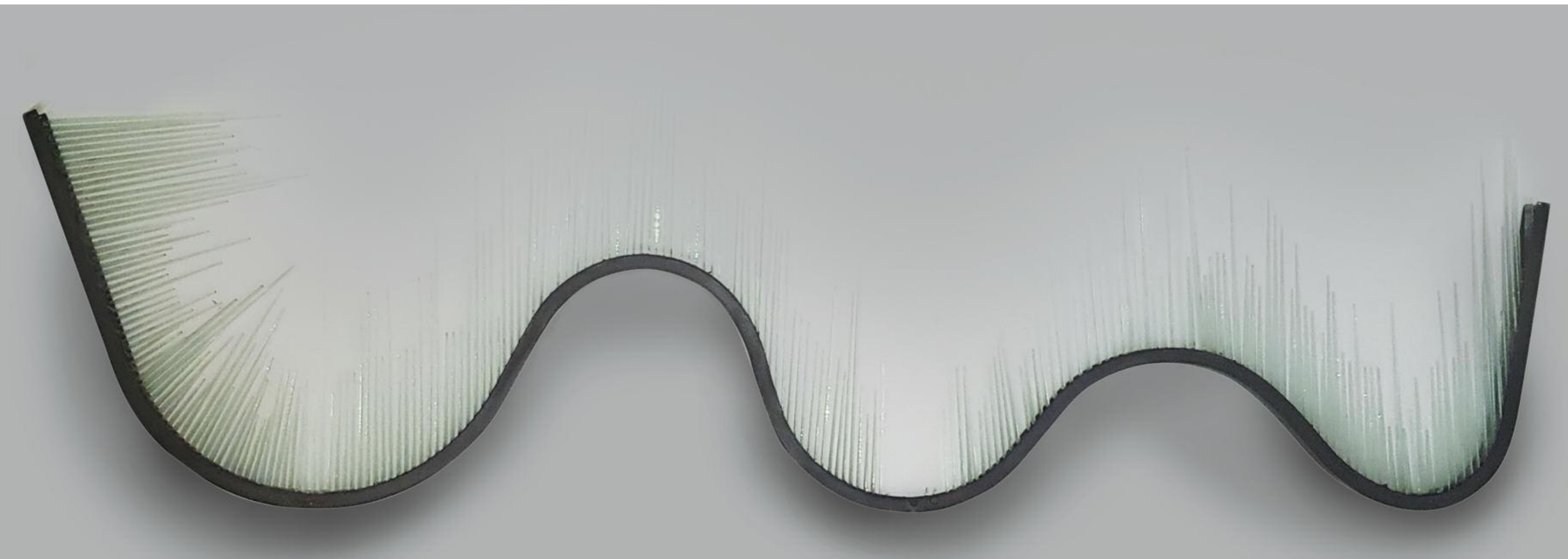
- 2019 *The Poet*, Plateia Eleftherias, Nicosia, Cyprus
- 2018 *Untitled*, Sofitel Hotel, Athens, Greece
- 2016 *Two Horizons*, University of Salerno, Fisciano, Salerno, Italy
- 2013 *Cypress*, Ioannina, Greece
- 2012 *L'Approdo. Opera all'Umanita Migrante*, Otranto, Puglia, Italy
- 2011 *Untitled*, Peristeri, Athens, Greece
- 2011 *Tension-Energy*, Lucerne, Switzerland
- 2011 *Horizons*, Drama, Greece
- 2010 *Moon*, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt
- 2009 *Gate of Aegina*, Aegina, Greece
- 2008 *Horizon 2008*, Murano Art Hotel, Tacoma, Seattle, USA
- 2006 *Horizon 4*, Certosa di Padula, Salerno, Italy
- 2006 *Untitled*, Bernstrasse, Steffisburg, Switzerland
- 2004 *Untitled*, Pireos Street, Athens, Greece
- 2004 *Untitled*, Doukissis Plakentias Metro Station, Athens, Greece
- 2003 *Untitled*, Aghios Ioannis Rentis Central Square, Athens, Greece
- 2003 *Contiguous Currents*, City Hall Square, Palm Beach, Miami, USA
- 2003 *Galaxy*, Washington Convention Center, Washington D.C., USA
- 2003 *La Luna*, Parco Casilino Labicano, Rome, Italy
- 2001 *Horizon*, San Diego, USA
- 2001 *Labirinto Transparente*, Aqua Potabile, Community of Lamezia, Terme, Italy
- 2001 *Untitled*, Foundation Villa Benzi Zecchini, Caerano di San Marco, Italy
- 1999 *Untitled*, Piazza Benefica, Turin, Italy
- 1998 *Horizon*, Aghios Konstantinos, Pyrgos Korinthias, Greece
- 1997 *The Poet*, Casacalenda, Italy
- 1997 *La Morgia*, Community of Gessopalena, Abruzzio, Italy
- 1997 *Untitled*, Mc Cormick Center, Chicago, USA
- 1995 *Anelixis II*, Bank of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus
- 1995 *Globe*, International Airport of Thessaloniki, Greece
- 1994 *The Runner*, Athens, Greece
- 1994 *Klepsydra*, European Cultural Center of Delphi, Greece
- 1992 *Paesagio con Rovine*, Gibellina, Italy
- 1992 *Anelixis I*, Interamerican Plaza, Athens, Greece
- 1992 *Paesagio con Rovine*, Museum of Gibellina, Gibelena, Italy
- 1990 *Arte Lago*, Community of Varese, Italy
- 1990 *Horizon*, Aristotelous Square, Thessaloniki, Greece
- 1988 *The Runner*, Omonia Square, Athens, Greece
- 1983 *The Poet*, Famagusta Gate Cultural Center, Nicosia, Cyprus



