



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Accession Numbers:

KN-02-3-FN

KN-02-3-C

KN-02-3-CS1-16//CN1-16

bio

Fieldnotes

Audio recordings

Photographic documentation

Additional materials

Date(s): 4/19/02 and 5/23/02

Related Accession Numbers:

Individual/Group/Event: Dimitri Dimopoulos

Fieldworker(s): Kathy Neustadt

Location of Interview: his studio, [redacted] Somerville

Street Address: [redacted]

City: [redacted] Zi [redacted] Co:

Contact person (if different from above): suggested by Chris Pantazelos and Beth Cohen

Title:

Sponsoring organization (for event or group):

Address (if different from above):

Phone: Daytime [redacted] Evening [redacted]

E-mail: Website:

Special Needs (including translation):

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community):

Karaghiozis puppetry (silhouetted puppetry of Turkish origins): with Everyman and underdog qualities

Traditions noted for follow-up:

Other Possible Contacts:

Summary Description: Dimitri is an animated, enthusiastic fellow. He refers to himself as a natural storyteller, and he is right: his voice has a wonderful range, as he booms, then whispers, swoops in on a story line, and semi-sings a refrain—charming. His artwork is very much centered on the Karaghiozis figure, which is personalized by him to include not only the underdog survivor, but the refugee, the exile. The departure from Greece in his early 20s has had a profound affect on his life (no surprise), and his relationship to Greek culture is intensified by that (again, no surprise).

Chris Pantazelos (a Greek instrument maker) had mentioned Dimitri to me because of the puppets, though it is clear that he doesn't really make them any more. They were originally toys for his daughter, his firstborn, and he made them for the fun and for the cultural gift of it. They sparked the imagination of lots of other people and he did sell some, but he went on to make other things, larger pieces, paintings and carved panels. He still has some puppets and scenery, however, and this was what I focused on in the interview.

His other work is quite delightful: humorous and philosophical, both. The symbolic palette is largely Greek and mythical, with historical references included. Dimitri may have some interest in the future in MCC artist grants, since he is looking for ways to be able to spend more time with his artwork, and I don't know whether we would want to slot himself as a "folk" artist, although he constantly questions the right to call himself an artist since he was not been "trained." For his narrative skills and humor and his profound understanding of the immigrant's burden (and inspiration), he is a gem on his own terms. Delightful!

QUICK return to photograph the puppets (5/23/02): I have the chance to see some 2 dozen+ of his puppets, which are really charming and fun. Dimitri calculates that he has made about 150 puppets in all, but at his previous work space in Watertown—where he used to display them—people were always wanting to buy them. In the group he has now, there is no Karaghiozis characters because that was always the most popular one, the one visitors wanted to have.

While we are looking at the puppets, he explains some additional features of the puppets. For example, traditionally, in Greece, they are made not of wood but of leather or "carton paper" he calls it, which I take to mean heavy cardboard. There would be 2 layers, between which they would place colored cellophane that could be seen through the cutouts on the figures (see CN10-11). The colors and shapes would show up beautifully through the scrim, the thin fabric the puppets were placed behind. Dimitri made the puppets with his young daughter out of wood so that she wouldn't be able to hurt them when she helped paint them and when she played with them.

The characters are divided into 2 groups: the good guys and the bad guys. The good guys are essentially all Greeks, although there is some traditional Albanian figure who also fought against the Turks, so he's also a good guy. And the bad guys are the Turks, but the Egyptians are, too (Dimitri chose to make the Egyptians dark skinned so his daughter would know which guys were which). For the costumes for the various groups, Dimitri would occasionally look at books for authentic details.

As before, conversation ranged far and wide but always remained cultural. About all of his work I was photographing, and the very notion of making of traditional objects, Dimitri commented, "I consider myself a thousand years old." And when I compliment him on his creativity and express my desire to share it with the MCC, he responds, "I don't know if I'm the right one—I am a slave to my Greekness." I know that I, at least, am grateful.