



Painting by George Vakalo

New “Vakalo Family Fund” Continues an Inspiring legacy

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by Artemis Leontis

“The Vakalo name is known throughout Greece for the wide range of contributions by George and Eleni Vakalo to poetry, the visual arts, criticism, education and cultural activism. Their son, Dr. Emmanuel-George Vakalo, brought this legacy to the University of Michigan as a doctoral student in Urban, Technological, and Environmental Planning and later as professor in the A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and urban Planning, and is remembered as an inspiring educator.”

Thus begins the “Inspiration Statement” of Kathleen L. Vakalo, wife of the late George Emmanuel Vakalo, in her gift agreement with UM signed in the fall of 2018. The gift establishes the Vakalo Family Fund for Visiting Scholars and Artists to support visiting residencies by emerging scholars and artists, including poets, writers, translators, musicians, and visual and performance artists.

For me, the Vakalo gift is inspiring for personal reasons.

Before I met her, I knew Eleni Vakalo (1925–2001) as an eminent art critic and poet. I had heard her lecture on modern Greek art in Thessaloniki in the early

1980s. I devoured her books of poetry and art criticism as a graduate student. A highly educated woman, she studied history and archaeology at the University of Athens and history of art in Paris. She published 9 books of art criticism and 14 books of poetry. She wrote a weekly column on art in the newspaper *Ta Nea* for 23 years, and produced radio programs. She lectured in the US. I also knew the paintings and illustrations of George Vakalo (1901–1991), her husband and an internationally acclaimed artist, with whom she founded the Vakalo School of Art and Design in 1958, the first school of applied arts in Greece and foremost design institution still today.

I first visited the Vakalo house on Papdiamanti Square in Athens in the summer of 1991. I was with Vassilis Lambropoulos and our three-year-old daughter, Daphne. Efthymia, the housekeeper, opened the door. She plucked a pomegranate from the tree in the courtyard, and handed it to Daphne. Eleni Vakalo stood nearby smiling, cigarette in hand. She exuded the confidence of someone who knew time was too short to waste on self-questioning.

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

The past academic year brought both major changes and inspiring developments. I use this column to bring you up to date on what is happening in the Modern Greek Program.

Vassilis Lambropoulos retired on June 1, 2018, becoming C. P. Cavafy Professor *emeritus* of Classical Studies and Comparative Literature. He was the director from 1999 to 2018, building the curriculum to offer an undergraduate major, minor, and graduate studies. He brought international recognition to Modern Greek studies with his teaching, research, graduate supervision, and leadership, organizing hundreds of events. Vassilis has published three authored books—*Greek Literature As National Institution*, *The Rise of Eurocentrism*, and *The Tragic Idea*—two co-edited books, two special issues of journals; and the complete works of author Melpo Axioti, in addition to numerous academic papers and articles in newspapers and literary magazines. He remains an active presence, authoring two blogs, where he posts reflective essays and a book in progress on the tragedy of revolution in modern theatre.

I have stepped into the position of C.P. Cavafy Professor of Modern Greek and Comparative Literature and the role of Director of the Modern Greek Program and continue to teach and advise students while chairing the Department of Classical Studies. My new book, *Eva Palmer Sikelianos: A Life in Ruins*, will appear in print in March 2019. The program has two full-time faculty, myself and **Despina Margomenou**, and will hire a new faculty next year. Dr. Margomenou teaches language and culture classes, bringing pedagogical innovation that place our students at the center of the learning process. **Drew Cabannis**, a PhD student in Classical Art and Archaeology with advanced knowledge of Modern Greek, will teach the second semester beginning Greek language class this winter. **Zachary Quint** is the new Classics and Modern Greek Librarian in the University Library, providing subject expertise and collection development. He takes the place of **Janet Crayne**, Head of Area Studies, who has been handling the Modern Greek collections since 1999 and will retire in 2019. Janet has been a marvelous collaborator. We will miss her!

Our students are also moving on. In September 2018, **William Stroebel** defended his dissertation, *Fluid Books, Fluid Borders: Modern Greek and Turkish Book Networks in a Shifting Sea*, a work of remarkable scope making contributions to book history, Mediterranean studies, and the comparative study of Greek and Turkish literature. He earned a PhD in Comparative Literature and is currently Postdoctoral Fellow in Hellenic Studies at Princeton University.

Ali Bolcakan, a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature, conducted important dissertation research in Greece last year. Dr. Stroebel, Ali Bolcakan, and **Peter Vorissis**, another PhD candidate in Comparative Literature, with help from our former student, **Professor Etienne Charriere**, edited “World Hellenisms,” an issue of *Absinthe: A Journal of World Literature in Translation*, publishing previously untranslated literature in English translation. Καλοτάξιδο!

