

Photo exhibition: "Home of the Heart: Mytilenians and Migration", by Vasilios Vasilas

Capturing Migrants Journey of Uncertainty and Hope

One of the highlights of the Mytilenian Brotherhood of N.S.W's inaugural "Mytilenian Week" of various functions was the photo exhibition, "Home of the Heart: Mytilenians and Migration", by Vasilios Vasilas.

With Australian multiculturalism continually evolving, the photo exhibition works on two distinct levels; the collection's universal appeal highlights the mutual experience among Australia's migrants by placing it within the context of one socio-cultural group- the Mytilenians from the Greek island of Lesbos.

One hundred photographs, collected from Mytilenian migrants, captured the migrant's journey: the emotional departure from their respective villages and, ports of Mytilene and Piraeus; their long voyages of uncertainty and hope on liners such as the *Patris* and *Cyrenia*; and the initial mixed emotions to their adopted homeland.

Complimenting each photograph is also a caption highlighting the migrants' own recount of what is actually happening, as well as their feelings and thoughts about their migratory journey. By placing a migrant's photograph and memory together, the exhibition vividly captures their experience.

In his support for functions of a cultural nature, Mytilenian Brotherhood President, Stavros Kritikos, believed Vasilas' work should be finally promoted on public display.

For several years, Sydney school teacher, Vasilios Vasilas, has been gathering photographs from Mytilenian migrants, culminating in a vast collection of visual material that depicts the journey of the Mytilenian people to Australia.

Vasilas' idea of gathering old photographs for future use in a possible photo exhibition ironically occurred while visiting an old friend of his late-grandfather and scouring through his old photo album.



The Vasiliou family-on the way to Australia- awaiting to board their ship bound for Piraeus. Apostolos Vasiliou, his mother, Myrsini, and his brother, Efstratios, are second, third and fourth from the left respectively.

Courtesy of Apostolos Vasiliou



Migrants from Paleohori enjoy a stopover in Premantle, Western Australia. Squatting and holding a rockmelon is Apostolos Malamas; on the left of him is Mersini Markou and her uncle, Konstantinos Markou, and on the right is his sister, Paradisia.

wealth of Lesbos and a photo exhibition on Mytilenians and Migration is a fitting way to

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acknowledge the journey of these people and integration within Australia's community," stated President, Stavros Kritikos.

"With functions such as a photo exhibition, in which all the captions are written in English I might add, we are ultimately trying to connect the migrants' generation to the next generations and the broader community."

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some of his old photos. One of them really struck me. His family was leaving their village, Vatousa, and on their day of departure, all their relatives came to farewell them. It immediately struck me; there were twenty or thirty people posing for one last photograph before the Kougiou family left. On the fringes were these old ladies dressed in black and there was so much sorrow in every-

one's faces.

"When I asked Pavlis the reason for such a photograph, he replied, 'We took the photo because we did not know whether we'd see our families again. We were, after all, traveling to the other side of the world; were we ever going to return?'"

"It is then it struck me that such photographs needed to be gathered and used in some way- in a photo exhibition- as one photograph may depict the personal history of an individual or family but a collection of photographs depict a history of a people," explained Vasilios Vasilas.

His long-term objective is to continue this work on Mytilenians and Migration

with a series of exhibitions that capture their whole journey (as a community).

"Although this exhibition is based on the journey of migration, I would love to do a prequel on the homeland these people left behind (Greece), and a sequel on their experiences in the adopted homeland they integrated in (Australia). Such a trilogy would offer viewers a complete image of their journey: the different contexts, adversities, triumphs and failures," continued Vasilas.

Home of the Heart: Mytilenians and Migration is being shown at the Mytilenian House during Mytilenian Week.



Nikolaos and Sophia Pandazes (in the front row, first and second from the left respectively) attend English lessons on board the passenger liner, *Patris*. Circa 1966.

Courtesy of Nikos and Sophia Pandazes