

ARTIST PROFILE

Mary Zoumpoulis

How did you become involved in the Hellenic Lyceum's "Nurturing Hellenic Heritage the Australian Way" exhibition?

In 1998, I had participated in a Biennale event titled Proteus, an exhibition by Greek Australian artists working around the theme of change and transformation and was approached accordingly for this show.

What influenced your decision to accept the invitation?

I have been focusing on working with the body and the energetic healing arts. Leading up to this invitation I had been feeling the internal pull to also return to artistic expression, personally yearning for the energetic beauty and power of handling colours and the act of creation as a personal spiritual expression. I felt aligned to the opportunity as being one of 'community'.

Was the artwork you are exhibiting especially designed for this event or is it part of your on-going work?

The works I have contributed are a combination of pertinent pieces from earlier series of portraiture and figurative works of mythos - textural, colour-rich, expressive, emotional, experimental, mixed media such as 'Fayum Aristocrat', 'Muses', 'Tarot', 'Sisters', 'Archaic' and 'Artemis' as well as a more recent abstract work 'Shipscape (The Passage)' using the immediacy of acrylics which spark and reference a current direction that are about line work, markings, spontaneous, intuitive expression and the energetic resonance of colours to trigger emotional responses for the viewer.

How did Hellenic culture and/or history influence your work?

That is a question that has part of me chuckle spontaneously as a reflex. I say this as there is an 'eternal' inherent sensibility of 'being Greek' that I cannot separate as where I am - it is. Thus, my Hellenic self is ever-present in my creative process to varying degrees both consciously and unconsciously.

If you wish to understand some apparent aspects I am referring to they may include the ongoing desire and pull to go beyond 'the ordinary', to aspire to progress, to believe that heights are accessible to me (as to all - as a divine birthright), to be attracted to beauty and to have the freedom to express passions as a-given characteristics. Corresponding to the Ionic columns which with exquisite simplicity tapered from their earthly foundations toward 'the heavens' to respect and acknowledge that although I am having human experiences I am reminded to 'look up' and sense that

I am unified just the same with Spirit and divinity and inspiration works through all of us...

How are these influences projected in your work?

Thematically, I have been attracted to refer to mythic entities: 'Muses', 'Archaic', 'Artemis. Artistically, I have readily granted myself the freedom to create religious icons with emotional expression of the human aspect when representing Saints...

The classic neutral tones of the pre-Christian 'iconic' works of the tombstone portraits of the 'Fayum Aristocrat' is a departure from my unabashed colour palette and holds the subject matter of the unknown realms and earthly death. These subjects do not deter me if I feel moved. That is my archaic courage. I feel free to express not to deny myself emotionally through my visual representations, this is a Greek characteristic. Having said that, my Greek 'idealistic' innate sensibilities do deter me from creating works that are of the denser, 'uglier' expressions...

A Greek-Australian artist: a blessing or a hurdle in getting recognized by the Australian art community?

I am uncertain as to how to respond to this as my personal struggle for artistic recognition at times has appeared as one as a non technical artist who is mostly self-taught in general perhaps as subject to a lack in support and opportunities for placements within the state of NSW specifically. Over the years I found myself illegible based on my age. I would not consider this a fair comment to draw in perhaps another state such as Victoria or even South Australia which may be generally more accessible to all artists...

Once upon not so long ago, the term "Greek-Australian" artists carried a certain stigma. What issues did you have to overcome on a personal basis?

Personally, I have not framed myself with the Greek-Australian label in my life experience. It is implied that Australians are multi-cultural and we naturally express this through our essence, persona, approach, intention etc spontaneously. As such, I have not identified such limitations.

Have you got any projects on the pipeline?

Yes, I have intentions to move to more abstract works; energetic, emotive, spiritual expressions to provoke more intuitive execution with a renewed fearlessness of colour, and experimentation with brush strokes and medium. As I am not a technician but rather an expressionistic artist I



cannot reclaim the exact emotional and energetic values expressed in works already produced as they were created 'in that moment', 'that passage' of personal experience and awareness, since passed. I am considering a return to some commercial reproductions taking up the technological production advances to bring my previously one-off original artworks to a wider audience, expanding accessibility. I also intend to refer to particular pieces of past works that hold popular or significant personal interest as inspiration to create new works as more portraits and figurative works.

Finally, a message to the Greek-Australian community.

My love for you has not always been easy but has always been present, akin to familial love. I am proud, and privileged to possess the birthright of Greek ancestry, a profound lineage of substance, community, family, warmth, passion, hospitality, drama, joy, humour, heights, compassion, the

esoteric, ritual and of Spirit. Coupled with the liberties my Australian upbringing has bestowed upon me to not have to consider threats of war and related political pressures, an innocence, naiveté, youth, pioneering spirit and comradeship and literal geographical distance has allowed me liberties to experiment and invent without impeaching classical constructs, is another blessing. I suppose my message at this moment is that unconditional love and intention matters and supports the truth that we are spiritual beings having human experiences and thus we are all 'One'.

There is a planetary urge toward releasing denser emotions: guilt, greed, judgment, limitation or shame and to surrender sufferance so as to remember 'community' and how to be 'heart-centric' to facilitate our return to our collective awakening and home-coming...irrespective of our geography.

Love is love, respect is respect. There is a 'New Golden Era on Earth' to come...where boundaries dissolve.