Seven undergraduates graduated with majors or minors in Modern Greek in April 2018, and a number of students are on track to complete degrees in 2019 and 2020. We were able to support seven for internships, research, and study in Greece last summer: **Michael Demetriou** (Solidarity Now), **William Fuerst** (Press Project), **Fotini Michalakis** (College Year in Athens), **Christina Missler** (IMXH), **Haris Missler** (Anatolia College), **Alexandra Niforos** (Center for Asia Minor Studies and CYA), and **Ashley Tomaszewski** (honors thesis research). This was Ashley’s first trip to Greece after four years of studying the language and culture. In her words, “Being able to be present, make connections, and ultimately see the crisis, by which I was very emotionally affected, was invaluable.” Our majors and minors are always looking for ways to connect the study of Greek with their career aspirations and life experiences. Their eagerness to learn Greek despite the difficulty of the language and their distance from Greece is a source of inspiration.

New students have entered our classes and are looking to incorporate the study of Greek in their plans, including a number of graduate students in Classics who took beginning Greek with me last year. We continue to work with our donors. The Foundation for Modern Greek Studies, which endowed the C. P. Cavafy Professorship, offers valuable support each year. Kathleen Vakalo’s gift will help us bring scholars and artists from Greece. We have a number of exciting events planned this winter. The Modern Greek Program is alive and vital.

Write to me if you have questions. I enjoy hearing from alumni, prospective and current students, donors, and friends who have ideas they wish to share.

Artemis Leontis

C. P. Cavafy Professor of Modern Greek Studies and Comparative Literature



Communicative Methods

by Drew Cabaniss



Drew Cabaniss is a Ph.D. candidate in IPCAA (Interdepartmental Program in Classical Art and Archaeology) and a Graduate Student Instructor of Modern Greek in Winter 2019.

The Greek word for a person born abroad, *omoyenis*, struck me the first time I heard it. A speaker who uses it asserts that someone belongs in Greek culture like themselves—in my experience, always with a positive connotation and frequently with an inquisitive inflection. The act of asking whether someone is an *omoyenis* makes a connection with a foreigner who shares some common traits, most often language, but sometimes an understanding of proper behavior, like how to order a frappe and water it down slowly throughout the day. Yet whatever this person knows, they lack an understanding of how to accomplish some present task in which both people are mutually engaged, likely because they lack a shared upbringing within Greece itself.

Each summer that I return to Greece as an archaeologist I find myself encountering unfamiliar situations requiring knowledge beyond language, and I think this is the reason this word has become a daily refrain of my life there. It should be made clear that I am not of Greek ancestry; my father's family can be traced back to French Huguenots before they disappear among anonymous foresters, and no one in recent memory spoke a word of Greek. But knowing any Greek at all, much less seven years' worth, seems to imply that I must share more bonds than language with the hosts, friends, and colleagues whom I meet in ancient and modern villages. Speaking my range of Greek with university students, professionals in the Greek Archaeological Service, and people in the villages where I live causes people to wonder why I can discuss excavation methods but seem so helpless in understanding the intricacies of the post office or cell phone companies.

This experience didn't seem unusual to me until I began taking classes at the University of Michigan in an attempt to improve my Greek communication skills, both linguistic and otherwise. Embedded in a classroom filled with heritage speakers, I learned my knowledge was almost entirely perpendicular to my peers'. Where they had visited Greece for years and understood how to behave at major milestones such as weddings and baptisms, as well as the differences in food between their hometown in Greece and other regions, I knew little of these subtleties. Yet I did know what it was like to work in an office and how to engage with the constant banter of colleagues. Where my basic understanding of how to be Greek was largely missing, working in Greece had filled in other knowledge.

Both types of knowledge proved equally valuable during my classes, especially as part of the Conversations on Culture project, during which we discussed cultural attitudes and stereotypes with college students in Thessaloniki. I was paired with a heritage speaker who knew fewer Greek words, but whose experiences with his Greek-American family made empathic conversations with our friend in Thessaloniki possible in ways my words could not. It became clear through these discussions why my status as an *omoyenis* was such a common question, as having a background as a Greek-American would open up pathways of communication that otherwise required more work and cultural understanding to transverse. Yet it also became clear that this was a question asked of my heritage speaker friend, whose Greek didn't quite mark him as a native speaker, and that there was more than one way to break from expectations.

With this in mind, I now find myself on the verge of a third perspective toward speaking without being Greek: teaching Greek to a new class of eager learners, themselves from a mixed set of backgrounds not dissimilar to myself and my classmates. I feel a slight unease at this, as I am responsible for teaching about a language and a living culture that I am not a part of. Yet unlike the ancient Greek world for which I am more frequently responsible in a classroom, I think I am more aware of the boundaries of my experiences than I have been at any other point in my life. As an educator, hopefully this will make it possible for my students to be more aware of these boundaries as well, recognizing the unique combinations of perspectives they bring to Greek studies, and that we all lack some key knowledge which education can foster.

