



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK ARTS & HERITAGE PROGRAM

AUDIO TAPE LOG

Accession No.: KN-02-3-CDate(s): 4/19/02Fieldworker(s): Kathy NeustadtInterviewee(s): Dimitri DimopoulosEvent: InterviewPlace of Recording: at his cabinetmaking shop in SomervilleRecording Equipment: Sony Walkman Pro Microphone(s): Realistic (external)Recorded in: stereo Tape Brand and Format: Cassette, 90 minutesAmount Tape Used: Cassette: 1 side and 1/4 of 2ndDAT: ABS time:Related Accession Numbers: KN-02-3-FN, KN-03-2-CS1-16, KN-02-3-CN1-16, and bio

Brief summary of tape contents: discussion of Karaghiozis puppets, artmaking, Greek culture

Counter/ABS	Contents
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SIDE 1

4-37

How I heard of Dimitri (through Chris Pantazelos and Beth Cohen), in regards to his puppets and "folk art"

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Karaghiozis puppet: adopted from the Turks into Greek, c. 200 or 300 years ago, coming from Greeks from Asia Minor. In Turkish culture, it's only for men "because he has a filthy mouth": Greeks give him a long hand, but for Turks it's something else [a penis]. Greeks "beautified" it for children and women. Greeks were slaves, so they created something for themselves, for their entertainment. This was major source of entertainment right through his time, when cinema comes in. Would be performed in a park, pay some dracmas; in a summertime in a garden, fenced in; in the wintertime, in a hall. Done as silhouettes: the player with puppets, with a screen in front and a light behind.

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Made from cellophane paper or leather, with some details. Held with sticks from far away. [Shows me photos of some of the puppets and the backdrops he made: KN-02-3-CS1-4] I experimented with it, making changes—including a plexiglass puppet with a hing for switching the puppet from side to side. What's fun is the child that it brings out: he started making them to entertain his daughter. [He told me more about this before I turned the tape on: he was young and wanted to share some Greek culture with his kids while entertaining them.] A great way to tell stories and myths. Karaghiozis in the Greek silver theater is the underdog, the slave, the peasant, who does anything he has to to survive.

- 150 Has incredible knowledge of Greek mythology and history, mixing up the folk culture (i.e., Alexander the Great will appear with a cross, as if bringing Xianity). Entertainment for common people. Puppeteers were common people--comes out beautifully. Pay money, go in, spend 2 hours being entertained. Another example: Alexander the Great killing a dragon; ancient times with a Greek flag flying [CS4]. Scenery would always have K's shack, "the cabin" [CS16] and the serai, the Turkish sultan's palace (the bad guy). To the Greeks, he's Greek; to the Turks, he's Turkish [and, I happen to know, to the Armenians, he's Armenian].
- 190 Karaghiozis is Turkish name: "gyoz" is eye and "kara" is black: black eye, because they are always beating him up. In one painting of Dimitri's [a triptych, CS13-16], he's dreaming he's a saint and he's playing the bouzuki, which is something he never does. Off to the left [CS14] are his uncle and best friend are listening to his music and dance. On the right hand side [CS15], modern Athens, with his sons, listening to the same music with "a different ear," and they are dancing their own dance. This is his story: "I'm a storyteller, you know--I'm a Greek."
- 218 "I came here [to this country] at the wrong time, the wrong age: I was 23 years old and already formed; I knew who I was." Not into bars, not into sports; had to do something for himself, something to stay after work for, "something to keep me going." This panel [CS5] was made in 1983; started puppets in 1980. Cabinetmaking was his work then. He had been a student in Athens in 1968; 1967 had been a military coup--thousands of young men had to leave. Was taking interior design; when I came here, got offered job in cabinet place and loved it. No background in art; this work was more hobby--"I needed balance in my life."
- 257 Did 7 shows in this studio, and some in New York, with Beth Cohen doing music at them. Was painting things [we look at slides]: Jesus smoking a cigarette with Karaghiozis (J asks :was it worth it?"). Mostly paintings on wood; some are reliefs. All the pieces are stories: "they say something to me." No background in carving--"everybody's drawing." Remembers a small hope chest, couple hundred years old, with carvings and writing. There's a man and woman on front of panel, his hand is inside her blouse on her breast: as a small boy, didn't understand it; later thought "somebody in this family has a sense of humor." Made by his great grandfather. When he was back in Greece last year, saw it again, at his sister's house. Maybe this was an inspiration.
- 315 "I learned one thing: Character is formed by experience and historical experience: what do you know and what do you think." Rich culture, knowing who one's ancestors are. Only way to express my cares, through art. I felt like Karaghioz myself [he had started by saying K. was his "patron saint"]: "he's the hero who strives to survive." Go to a foreign land without knowing anything and you're young: you look back, you feel sad, you try to fit in a system that is not yours--then you feel like a Karaghioz. "Have to make a humor out of the whole thing; otherwise, you're dead."
- 354 Another picture: an angel who used to live in paradise, but he wanted to escape, comes down to earth: creates his own angels (love, sex, anything), but he's can't put roots down--self-portrait. Reading from a painting: "when a Greek sees himself in the mirror, he sees Alexander the Great or Onassis or some other great

figure, but he never wants to see himself, the person he really is--Karaghiozis." This character is there all the time, but I made the art from love.

