

# An artist rooted in her work

**Jerome Szymczak**  
*Special to the Greek News*

**L**eda Papakonstantinou is first and foremost a Greek artist. Though initially “exposed and educated” in art in Athens and London in the late 1960s and early 1970s she is now, after nearly a quarter century of painting, performance, and sculptural work, finally “at home” with her ethnic identity. Yet today she is more at ease with the “common language of abstraction,” to which she feels her work contributes. In this way, Leda has both literally and figuratively returned to Greece.

At a showing of nearly 30 of her more powerful paintings and sculptural pieces, featured on Spetses, Leda elaborated on this theme of returning.

“I use a lot of pine and olive wood found here on the island. I select only the burnt or dead trees, dig them up completely from the roots, and then take them to the local boat-builders to be cut into workable sizes. These men are fascinating, for they have a natural appreciation for the former life of the wood bred into them from centuries of building boats. This is a life I seek to bring out in my work as well.”

What emerges are works of art designed to bridge a much neglected gap between nature and ourselves.

She smooths wooden surfaces to a tactile gloss, tars the wood to a rich ebony and then incorporates bits of stainless-steel, nickel-plate, lead, aluminum and sometimes marble to create evocative sculptures, both primitive and modern at once. According to the artist, the attempt is to both link and emphasize the distance between ourselves and nature, while stressing our communion with it.

“My work can be assertive in ways that I cannot,” Leda claims. “I am most happy when in closer touch with the matter which makes up all of us. “It is both a luxury and a contentment to keep busy,” she says with a smile, and I dare say this applies to us art-lovers as well.

*The work of Leda Papakonstantinou can be viewed by appointment until the end of August by calling her at her studio on Spetses (0298) 73770.*

*Her work is also on permanent display in Athens at the gallery of Ileana Tounta, 643 9466.*



*Where time stands still... an Olympian mother and child in national costume*

## A land of closely guarded tradition

**Alison Montford**  
*Special to the Greek News*

**F**or hundreds of years the people of Karpathos have fiercely guarded their traditions and culture, successfully keeping their home relatively unspoiled by the advent of tourism. In many ways the island seems to be caught in a time capsule.

Located at the southern-most point of the Dodecanese, halfway between Crete and Rhodes, the barren and infertile island features a coastline of majestic cliffs and dramatic, rocky mountains, regularly interrupted by small, often deserted beaches.

It is thought that the first residents originated from Crete, but since then the island has been conquered by various invaders, including Turks and Italians. It became Greek again at the end of World War II, but the original architecture is a showcase of the varying foreign influences.

It has been said that due to the suffering of the people caused by the various conquerors, the character of the islanders has remained pure. They are an extremely traditional race; proud and strong, like the contours of their rugged landscape. Here there is a certain suspicion of foreigners, a fact overlooked by most tourists who stay for only a short spell.

Due to the lack of industry, many natives work abroad. Whether abroad or at home, however, the Karpathian traditions remain.

In addition to the main town of Pigadia, Karpathos features twelve smaller villages in which the traditions vary. Probably the most

culturally strict is Olympus, the most isolated northerly mountain village, built in 1200BC, which overlooks a chain of 85 windmills.

On entering the village, the visitor is often surprised and dazzled by its wild nature, and by the sight of two traditional Olympian houses resting on the mountainside. Technology has arrived, as one can observe from the television aerials on rooftops, but here in Olympus life is lived as it has been for hundreds of years. The natives speak an ancient Dorian dialect, while the women, dressed in traditional national costumes, carry goods through the streets balanced on their shoulders, work in gardens, bake bread in mountainside bakeries and tend to their sheep and goats.

Throughout Karpathos, and unique to Greece, is a custom of inheritance which favors the women, with houses and shops passing from mother to daughter upon marriage. Marriages are still arranged by the family, with daughters marrying before the sons, and although dowries have been made illegal in Greece, the practice remains here. The men tend to marry at a much older age, with women often becoming brides in their very early teens.

Due perhaps to its isolation from central Greece, Karpathos has in many ways not yet entered the twentieth century. Certainly in Olympus, time seems to stand still, but even here, with the influence from abroad, change is occurring if somewhat slowly.