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Photo 1: Myself at a taverna, home to many long conversations about cultural difference.

Photo 2: Two towns, modern and ancient, at Kavousi, east Crete, where friends helped me learn how to speak and behave as part of a Greek excavation team.



(continued from front cover)

She showed us into living space, a room surrounded by windows and art. We all sat down. For the next hour, nothing mattered except our conversation. The subject was a paper I had written on gender representation in her poetry. I was trying to understand the degree to which writing was for her a subversive act of rewriting male dominated literary canons. "The way to be in danger is our way as poets," she wrote in "Our Way of Being in Danger" (1966). What were her poetry's undercurrents? She questioned me determinedly, not in order to force my work into her notion of what it meant but to hear and feel out my dynamic relationship to it: to encourage me to develop the viewpoint that mattered most to me. Nothing was more important to her, I discovered, than to encourage young people to become creative meaning makers.

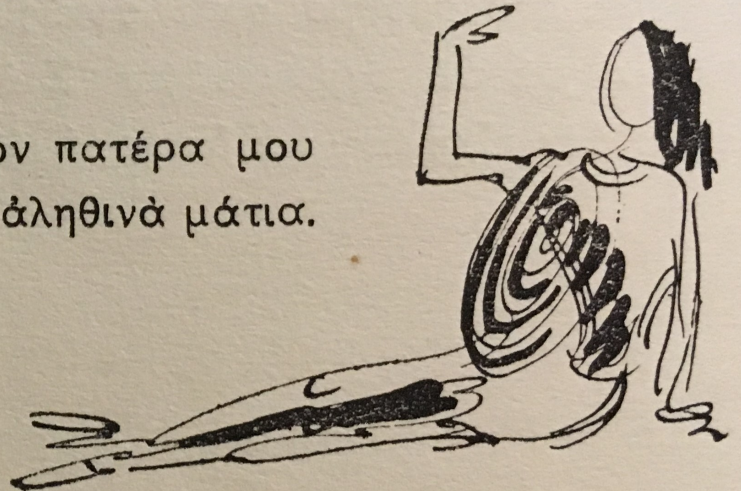
George Emmanuel "Manos" Vakalo, the son of Eleni and George and Professor of Architecture from 1985 to 2000, had his parents' gift of mentoring younger generations. He chaired the doctoral program in architecture in 1994-99. He was awarded the Sol King Award for Excellence in Teaching. I

met him once after moving to Ann Arbor in 1999. A year later came his untimely passing. At his memorial, dozens of former graduate students gave testimonials about his inspiring, guiding presence and uncanny ability to help them find their path to creative self-expression.

At the time of Manos's death and a year before her passing, Eleni Vakalo expressed her wish to create a Vakalo legacy at UM. She donated her books to Hatcher Library and talked about making a family gift to support visiting artists and scholars from Greece.

It gives me personal joy to announce that Kathleen Vakalo has now made a gift that will honor the family's contributions to Greek culture, establishing an endowed fund, administered by the Modern Greek Program at UM, that supports emerging scholars, writers, and artists. The effort to support young scholars and artists, bringing contemporary Greece to an international audience, above and beyond the achievements of the country's ancient past, truly characterizes the educational and cultural legacy of the Vakalo family.

“Υστερα από την ιστορία με τον πατέρα μου
υποψιαζόμουν και όσους είχαν αληθινά μάτια.



Line from a poem and drawing by Eleni and George Vakalo

STUDENT AWARDS, DEGREES, GRANTS, AND NEWS

Award Winners

Haralambos “Haris” J. Missler received the Modern Greek Senior Prize, awarded in memory of Calliopi Papala Politou, recognizing the most outstanding undergraduate senior who excels in the study of Modern Greek. He distinguished himself with his unflinching commitment to studies in Modern Greek and History. He writes: “Pursuing a major in Modern Greek was for me a way to better understand my Greek-Cypriot heritage and identity: to strengthen my language and better communicate with Greeks in my immediate community and abroad. The Modern Greek Program also offered a different perspective to modern Greek history than the traditional, ethnocentric tales of my parents and grandparents: it challenged nationalistic notions and better informed me of the Greece I did not know.”



Ashley Tomaszewski, Contexts for Classics Undergraduate Translation Prize, for Haris Psarras, “Gloria in Excelsis”

Christina Panagoulia Triantafillopoulos, Modern Greek Advanced Intermediate Translation Prize

Xhulja Biraku, Modern Greek Intermediate Translation Prize

Graduating Seniors and PhD Students 2017–2018

Akshay Neellesh Chhajed (BBA, Minor in Modern Greek and in International Studies). In the summer of 2017, Akshay volunteered as a medical translator and cultural mediator at the Moria Refugee Camp, Lesbos, Greece through the Emergency Response Centre International, an NGO, where he used his considerable language skills in Greek, Urdu/Hindi, French, and English.

