

The Three Words No One Wants to Hear: What’s for Dinner?

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Jesse Newman and Amira McKee

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It can seem like there is no bigger problem for American families. The same question comes every single day. “What’s for dinner?”

Schedules are more chaotic than ever. Dietary restrictions and picky eaters mean cooking multiple dishes. The cost is growing, and so is the pressure to measure up to social media’s army of food influencers—not to mention the “Make America Healthy Again” movement.

Kelly Mitchell and her husband, Craig, both work full time. Their 11-year-old daughter’s schedule is a crazy quilt of dance classes and competitions. Both Mitchell and her daughter avoid gluten. Figuring out what can feed everyone, based on the time, cost and ingredients on hand, is a struggle that repeats every day around 5:30 p.m.

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TO BHMA International edition

Afroditi Liti: ‘I was always searching for the meaning of art’

By Panos Kougias

In Afroditi Liti’s studio, it takes a while for the eye to decide where to linger. Sculptures, metalwork, birds, foliage, miniature figures—fragments of an oeuvre decades in the making coexist with works by George Lappas, the sculptor with whom she shared years of her life. Nothing seems arranged as mere décor to welcome a visitor, which may be why the space reveals so much about the people who lived and worked in it.

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Students march by foot throughout remote villages across Serbia, in harsh weather conditions, holding symbols such as the Orthodox cross.

STUDENTS IN BLOCKADE (STUDENT U BLOKADI)

TO BHMA International edition

Vuk: ‘My message to the Greek people is fight for your rights, your country, and your people’

By Kristina Tremonti

By the time Vuk was free to speak, it was already late in Belgrade. I had been waiting for him to finish one of the student meetings that have

become the quiet machinery of Serbia’s most consequential political movement in years. He asked to be identified only by his first name and studies — Vuk, Computer Science Faculty — an instinct for anonymity that, I would discover, was almost doctrinal to

what the students had built. His WhatsApp profile photo shows a very young man in basketball shorts, caught mid-game. Yet at 19, Vuk spoke with measured language and disciplined argument, notably devoid of the self-promotion that so

often accompanies political ambition. As we spoke, I found myself reaching instinctively for categories. Was this populism? Civic nationalism? Communitarianism? Direct democracy? Something faintly reminiscent of Yugoslavia’s

experiments in decentralised self-management? At moments it felt almost Tocquevilian: politics rooted in social equality, voluntary association and civic habit. Each description captured something; none captured the whole. Please turn to Page 2

TO BHMA International edition

Running for Those We Love: Greece Races for the Cure

By Maria Paravantes

“I am running for... my friend, my mother, my cousin, my sister, my teacher, my wife, myself; for all of us; for those who are not here with us today.”

Before the race begins, every participant in Greece’s annual Race for the Cure is asked a simple but deeply personal question: “Who are you running for?”

The answers are written by hand on stickers and stuck to the backs of T-shirts. Names of mothers, sisters, friends, wives, and teachers. Names of people still fighting, of those who have survived, and of women who are no longer here to run alongside them.

Every autumn, Athens turns pink as thousands of people take to the streets for the Greece Race for the Cure, transforming what began as

a small gathering nearly two decades ago into one of the largest breast cancer awareness events in Europe. TO BHMA International Edition sits down with Paraskevi Michalopoulou, President of the Board of Directors of the Hellenic Association of Women with Breast Cancer “Alma Zois”, to discuss the power of this celebration of life, love, and sharing. Please turn to Page 4



Two breast cancer survivors lead the way by sending the most powerful message of all: we are here today, together, stronger, never alone.

ROMANOS LOUATIRACE FOR THE CURE

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One with the future

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Studenti u blokadi — **Students in Blockade** — emerged from the wave of university protests that followed the November 1, 2024 collapse of the Novi Sad railway-station canopy, which killed 16 people. Organized through decentralized faculty assemblies and deliberately resistant to central leadership, it developed around demands for accountability, transparency and institutional responsibility. Its electoral incarnation is formally distinct. In September 2026, the students established *Studentska lista* — *Studenti pobeđuju* — **Student List – Students Win** — to contest Serbia’s October 25th parliamentary election with 250 candidates, an attempt to translate the political culture forged in the blockades into representative politics.

A different kind of politics

What Vuk described was politics without its usual architecture: university faculties organizing internally and negotiating with one another; decisions taking hours because legitimacy mattered almost as much as efficiency; families feeding and housing students as they crossed the country. There was something intensely communitarian in it, a vocabulary of obligation and reciprocity. “All for one” would be too romantic a description, but the sentiment was difficult to miss: any reference to an individual repeatedly disappeared into the collective. Researchers have described the students’ assemblies as egalitarian, non-hierarchical direct democracy, deliberately designed to prevent fixed leaders.

The campaign has reduced its argument to a stark question: “**Serbia or mafia?**” Yet the Serbia Vuk invoked was not a claim of ethnic superiority or exclusion. It was closer to a claim of civic possession: that institutions, streets, universities and ultimately the state belong to those who live under them. Its patriotism was rooted in belonging rather than nationalism, radical in its demand for accountability yet conventional in its faith that institutions should simply perform the functions assigned to them.

