



ALLYSON VIEIRA

ON THE ROCK

THE ACROPOLIS INTERVIEWS

ΣΤΟΝ ΒΡΑΧΟ

ΟΙ ΣΥΝΕΝΤΕΥΞΕΙΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΚΡΟΠΟΛΗ

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The essential marble carving tools:
pencil, folding rule, kopídhi (pitching
chisel), velóni (pointed chisel),
dislidiko (small toothed chisel),
fagána (large toothed chisel), láma
(flat chisel), hammer, and pihi
(parallel straightedge).



THE INTERVIEWS

GIORGOS ANGELOPOULOS

In his uncle's barbershop, Athens

TO START AT THE BEGINNING, I'll have to go back thirty-five, thirty-eight years. It started in 1974. Since childhood I liked working in stone, and when I came to Athens at fourteen—no, twelve years old, from my home in Ilia, or as you would say, from the Peloponnese—I was really impressed. One day I was with my uncle, my mother's brother, and we passed by a workshop where I saw a sculpture of an aviator, an Air Force man. It was just a plaster figure. And I admired it so much that I wanted to do all that work. I wanted to be able to make it myself.

I was thirteen, and I decided then and there. With my uncle's help we found the sculptor and talked to him: Yiannis Georgiou, who was by then a very successful sculptor. I went to school at night and worked in the morning, from seven o'clock until three. I studied in the afternoon in order to go to school in the evening.

In early '77, I began working officially. Before that I was working as an amateur, an apprentice. But in 1977, I earned my first legal wage. I was sixteen years old. The first period was extremely hard because our work is arduous. That is, the *mandrakás* and chisel—as a young boy to take that up and work on the marble is certainly tiring.¹ It's one of the hardest tasks—marble sculpting. How can I say it—being on your feet for so many hours chiseling marble is wearing and tiring. You need arm muscles; you have to have a robust constitution to be able to cope, so to speak. After a while you get used to it. And by now, as experienced as I am, no matter how many hours I'm standing it doesn't bother me. Rather, it gives me pleasure, like I'm not standing at all.

[Georgiou's workshop] is well known, so we didn't work only in Athens. We made all types of monuments—memorials, statues—all over Greece. We had jobs from Crete to Evros, on almost every island, whenever and wherever there was a need. We made memorials of heroes, we made statues for cemeteries, for public squares, we made major public monuments. . . . I worked together with [Georgiou's] son—we were a year apart in age. I later left to work on the Parthenon. But the son has continued; this marble workshop still exists.

[Georgiou] was a very strict master, a very good teacher, because that's the only way you can learn this work. Oh, he was extremely strict. Very! His strictness interested me in that he was not strict for its own sake, or because of his personality. It was all about the work. He simply was strict in order to teach the kids who studied alongside him, his son and me, for us to properly learn the work. Especially about the detail, because marble requires serious patience and attention to detail. Damage can occur in an instant. So you must have the experience to protect [the marble], especially when you're dealing with four, five, or six, or ten tons of marble that you have to move or turn over to work in various ways.

With all the experience that Yiannis Georgiou had, he certainly wouldn't have anyone do something irresponsible or dangerous. He had me do simple types of work first. I started on the full block of marble, and he watched me until the point that I wouldn't damage it. As time goes by, you gradually evolve, you gain experience until, at some point in the stages of the work, you become trustworthy. The

¹ *Mandrakás* (pl. *mandrakádes*): a small, symmetrical, square, hand-held hammer, often with slightly flared ends, used with a chisel.

master trusts you and you begin alongside him, and with his help, of course, you work carefully and until the final form emerges.

Mainly I dealt with marble. I made the marble copies from my master, who made the clay, and from the clay I—we—made the plaster cast. That was great experience. When a sculptor makes the clay, he has an inspiration of his own, which is to achieve a specific [likeness of a] person. From that clay I had to make that same likeness in marble. It requires great care. Everyone had his responsibility.

I could tell you, of course, about some of the large personal jobs that I've done such as the Venizelos in Thessaloniki, which is four meters, twenty centimeters. It was the first piece that I participated in, but as a secondary master. From then on I had the experience to undertake works by myself, such as the Lion of Piraeus. I also did Makarios, the leader of Cyprus, a 2.2 meter statue.

I remained [in the workshop] twelve years, and then I considered myself a ready master. Okay, the reason that I left then was that I wanted to do my own thing. I felt that I was ready as a marble master. At the same time, [the Acropolis job] came up, so I went there. It was a coincidence that when I applied to go up on the Rock, I had an old acquaintance there, a marble sculptor, who I'd worked with in the workshop. In 1987 about twenty of us took exams and I basically came in second. So I got into the Acropolis. That's when I was twenty-six. The conditions and the pay were okay there, and at the same time I was working at a second job. If I hadn't liked it or seen something that didn't sit right with me, I could have opened my own shop, let's say. That's what I mean.

Look, when first I went to the Parthenon, I felt really different. It's a big difference from the private sector, the behavior and the demands are different. At the workshop you are obliged to obey and accept your master, or as I told you, I wouldn't have been able to learn the job. There was also the strictness and other things that were oppressive. I wanted something better. On the Parthenon, the engineers and the architects behave differently. They don't speak the same way as in the private sector, where they can curse at you. I guess the reason I left [the workshop] was that I was feeling humiliated. That is, you are required to listen to whatever and if you respond or argue, you're finished. And I wasn't satisfied with the money I was getting. In general, there was a lot of pressure. However, when I went to the Acropolis, I felt liberated. That is, so long as I knew the work, I didn't have anyone on top of me. You always advance, that's the way I began, and I later became, by the engineers' choice, the foreman of the place.

