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Free Collectors Edition

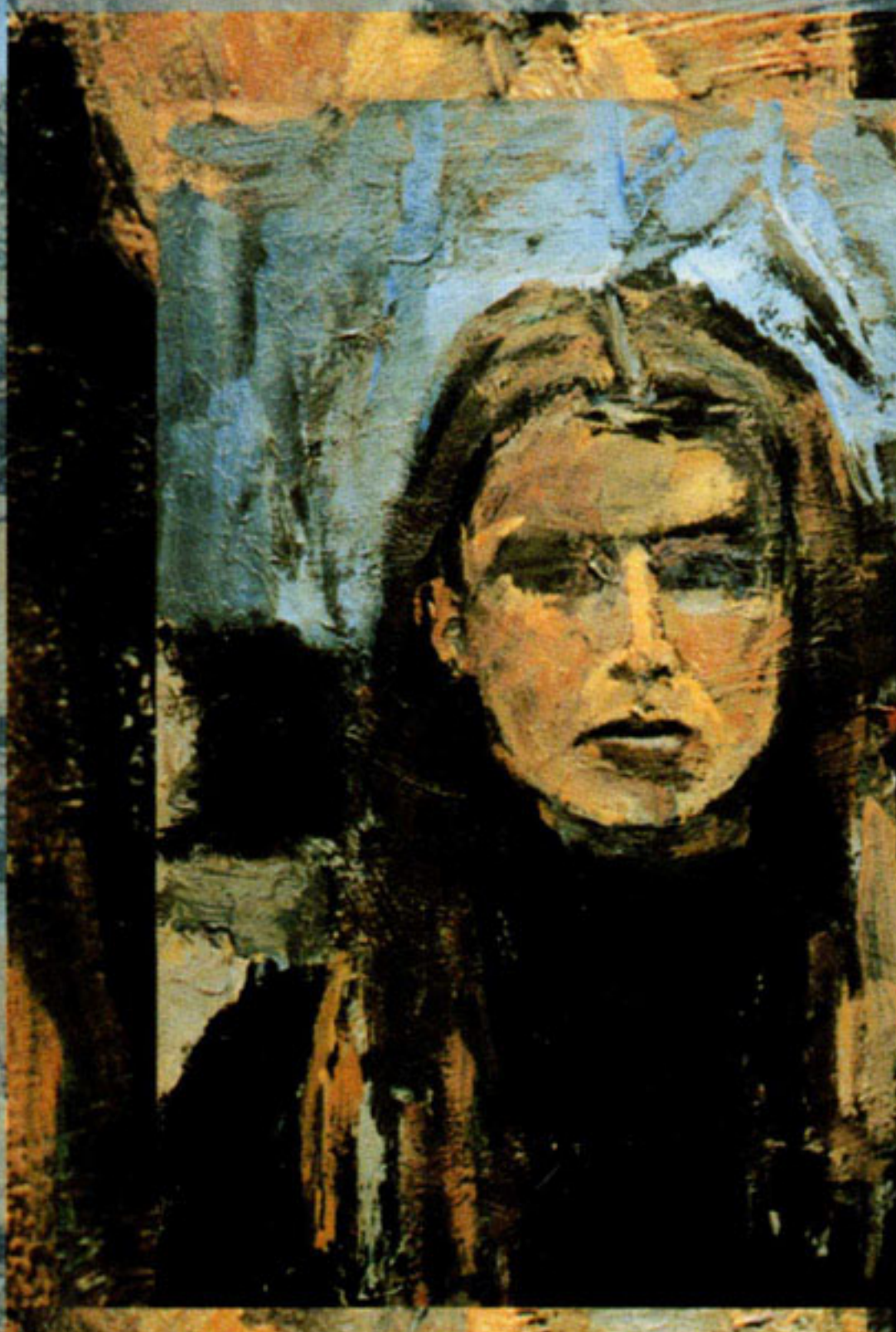


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# *The art* of freedom

Mina Papatheodorou-Valiraki



Strong colours, bold strokes, challenging themes. The work of internationally acclaimed artist Mina Papatheodorou - Valiraki is full of people, cars, sports... Yet, most of all, it depicts her independent way of life, her unique sense of style.

*By Marina Dimitriadis*



First person



Mine Papatheodorou  
Valyrahi





*Pomegranates and Drops of Wine, 1995. Acrylic on canvas. Private collection.*

**Which painters do you admire?**

For different reasons and from different periods I like Piero della Francesca, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Frank Stella, Anselm Kiefer.

**Which people have, in your opinion, influenced your work? Who do you feel has taught you something?**

Without any hesitation, I'd say my first teacher at the Polytechnic, Yannis Moralis, influenced me as far as colour and composition are concerned. Lazaros Lameris influenced me in matters of design, spatial arrangement, the strength that exists in the combination of space—composition, colour, design. My own style came about as a result of these influences plus many other resources I gleaned during my studies, travel, museums.

