

# Archipelago Network ————— Press Release

## Press release #03

July 13, 2023

### Archipelago Network presents "Pottery of Sifnos"

The Archipelago Network presents "Pottery of Sifnos," a multi-layered research project aiming to preserve and promote the unique pottery craft practice of Sifnos island and aspiring to stimulate discussions regarding the cultural heritage of the Cycladic islands: a heritage which is currently endangered, and holds a key role in the region's sustainable development and future cultural fabric.

Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sifnos has hosted some of the most prolific and renowned pottery workshops in the Aegean. The island's rich clay deposits, suitable for creating heat-resistant pots, its access to fresh water through an extensive network of springs, and its protected bays ideal for loading and transporting wares by caique, combined with the industrious craftspeople of the island, have fostered a deep connection between Sifnos and pottery craftsmanship. Today, as use has predominantly shifted from local to touristic consumers, over fifteen pottery workshops located across the island continue to produce distinctive ceramic objects.

Through a wide spectrum of archival materials, a new docu-series, as well as an in-progress interdisciplinary research, the Archipelago Network unfolds the historical evolution and continued relevance of this unique Sifnian craft, inviting the audience to explore its various layers at AN's open-access website.

#### Archival Materials

A newly digitized range of archival materials, including photographs, documents, films, and musical recordings, sourced from local workshops, regional archives, and private collections, illustrates the technical and symbolic knowledge accumulated over generations. These materials provide insights into the economic, social, technical and environmental dimensions of the pottery production process, among others.

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### **Cosmas Xenakis's *Crafts Collection***

Renowned artist Cosmas Xenakis (1925-1984) resided in Sifnos in the mid-1960s, at a time when production of functional ceramics had begun to decline due to the introduction of new materials and economic shifts. Xenakis collected cookware and tools, many of which were donated by local pottery workshops. These objects form his *Crafts Collection*, offering invaluable material evidence of Sifnian pottery production during a transitional period. The collection, loaned by the estate of Cosmas Xenakis to the Sifnos Potters' Union, constitutes the core of the Sifnos Pottery Museum's holdings.

In parallel, Xenakis meticulously documented the objects and collection process in a notebook, including diagrams, sketches, notes and detailed annotations about each item's origin, use, and former owner: a partially realized documentation system for taxonomizing individual items within the collection. The notebook reflects Xenakis's architectural and artistic

background and underscores the value of Sifnian pottery in relation to the island's broader social and environmental concerns. As Xenakis declared in an open letter to the local "Sifnaiki Foni" newspaper in June 1982, asking Sifnians to contribute to his effort, "[the collection] will help us somehow preserve the historical testimony of this culture of the everyday."

Selected documents digitized in collaboration with the estate of Cosmas Xenakis are presented for the first time within the context of this project.

### **Video Portraits: Potters**

A series of thirteen video portraits showcase active Sifnian pottery workshops, presenting a panorama of their history and current activities. Through observational footage, archival materials, and in-depth interviews, this docu-series captures the multigenerational histories and vibrant activities taking place in thirteen active workshops on Sifnos island.

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The video portraits present the following potters: Giannis Apostolidis, Giannis & Antonis Atsonios, Georgios Atsonios, Vasilis Depastas, Kostas Depastas, Giorgos Exylzes, Antonis K. Kalogirou, Antonis Z. Kalogirou, Nikos & Giannis Lembesis, Alexandros Lemonis, Frazeskos Lemonis, Giannis Narlis, and Giannis Podotas. A selection of four portraits are currently available at the project website, while the rest will be released progressively in the coming months.

### Forthcoming Research

In collaboration with curator Lydia Matthews (Parsons Fine Arts Program) and architectural historian Ioanna Theocharopoulou (Cornell University), the Archipelago Network team is conducting interdisciplinary research that explores the continued relevance of this craft tradition in the present day through the prisms of visual culture and architecture. Details on this research will be announced and published later in 2023.

A selection of the aforementioned materials is available on the Archipelago Network's open access website, encouraging visitors to browse, reuse them, as well as continue the research on the pottery of Sifnos.

"Pottery of Sifnos" is held in collaboration with the Sifnos Potters' Union, the working group for the Sifnos Pottery Museum, the estate of Cosmas Xenakis, and various regional archives. The project is realized under the auspices and with the financial support of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture.

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For all media inquiries, please contact Archipelago Network at [comms@archipelagonetwork.org](mailto:comms@archipelagonetwork.org).

[info@archipelagonetwork.org](mailto:info@archipelagonetwork.org)

[www.archipelagonetwork.org](http://www.archipelagonetwork.org)