

**Bob Chaundy**

Freelance journalist, ex-BBC News

**THE BLOG**

Kalliopi Lemos - Sculpting for Human Rights

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London-based Greek sculptor Kalliopi Lemos loves creating things in threes. It gives her a wider expression of the same idea. For more than a decade, her abiding concern with human rights has resulted in projects that often focused on the plight of the migrant.



In 2003, she began collecting old authentic boats that carried migrants from Turkey to Greece and which had been left rotting on the shores of Greek islands. They formed the basis of three giant installations between 2006 and 2009 culminating in a stack of upturned boats placed beside Berlin's Brandenburg Gate (above) as part of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

"I wanted to engage the feeling of people with these vessels, to imagine themselves sitting in a boat and crossing the sea, having no idea even what the sea is like because most of them were coming from Afghanistan, Pakistan and places where the sea does not surround them."

Another trilogy, *Navigating in the Dark*, in 2011, dealt with themes of journeys and the passage through life, both physical and emotional. She is speaking to me inside one of her three studios in north London, offering a rare glimpse into the artist's mindset as she

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Art House in March.

It follows two more recent projects, firstly the exhibition *I Am I Between Worlds and Between Shadows*. This focused on women's experiences and the frequent abuse of their self-respect for which she sculpted often grotesque and distorted female forms and placed them in a closed Greek girls school in Istanbul during the 2013 Biennale there.

Then she made a prize-winning film, *At the Centre of the World*, which includes a haunting section in which a young woman awakes to find herself in a steel spherical cage from which she is fighting to escape, fighting her oppression, fighting for her inner freedom, fighting for her dignity.



She has developed this metaphor for the sculpture (above), a work in progress since the temporary torso in the centre will be replaced by one made from steel wire. The sculpture is cleverly devised so that the various circles representing time, place, and forms of

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Steel predominates as the current favoured material. She has constructed a number of playful pieces that resemble missiles on a stand that can spin or rotate, with various spheres that can be moved to affect its balance. Once again, the metaphor is concerned with gender balance, inner balance, aggressive and passive, creation and destruction, war and peace, you name it.



One of the more striking exhibits is *The Stiletto Heel* (above, with the artist).


Together with an oversized steel bra, they are what Lemos describes, somewhat sarcastically, as "tools of endearment".



"They express the need for women to fortify themselves in order to manage the outer world which demands that they be very beautiful, very intelligent, excellent professional


people and good mothers."

She would like these two pieces to be exhibited together outside in a public place, and

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Lemos knows  too well how women, at whatever level, can be discriminated against by their gender alone. She grew up in a Greek family with very strict and conservative parents.

 "When I wanted to study art as a teenager, they thought this too radical and stopped me from doing so." 

 She got married at the age of 20 and came to London where she has lived ever since. She studied painting and printing at Byam Shaw, now part of Central Saint Martins and the University of the Arts, London where she took a post-graduate degree.

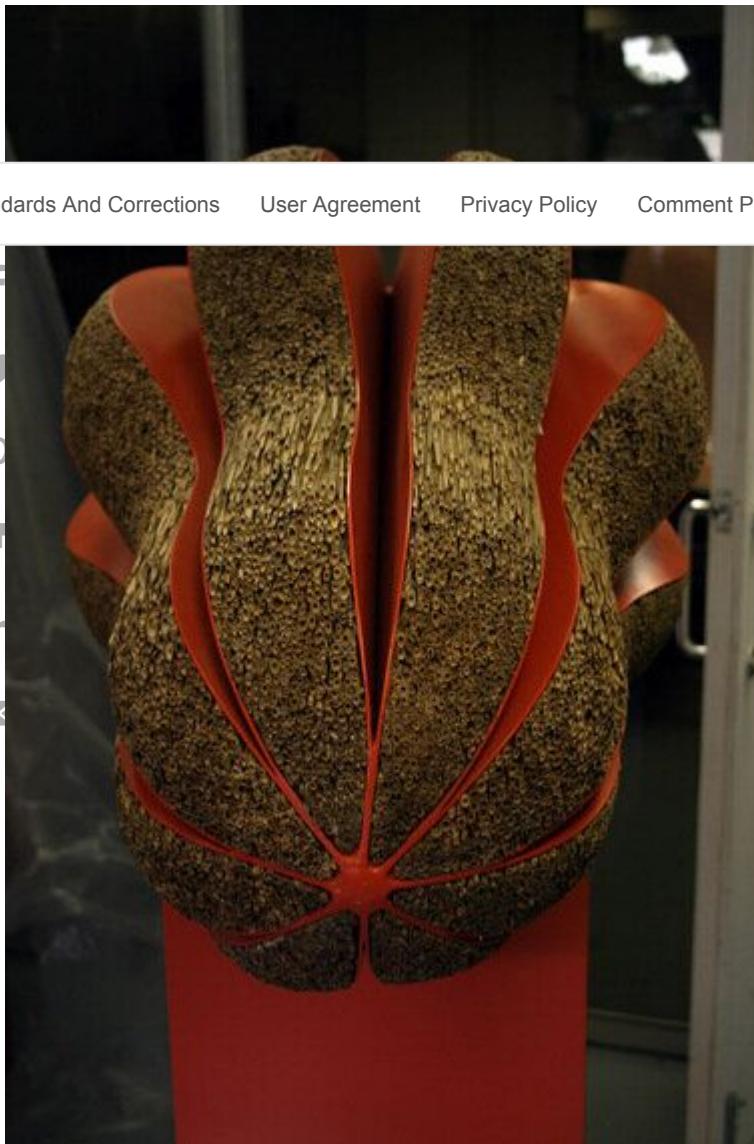
After finishing her studies, she moved into three dimensions becoming a sculptor. "I was worried about having to abandon colour but one day I picked up a lump of clay and that was it!"



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The prevalence of colour may have been reduced but not abandoned. Among her new sculptures are *Seeds* (above) made from aluminium and reeds stuck together and shaved into shape. They are not fixed to the pedestal but perfectly balanced.

"This is a comment on our inner balance and how we are in the world and we would like people to accept us in whatever balance we have."

They are exquisite creations representing the beginning of life with the warm colours of energy and optimism, soft and friendly against the coldness of her stainless steel creations. Another balance.

Kalliopi Lemos is assembling perhaps a more subtle, varied and nuanced collection of works for this latest project. Yet the passion to communicate the hardship felt by so many human beings around the world remains as strong.

"I want people to feel and think. I think feeling is a bridge directly to your whole being and then you exercise your thinking, your willpower, to do something about it."