

don's horse, seem to derive from the coinage of mighty Athens during the archaic and classical eras.

Since the early 6th century BC, the images adorning coins are directly related to the patron deities of each city-state. These images of either the deity alone or accompanied by related attributes, become dominant on the faces of coins as emblems indicating the issuing authority. As far as the Hellenic world is concerned, this symbolism remained sacred and in most cases was directly related to a deity up until at least the Hellenistic age. Myths and religion in general were an inexhaustible source of inspiration for ancient engravers, who carved dies depicting local deities related to each region, so they could be easily identified as representative of each city-state.

Athens, one of the first Greek cities to issue coins, depicted on them the goddess Athena and the owl, symbol of wisdom and prudence. These symbolic images remained basically unchanged, with only slight variations through the ages, from the very start of Athenian coin minting to its eventual end.

The first issues of the famed silver "Athenian owls" were minted during the time of Hippias (525-510 BC) and carried easily recognizable designs. On the obverse the head of the glaukopis (bright eyed) helmeted goddess Athena and on the reverse the owl, her sacred symbol. Later on, following political reform and the establishment of democracy by Kleisthenes (508-507 BC), an olive branch and a crescent were added, denoting the owl's nocturnal nature, along with the inscription ΑΘΕ, meaning "of the Athenians". These additions were meant to promote the usage of Athenian coins in foreign markets. Due to this significant development, the Athenian tetradrachm, or "owl", became one of the strongest coins in the ancient world, predominantly used in commercial transactions from the last decade of the 6th century BC to the late 1st century BC. The discovery of a rich vein of silver in the Laurion mines in Attica's Maroneia region circa 480 BC was a critical factor ensuring the continued production and dissemination of Athenian coinage.

Tracing these "cultural deposits" with heightened sensitivity, the artist Aphrodite Liti is inspired by them, breaks the old forms and, without dissolving them, invests them with new life, using contemporary techniques to create inventive sculptural works of art.

Scheduled to run for three months, this exhibition aims to boost the museum's foot traffic and promote its outward-looking vision by reaching a broader audience.

**Dr. George Kakavas**  
Director of the Numismatic Museum



Aphrodite Liti was born in Athens. She studied sculpture, mosaic and icon painting at the Athens School of Fine Arts (ASKT, 1972-1978), with professors Y. Pappas, Y. Kolefa and K. Xinopoulos. She attended Degli Studi in Milan in 1978. She completed her postgraduate studies at London University (1983-1986) with a scholarship of the National Scholarships Foundation (IKY). In 1985, she received the sculpture award by the Chamber of Fine Arts of Greece. From 1978 until 2000, she worked as a museum sculptor at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens. Since 2000, she is Professor of Sculpture at the Athens School of Fine Arts. Since 1981, she has exhibited her artwork in solo and group exhibitions, in Greece and abroad. Her artwork is in both private and public collections.

*Afroditi Liti – Invisibly Gyration* Giali Tzami • Chania (2018)  
*The owls and the Athenian Democracy* Numismatic Museum (2018), *Owls* Archaeological Museum of Poros (2017), *The myths at our hands* Museum of Delphi (2016), *Inside Paradise* Gallery CITRONNE, Poros (2012), *The Cuckoo Clock* The Bath House of the Winds, Athens (2010), *Myths and Properties* Gallery of Psychiko, Athens (2010), *The Radiance of Colossus and the Power of Heraldic Symbols* Museum of Contemporary Art of Rhodes (2009), *A. Liti in Wonderland* Gallery Potnia Theron, Athens (2007-08), *Aphrodite Liti at the Numismatic Museum, A Fruitful Encounter*, Numismatic Museum, Athens (2007), *Sculptural Rings* Ilias Lalaounis Jewelry Museum, Athens (2007), *Precious Tradition* Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki (2006), *Diving in the Realm of Innocence* Cultural Center Filothei, Athens (2004), *The Blessedness of Sharing the Produce* Athens Art Gallery (2004), *Rings* Gallery Z. Athanasiadis, Thessaloniki (2002), *The Coastal Landscape* Athens Art Gallery, (2000), *The Enigmatic Princesses* Athens Art Gallery, Athens (1998), *The Secret Gardens* Athens Art Gallery, Athens (1997), *A Walk in the Theater of Nature* Gallery Z. Athanasiadis, Thessaloniki (1995), *The Congress of Birds and Fruits* Athens Art Gallery (1994), *From Culture to Nature* Mylos, Thessaloniki (1994).

**EXHIBITION**  
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# OWLS AND THE ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

FROM ANCIENT NUMISMATICS TO CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE  
AN ART DISCOURSE BETWEEN ANCIENT ARTIFACTS  
AND WORKS BY SCULPTOR APHRODITE LITI



Duration

05/10/2018  
30/11/2018

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NUMISMATIC MUSEUM

## Owls and the Athenian Democracy.

From Ancient Numismatics  
to Contemporary Sculpture

The exhibition titled "Owls and the Athenian Democracy. From Ancient Numismatics to Contemporary Sculpture" is being held at the Iliou Melathron large temporary exhibition hall on the second floor, once the library of Heinrich Schliemann, in cooperation with acclaimed sculptor Aphrodite Liti, Professor at the Athens School of Fine Arts. The exhibition was organized as part of the XXV ICOMON Meeting - ATHENS 2018, an annual event with a global reach, co-organized by the Numismatic Museum, ICOMON and the ICOM Hellenic National Committee in memory of Mando Oeconomides.

