

THE LACE COLLECTION OF ELENI KYRIACOU

Eleni Kyriacou's lace collection comprises of over 1,000 pieces. The collection consists of exceptional 19th and 20th century laces, covering almost every kind of lace-making technique. Lace-making was practiced by women in Greece, Cyprus as well as the eastern Mediterranean with great knowledge and skill, with refined taste and artistry.

One can say the art of lace exists in contemporary Greek culture as a collective memory. Eleni Kyriacou shares this memory and gives precedence to her love and appreciation for this artistic creativity crafted by women - finely executed laces. She thereby sets about collecting laces which she brings into her design studio to assess in detail. In an independent, discreet manner she collects and salvages various laces that she sources from the streets and markets of Athens, thus salvaging an essentially overlooked part of our cultural past. Thus, this is a moving recovery of these seemingly insignificant, unassuming works of lace which are in a sense 'woven glory' of a remarkable legacy of female artistry, which has handed down supreme creations over time. Eleni Kyriacou's recovery and safe-guarding of these various laces (those she has been able to save) stems from her own personal love, passion and fascination towards them, made possible by her sheer desire and enabled by personal funding. One could say these laces are a material index of Modern Greek culture. In spite of the original owners' disinterest in the laces, and even the inability of the Greek state to play a role in protecting what is left of these cultural treasures; Eleni Kyriacou tasks herself in accumulating as many as she can. This self-assigned mission bears testament to the determination of the collector to defend the "lost honour" of the past occupation of women, also known as "folk" artistry.

This lace collection is representative of virtually every lace-making technique: crochet, filet, needle-point, bobbin, tatting, Tenerife, Venise, cutwork and so on, resulting in a design typology directed by and brought about by the technique used. The way in which the laces have been sourced (from the streets and bazaars of Athens), means we do not have their precise place of origin. However, several of the collection pieces point to a specific place of origin, either through a technique used exclusively by a certain place or used generally by particular places.

Greece became a multi-cultural society via various historical and socio-economic circumstances, thereby becoming a point of settlement for communities from a range of places. This meant laces brought to the bazaars of Athens came from far and wide, such as: the Greek islands (where lace-making flourished - Chios, Samos, Psara, Ios, Tinos, Naxos, Skyros, Rhodes, Crete, Aegina, the Ionian Islands, and so on), Cyprus, Constantinople (Istanbul), Smyrna (Izmir), Egypt and Armenia. Nevertheless, what can be observed in the collection is the consistency and recurrence of certain design themes but also the imaginative range in designs. This is due to the various lace-making centres that flourished in Greece and beyond, which influenced lace-making production, as well as being a means by which to circulate lace design manuals, which women used to guide their creativity. The adoptive and adaptive capabilities of Greek women (where standard designs were taken, then developed and progressed) meant they produced outstanding pieces bearing the hallmark of Greek tradition. They created brilliant works of art, on a par with laces from other prominent European lace-making centres (such as those of Italy, France, England, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Czech Republic, Hungary, etc.).

It is a moment of contentment to collect and salvage the artworks of these women that were initially "discarded" to the streets and markets of Athens, because of the ignorance and indifference of those who once had them in their possession. However, it is significant that these laces have managed to move someone like Eleni Kyriacou – who can be proud of their sense of obligation in wishing to highlight this sector of Modern Greek artistry, contrary to the current popular trend. Laces for her are a source of inspiration and artistic expression, where she boldly and imaginatively sets a new creative approach and artistic vision.