The shadow of the Greek Tempi railway tragedy

Listening to Vuk, my mind wandered inevitably towards Greece: first to the Athens Polytechnic students’ uprising of 1973 against the Junta, then to the much more immediate memory of the tragic Tempi train crash. The two neighboring Orthodox societies

From Novi Sad Tragedy to Ballot Box: Serbia’s Leaderless Students Take Fight for Accountability to the Polls

Two years after Novi Sad, with resemblances to Tempi, a bloc of Serbia’s students bills the October 25 election as a choice between “Serbia or the mafia,” fielding 250 candidates



PHOTOGRAPH BY STUDENTS IN BLOCKADE (STUDENTI U BLOKADI)

The major Vidovdan protest organized by Studenti blokadi on June 28, 2025.

have long recognized something of themselves in one another; in recent years, that affinity has acquired a darker dimension.

For Greeks, Novi Sad is unnervingly familiar. The railway station had recently undergone major works as part of Serbia’s flagship Belgrade-Budapest project, and the collapse quickly came to be read not only as an engineering failure but an institutional one. Protesters carried red handprints and the message “**corruption kills**”. The charge resonated in a country where the OECD and European Commission had already documented weaknesses in anti-corruption enforcement, public procurement and judicial independence. None of this proves corruption caused the collapse, but it helps explain why Novi Sad became evidence, for many, of a broader failure of governance.

The parallel with Tem-

pi is difficult to miss. Fifty-seven people were killed on February 28, 2023, when a passenger train collided with a freight train in central Greece, exposing long-standing failures in railway safety and delays in modern signaling. In both countries, private grief became collective and transport disasters became arguments about the quality of the state itself. But this is where the Serbian story begins to diverge: what emerged from Novi Sad did not remain simply a protest. The students turned catastrophe into an organizational system — and, eventually, that system into an electoral proposition.

Organizing without leaders

The movement began with students standing in silence for the Novi Sad victims. When one vigil outside Belgrade’s Faculty of Dramatic Arts was attacked by a

group that included supporters and local officials of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), commemoration quickly metamorphosed into organization. Students blockaded the faculty and the movement spread across Serbia’s universities, where open assemblies of formally equal participants coordinated through rotating delegates and working groups. It was, in political-science terms, a form of prefigurative politics: rather than merely demanding more accountable institutions, the students were attempting to practice the decentralized, participatory politics they wanted to see beyond the movement.

That idealism came with a practical division of labor. “There is a place and a job for everyone,” Vuk told me. Dramatic-arts students gravitated towards media and production, computer-science students built digital

platforms, while mathematics and statistics students worked on analytics. The structure soon moved onto Serbia’s roads: in April 2025, 80 students rode roughly 1,300km to Strasbourg to take their concerns over democracy and the rule of law to European institutions.

Vuk believes that reach was possible because students occupied a space conventional opposition politics had failed to fill. “There had been dissatisfaction with President Aleksandar Vučić and his government for years,” he said, but many Serbians had disengaged from politics. Students felt different because “everyone knows students” — in their families, neighborhoods and streets. Their credibility derived from the fact that the movement had arisen organically from public anger and trust.

The more Vuk explained the movement, the clearer it

became that “leaderlessness” was one of its most carefully defended choices. “Every student is equal to every other student. Not a single voice is louder than another,” he said. Elevating one person, he fears, can make a movement indistinguishable from the personality representing it. Moderators rotate and media representatives change. “How we managed to remain without a leader was maybe the biggest battle of our movement,” Vuk said.

The contrast with Greece is instructive. The Tempi movement was never reducible to one person, but Maria Karystianou, who lost her 19-year-old daughter in the crash, became its most recognizable public face and has since launched a party of her own. Serbia’s students have tried to prevent precisely such personification. The same instinct may explain their refusal to settle comfortably on the ideological spectrum. “Our battle isn’t about whether you are for the US, for Russia, for the EU, against the EU, for BRICS or any of those things,” Vuk said. “As students, we don’t think it’s the time to decide whether you are liberal, conservative, nationalist or leftist.”

For now, the objective is more elemental: creating “a better and freer Serbia” in which those arguments can eventually take place. Yet that breadth is also one of the movement’s vulnerabilities. Critics, particularly within Serbia’s pro-European opposition, argue that choices over Europe, Kosovo and the architecture of a future government cannot be postponed indefinitely. A movement can defer ideological conflict more easily than a government can.

Surveillance

For a movement built on trust and open deliberation, surveillance cuts particularly deep. “When something important is happening in a meeting, we hide our phones in a box outside the room,” Vuk told me. In August 2026, Apple warned Serbian students, activists and opposition figures that they had been targeted with spyware. At least 14 people were identified as targets, while the University of Toronto’s Citizen Lab forensically confirmed that one student activist’s iPhone had been infected with Pegasus, an advanced hacking tool, through a zero-click attack.

The students appealed to European and cybersecurity institutions, Vuk said, but received mostly acknowledgements of receipt rather than substantive help. The impact is as personal as it is political. “When you are 18 or 19 years old and you see police waiting outside your home, you start feeling

that you're living in a police state." When I mentioned Orwell, he laughed; 1984, he said, is regularly referred to amongst the students, since it no longer feels entirely absurd.

The students' investigations suggest such spyware can cost hundreds of thousands of euros. "It's a product that governments buy," Vuk said. For Greeks, the parallel with Predator is immediate: journalists, politicians and other public figures were targeted with spyware marketed to state clients; four individuals linked to Intellexa, the commercial surveillance consortium behind such spyware, were convicted in 2026, while the broader investigation into possible state involvement remains archived and contested. The pressure in Serbia extends beyond privacy. Nine students arrested after the 2025 Vidovdan protest were charged with offences against the constitutional order; Belgrade's Higher Court later excluded secret-surveillance material used in the case as unlawfully obtained, though prosecutors appealed. "If they are spying on us before the elections, what will happen after?" Vuk asked. "They will chase us through the streets. They will arrest all of us."