**What do you think is the most "powerful" element in your paintings?**

I believe that it is the certainty of my design combined with a daring use of colour. These two together are what gives strength to my work, plus my knowledge of composition.

**What is it that draws you to depict sports people just at that unique moment when they are making a superhuman effort?**

I believe that an artist and an athlete have something in common when they try to go beyond the limits, to surpass themselves. It's got something to do with achieving freedom.

**How do you reconcile the mainly "male"**

**fetishes you paint, like cars, with your feminine side?**

How can we include cars in a cliché like "male fetish"? Cars are a tool. They inspire you and give you freedom, especially if they are top class "aerodynamic" models. What could be a greater challenge than studying them and paying homage to them pictorially?

**What contribution does painting make to life today?**

Art has always improved the quality of life for Man and broadened his horizons. Over the centuries, world views have always gone hand in hand with art and vice-versa. And that is not only true of art. It is especially true of architecture, which is the mother of the arts, according to Leon Battista Alberti during the Renaissance.

**Out of all the many major distinctions you have earned, is there one which stands out in your mind? One that made you particularly happy?**

The time when I was declared Sport Artist of the Year 2002 by the United States Sports Academy and the selection of my work "The Downhill Skier" for the official poster of the Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City.

There was also the "Guirlande d'Honneur 2004" which was awarded to me last year by the Presidency of the Italian Republic during the "ARTS, SPORT MOVIES & TV Festival" in Milan. I received the award in recognition of my





Times Square, 1995. Acrylic on canvas. Private collection.





*Formula 1, 2001. Acrylic on canvas. Private collection.*

contribution to Art and Culture for the 2004 Olympics. It was very touching.

**How is it that some works of art can still manage to move people of different ages and different social status all over the planet so deeply even after centuries?**

The golden rule and classic values which have governed every higher work of art over the centuries are what give such works their majesty and uniqueness all over the world and make them able to move human beings. A kouros (ancient statue of a young man) from the archaic period can move us just as much as the statue of the Charioteer from Classical Antiquity. The Bronzes of Riace can move us just as much as the "Stanza della Segnatura" by Raphael and the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo affects us just as much as Guernica.

**What does painting mean to you?**

It's the challenge of coming face to face with my ideas and having a chance to and being able to express them in my own way. When I paint, I'm free, I'm up in the skies with whatever that requires and entails.

**What kind of relationship develops between a work of art and the public?**

The dialogue that springs up between the observer and the work of art. An inner dialogue. What the work conveys to you and how you and your feelings respond.

**Are there different stages to the process**

**of completing a work?**

There are, of course, different stages. And I wish we could separate and demonstrate each stage, because each stage in itself involves a process. But eventually, what follows each stage is what leads us collectively to the completion or non-completion (non finito) of our original idea.

**You have travelled virtually everywhere in the world? What is your favourite destination and why?**

My favourite destination has always been Italy. I've adopted its ways and the country has won me over completely. Especially Tuscany (by that I mean Florence), Rome and the whole of southern Italy. Being in America is equally important for me. The simplicity and open-mindedness of the people there, the contrasts, the challenges, the opportunities and the "value" of each person as an individual, you don't find those things in Greece.

**What do you look for in a holiday?**

I want to be able to be lazy and have fun.

**Do you get any free time, and if so, how do you use it?**

I do get free time and I use it to travel (always with a particular goal in mind). I also go to the cinema; I go swimming.

**Describe what, for you, is a perfect day.**

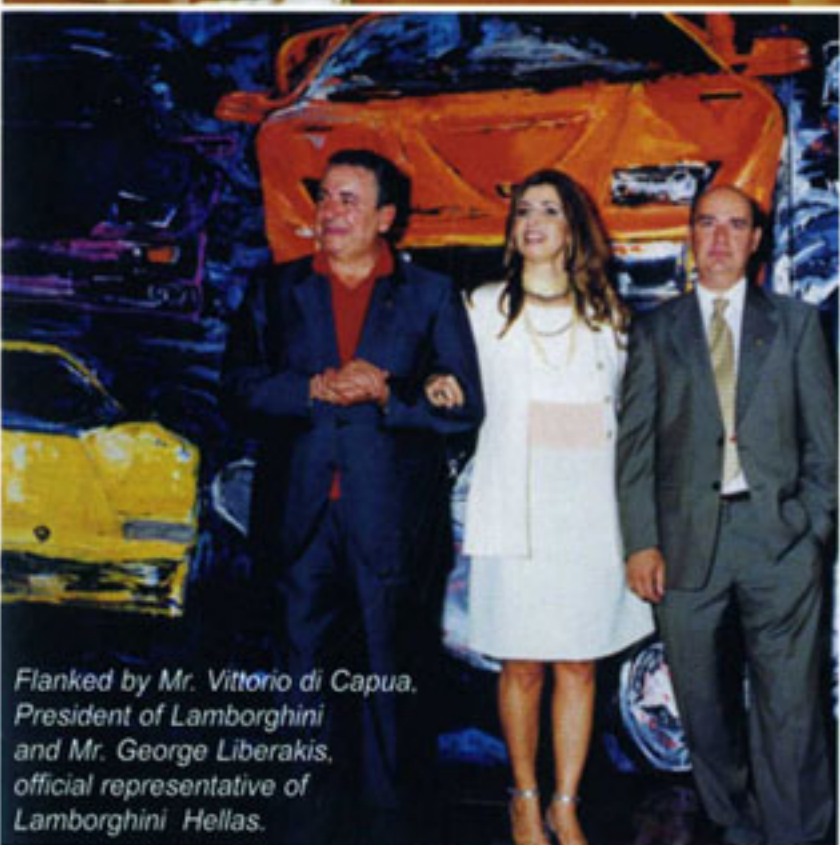
Wake up with a cappuccino, make some phone calls about work, then, most important of all, down to my studio (it's in the same building as