To learn this craft and then dare—like me—to apply to work on the Acropolis. . . . This craft is so specialized. You have to have patience. And you have

DIMITRIS FOSKOLOS

Outdoor café, Panormos Bay, Tinos

A new piece of marble is carved to complete an ancient, broken architrave. The ancient marble is coated with a clay slip, the two massive pieces are rolled together to touch, and the clay leaves marks where the fit is not yet precise.

MOST OF THE PEOPLE who have worked on the Acropolis are natives of Tinos, master marble carvers who've started here, have learned the art here, like me. We've fallen in love—at least me—I've fallen in love with marble and this particular art. And it was always my dream to go and work on the reconstruction of the Acropolis.

I was born here in 1957. I grew up and finished elementary school here. I started [with marble] when I was a little boy. We did what we could, engraving marble with iron tools. Playing around! We saw it as a game. We'd take a piece of marble and first we'd

engrave our names, like this, *taka-taka-taka*, on any piece of marble we'd find, on the low walls and benches in the courtyards. We didn't understand then what we were ruining. The school here had tools. They were in our homes, too. The old folks, my granddad, had a *velóni*. There was an old *mandrakás*. . . . I'd find them in drawers, in trunks. So, I'd find a tool and see that it worked for what I wanted, and use it.

From there on, my hands slowly became free. And gradually I saw, and others did too, that I had an inclination towards marble and that I could continue. An aunt of mine was telling me since I was little that I should go to school and learn the art of marble carving. But it was also the local craftsmen who saw me, as a young boy. They urged me to continue this work.

I went to the marble school here, the one in Pyrgos.¹⁹ My first professor of sculpture was called Paraschos. Vassilis Paraschos. Also Yiannis Maniatakos.²⁰ I was in my last year [as a student] and Yiannis Maniatakos was in his first year [teaching]. I finished that school, and was second in my class, so I got a scholarship to the Athens Polytechnic. I understood that Yannis sent me to the Polytechnic because I'd matured as a boy. He said to me, "Dimitris, you should go, even though times are hard, go."

It was one level of learning there [in Athens], another here [on Tinos]. Here, we were kids.²¹ Older students didn't come here then. Almost everyone was from Tinos. There were no foreigners then.²² And we were all kids. The students were different in Athens. Things had become serious there. There we had to deal with different people from different schools. It was great. The professors were very good. There the marble professor was Bárba-Yiorgis Kouskouris.²³ But the conditions were not good then.

I arrived there at the worst time. It was the time of the Junta, the Dictatorship.²⁴ Things were hard. There were beatings; there were strikes. We couldn't have our lessons. There was a great upheaval in Athens. What can I tell you. . . .

Well, you see, the Polytechnic was an assembly point. And the dictators didn't want people assembling anywhere. But we, all the kids, did our protesting. I also

19 The Preparatory and Professional School of Fine Arts of Panormos (also known as the School of Fine Arts at Pyrgos) has been training marble carvers on Tinos since 1955.

20 Yiannis Maniatakos (1935–2017), sculptor and painter, director of the School on Tinos for thirty years.

21 Between thirteen and sixteen years old.

22 Non-locals, or non-Tinians.

23 *Bárba*–: literally, "uncle." When hyphenated before a first name becomes a traditional, old-fashioned form of affectionate, respectful address for an older man.

24 1967–74.

went out to the gates shortly before the tanks came in. I can't say for sure since I wasn't there the last evening. I'd left the day before the invasion.²⁵ And what happened, happened. They didn't want any assemblies. They invaded the studios and busted up everything. [Students] on one side; the police, riot police, on the other. They wouldn't let us concentrate. How could you study like that? My seeing all that—I tell you—and for financial reasons, it was a difficult time. Some withstood it, others committed suicide, others were lost. . . . Others, I don't know. . . . I lost a lot of colleagues. Some said they were killed, others that they were thrown [out of windows]. I had an acquaintance at that time who was thrown from the fifth floor.

All of Athens was turned upside down. You couldn't go out and about. I stayed there only one year, because of all of the events that were taking place, plus financial reasons. My parents couldn't afford to have me there and pay for me to study. I was from a poor family. There were no possibilities for me to work outside because we had morning and afternoon classes. We went to painting and sculpture classes with nude models in the afternoon, in the evening. I didn't have the hours. And I had to choose: to stay—I don't know how I could have—or to go out to work, which I did.

I went to work outside in a workshop. There I really learned the art well. I was seventeen, eighteen. Then, of course, the army took me, like all the kids. After I was discharged, I continued in a workshop for a decade more. We worked a lot on ecclesiastical projects. When we say ecclesiastical works, we mostly mean Byzantine. We made icon screens, *despotiká*, pulpits. We carved bell towers. The *despotikó* is where the priest goes up and chants. Then I went to the Acropolis, which was my dream. I pursued it. I must have been twenty-nine or thirty.

But the one job is completely different from the other. On the Acropolis, someone who hasn't worked there, no matter how skilled an artist he is, no matter how much he says he knows the craft . . . what happens on the Acropolis doesn't happen outside of it. It doesn't happen in any workshop. It's different. And that difference is what pulls all of us Whatever you do on the outside, freelance, it has absolutely no worth before the pieces we worked on that went in alongside the pieces [carved by] the ancients.

Let's begin at the beginning. You put your hands [on the marble] and work on top of the hands of the ancient Greeks. It's terrific, inconceivable! We would try to find some mistake they'd made. And we couldn't find it for anything! It was perfect. That was exciting.

Before I went to work on the Acropolis, I had no idea what restoration was. In the beginning, like everyone, we were scared. And then our hands were freed.

25 On November 17, 1973, tanks crashed through the gates of the Athens Polytechnic and it was violently invaded. Many students died.