From blockade to ballot

The leap from blockade to ballot came slowly. By May 2025, *Studenti u blokadi* had called for early elections and begun constructing a civic list. "We fought for people's rights, and after we saw that we couldn't achieve those things through protests, we realised that we needed to go to the elections," Vuk told me. Faculties proposed and interviewed candidates, examining expertise, public records and political independence; the final slate contains 250 non-students from academia, medicine, law, engineering, culture and public life, many without conventional party careers.

Vuk's language repeatedly returns to trust rather than ideology. "Expertise is not enough," he told me. "The most important thing is still that you have good values, that you are someone we can trust, and are loyal — not loyal to us, loyal to the people of Serbia and to the Serbian country." More than 100 university professors appear on the list, while, he says, "hundreds of experts" are already working on plans for medicine, education, the economy and other areas of government.

I asked whether they had studied the fate of movements such as Spain's Podemos and Italy's Five Star, which rose on popular momentum and prom-



Student activists from the "Student List – Students Win" movement present their chosen 250 candidates for Serbia's parliamentary elections to be held October 25, 2026. Many of the students in the photo had been arrested during the mass demonstrations.

ises of participatory politics, then struggled to preserve that spirit once in parliament. Vuk said they had but regarded their own structure as different. "In the other movements we looked at, there was usually a smaller group of people making the important decisions, and there were leaders," he said. Their defense against the same fate, he argues, is the diffusion of authority. "It's a form of direct democracy." That principle, he insists, is meant to survive the transition into government: if representatives depart from the movement's values, "we will tell them. If they continue, we will go to the people."

I interrupted him to ask what gives a group of students the moral authority to decide who is "good", who is capable, and who should govern Serbia. "I don't feel like we have moral authority," he replied. Then his answer shifted from legitimacy

to inheritance. "We are the future. We are supposed to live in this country for the next 50 years."

Throughout our conversation, Vuk consistently referred to President Vučić's elected government as "the regime" — the term the students themselves commonly use for the political system they oppose. For him, the choice is binary: "You're choosing between a country governed by people with good values and expertise, and a country that we believe is controlled by corrupt and criminal interests." Their goal, he said, is "to change the country for the future generation, so that our children and grandchildren can live in a better and freer Serbia."

Protecting the vote

The movement's campaign operations remain strikingly improvised. Vuk says funding comes largely from or-

dinary citizens and the diaspora, while even finding permanent headquarters space has been difficult. They are nevertheless aiming high. "We are aiming for a majority," he told me.

Vučić, meanwhile, has said he will resign on September 27, months before the end of his second term, and campaign for the October 25 parliamentary election as the SNS candidate for prime minister — in his formulation, as an "ordinary citizen" rather than sitting head of state. For the students, however, winning votes is only half the task. They are training election integrity monitors and intend to place representatives across the country's polling stations. "This time, we want to have people everywhere," Vuk said. By July, the movement said roughly 15,000 people were already in training.

That concern is grounded

in precedent. OSCE observers found Serbia's 2023 parliamentary elections marred by pressure on voters, misuse of public resources, media bias and blurred boundaries between state and party. In 2024, CRTA, a Serbian election-monitoring NGO, filed criminal complaints alleging vote-buying and organized voting.

The victims' families have largely remained outside the movement's political orbit. Vuk said only one mother has openly backed the students, while most relatives have not publicly taken sides. He mentioned suspicions of pressure, but stressed these were unproven. Whatever their politics, he said, "we would still want justice for their relatives."

Almost two years after the Novi Sad collapse, accountability remains unresolved. Serbia's Court of Appeals has confirmed the indictment against 13 de-

fendants, including former construction minister Goran Vesić, but the trial has yet to begin. Questions have also been raised over the completeness and authenticity of parts of the reconstruction record. More than three years after Tempi, 36 defendants are now on trial in Larissa, while the evidentiary record remains contested after the crash site was found not to have been properly preserved. In both cases, the pursuit of accountability now concerns not only the disaster, but the integrity of what happened to the evidence afterwards.

From protest to political order

For all its electoral ambition, the movement still defines its immediate purpose through the demands with which it began: publication of the Novi Sad documentation, accountability for those who attacked students, the release of arrested protesters and greater financial support for education. That raises another question: if those demands are the threshold rather than the endpoint, what comes next?

The priorities, Vuk said, are "freedom of the media, an independent justice system and fair and transparent elections." After a normal parliamentary term, the aim is not to perpetuate the movement indefinitely but to restore genuinely competitive politics. "Once the elections are genuinely free and fair, there should be normal political competition," he said.

What is most striking is the inversion at the movement's core: rather than beginning with ideology and deriving values from it, the students begin with values and defer ideology. Conventional parties offer a worldview and ask voters to endorse it; Serbia's students begin with a more elemental proposition — functioning institutions, accountability and rules that can be trusted. Ideological competition is not rejected, but postponed until the democratic arena in which it takes place has first been repaired. Whether that suspension can survive the trade-offs of government is another question.

In their own terms, what they are attempting resembles a civic catharsis: a clearing-out not only of institutional dysfunction, but of the political fatalism that allows opacity, corruption and impunity to become accepted features of public life. When we finished our conversation, I began to wonder whether trying to identify what the movement resembled was less interesting than asking whether Serbia's students had assembled something that did not yet have a name.