Anna Zoe Haritos (BA in Modern Greek Language and Culture and BS Biopsychology Cognition and Neuroscience). Anna was the winner of the 2017 Undergraduate CFC translation prize, and Managing Social Media Editor of the Michigan Daily. She is now at the University of Virginia pursuing a Master’s degree in Public Policy.

Konstantinos Christos Karabetsos (BS in Movement Science with Honors in the School of Kinesiology; Minor in Modern Greek). Kostas was a James B. Angell Scholar, received University Honors and Ginsberg Service Honors, and was an American Collegiate Hockey Association Academic All-American. He is working as a clinical exercise physiologist and plans to attend medical school.

Vasiliki Kazdaglis (BA in Modern Greek Language and Culture and BS in BCN). Vicki received University Honors and is now attending Wayne State University Medical School.

Haralambos J. Missler (BA in Modern Greek Language

and History and in History). Haris received University honors and was the Calliopi Papala Politou Modern Greek Senior Prize winner. He was an intern working in the archives of Anatolia College last summer, documenting materials donated by Dr. Constance Ecklund from her grandfather, Rev. Christo Papadopoulos (1864–1922), a protestant minister and member of the minority Greek community of the Ottoman Empire who moved to America to escape the oppression of Christians at the end of the 19th-century.

Alexandria Seta-Marie Najarian (BA in Modern Greek Language and Culture and in Psychology). Alexandria competed on the varsity tennis team at UM and was two times All Big-Ten and two times Academic All Big-Ten.

Nicholas Perry Porikos (BA in International Studies, Minor in Entrepreneurship and with degree work in Modern Greek). Niko played varsity hockey and was three times Academic All-Big Ten and three times UM Athletic Academic Achievement honoree. He hung up his skates in October 2018.

William Stroebel (PhD in Comparative Literature), dissertation “Fluid Books, Fluid Borders: Modern Greek and Turkish Book Networks in a Shifting Sea,” a work of remarkable scope making contributions to book history, Mediterranean studies, and the comparative study of Greek and Turkish literature. He is currently Postdoctoral Fellow in Hellenic Studies at Princeton University.

Student Grants, Internships, Study Abroad

Ali Bolcakan, Dr. William Stroebel, and Peter Vorissis, PhD students in Comparative Literature, launched “World Hellenisms,” an issue of *Absinthe: A Journal of World Literature in Translation*, publishing previously untranslated literature in English translation, with support from the Modern Greek Program (Constantine A. Tsangadas Trust)

Michael Demetriou, internship with Solidarity Now in Athens (Kalliopi Kontou-Filis and Kenneth P. Mathews Fund, Tsangadas Trust)

William Fuerst, translation for the Press Project (Tsangadas Trust)

Konstantinos Karabetsos, translation for the Press Project

Fotini Michalakis, College Year in Athens (Tsangadas Trust)

Christina Missler, Institute for Balkan Studies in Thessaloniki (Tsangadas Trust)

Haralambos J. Missler, internship in the archives of the American College of Thessaloniki (Carrie Arbour Fund, Tsangadas Trust)

Alexandra Niforos, internship at the Center for Asia Minor Studies; College Year in Athens (faculty research fund, Tsangadas Trust)

Ashley Tomaszewski, research trip to Athens preparing for her Honors Thesis, “Attitudes Toward Outgroups in the Aegean Islands” (Tsangadas Trust)

EVENTS

- **Monday, February 4th, 4:00PM, 2175 Angell Hall:** "Handle with Care: Hazards and Wonders of Early Modern Greek Literature" - Nikos Panou, Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at SUNY Stony brook
- **Sunday, February 17th, 4:00PM—7:00PM, Kalamazoo Room, Michigan League:** Conversation with Ambassador of Cyprus to the US, Marios Lyssiotis, on Cyprus, world politics, and Greek culture
- **Thursday, March 21st, 4:00PM, 2175 Angell Hall:** "Excavating Home: Archaeologies of the Greek American Experience" - 17th Annual Dimitri and Irmgard Pallas Lecture, Kostis Kourelis, Associate Professor of Art History, Franklin and Marshall College
- **Tuesday, April 23rd, 4:00PM, Michigan League:** Phillips Prize Ceremony in Classics, with guest speaker Konstantinos Poulis, author, publisher, performer, and contributor to The Press Project, a bilingual online Greek newspaper

For up-to-date information on upcoming events, please visit:

