



Private Collection

Nicos Fronimopoulos was given a private tour inside the Canellopoulos Museum in Plaka by the Museum's founder, collector Alexandra Canellopoulou

The serene and elegant neoclassical mansion on the corner of Panos and Theorias streets with the majestic Acropolis in the background is the home to the Canellopoulos Museum where some of the most precious acquisitions of private collectors and Titan Cement owners Pavlos and Alexandra Canellopoulos are exhibited. Greek art from the Neolithic era to the Middle Ages including very rare Byzantine icons, consisting of more than 6,000 exhibits, have made this small, but very special museum that is an all-time Plaka favorite.

Fifteenth, 16th and 17th century icons from the Cretan and Constantinople schools, gold jewelry, Early Christian and Byzantine and



Above: The neoclassic mansion that houses the Canellopoulos Museum
Below: The Museum's founder Alexandra Canellopoulou with the writer in front of rare Byzantine icons

Coptic textiles, Bronze reliquary crosses, encolpia, miniature stone-icon amulets, Roman sculptures and funerary Fayum masks are exhibited in the four rooms on the ground floor. The greatest part of the collection consists of works from the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods including a 14th century *Dormition of the Virgin*. The basement and lower mezzanine house Greek folk and post-Byzantine art, whereas in the Northern Courtyard one can see sculptures and gravestones from the Classical Period. Cycladic, Minoan, Mycenaean, Cypriot, Corinthian, Classical and Hellenistic art are on the upper floor and the mezzanine, including an impressive collection of terracotta figurines from Tanagra.



Above left: Terracotta figurines of horsemen. Boetian workshops of the Archaic period. Right: 7th-10th AD Processional crosses, bronze censers and 16th century communion chalices on the ground floor

"We went through many hard times in order to have our donation for the museum accepted," explains Alexandra Canellopoulou. "My husband, Pavlos, had been soliciting various authorities for a number of years yet nobody seemed interested. He was very upset. We were ready to make the donation to the US government instead. Their project concerned a museum in Greece but under US management, modeled after the Gennadios Library. Yet he persevered - out of pride maybe - to persuade the Greek state. Finally in the early Seventies we were given this building that belongs to the state. I must say that it happened during the Papadopoulos military regime. And it happened largely thanks to my contacts," says Mrs. Canellopoulou with a smile.

"One day I was at my dressmaker who knew the Papadopoulos family. Thanks to her introduction I was received immediately and

given time enough to explain our intentions. 'I have not come to you to beg,' I told him (Papadopoulos). 'Especially given the fact that my donation is in the order of \$200 million.' He replied, 'With the position I am holding I cannot refuse even 100 drachmas donated to the Greek state yet I still need for our experts to examine the collection. So they did and I remember that one of the assigned experts, Professor Marinatos, even claimed that there was no such thing as a Canellopoulos collection but that it all belonged *ipso facto* to the Greek state. Finally, in 1975, the year after the political changeover, the museum was inaugurated with presidents Constantine Tsatsos and Constantine Karamanlis attending," Mrs. Canellopoulou reminisces.

"Renovating the building also required a tremendous amount of work. It had been abandoned for decades and inhabited by squatters. Nevertheless, it became warm and

cozy and felt like a home, ideal to house this private collection. Painter Nikos Hadzikyriakos-Ghika loved the frescos on the ceilings as well as its Acropolis views," she adds.

The 96-year-old Pavlos Canellopoulos, Titan's honorary CEO, oversaw the expansion of the cement and shipping empire as it became Greece's leading multinational company and spent all his free time collecting Greek art. Despite his weakening vision he is still very actively involved with the museum today. "Even though he never studied archaeology he developed a flair for ancient art. The venerable antiques dealer Martinos used to tell his clients that should they wish to check the authenticity of an object, they should have Pavlos Canellopoulos examine it."

As Titan expanded-- last year the company celebrated its 100th anniversary-- so did the



Inside the Canellopoulos Museum. The visitor travels from the Neolithic age and Minoan Crete to Classical Attica, the Roman and Hellenistic times to the Byantine era through this very unique collection

collection. "Pavlos spent all his free time studying. He became obsessed with archaeology. He even donated a jeep to the Ministry of Culture for excavations," she points out. One of Mrs. Canellopoulou's most recent donations is a shrine in memory of the missionary brothers Cyril and Methodios (who created the Cyrillic alphabet) in the courtyard of the Reichenau island monastery in Costanza, Germany. With her sister Thekla Marinidi, they also financed the brand-new Maria Callas Museum in the Technopolis of the City of Athens at Gazi.



The couple lives on Hirodou Attikou Street in a beautiful apartment overlooking the National Gardens with the Acropolis beyond. "Athens has lost the ambiance of the earlier days. It increasingly reminds me of a concrete village. I know we are cement producers ourselves and this is where our wealth came from, yet I have a hard time reconciling the fact that all the neoclassical houses were sacrificed to (bad) modern architecture. The city center should have

remained intact and modern Athens should have been built in the outskirts," she maintains.

A portrait of Mrs. Canellopoulou by painter Yannis Moralis, one of his early works, dominates the living room where there are hundreds of impressive antiquities and antiques. But one item, a 24-carat bracelet, remains her favorite object. "This very bracelet inspired Xenophon Zolotas to create the Crysotheque Zolotas with jewelry inspired from antiquity."

Expanding the museum to display more

exhibits, recent acquisitions and visitors is the Canellopoulos' goal now. "Once again we were not particularly encouraged by the ever-changing administrators. Only recently Mrs. Papazoi, the previous minister of culture, gave the green light for a new wing in the adjoining plot," she explains. The foundations are already in place and works are rapidly progressing to present the extension before the Olympic Games. □

Canellopoulos Museum, Theorias and Panos Sts., Plaka. Tel: 210.321.2313. Tues-Sun 8:30am-3pm. Admission €1.50