With former minister of Culture, Mr. Evangelos Venizelos.



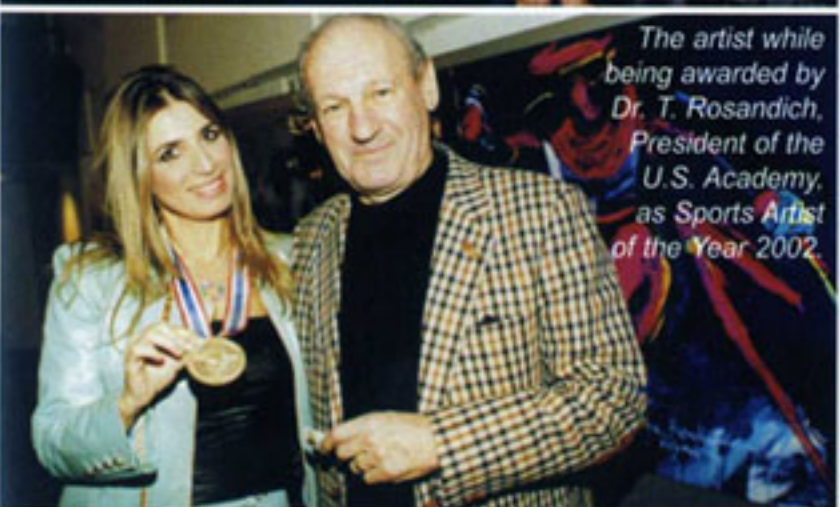
With H.E the Prince Sheikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa.



Flanked by Mr. Vittorio di Capua, President of Lamborghini and Mr. George Liberakis, official representative of Lamborghini Hellas.



With the company of H.E., the President of Greek Republic, Mr. Karolos Papoulias, her husband, Mr. Sifis Valirakis and Mr. John - Philip Lapo Elcan - Agnelli, President of Maserati, grandson and heir of Gianni Agnelli.



The artist while being awarded by Dr. T. Rosandich, President of the U.S. Academy, as Sports Artist of the Year 2002.



With the Governor of Bahrain, Mr. Hummood bin Abdula Al Khalife.



With the famous artist Mr. Fernando Botero.



At the opening of her exhibition in Constantinople, together with His Eminence, the Patriarch Bartholomeos, H.E. Karolos Papoulias and friends.





*Elli, 2001. Mixed technique on papyrus. Private collection.*



*The Obstacle, 1998. Acrylic on canvas. Private collection.*

the apartment, three floors down). The happiest and most productive time for me are the daylight hours I spend there. After I like to go to an open-air cinema, and then, if we're in high spirits, it's off for a nice evening meal in a nearby restaurant in Papagou Park. Up until last year, my children were still at school and my days used to start and end differently. I miss it unbelievably.

**What does the word luxury mean to you? What luxuries do you think you have in your life?**

Sitting on the balcony of my home in Eretria, reading or contemplating, looking out over the little islands opposite as the sun sets - it reminds me of images created by Magritte. Evening walks in Rome at the Campo dei Fiori, buying ice cream at the best gelateria or drinking espresso in the morning at the Café Greco in the Via Condotti. I think it's a luxury to be able to steal back a little bit of precious time and improve the quality of your life and really lift your spirits as a result.

**Mother, wife, internationally recognised artist. How do you manage to cope with playing so many different roles?**

It's a nice game but a tough one. I'd say the most important thing for me are my children and the happiness of my family. And that depends on the strength of my work.

**Your husband is a well-known politician.**

**Would you say you are the political type?**

I don't get involved with politics. I live with a major politician but I keep away politics. I'm not the political type. I am interested in protecting human rights and the principle of Democracy - Human Rights - Dialogue.

**Can an artistic personality such as yourself co-exist with a person like Sifis Valirakis, whose own life is dominated by thoughts of politics?**

It's the fact that we are different that has kept us together all this time.

**What is your recipe for a successful marriage?**

The woman is the driving force. She is the source of inspiration. She is the one who can keep the relationship from going stale.





*Back (Domna), 1983. Tempera on paper. Private collection.*