

# George Zongolopoulos and the vision of public sculpture

Ever since it was first recorded in human history, sculpture has been a public art form. In its inception, it was considered monumental art – not in the sense of scale, which is how we use the term today, but in its function of serving memory, reminding, commemorating. A sculpture commemorates, preserves the memory of a deserving person, living or dead, or of an actual, or perceived, event that the state and the community deem worthy of honor and commemoration. The earliest sculptures, after the ones that simply served as burial markers, depicted female flute players, athletes, Olympic Games winners, warriors or heroes who distinguished themselves or died in battle, gods or demigods, deceased relatives, noblemen, or pre-eminent members of society. Therefore, sculptures evoke memorable public figures or places where an important event occurred that redefined the boundaries between life and death, courage and generosity, moral integrity and grace, presence and absence, responsibility and bravery. All the virtues that make sculpture a public art form.

The vision of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC) is to redefine the citizens' relationship with the public space through its daily operation. The George Zongolopoulos sculpture exhibition at the SNFCC contributes to the dialogue on the role of the arts and culture in the public realm. As a public art form and as a means to reflect the socio-political conditions of each period, sculpture enjoyed a privileged position in Zongolopoulos' vision from early on. His artistic endeavor aimed



Alexander,  
G. Zongolopoulos Square,  
Filiothei- Psychiko, Athens

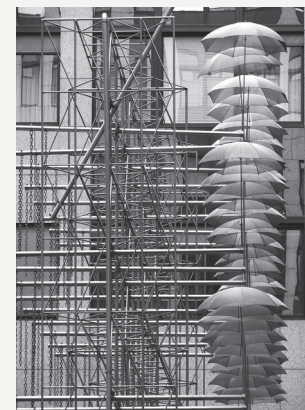


Five Circles,  
Omonoia Square, Athens

to promote education, architecture, democracy, liberty, as well as to honor the preeminent public figures of his times.

He became engaged with the restoration of antiquities, working alongside acclaimed architect A. Orlandos. With poet A. Sikelianos he contributed to the organization of the Delphic Festivities at the Delphi archeological site to promote world peace. He built schools all over Greece, working with architects N. Mitsakis and P. Karantinos. Together with notable Greek modernist architect A. Konstantinidis, he became involved in the *Xenia Hotel* projects on the island of Poros and at Olympia. He entered public competitions for landmark public sites and monuments including Omonoia Square, which he was awarded alongside K. Bitsios in 1958, with his *Fountains* and *Poseidon*; the *Umbrellas*, on display at the Venice Biennale, which earned the 1st prize and was permanently installed in the Cour d' Honneur of the European Council of Ministers building in Brussels as a symbol of the peaceful coexistence of nations and democracy. Memorials commemorating important historical events include his masterpiece at *Zalongo*, the monument at *Gorgopotamos*, the *Roadblock of Kokkinia*, the *Olympic Rings*; his statues include *Errikos Frantziskakis*; *Mimis Vitsoris*; *Ariadne Xenaki*; *The Unknown Political Prisoner*; *Mother and Dead Child*; *Soldier*; *The Monument to the Fallen*, in collaboration with A. Apergis.

Throughout his life, whether adopting figuration or abstraction, and in spite of the bold experimental and original nature of his work, he was deeply committed to history. His sculptures flow in space as he experimented, in his long creative career, with all kinds of materials and media, engaged with all art forms and styles, yet never ceased to be aware of and to communicate that public space is fluid, in motion and dynamic with respect to time, nature, and man. Hence, water is a recurring element in his



Umbrellas,  
Justus Lipsius Building, Brussels



Monument to the Fallen,  
Nice



Umbrellas,  
Al Alamein Hotel, Egypt

work: his hydrokinetic *Umbrellas*, for instance, playing with the motion of water; the *Poseidon* fountain sculpture at Omonoia Square in Athens. Serving memory and commemoration, all of his work – a landmark in twentieth-century world sculpture – reminds us that Zongolopoulos worked for peace.

Zongolopoulos dedicated his life to fighting to release man from the fear of the void; to bring life at the point where void and full make each other complete, as in the *Zalongo* monument, where man learns to fear neither emptiness nor fullness as a viewer or citizen, but to experience them as an expression of love for freedom and redemption.

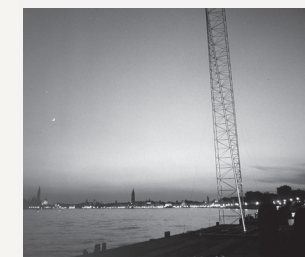
His work frequently juxtaposes water and fire, in the hope that fire, rather than generating war, will become a tool for art and that water, rather than drowning, will give life and fluidity to the world. “Everything flows,” and the ebb and flow of the world now brings Zongolopoulos' work on display by the water of the Saronic Gulf and the Italian architect Renzo Piano's Canal. It is reflecting the fact that the artist divided his life between Omonoia, where he spent his childhood years, and the canals of Venice, where he was so active as an artist, including as member, and for some time chairman, of the executive council of the European Society for Culture (SEC) in Venice, which promoted dialogue and cooperation among European nations – an opportunity for him to communicate his passion for a Europe of culture and peace.

Today, Zongolopoulos' work conveys the artist's positive vision for education and art, and compels us, in turn, to love peace and knowledge as joys of living; to be free of fear and to forge ahead, inspired by his work, which reminds us daily of the significance of civil society, art, public dialogue and of the artist's responsibility, whose work encapsulates a dynamic vision of a better world.

**Denys Zacharopoulos**  
Art Historian



Monument of Zalongo,  
Mount Zalongo, Epirus



Column,  
Venice