Horizon [2017], iron and glass, Ø2x14 m, Syros, Greece



Spiral [1992], iron and glass, Ø168x13 cm



Untitled [2000], iron and glass, 135x410x7 cm



Dual Twist [2018], iron and glass, 180x100x40 cm



Tree [2018], iron and polyester, height 2.4 m (each)



Sail [2017], iron and glass, 60x40x3 cm



Untitled [2018], iron and glass, 60x27x3 cm



Two Horizons [2016], iron and glass, length 34 m, Univeristy of Salerno, Italy



V [2017], iron and glass, 195x140x7 cm

Horizon [2015], iron and glass, height 7m, Gerovassiliou Estate Winaery, Greece



Costas Varotsos A Different Gleam of Glass

Wind and wave, presence and absence, matter and space – these mark Costas Varotsos' latest work. This is sculptural storytelling, reflecting the continuity of the artist's vision over time. From the early 1970s to date, he has been firmly on a path of constant redefinition in search of originality. His aim has been to provide both challenge and pleasure for viewers. His sculpture idiom directly emphasises visible space, form and content, and explores the aesthetic experience. The speed of his production process is astonishing – it takes only a few months for the artist to complete a monumental installation; yet, it is always supported by meticulous research, planning, and study. Achille Bonito Oliva points out that Varotsos' work 'restores the quality of integration inherent in Greek tradition, in which the architect did not only design space to be inhabited by humans or by the gods, but also incorporated in his design history and geography, environmental and atmospheric factors...' (Varotsos, Futura Books, Athens 2005)

In 1973, aged 18, Varotsos moved to Rome, five years before Giorgio de Chirico died – at the time of Arte Povera, Conceptual Art, and Transavanguardia. Jannis Kounellis was already an eminent exponent of a new aesthetic proposition, of a radical departure from classicism and tradition; on the opposite end of the spectrum, Leonardo Cremonini, a passionate advocate of two-dimensional painting, championed the principles and values of a distinct, enigmatic expressionism. Having lived for almost a decade in Italy, Varotsos was influenced by the country's contemporary art; he held in great respect the three-dimensional solidity of the Renaissance – the masterpieces by Donatello, Alberti, Brunelleschi, Masaccio, while seeking something new and original. In Italy, he experienced fully the art of his time, including Emilio Vedova from Venice, then at the peak of his creative powers, with his abstract compositions, and the pioneers Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri, Piero Manzoni, Mario Merz, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Sandro Chia, Alighiero Boetti, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola de Maria and Mimmo Paladino, who broke new ground in art.