- 374 Another story: an angel escapes and his building a dream in the form of a bicycle --going to crash into a tree. Other pieces. A work in progress: village and faces [CS8-10: hard to photograph]. Cites a poet: Kavafe--a famous poem, "Ithaca," recited at Kacie Kennedy's funeral. A homosexual in the last century and open about it, a genius. This piece: the arms become vines and hug his Ithaca. This is what he's working on now--eventually he will have another show. [Several shows, including Lexington Avenue showing in NYC.] I don't have any time, and it doesn't pay to do shows. Two kids with big tuitions: both went to Andover, daughter graduated Yale and is going to Columbia for Master's; he's still in high school.
- 434 "This is me, this is part of me." Doesn't do it for money; when people have priced his work, he wonders how anybody can afford buy things. Would rather give it to people. Don't feel like I'm an artist. "I wish someday I will do that, make my living out of this. And believe me, I am hoping about that. Because that is fun; this is not fun [indicating the cabinets], this is business." Lots in progress; inspired by recent visits to Greece (2 visits in 11 months). Have some of the puppets at home. "I love this character, because he represents everybody." People responded very enthusiastically; wanted to buy them.
- 483 Puppets as nostalgia. The only entertainment, and very fun. The puppeteers were artists. Have lots of books about them. They were doing it for love; 50 or 60 year old kids. Made the puppets and then did the action. In the 40s, there were lots of puppeteers--a dozen--travelling all over the country. They each had a troupe: moving boxes, singing, playing instruments. Only one puppeteer, though: he could play 2 characters at a time and a third sometimes. "He might have a helper holding the light, but the player was the artist himself." They disappeared in late 50s, early 60s, from his area--from Peloponnesus, south of Athens; comes from Sparta. They vanished; they died and no one picked it up until 80s, as cultural revival. Glad they did it, because even where there's plastic, the character is there. Why let it die? I see lots of cultural things over there that are dying--let's not destroy it! [I discuss some of the MCC work.]
- 552 Left Greece in a time of darkness; he hadn't even known his own Greece and, particularly, how Byzantine Christians in 4th c. destroyed the traditional culture. His village, 25 k from Sparta, was affected this way. "Why didn't they tell us? I have kids to raise; I don't want to tell them lies!" Some people--from his village and others--went up into the mountains and survived there: they still believe in the gods; speak ancient Doric as well as modern Greek--nobody pays attention to them. [We talk about Beth Cohen's collecting of traditional music; "she is unbelievable--she's something else."]
- 592 Both parents, both families, from Sparta. Was living with parents; had brothers and sisters he didn't even know--they were in NYC in 1950, when he was 5. They came after the civil war--there was a lot of suffering in the family; a lot of poverty--so he was the only child still at home (younger by lots). Father had been in exile, then was let go [the story gets confused here]: the phrase "from exile," he thought meant a place. He left Greece for Sweden--where they were accepting

Greek students--and then for America, where his siblings were. He was 23 and didn't know anybody else but family (has a niece older than he is; his sister's). But he knows who he is; his kids ask why he didn't change his name ("it sounds like a train: Dimitri Dimopoulos"). "I don't suffer for my identity: I know who I am. Look, I don't want to be anybody else." Respect for differences: "I don't care who you are and where you come from; it's what do you have there in your heart, in your mind. Nothing else counts."

636 Does his cutting at this studio; takes work home to paint. [We walk around to look at stuff.] One large piece that is carved: his village, with his ancestors as faces [CS8-10]. Talks about not going to school for art: would school spoil him? [Picture taking.] Hoping to do another show this year; will let me know. [He holds up a frame with some figures: Jesus, ???, Mother Earth, and Karaghiozis, CS11-12.] "I'm happy: at least I have wood and paint to do this--that's what I know how to do."

691 Points out a part of this piece where the wood has darkened, which he knew would happen. A door harp (pieces that hit strings and make music) [CS6-7]--somebody told him about them, and one Sunday he stayed in his shop and he thought to make it as a Greek lyra--worked on the design for a few days. [Photographing his photos] 728 end of SIDE 1

SIDE 2

2 No one else making the puppets: "how many people are going to be crazy like me?" Not here; in Greece, there are some. Make arrangements to bring the puppets in. How often he wants to do the artwork. He sketches the ideas so he won't forget what he wants to work on. [We exchange numbers. Filling out forms.]

66 Doing his art is important to his kids, part of their development. His daughter, when she was younger, would tell people he was a cabinetmaker and a folk artist (he doesn't call himself a folk artist--"I don't call myself nothing!"). It was important to them and still is; they want him to do more. It's not art; it's expression; it's me. "We all need something for balance in life, right?"

108 Discovery channel show on Greeks: how much ahead of their times they were. Stories about being in Greece with each of his kids, and how in awe they were: great for him--"the payment." What else to give them? I give them myself. "Look, like everybody else, I want them to be nice people, and that's all there is to it." [Jokes about teenaged boys.] 184 End of SIDE 2