

## Analects

*The artist is called upon to “read” the past and to add his reading to the future. Reading the past is a habit, a tradition...* —Jannis Kounellis

In Byzantine times, correspondence was the main means of communication for the state and private individuals. To protect the secrecy of documents sent through this form of communication and to certify their authenticity, the sender would use a lead seal or bulla. The inscriptions and scenes inscribed on these seals, the subject of sigillography, make for a richly diverse panorama no artist can easily resist. For scholars, on the other hand, they are a rich source of information about the life and culture of Byzantium. The events and scenes they depict carry a strong religious sentiment and reflect the profoundly Christian foundation of Byzantine culture, although more secular representations can also be found.

It was their artistic aspect, however, that appealed to me and first aroused my interest.

Engraved with inspiration, care and expertise by master craftsmen of the age, these small coin-sized forms have come down to us oxidized and damaged, with details of scenes haphazardly effaced. Yet they have acquired that secret allure of decay and the patina of time without losing any of their value or appeal.

Working with aquatint on tin plates, I tried to transfer whatever piqued my curiosity and aroused my pulse. I played with the mirror that etching gives me, the positive-negative, creating engraving surfaces through a “correct” reading. I used thick waxed red thread for stitching to allude to the threads or *mirinθοι* that were used to affix the seals to the documents they authenticated.

As might be expected, the secret charm of Byzantine art and culture could not but lead me to another set of Byzantine possibilities and thus to the creation of two series of works: Together they form what one could call my personal “analects”, in the sense of a collection of favorite subjects.

In this second set I created engraving plates with figures one might consider incompatible with Christianity but which were nonetheless found all around Byzantine art. These figures believed to have magical, apotropaic powers that point to primordial fears and their overcoming, with means that are not rational, a timely reference, one might say, in today's age of fear and uncertainty.