Varotsos is fully immersed in the Greek sensory experience and aware of the value of anthropocentric sculpture, which constantly strives for aesthetic perfection. Meanwhile, he delves into the teaching of the great Greek sculptors, Praxiteles, Phidias, Polykleitos, Myron, Kallimachos. Notably, Varotsos lived his childhood and adolescence in Olympia, near the tomb of Pelops, the Hippodameion, the Great Stadion, the temple of Hera, the Altis, and the temple of Zeus. From early on, he opted for simple form, eliminating complexity of meaning and symbol. Seeking a harmonious relation with its environment, his work is closely linked to architecture. He works mainly in glass and iron, using straight and curved lines, focusing on the process of making, on the fluidity of shaping, on the precision of balance and measure in installation. His daring interventions interrogate the future of sculpture. In La Morgia, in the Appenine Mountains, for instance, a monumental sculptural installation broke the silence of the natural landscape, disturbing its tranquillity. Marked by expressive austerity, geometric development, and transparency, this sculpture installation directly captures a visual impression of serenity and rigor. Moreover, it recalls

historical memory: This area was bombed by the Nazis in World War II, as it was the hideout of Italian Resistance fighters. Notably, workers and farmers from more than 30 villages in the region volunteered to make this monumental intervention possible.

The artist's persistent concerns are achieving the ideal texture, elegance of line; creating a different kind of horizon, another sense of freedom. At the same time, his personal approach reflects, his concern, not only with the pictorial effect of his pieces, but also with the viewer's position, apparent in *Horizon in La Morgia*, and *Disembarkation – A Work on Migrating Humanity in Otranto*, Puglia. The latter was inspired by the tragic sinking of a ship carrying Albanian migrants, in the Adriatic Sea – a monumental work that reflects the pain and the hopes of people forced to flee their country in search of a better life. Never provoking through complexity of articulation, Varotsos makes for powerful and bold aesthetic experiences, searching for the essential through restraint and austerity.

A Brief Bio of the Sculptor Who Lives Dreaming

In 1980, the artist moved from Italy to Athens. Encouraged and supported by the pioneering art collector Dakis Joannou, two years later he pursued his personal mythology by producing the 6m-tall monumental sculpture *The Poet*, installed at the Famagusta Gate, originally located near the Green Line in Nicosia, which separates the free from the occupied area, soon on Eleftherias Square. Weighing several tons, this is a celebration of humanity and higher values that charges the installation site with energy. Through successive layers of glass, the artist evokes the three-dimensional figure of a poet. The rich colour and imposing presence vary with the intensity of light, releasing hidden sensitivity. Varotsos prepares each artwork for long periods of time, producing pieces on the same theme but at a different scale and with different sculptural qualities. That was also the case with the 8m-tall *Poet* in Casacalenda (1997), made in local stone, or the 1m-tall *Poet* (2011), a sculpture of fine proportion, produced for the survey exhibition *Odysseus Elytis: Poetry and Painting* held at the B. & M. Theocharakis Foundation. Stone was, of course, a familiar medium for the artist, used in earlier works, such as *Clepsydra* (1994), set in the garden of the European Cultural Centre at Delphi, a piece that reveals a different aspect of the artist's outlook. Rather than using his favourite material – glass – the artist here used local stone slabs, prioritising the construction process and the fluidity of modelling, reminding us that in sculpture there is no end – only a beginning.

