

Integrating terms referring to Greek art in to the DYAS Thesaurus: the “bottom-up” method based on the case of ASFA gallery

The lack of vocabulary tools concerning Greek art is obvious to everyone specializing in Greek art, no matter what the exact scope of her discipline (artist, art historian, art theoretician, art critic etc.) or her current academic status (student, researcher etc.) is. It is not here the place nor the time to discuss the reasons of this constant research difficulty which is closely related to the absence of a legitimate terminology in Greek established by the scientific community of art historians specializing in Greek art. What we would like to point out is that the absence of this kind of terminology and of a cohesive net of conceptual relations between art terms referring to Greek art, seems to have inevitably affect the ΔΥΑΣ Thesaurus and the way it is developing.

Let us take for instance the generic term “modern Greek art” (Νεοελληνική Τέχνη) and the way it appears in its typical hierarchical presentation in the ΔΥΑΣ Thesaurus system. The term appears in the general category “artistic tendencies” under a long list which includes art movements such as “Abstract art”, “Expressionism” or “Impressionism” along with historical artistic phenomena such as “Renaissance”, “Modernism” and “Modern Art” (Νεότερη Τέχνη) which can hardly be considered as “artistic tendencies” from the point of view of art history. “Modern Greek art” is listed as a subcategory of “Modern art”. Especially the term “Modern art” which is differentiated from “Modernism”, is seen as an artistic tendency distinct from “Impressionism” or “Surrealism” instead of appearing as a broader artistic category which includes the last two. It goes without saying, that the term “Modern Greek art” – subsumed under the term “Modern art”– is also seen isolated from its relations with the above mentioned artistic tendencies. This could lead someone to assume that Modern

Greek art is just a branch of Modern art not connected to artistic tendencies such as Neoclassicism, Impressionism, Expressionism and so on. But this is only a case of a “misleading” hierarchy concerning basic terms of art history and its relations to modern Greek art. The problem can become even more complicated when it comes to special terms largely debated and referring exclusively to Greek art, such as “ellinikotita” or “generation of the thirties” (γεννιά του 1930), which Thesaurus in its present status hasn’t yet incorporated but –hopefully– it will soon have to face.

We think that the problem of art terms referring to Greek art should be taken seriously into account even at this early stage of the development of DYAS Thesaurus. Since there isn’t any existing valid vocabulary tool for Greek art that we can rely on or translate (as is the case for western art), we have to create one right from the beginning. What we would like to propose here is another way of building up the art vocabulary – different from the one we followed till now. This time with a special emphasis on terms referring to Greek art.

The idea may seem a bit unorthodox. Yet is simple and far from original and can be summarized in what is often schematically described as the “bottom-up method”. More specifically, while continuing to integrate basic art terms into the DYAS Thesaurus risking to get lost into daidalean classification schemes more appropriate to the taxonomies of western art, we can at the same time start backwards and focus on a more “down-to-earth” goal. This goal is also more relevant to the content of the art collections registered in the DYAS data base. By using the visual resource collection of ASFA gallery as a corpus of reference, we would like to propose the development of a sample vocabulary of art terms (technical and historic ones) describing the specific art works and consequently referring straight to greek art. The art collection of ASFA gallery can be proved a valuable starting point in this case for two reasons. Firstly, because it’s a

relatively small, easily accessible through the internet and already categorized collection according to basic art terms. Secondly because it constitutes a corpus of art works highly representative of Greek art and of its history. In our case, this special vocabulary could contain a brief description of each term, its translation (in English, French or German), a reference to external links wherever this is possible along with a link to the related iconographic subjects from ASFA's gallery collection. In this way, following a trajectory from the particular (Greek art) to the universal (art), we could create a basis vocabulary for Greek art as a component of DYAS Thesaurus, which could progressively expand by placing Greek art into more complex and accurate classification schemes for art and art history.

Since one of our principal interests is to develop a vocabulary tool useful to the Greek scientific community and compatible with the particularities of the special field of modern Greek art, those particularities have to be taken into consideration. After having assimilated the difficulties concerning the development and use of an art vocabulary, we tend to believe that the DYAS Thesaurus in this second phase of its development should deal with Greek art in a more systematic way than before in order to meet the research needs of a scientific community almost completely deprived from such tools. We think that a well-documented and restricted vocabulary specializing in terms referring to greek art, as the one we propose here, can be proved more useful than a general vocabulary of art terms quite similar to the existing ones and at the same time more functional in the context of a main DYAS Thesaurus.