16 people died on November 1, 2024 from the Novi Sad railway station canopy collapse—echoing a similar pain to the Tempi railway disaster in Greece.



Running for Those We Love: Greece Races for the Cure

One Sunday each year, thousands gather in Athens to send a message of solidarity and hope. *TO BHMA International Edition* speaks with organizer Paraskevi Michalopoulou about the meaning and impact of Greece's Race for the Cure



Greece Race for the Cure: for some it is a celebration of survival. For others, a tribute to someone they have lost. And for many, it is simply a reminder that no one should have to face breast cancer alone.

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“The Greece Race for the Cure is far more than a race or a walk. It’s a conscious choice to stand by one another,” says Michalopoulou. “Participation symbolizes strength, solidarity, hope, and the power of togetherness. It’s a way to send a powerful message that no one walks this path alone.”

No one is alone

The Greece Race for the Cure came to life as an initiative of Alma Zois (Leap of Life), an organization made up of women with personal experience of breast cancer. “They saw the event as much more than a race,” Michalopoulou explains. “They transformed it into a space of awareness, solidarity, memory, and support. They turned a difficult subject into a collective, positive experience.” Anyone who has participated understands what she means. There is a tangible contrast between the seriousness of

the cause and the atmosphere of the day. Music, movement, laughter and colour. Friends arrive together. Families walk side by side. Survivors in pink T-shirts stand at the starting line. It certainly feels like a celebration. And that, perhaps, is precisely the point. “Breast cancer is often associated with fear, anxiety, and loss,” Michalopoulou explains. “The Race creates a different kind of symbolism. The presence of women who have battled the disease, their families, and thousands of people makes it clear that illness should not be faced in silence and isolation. Instead, we run and



walk together, talk about it, and spread the word.” The annual event is open to women, men and children of all ages. The message is deliberately inclusive. “Breast cancer is an issue that concerns us all,” Michalopoulou tells *TO BHMA International Edition*. “Even if we have not personally experienced the disease, it could affect someone we love.” Since the first time it was run in 2009, by around 5,000 people, the Greece Race for the Cure has grown into a major annual show of solidarity. Now in its 18th year, it is the country’s largest social sporting happening. More than 60,000 people took part in the 2025 edition—a record turnout that placed Greece second among Race for the Cure events in Europe. Across the wider European movement, nearly 300,000 people registered in 2025. The Greece event includes a 5km run, a 2km walk, and the

option to participate virtually from anywhere in the country. **From Dallas to Athens** The story of Race for the Cure began in Dallas, Texas, in 1983. Nancy G. Brinker organized the first race in honor of her sister Susan G. Komen, who had died of breast cancer in 1980 at age 36. The inaugural event was named the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. A year earlier, Brinker had set up the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, keeping a promise to her sister to end the suffering, social stigma, and silence surrounding the disease. The first race attracted a few hundred participants, only to grow into a worldwide movement bringing together survivors, patients, families, friends, companies, schools, sports groups, and communities. In Europe, Race has become the continent’s largest sporting event dedicated to women’s health, combining fundraising

with awareness, patient and survivor support, research, education and advocacy.

Changing lives

Beyond raising awareness, the Greece Race for the Cure secures funding through participation fees and donations. These funds are channeled into support programs run by Alma Zois, including awareness initiatives, psychosocial support and empowerment for breast cancer patients, support for caregivers and families, and public education about prevention and early diagnosis, explains Michalopoulou.

The impact continues long after participants cross the finish line. But Michalopoulou is careful not to separate fundraising from the wider social impact of the event.

“Everyone participates in the race for their own personal reason,” she says. “Some come to support a loved one, others to honor the memory of a woman they have lost; some have experienced the disease themselves, while others simply believe that no one should face it alone.”

“All these different paths converge at the same point, creating something far greater than a race: a powerful collective statement that we are here for one another.”

That, she says, is the true power of the Greece Race for the Cure.

Changing the conversation

There is another kind of

impact that cannot easily be measured in registration figures or fundraising totals: the power of word of mouth. Thousands of people participate, talk about breast cancer, and bring these discussions home to their families, workplaces, schools, and communities. Prevention and early detection become part of everyday conversation.

For Michalopoulou, this is crucial. A single awareness talk can encourage a woman to seek medical advice and discover an abnormality early. A conversation may lead someone to look for information they would not otherwise have sought. A patient may find the support she needs at a moment of fear or uncertainty.

“Perhaps that is the

‘Breast cancer is often associated with fear, anxiety, and loss—The Race creates a different kind of symbolism. The presence of women who have battled the disease, their families, and thousands of people makes it clear that illness should not be faced in silence and isolation.’

Paraskevi Michalopoulou,
President
of the Board of
Directors of the
Hellenic Association
of Women with Breast
Cancer Alma Zois

event’s greatest value: that a single day of participation can generate initiatives and support that continue throughout the year.”

Every participant matters

One of the most powerful sights at the Race is seeing men and children turn out in force. Breast cancer may be predominantly associated with women, but its impact extends far beyond the person diagnosed, Michalopoulou explains.

“It affects families, friends, colleagues, and caregivers; everyone who stands by someone else during a difficult and demanding journey.”

“That is why participation matters even for those without a personal connection to the disease. By showing up, they are effectively saying: I’m here, too.”

Over time, that collective presence helps build a stronger culture of prevention, awareness and care, and a society more willing to speak openly about breast cancer.

“It is crucial that no one feels alone on this journey,” Michalopoulou says. “The burden of a difficult experience can feel a little lighter when shared.”

