

## Mia Muse Ceramics Workshop, Skopelos *By Suzy Birstein*

*Follow your bliss and the rest will follow.*

—Joseph Campbell

For better or worse, this quote has been my mantra. I experienced its essence last September while offering *Mia Muse*, a two-week figurative ceramics workshop on Skopelos, the stunning Greek island where *Mamma Mia* was filmed. How truly blissful to return to the place I considered my spiritual homeland 30 years ago, as the artist and teacher I have since become.

The journey to Skopelos began with an optional pre-tour to Athens, where we visited the stunning ancient sites of the Acropolis and Delphi, as well as the much-awaited New Acropolis Museum, churches, flea markets, the Plaka and of course, shopping at Melissanos', the Poet-Sandal maker!

Although it was September and still hot, Zeus greeted us with a freak electrical storm, both coming and going to Skopelos—quite appropriate for the nine muses who were to be my students! That first morning, I was awakened by a dramatic sunrise blazing through my balcony windows. In fact, every morning featured a differently spectacular sunrise view, looking upon the tile and slate rooftops of Skopelos town, the harbour, olive groves and Sporades islands of the turquoise Aegean.



Awakening to a Skopelos sunrise.



Suzy and her students at work.

The Skopelos Art Foundation (Skopart) is run by two visionary American women (mother and daughter) who facilitate international workshops. Skopart is located on the hilltop overlooking the town, a short walk from our charming accommodation. The Centre is a large contemporary facility offering printmaking, photography, painting and ceramic workshops and residencies. The ceramics studio is a gorgeous place to work; a large covered space opening onto views of Aegean beaches and monasteries.

Our days began with a delicious breakfast provided by Jill and Gloria, followed by five hours of structured studio time, with the option of using the studio 24/7. In the short two weeks we were there, time

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Some of the pieces created by Suzy's students during the workshop.



Climbing around town.



Local pottery by Nikos Rodios, third generation Skopelos potter.

## Time slowed down, *Cont'd from Page 9.*

slowed down. It was as if we lived there. My “muses” were incredibly prolific, creating masks, heads and mugs bisqued in the alternately firing two electric kilns and then surfaced with combinations of colourful glazes, acrylics and/or patinas. (Most materials were Greek.)

We were welcomed with a delicious Greek feast conjured by Christos, our accommodation maestro, followed by a hilarious evening of Greek dancing and music where we absolutely got a hit of warm, gracious Greek hospitality. The two weeks culminated with a grand closing party and exhibit, hosted by Jill and Gloria of Skopart and attended by the local Greek and ex-pat communities. Everyone was blown away by the quality and variety of the pieces created by both experienced and novice participants.

Skopelos is a magical place to relax, imagine and fantasize; the perfect ambiance to forget our everyday lives and focus on our inner muse expressed through clay and colour.

From the beginning, Jill and Gloria were impressed with the harmony, creativity and diversity of our group. We had nine wonderful students attending the workshop, all with their individually unique skills and personalities—potters, painters, scientists and students. Participants were primarily from B.C. We were delighted to have a wonderful potter from North Carolina who leaped upon the opportunity to return to her beloved Skopelos and explore *Mia Muse*. In addition, we welcomed four non-participants who accompanied the muses and an American photographer-in-residence, all of whom enriched the overall experience.

When not in the studio, we were inspired by the charming labyrinthine walks into the old, yet immaculate town of Skopelos. It is everything you imagine a Greek village to be: whitewashed houses, colourful balconies adorned with overhanging bougainvilleas and large ceramic pots created on island. Skopelos town houses wonderful shops filled with clothing, jewelry and ceramics created by Greek artisans, multiple seaside cafes and restaurants—all reasonably priced! There are no large hotels. The beaches of Skopelos are exquisite, which is why it was chosen as the site for *Mamma Mia*. In addition to the beaches, there are numerous churches and monasteries, a local folk art museum, quaint villages, pine forests and mini cruises to neighbouring islands. Revivalist-traditional potter Nikos Rodios and folk artist Violetta graced us with studio visits and demos.

I am thrilled to be invited back to Skopelos this September to offer *Mytho Muse*. This two-week workshop will focus on creating transformational figurative ceramic sculptures inspired by Greek and world mythological creatures. It will build upon all that has transpired and influenced me during and since *Mia Muse*. 📍

*Suzy will be offering the Mytho Muse workshop Sept. 10–25, 2010. She invites you to join her and looks forward to hearing from you. For more information about the workshop and about Suzy's work, contact her at:*

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