In 1994, Varotsos produced his most famous sculpture, the impressive *Runner*, installed in the heart of Athens – a sculpture that pierces through immobility, emphasising solidity of structure and fragility of material. Harmoniously blending into the urban landscape, this sculpture was made of successive layers of glass attached to a frame able to support several tons of weight. The *Runner* has become an iconic landmark of Athens. The sculpture was first installed on Omonoia Square, before moving to the square just across from the National Gallery, in 2004. In 2015, Varotsos produced a smaller, 2.80m-tall version of *The Runner* – a work full of tension, for a private garden on Corfu.

People who know Varotsos well are aware that the sculptor never rests on his laurels. In Pierides Gallery, I lived for many years in the presence of his astounding *Medusa* (1986), in which the artist combined

painting and sculpture to great poetic effect. Treated with sculptural intensity and power, olive branches become the centrepiece of an enormous installation, with painted gestures on transparent sculpted planes, intensifying the dialogue between plastic and pictorial form. I had the feeling that a strong current was breathing life into the innumerable lines, evoking a space of translucent mystery. *Medusa* alludes to the myth of the beautiful priestess to Athena whom the goddess of wisdom, to avenge Poseidon, transformed into a hideous monster by turning her hair into snake locks. It is evident here that it is the ongoing relationship of sculpture and painting with space that preoccupied the artist. Throughout his evolutionary journey, restless and imaginative, he has striven to create a form that is readily recognisable at a specific site, yet which is shaped by the future.

Varotsos is not a classicist, but a fervent exponent of dynamic forms in linear arrays. He communicates an exacting sculptural vision, firmly oriented towards originality. Thin sheets of glass converse with thin stone slabs in several of his sculptural pieces, including the well-known *Bridge* (1999). Stoic and unwavering in his art, he opts for simplicity in his quest for the absolute. With a dreamy intensity and expressive freedom, Varotsos produced *Moons*, either in monumental scale, set in the outdoors under the Mediterranean light, for instance the famous celebrated *Moon* set on the rocks of a beach on Spetses, or in smaller- and medium-size versions, in interior settings.

Varotsos and Public Space

Few artists nowadays, Daniel Buren, Richard Serra, Takis, and Gordon Matta Clark among them, have had the good fortune to have their visionary sculptures installed in public sites. Richard Serra, on the other hand, had a rather painful experience when, in 1989, his sculpture was removed from Foley Federal Plaza in Manhattan by court order. Struggling with public indifference, Varotsos managed to have major sculptures installed in public and private spaces in Greece, Switzerland, the U.S.A., Cyprus, Italy, and other countries. Of course, the challenges were substantial, yet his determination and creative powers helped him realise his vision. I will never forget, however, his confession to Mary Adamopoulou about *Horizons*, which went on display at the Venice Biennale in 1995 and was subsequently installed at the Port of Antwerp: 'The City of Antwerp asked to acquire *Horizons*. Yet, I also received a proposal to bring the piece to Corfu, and I accepted. I didn't get any money; I cut the work into pieces, loaded them on lorries, and we proceeded to install the artwork in the port. Elections came, the mayor changed, and the new one decided he didn't like the artwork. He ordered for it to be scrapped – the work I had donated! I was too shocked to react.' ('Costas Varotsos', *Contemporary Greek Visual Artists*, Ta Nea [in Greek]). Varotsos fought against the misery and grief of utter mediocrity, against indifference to the public good and the beauty of space; he preferred fighting stubbornly to distancing and silencing himself.

Takis Mavrotas

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B. & M. Theocharakis Foundation
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Horizon [2017], iron and glass, Ø170 cm (each)



Press Machine [2005], iron and glass, 190x90x8 cm



Double Moon [2018], iron and glass, 70x80x3 cm



Totem [2018], iron and glass, 100x60x40 cm



Europe 2018 [2018], iron and glass, 65x35x4 cm



Europe 2018 [2018], iron and glass, 70x60x20 cm



Totem [2005], iron and glass, 50x30x30 cm



Spiral [2017], iron and glass, 70x40x40 cm



Poet [1983], iron and glass, height 6 m, Nicosia, Cyprus