The work that remains

Nearly two decades after the first Greece Race for the Cure, there has been progress in prevention and early diagnosis. Michalopoulou points to organized screening programs such as the “Fofi Gennimata” initiative, which provides free

Since the first time it was run in 2009, by around 5,000 people, the Greece Race for the Cure has grown into a major annual show of solidarity. Now in its 18th year, it is the country’s largest social sporting happening

digital mammograms and follow-up ultrasounds to women aged 45 to 74, as well as the development of certified Breast Centers in seven public hospitals as important steps forward.

But she stresses that access must be equal, regardless of income, awareness or where someone lives.

“Inequalities persist not only regarding participation in screening but throughout the entire patient journey: from the initial discovery, early diagnosis and the start of treatment through to the post-therapy period,” she says.

Psychosocial support, rehabilitation, returning to work, quality of life—all require continued investment. Younger women diagnosed with breast cancer face additional questions surrounding fertility, family, employment and life planning, while women living with metastatic breast cancer face a different, long-term journey requiring con-

tinuous specialized support.

Behind all these challenges lies the ultimate goal: reducing breast cancer mortality through prevention, early diagnosis, equitable access to modern treatment, and comprehensive care.

The image that says it all

Michalopoulou has taken part in many Race for the Cure events. Asked which moment has stayed with her most, she does not mention the size of the crowds or the fundraising figures. She remembers the women at the starting line, survivors wearing their pink T-shirts, standing together and holding hands.

“It is a moving, powerful image, and one that’s

full of life,” she says. “Seeing them, you feel a strength and receive a silent yet incredibly powerful message: ‘We are here for one another. We are in this together.’”

This image explains better than any statistic what the Greece Race for the Cure is all about. The thousands of participants are real people, families and friends with battles, losses, hopes and fears. Every single sticker on the back of a T-shirt tells a different story. Yet on the streets of Athens, those stories come together to create something far greater.

For the past six years, I have taken part in the Race myself, and the positive energy flowing through the streets is difficult to capture in words. I asked Michalopoulou what she would want those who show up on Sunday to take home with them.

“To feel the strength they have offered fellow human beings who are facing hardship. I want them to feel that their presence and support have a real impact.”

If each of us goes home having taken just one of the Race’s many messages to heart, and then shares it with someone else, its power can endure far beyond that single day.

It will live on in the conversations we have, the choices we make, the support we offer and, most importantly, in the hearts of those facing an uphill battle.

You are not alone.

Support the cause

This year’s Greece Race for the Cure events start on October 3 at the Pedion tou Areos Park.

The race takes place on Sunday, October 4. Alter Media Group will be participating. You can also support Alma Zois and Race for the Cure by participating as a volunteer or by making a donation.



Every year in Athens, the roads turn pink as people of all ages and from all walks of life come together to walk or run, and talk openly about breast cancer.

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There is a haphazard curation at play: a strange beauty that has emerged from use and time, from things that were moved around, set down somewhere, and ultimately stayed put.

Her hospitality has something of the generosity of the space about it. Chilled soft drinks, sweets, and delicious nibbles were already in place on the table when we sat down to talk on that beautiful September afternoon. The conversation lasted much longer than we had anticipated.

It ranged back to her childhood and the first time she felt clay in her hands, moved on to Yannis Pappas, the National Archaeological Museum, and her teaching years, touched on Maria Callas, and returned once more to the trees, birds, insects and the constant curiosity that clearly continues to inform her work to this day.

At some point during this afternoon conversation of rare beauty, she remarks that she is able to connect moves whose rationale she hadn't fully understood at the time. Perhaps the same is true of the things around us. At first glance, they look like traces of different eras and people. But as time passes, they begin to interconnect, revealing something of a life lived through art without ever considering it finished. After so many decades involved with sculpture, with studies and scholarships in Greece and abroad, exhibitions everywhere from Europe to the United States and China, awards and distinctions, a long tenure at the National Archaeological Museum, and over twenty years of teaching at the Athens School of Fine Arts, Afroditi Liti continues to work. In the end, this probably says more about her than any retrospective ever could.

The human figure was fundamental to your training. What made you move away from a strictly anthropocentric sculpture later on?

I never really abandoned it. Rather, I think I was overexposed to the study of the human figure. So much so that, at a certain point, I changed tack. I wanted sculpture to be more than a study from life. There is so much going on in a sculpture, and I had to find my own personal idiom to be able to articulate these multiple elements. Following a short break after the School of Fine Arts, I made my leaf. I needed the works to be enormous, but I didn't want their size to be intimidating, which is why I opted for fragmentation. Through the use of mirrors,

Afroditi Liti: 'I never betrayed what captivated me — I was always searching for the meaning of art'

Greek sculptor Afroditi Liti reflects on a life shaped by art, from her first encounter with sculpture to teaching at the Athens School of Fine Arts. She speaks about nature, materials, public sculpture and Maria Callas, while describing her entire body of work as one continuous, still-unfinished story in progress



The artist welcomed us into her studio and spoke about precious memories attached to her career trajectory—as well as what is yet to come.

parents never told me to do this or that.

Your work also displays a great sense of freedom with regard to your medium. Didn't you ever want to confine your work to a single, recognizable form?

No! I never cared whether I'd be labeled a sculptor or something else. I wanted sculpture to break away from the stereotypes and move toward true art. Nor did I care whether I'd make any money or not. Research has been a lifetime endeavor. In the first critique ever made of my work, they told me: "My dear, these things just aren't done anymore. It's video, photography or nothing." And I replied: "Come back in thirty years and we'll discuss it. You'll see then what it is I want to do." I was twenty-two years old. I had a vision; I knew what I wanted, what I was seeking. But I never dwelled on people's reactions. I wasn't interested in words. It was actions I cared about.

