

THE TEMPERATURE IN 1968 IN ATHENS PER HOUR

For Pierre Bonnard

1968

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In 1968, I turned fourteen and entered that special time of our lives: adolescence. In February, my father died. It was also the year that I decided to become a painter, with all that it entailed. That, in brief, is what happened in my life then.

Outside of me, of course, was the world. I remember certain events that took place, such as Robert Kennedy's assassination, Paris in May, the Prague invasion.

From there on, what I truly remember and what I've fabricated in my memory I cannot say.

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The water in the pot of the 1960s had reached a boil, but the heavy lid could not take the pressure and flew off in 1968.

A storm swept the world in 1968. That's how Tariq Ali begins his essay *Storming the Heavens*, and it was indeed a storm.

The war in Vietnam gave rise to a massive student movement, not just in the US, but almost everywhere. Photographs from the war, such as those by Eddie Adams, and from the slaughtering of entire villages, such as those by Ha My, made their way around the world, inciting strong reactions and protests. In the US, the protests gained huge momentum, culminating in the refusal to enlist through the public burning of military draft papers.

The movement for human rights in America gained great power and, on the 4th of April, Martin Luther King was assassinated. In May, Paris was out of the government's control, with 11,000,000 labourers on strike across

France. On Wednesday, October 2, the government in Mexico killed 300-400 protesters in its attempt to quash the student movement, whose social impact had become extensive.

This was the time of sexual and social liberation, of the women's movement, of hope that the world could change; it was the time that the Soviet Union lost its influence on the new generation as the expresser of the Left.

In addition, *as the lid flew off*, several ideas began to mature in cinema and theatre, and the visual arts were redefined in unprecedented ways.

As a central event of 1968, the Paris movement was defeated in political but not in cultural terms, since the mark it left had a widespread effect on ideas and the arts. Here, however, we were under a dictatorship.

The work

Each hour is a square measuring 3x3 cm. The colour contained within each square indicates the temperature of the respective hour. The 24 squares in each horizontal line are one day. Each month – depending of the number of days it's made up of – has the corresponding number of horizontal lines.

In 1968, the lowest temperature was -4 and the highest 37 degrees centigrade. I made 41 different colours, from blue, which is the coldest, to a warm red. Each colour corresponds to a degree of temperature, with 0°C represented by white.

This work is connected to another I made in 1997-98, titled *Days and Nights in York*, where I showed the shape the sky would take on if we were to develop the hours of sunrise and sunset throughout the year, to create an image.

Both these works belong in the field of landscape painting, since the first shows us the sky and the second an element of the atmosphere (which was a recurring subject for the impressionists): temperature. They are, of course, landscapes that can't be seen, but painting has always been the art that reveals what we cannot see.

To create *The temperature in 1968 in Athens, by the hour*, I had to find the relevant records and, in my search, I stumbled. The records I found listed the temperature at three-hour intervals. I was disheartened, but then I happened to speak with Athina Azina, who suggested I ask Giannis Tsiros, professor and director of the Meteorology Lab at the Athens Agricultural University. It was thanks to the records he had access to, on the hourly measurements of the air temperature in Athens in 1968, that I was able to make this piece. Coincidences, chance and mistakes that, in correcting them, lead you elsewhere, are some of the basic conditions for creating a work of art. Without this material, the work could obviously not have been made.

A word of the dedication to Pierre Bonnard

Aside from the great love and admiration I've had for Bonnard ever since my time as a student, this is a piece that, despite not being obvious, is deeply influenced by his painting.

And another thing. In his journals, as well as sketches and ideas on potential paintings, there is almost always a note on the weather.

George Hadjimichalis