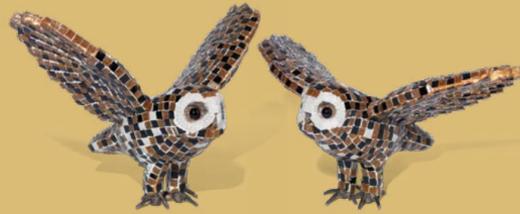
The exhibition is one of the innovative projects the Numismatic Museum has undertaken to foster cross-cultural communication and familiarize a broader audience with Greece's cultural heritage, as reflected in ancient artifacts and contemporary works of art.

As part of these efforts, which have established it as a consistent and important point of reference in the cultural life of Athens, the Numismatic Museum continues an interesting discourse with contemporary art, which it initiated in 2012 with the exhibition entitled "Cultural Deposits: From Ancient Seal-Stones to Contemporary Printmaking" in cooperation with engraver and Athens School of Fine Arts professor Vicky Tsalamata, and sustained in 2014 with the "Spiral. Primordial Engravings - Contemporary Approaches" show, featuring works by artist Takis Stefanou. By choosing a not purely numismatic theme but rather an up-to-date and forward-looking one, the Museum draws a selection of unique miniature masterpieces from its rich permanent collection, which engage in a dialogue with contemporary sculpture through a sparse yet inspired museological and museographic approach.

This dialogue is carried out between ancient examples of miniature art and contemporary artistic expression, as reflected in sculptural works of high aesthetic value by the internationally acclaimed artist.

Seventeen mixed-media works are on display, inspired mainly by ancient coins and other miniature carvings, accompanied by silver and bronze coins and treasure troves. The artist's representations of the owl, sacred symbol of Athena, the goddess of wisdom and patron of the city of Athens, and the leaves of the olive tree, which the Athenians chose as a symbol of their city over Posei-

## The magic of metamorphosis



My preoccupation with the owls and their entry into my sphere of sculpture are the result of a long journey of inner quest and exhaustive research in the area of symbols and collective memory. My desire to set out on what I thought would be an adventure with them became a comforting necessity and a ritual.

In the imposing neo-classical space of the museum replete with ancient coins and treasures, I suddenly find myself surrounded by my sculpted, pasted-up-with-mosaics owls. This rather strange existence of an 'interior' sculpted garden created by the juxtaposition of a flock of birds and shiny leaves together with the coins and the magnetic gaze of the owls seems to be carrying me dynamically towards an imaginary flight that I have never experienced before.

The owls, given their power and beneficence towards humans, were regarded as the symbol of wisdom. As a term, the word 'symbol' is derived from the Greek verb 'συμβάλλω' (contribute), that is, it turns the non-existent into something tangible, perceptible, like abstract concepts and authority.

In my quest, as I immersed myself in the various works of art, I observed that societies need to express themselves symbolically regarding their customs, institutions, and the characteristic features of their religions which are expressed in symbolic icons. Throughout the ages all of these are enriched by the artist's imagination and his correlation with philosophy which is quite relevant to artistic ingenuity.

The word 'wisdom' is Homeric and its original meaning was Knowledge and a perfect mastery of an art. But with the passing of time, it acquired more connotations and nowadays it denotes a profound understanding of things and a high-level ability to confront and resolve the problems life has in store for us.

According to Pindar 'wisdom' was not a product of learning; it was Knowledge that flows effortlessly and spontaneously from a person of exceptional spirituality: 'Σοφός ο πολλά ειδώς φυά' (wise is the man who has seen much and acts accordingly).

With the owl as symbol, in antiquity, of the Goddess Athena's sacred bird whose image is depicted on the reverse of the tetradrachm of the Athenian Democracy, while on the obverse is the Goddess's head, I have endeavoured to bring about a dialogue between the coins, the sculptures and the viewers.

The minting of this particular coin was intended to celebrate the democracy's battles against the danger from the East and despotism. The invention of coins has enabled human beings to engage in trade with their fellow humans, in this way meeting their needs and fulfilling their obligations. Coins are directly related to the image they depict, which is informative and at the same time a symbolic medium that everyone can have in their possession. The tiny metal surfaces become trumpeters that trumpet forth symbols, merits, values, ideas, power and messages from the issuing authority.

Finally, the winged birds of the exhibition, in their dialogue, palpably transport us to a world where the use of the minimum in the service of the maximum is nothing more than a safeguard of the meaning of life as it is conveyed through art and religion.

Afroditi Liti



## Museum conversations



This isn't the first time Aphrodite Liti's works are showcased by the Numismatic Museum. In fact, it's an ongoing relationship that "bears fruit" by exploring the interplay of historical and mythological time, cultural creativity and social contribution.

Her flock of Owls, silent and familiar, make you feel like you're being watched, as if they are in their natural environment, leading us to another way of looking and understanding—that of the weight of history borne by the Iliou Melathron. An age-old symbol and key to a host of associations between wisdom and art, allegory and metaphor, vision and darkness, takes visitors on a conceptual and aesthetic journey, spanning years and eras.

The Numismatic Museum pointedly aims to highlight its role not only as a "treasure guardian" but also as a custodian of collections that are an inexhaustible source of knowledge. Moreover, it pursues—with ever increasing consistency and persistence in recent years—an active presence in the contemporary cultural scene by focusing on fruitful collaborations with artists, by trusting young people, by targeting the "points of reference" of our time and by remaining a friendly venue for showcasing contemporary artifacts.

This way, the Museum fulfills its exemplary, multifaceted role as a showplace of contemporary culture, breathing new life into its treasure trove of riches and investing them with renewed interest.

Piece by piece, the present finds its place alongside the sacred amulets, the collections, the traditions and the controversial stories that accompany them, making the Museum's mission even more clear and timeless; especially nowadays, when the current conjuncture favors neither the lofty visions of art patrons nor center stage stunts by the avant-garde.

The Museum listens carefully, stays on the lookout and keeps its gates open, welcoming both enduring values and the new talents who claim the future.

Anastasia Rammou  
Archaeologist