You worked for many years at the Archaeological Service and the National Archaeological Museum. How did that experience affect the way you viewed cultural heritage?

I believe luck has helped me tremendously in my life. Many times, something I've thought about which interests me has just appeared in front of me—and always after my initial thoughts have had time to mature. It was just such a stroke of luck that led me to the exams to become a museum sculptor, just as I was preparing to go abroad on a scholarship from the School of Fine Arts. My teacher, Yannis Pappas, told me to go and get a letter of recommendation from the museum across the

street. There, they told me about the competition, and I ended up taking the exams. I'd already worked two or three summers on digs with the Archaeological Service, because I really loved the whole idea of it. At the same time, I had a passion for cultural heritage. In the School library, I'd read UNESCO pamphlets on monuments from all over the world and study how different countries approached and conserved their cultural heritage. Some were in Italian and, seeing how fascinated I was by them, my mother suggested I learn Italian so I could read them. I studied the language for five years and learned all the relevant terminology. Then luck struck again: the exam topic was something I knew inside-out. I passed and was appointed to the National Archaeological Museum. I already knew the Museum very well because I'd been going there for years to sketch the sculptures. Until that point, however, I had viewed them as an artist. Now I'd have to deal with them in a completely different way. And I decided that I wanted to devote myself to spotlighting cultural heritage.

You also undertook significant initiatives for the National Archaeological Museum. What do you remember most from that period?

When I joined the Museum, a large part of it was closed. The prehistoric rooms and certain other sections were open, but many remained shut. Driven by my passion, I tried to get the entire Museum open to the public. I involved myself with the garden, the entrance, the floors—things that might seem self-evident today. But most of all, I focused on the Egyptian Collection. When I joined the Museum, Periklis Kourachanis, a young Egyptologist who had been put in charge of the collection, came to see me. He asked me to come and take a look at it. I told him: "I'm going to get the whole thing on display. We are going to open up the Egyptian Collection." He replied: "The classical antiquities aren't even open to the public, and we're going to get the Egyptian artifacts on display! Really?" But I'd already formulated my battle plan. From studying the sculptures, my focus now was on studying how best to display them, so the public could see what I saw in them. Later, when I left for England on a three-year scholarship, I'd study the Egyptian collections wherever I went. On weekends, I would even go to the Louvre to study their Egyptian antiquities. In the meantime,

I wanted them to bring the whole world inside themselves, to shine, to appear to be in motion, to have color, and include a leaf's arterial pathways. I am still striving and experimenting.

Did you have support from your family, as a child who showed such a strong inclination toward painting from so early on?

Let me tell you a story. I adored pictures. Back then, there were these really small cards showing paintings, and I was obsessed with them. I was about three and a half years old, and I knew where the money was kept

in the house. I took it all, went to the shop that sold these pictures, and bought as many as I could. I went home, hid under the dining room table, spread the pictures out around me. I can still remember the pleasure I felt in the company of all those little angels, beautiful girls, couples, swings—images that evoked Watteau. Of course, I was discovered and they took me back to the shop to return the pictures. It was a punishment, but not a punishment meant to warn me off art and pictures. Quite the opposite. My parents embraced this love of mine. They started buying me books, which I adored. From my earliest

years at primary school, I remember the volumes from Melissa Publishing about the great painters. The works of Seurat and Van Gogh lived inside me—and they still do. I would sit for hours when I got back from school, looking at them, reading, and making up stories in my mind. After I turned eleven, my father would help me go out and paint landscapes. Initially, because I couldn't go out on my own, he'd tell me to paint still lifes. Later, he would take me out with my easel, wait until I was finished, then take me back home. No matter the sun, the heat, or the cold—I painted day and night. But I did it because I liked it. My

PHOTOGRAPH BY PANOS KOUKOUSIS/TO BHMA IN THE EDITION

Periklis Kourachanis died suddenly, at a very young age. I told myself I would see the collection exhibited in his memory. I drew up the plans, explained what I wanted, and was given the use of two large rooms, allowing for a highly significant presentation of the Egyptian antiquities. I swayed them, I think, with my argument focused on the profound connection between the Greek and Egyptian civilizations and everything that Greek culture owes to Egypt.

Nature is forever showing up in your work: trees, fruit, leaves, birds, insects, lizards, owls. Why is Nature so important to you?

All those subjects are metaphorical. I use them as symbols to convey what I want to say. I am also very interested in archetypes. It is not simply that I happened on a leaf and made it. I convey things through its veins and pathways. Which gives me a very broad range of subjects I can speak through.

What is it that inspires you in this symbolic representation of nature?

It's as if nature comes up and offers me a gift. Like it's telling me: "This is for you." Nature comes to me, I don't go to Nature.. That's how I see it. All these things, aside from being spiritual, are deeply connected to sensation. A green bottle fly, for instance, can excite me so much with its iridescence that I seek out tesserae in that precise shade of green. You can't explain these things easily. But you can make them. And we say insect, but what can it contain? The soul, the spirit, power, deities...everything. Things that are beyond human reach, but which we can still depict through certain images, in both sculpture and painting.

You have worked with extremely diverse materials. How do you decide which material works best for a particular work?

