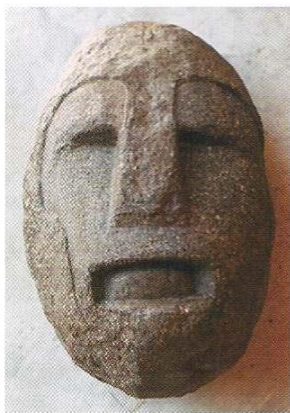


'I believe that art is a way of metamorphosing the world'

Venia Dimitrakopoulou sees what makes each person unique



Venia Dimitrakopoulou studied sculpture with Theodore Papagiannis at the Athens School of Fine Arts and her work is in public and private collections, as well as public spaces such as Athens airport and squares in Lavrion and Piraeus. She recently exhibited her series of stone heads carved from the volcanic rock of Aegina, the island where she lives and works, at the Athens Hilton.

My father taught me to love sculpture. He had a talent in sculpting and painting, and he drew wonderfully. He had come first in the examinations for the Athens School of Fine Arts, but he preferred to become a lawyer. I chose to do what he had left behind him in his life, rather like a void. With hindsight, I think that maybe in doing so I was looking for a way of communicating with him. Who knows?

When I was a little girl, I was not engrossed in painting or in playing with materials and making various shapes. However, the images I created in my imagination were always more powerful than my reason. I felt I was living in a totally imaginary world. I created images, the images became whole stories and in these stories I too existed. I got lost in their maze and, fortunately, I found myself again in reality. That is why, when I finished school, I began studying dramatic art. It was a way of hanging on to this world of make-believe, which so fascinated me. Several years later, when I had graduated from drama school, I began my involvement with sculpture. I discovered that it was very easy for me to take an amorphous material into my hands and to give it form. I had no idea I could do this until then, and when I discovered it I found it tremendously exciting.

It is exciting to see a lump of stone and to be able to give it features, expression, soul. My work is mainly anthropocentric. I have made reliefs, portraits, busts, and I feel the greatest satisfaction not when I achieve the faithful rendering of the features of a face but when I succeed, through these features, in forming and enhancing that special something that is hidden inside every person and which makes him or her unique.

When I start a sculpture I do not think about what material I shall use. First, I let the image take hold of me and deposit within me its emotive charge, which asks me to bring it up to the surface. The choice of material comes after. My most recent work is in volcanic stones from the south side of Aegina, where my studio is located. This is a landscape that makes you feel that within yourself, in every nook and cranny, there hides a myth, a person, a story that comes from far away, like the sunlight, but which warms you with its breath. This is the landscape of Mount Hellenion with the altar of Zeus on its summit, and of Aiakos son of Zeus, mythical king of Aegina and one of the judges of the Underworld, who prayed to his father to bring rain to the island after a three-year drought, and around them moves a whole population of warriors, admirals, heroes, gods and nymphs. Through this landscape emerged the stones, which acquired form and have one common characteristic, the mouth. Sometimes half-open, sometimes wide-open, their mouth utters no cries. What I strive to capture is the expression the mouth takes just before the voice is voiced, just before the triumphant cheer, the joyous laughter, the wail of pain or sorrow, the intensity of the moment when silence gives birth to sound.

I believe that art is a way of metamorphosing the world, of transforming matter, of changing the role of the things around you, of communicating with others through images. And as I said already at the beginning, for me images have always been more powerful than reason.