

# Myth carved in stone

Sculptor Venia Dimitrakopoulou shapes Aegina's volcanic rocks into figures from the ancient past

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AT TIMES resembling face-masks from the tragedies of ancient theatre, Venia Dimitrakopoulou's sculpted heads are invested with a strong dramatic element now on display in *Conquered Territories of Mneme and Cosmos*, her exhibition at the Athens Art Gallery.



Agamemnon's cry started it all

The show, resembling an installation, has Aiakos, son of Zeus and nymph Aegina, seemingly conversing with Agamemnon in the presence of Hemera, personification of the day. The dramatic heads of Dimitrakopoulou's figures appear serene and sage, as if awakened from a deep, centuries-long sleep.

Their half-gaping mouths seem to hint at whispers from the past.

The cry's multiple connotations - be it a shout, exclamation of pain, or expression of triumph - are at the heart of the work.

"I started off with Agamemnon's cry of awe," Dimitrakopoulou told the *Athens News*. "After running its course, the cry takes the shape of a smile in the face of Gaia, who - like all the female figures in the exhibition - is smiling."

The discourse between past and present is reinforced through Philippos Koutsaftis' evocative-lighting touch. (Koutsaftis's 2001 *Mirthless Rock* documentary traced the connection between the industrial town of Elefsis, west of Athens, and the Eleusinian mysteries of antiquity.)

## Love inherited

Dimitrakopoulou inherited her love for the medium from her father, a lawyer who was an amateur sculptor in his youth.

Up till now she has captured seminal figures which include the busts of 20th-century Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos and conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos.



Warrior with helmet in bronze

This time round Dimitrakopoulou focuses on faces alone. They are rarities, in part because of the material used and its origin.

In addition to the more widely used clay and bronze, she sculpts volcanic rock she collects from Mount Ellanio, widely known as Oros, on the Saronic island of Aegina.

The artist shapes the heads in her studio in Palia Rachi, a village near the 532m mountain which once served as a shrine to worship Zeus.

"Myth has it that during a period of draught Aiakos asked Zeus for rain here," Dimitrakopoulou says. "This is also the place where pilgrims spent the night before performing sacrifices."

Known as andesite, the granite-like stone shares the texture of porphyry but has softer elements to it.

"It is difficult in its handling,"

Dimitrakopoulou says. "Due to its texture it doesn't allow for detailed work like marble does."

The artist does not set out with a certain figure in mind when beginning a piece.

"It is the stones themselves that show me the way. Once I start I can't stop."

✓ Venia Dimitrakopoulou's *Conquered Territories of Mneme (Memory) and Cosmos* is on at the Athens Gallery (4 Glykonas St, tel 210-721-3938) until June 6. Open Tuesday-Friday, 10.30am-2pm and 6-9pm; Saturday 10.30am-2pm; closed Sunday and Monday