I like materials—all of them. When I was working on my first work, a feather with birds inspired by a favorite fairy tale, a craftsman who was watching me work said: "I've been working with metal all my life. I never even imagined such things could be made." His observation made a tremendous impression on me. Because you realize you can make the slightest thing into whatever you want. The material makes it easier to say what you want. To me, all materials are like wax—they're my plasticine.



Colorful sculpted butterflies hang from the ceiling of Afroditi Liti's home, lovingly observed by two brass deer sculptures.

Is there a thread that runs through the entirety of your oeuvre from one period to another, or does each series start from scratch?

I can answer that today. I don't think I could have in the past. It's all one big work. My entire body of work is a single piece divided into sections. Like a book has chapters. That's how I think of my work. I don't know if I'll have time to write the ending, but I'm enthusiastic enough to believe I'll keep articulating things well as I near the end. Every time I finish a work, I think it's time to wrap it up. But they just keep multiplying.

I would like us to dwell for a moment on the sculpture of Maria Callas, setting aside all the debate it sparked. What inspired you, and how did you approach such a legendary figure?

Her soul. I studied Callas extensively. The commission began with the Maria Callas Association. They invited me to do something, originally



The controversial sculpture of Maria Callas by Afroditi Liti.

for the museum. Then they asked me to do the full figure, which is how we ended up with a full-length statue. I made a drawing—essentially what you see today—and it passed through the various municipal committees before being presented to the Central Archaeological Council (KAS). The initial proposal was to install it in the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, but I am against placing artworks inside monuments; it's either a monument or it isn't. Later, they suggested Roberto Galli Square. I didn't even know it was called that. I went, saw it, and said: "Very nice, modest. It's perfect." There's the Acropolis opposite. I wanted Callas to converse with the Acropolis. To be like a Kore. For that connection to exist. For me, this woman has all the grandeur of the world within her. There's also the drapery. I studied El Greco a great deal and the way he handled folds. There is also a connection to the figures in the Byzantine church of

Agia Sophia in Thessaloniki. I wanted it to have similar elements and, above all, to look toward the Acropolis. To guide the viewer's gaze toward that ancient grandeur, too.

But the construction stage proved an ordeal. I had finished the initial piece and asked for it to be transported in a very specific way, because it was exceptionally finely worked, almost egg-shell-thin. When I went to see it, it had been destroyed. There was very little time left now before the delivery date. So I sat down and said: "It's over, forget about me. I'll stay here and remake the work." And I redid it from scratch. She is Afroditi Liti's Callas. This is how I wanted her, and that was the end of the matter for me. I had no interest in making an effigy. A sculpture is not an effigy. My Callas comes from my studies, from what I have seen, and from what I want.

What is it like for a creator to see their work cross over into the public sphere and become part of a city's life?

I consider it a great honor, because an artist might work their whole life long and never get that opportunity. And it certainly gives us courage. I feel very positively about my own sculpture. And because it gives me joy, others share in that joy and it is doubled. I remember a large tree, eight meters tall—my first large tree—which I made when Greece assumed the Presidency of the EU; it was in Porto Carras. I had created a flock of birds, like visitors coming and resting on the tree. And I remember the tremendous joy I got out of the public's response. It isn't easy to integrate things like that into a space. It's one thing to have them in your mind, but quite another to make them real. But that is what I want: for people to enter the space and feel comfortable in it, as if they too could fly in and settle on its branches.

How do you see art today? Do you feel the public has drifted away, or is it more interested in seeking out art than ever before?

It's better than ever. People want art; they love it. I believe the exact opposite from those people who say the public has drifted away. They have never followed art as much as they do now. It's crossed over to a new audience now, beyond the connoisseurs. And that's really something. More and more young people are reading about art, going out and seeing art, and their families are learning alongside them. Art is permeating everything, and shaping noble feelings, as we said. Greeks are cultivating themselves, traveling, visiting museums. Even if they just look—nothing else is needed. They internalize all those messages.

And Greek sculpture? Where do you think it finds itself today?

It can hold its head up high. I don't feel we've lost momentum, or are working at a lower level. And with more support, it will be even better.

Is there something new in the works, or something you have in mind? Should we expect something new from you?

Yes, of course. I'm working. I think it will be something very beautiful and, above all, very optimistic. Extremely optimistic about what's happening in Greece today. I don't isolate opinions. I see things holistically. I don't join groups or discussions of that kind. I like to keep free and see things as they are.

When should we expect it?

Soon, I think. I've already made some headway with it.

Continued from Page One

"The hardest part is having to solve that problem over and over again," said Mitchell, who works for a nonprofit in suburban Chicago.

A weekday text exchange

Eating out used to be an easy fallback on busy nights. But restaurant prices have shot up. Instead Mitchell's family turns to ready-to-cook foods and meal-delivery services. Sometimes they make charcuterie boards with cheeses, nuts, salami and crackers as a dinner hack.

"We're trying to shift our mindset," Mitchell said, "and not try to hold ourselves to the expectations of what I saw my mom do."

Americans now spend more time in the kitchen than they have in more than 20 years, according to the Labor Department.

Since 2020, about half of U.S. families have reported both parents working full-time jobs, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. Youth sports can go nearly around the clock. Even toddlers are enrolled in multiple extracurricular activities. Parents are the chauffeurs.

By the time 4 p.m. rolls around on any given day, about 80% of Americans still don't know what they will have for dinner, said Lauren Fitzgerald, managing partner of the Mom Complex, a consulting firm that helps companies develop products and services for mothers. Text messages about dinner peak around that same time, she said, referring to findings from research conducted with thousands of families each year.

Squeezing dinner in between work and other activities can be a logistical nightmare. One in five meals are eaten in the car, Fitzgerald said.

"Dinner is the number one pain point in modern family life," she said.

Running the home restaurant

On average, Americans 15 years and older spent 43 minutes a day on food preparation and cleanup in 2025, data from the Labor Department's annual time use surveys show.

Time in the kitchen fell sharply after 1965 but began gradually climbing again near the turn of the century, according to a historical time diary hosted by the University of Minnesota. It is up about 34% since the early 2000s, when the Labor Department began its survey.

Men are driving much of the increase. Their time spent cooking and cleaning has doubled in the past two decades, to 31 minutes a day last year from 16 minutes in

The Three Dreaded Words No One Wants to Hear: What's for Dinner?

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Americans spend more time cooking than they have in two decades, but hectic schedules and rising costs make it a key pain point



Alice Avelar spends hours each week scouring the internet for recipes that accommodate the varied needs of her family.

2003. (Women still spend far more time in the kitchen—55 minutes a day.)

The Trump administration's MAHA movement extols the virtues of home cooking. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who recently launched an online cooking show, has said that Americans have forgotten how to shop for food and make meals. He has also said that cooking and eating together is one way to address the country's "spiritual malaise."

Then there is the growing roster of online influencers showing off backyard chicken flocks and freshly baked bread, amplifying the pressure parents feel to produce healthy, home-cooked meals. Many turn to Instagram and TikTok for inspiration, only for recipe screenshots to go buried and unused in their phones' camera rolls.

Alice Avelar, an Illinois insurance specialist, said she spends hours each week scouring the internet for recipes that can accommodate a variety of needs in her big, blended family.

Avelar's youngest daughter has an eating disorder and is trying to gain weight. So is her father-in-law, who has diabetes and is recovering from colon can-

cer. Her husband suffers from gout, and doesn't eat red meat. He and his father prefer spicy food, but the rest of Avelar's family can't tolerate as much heat.

3:46 p.m.: The dinner text

"Dinners are so exhausting," Avelar said. "Most of the time I make two meals."

For some parents, keeping up with everyone's dinner needs leaves them feeling like they are running a restaurant. Others said they wind up serving foods like

chicken nuggets more often than they'd like because they don't have the bandwidth for nightly battles over meals that picky eaters may or may not eat.

Some people said they are making it work. Luba Golosinskiy got a master class in bulk shopping and home cooking by watching her mother feed their large family.

"Hence all the meal prepping that I've been doing," she said. "It all adds up at the end."

To feed her own family

of five, the South Carolina-based nurse said she spends hours turning Costco hauls into big batches of soup and salad. She has also got a rotation of slow-cooker meals like lasagna and chicken teriyaki that make for hot, low-effort dinners.

Selling convenience

Food brands see America's dinner problem as an opportunity.

In 2023, snack giant Mars purchased Kevin's Natural Foods, a startup that sells refrigerated meals like Chimichurri Beef and Chicken Tikka Masala as well as newer frozen offerings. The brand touts its simple ingredients, targeting busy consumers who want to serve up healthier food in minutes.

The main consumers buying Kevin's meals are millennial men, making the brand an anomaly among packaged foods.

"They are very time-strapped, but they don't want to give up on their health focus," said Kevin's Chief Executive Roxanne Bernstein.

The company expects Kevin's to hit \$500 million in annual sales in the next few years, and says that could rise to \$1 billion over the next decade.

Organic-food company Amy's Kitchen, which started selling frozen pot pies nearly 40 years ago, recently rolled out family-size options for meals like vegetable lasagna, cheese enchiladas and pad thai.

Amy's pitch, CEO Paul Schiefer said, is tasty, healthy meals that can assuage people's guilt about reaching for something quick.

Consumers are searching for restaurant-caliber meals that can be made even faster, said Jennifer Barnes, vice president of marketing for NestléUSA's frozen-foods division.

To understand people's needs and preferences, Barnes said her team regularly follows shoppers through supermarkets and then home as they unload groceries.

Nestlé recently began working with retailers to offer meal bundles featuring its products. With one click, Walmart shoppers can add to their online carts a family-size Stouffer's Lasagna with a store brand Caesar salad kit and French bread. The goal, Barnes said: "Lessen the burden."

'Do it again'

Convenience hasn't come cheap. Grocery prices in July were roughly 26% higher than they were five years ago, according to the Labor Department.

Anthony Fumo, a New Jersey-based accountant and father of two young children, said premade meals were the first to go when his grocery bill started climbing.

"The cost was just astronomical," said Fumo, who sometimes hits four different grocery stores to seek out the best deals.

On Sundays, Fumo often prepares a big portion of ground beef or chicken, using it to piece together dinner throughout the week, with rice or potatoes and a vegetable side. Sometimes they spring for heat-and-serve options like Green Giant frozen vegetables or Sam's Club grilled chicken, to avoid ordering takeout.

Some families take home cooking even further. Social media is abuzz with posts by mothers of young athletes plugging appliances like crockpots into cars to serve hot meals out of the backs of their vehicles—also known as "trunk dinner"—during long days of sports.

Fitzgerald, the consultant, said some parents have told her that they would rather get a flat tire than have to deal with the mental load of cooking dinner night after night.

"A flat tire has a beginning, a middle and an end," she said. "You cook dinner on Thursday, but then you have to do it again on Friday."



Avelar at the dinner table with her daughters, husband and father-in-law.