

IN MEMORIAM**Niki Goulandris (1925–2019)**

Niki Goulandris passed away peacefully in Kifissia, north of Athens, on Saturday 9 February 2019 at the age of 94. Kit Tan received the news the same morning from Vasso Kousoula, her trusted personal secretary of many years.

Niki (née Kephalia) was born in Athens. Her family was from Lixouri on the west coast of the Ionian island of Kefalonia. After graduating from the German School of Athens she studied at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (1946–1951), obtaining her Master's degree in political science and economics. She continued post-graduate studies at the University of Frankfurt in Germany (1953–1957), in political theory under Carlo Schmidt, and in philosophy under two leading philosophers and sociologists of the 1960s, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. She was fluent in English, French and German. In 1964 she went to the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh to learn more concerning the management of large botanical collections. There she was tutored in botany and aspects of botanical art by Peter Davis of *Flora of Turkey* fame, for whom she had the greatest admiration. *Peonies of Greece* (1984) which is a taxonomic and historical survey of the genus *Paeonia* in Greece was the result of a happy collaboration with Peter Davis and William T. Stearn from Kew and the London Natural History Museum. The work contains illustrations and line drawings prepared by her. This was preceded by a folio publication (1983) containing 12 life-size paintings of all the *Paeonia* species collected in Greece. Her skill in botanical illustration was evident in an earlier publication *Wild Flowers of Greece* (1968) the text of which was written by Constantine Goulimis and William Stearn. This volume, as well as the Peony book, was printed in revised and enlarged editions in 2009 and 2012 respectively.

For more than 35 years Niki campaigned to promote cultural and ethical values linking nature, man and society, speaking to the Greek and foreign press, appearing on television, lecturing in universities, in-



Niki Goulandris, our favourite photo.

stitutions and organizations. She travelled widely in this role, visiting nature reserves and threatened ecosystems in the northern and southern hemisphere. In 1992 she was a member of the Greek delegation to the Rio Conference and in 2002, the Johannesburg Summit.

Her accomplishments can be measured by the services she has rendered in high-profile political and public positions. In 1964 she founded the unique Goulandris Natural History Museum together with her husband Angelos who came from the wealthy ship-owning Goulandris family, and served as its vice-president till 1996. From 1964–1981 she was president of the Association of Greek Women University graduates. From 1974–1975 she was deputy minister for Social Services and secretary of state for Health in the first democratic government of Constantine

Karamanlis after the collapse of the 1967–1974 Military Junta. She took responsibility for the care and welfare of more than 200,000 refugees from Cyprus. From 1975–1981 she was honorary vice-president of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT). From 1980–2002 she served as president of ‘Save the Children Fund’ in Greece and from 1989–1991 as vice-president of the Greek National Tourism Board. As director of the Goulandris Natural History Museum she supported the operation of the NATURA 2000 Network in Greece. From 1992–1995 she was appointed to a three-year term on the board of Directors of the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

Between 1993–1996 she was one of the 12-member United Nations International Commission on Culture and Development (UNESCO). She fully understood the role of biodiversity and reflected on cultural diversity thus: — Cultural diversity is manifested by the diversity of languages, creeds, the arts, music, social structures, farming practices, food habits, pharmaceutical products and many more expressions of human motivation and behaviour.

Following the death of Angelos in 1996, she became president and director of the Goulandris Natural History Museum — GAIA Centre for Environmental Research and Education.

Honours and awards naturally follow her international recognition and career achievements. Among them are the Silver Medal in Natural Sciences from the Academy of Athens received on behalf of the Museum in 1979, the Onassis Foundation’s ‘Delphi International Prize’ in 1990, the Order of the Smile in 1978 (Poland) and membership of the Linnaean Academy. She was elected ‘Woman of Europe’ in December 1990 by the European Commission in Brussels and received the gold medal from the Municipality of Athens in the same year.

She received an honorary doctorate from the University of Uppsala, Sweden, and in 1988, together with her husband Angelos, honorary doctorates of science from the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki (representing the Departments of Forestry and Natural Environment, Department of Agriculture and Department of Biology), and also honorary degrees from the University of Thessaly and the Agricultural University of Athens. In addition she was nominated to the United Nations Roll of Honour ‘the Global 500’ in 1990 and received the ‘Légion d’Honneur’. She was

winner of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) ‘Eyes on the Environment’, and selected as one of 25 Women Leaders in Action (1997). She is also a Corresponding Member of the French Academy of Ethics and Political Science, a recipient of the Commander of the Order of Phoenix from the Greek State and recipient of the Order of Merit from the Federal Republic of Germany.

What were Niki’s beliefs? Her independent spirit revealed an intelligent mind receptive to new ideas and scientific thinking. She was able to support and carry out her strong conviction to protect the environment. She was convinced that the world needed a new set of values for the future so that nature and society can exist in harmony. Thus, her beliefs encompass a combination of ecological ideals (nature conservation) with cultural and ethical values (human achievement).

Praised by William Stearn and many others as an accomplished botanical artist, her flower paintings of nearly 900 native Greek plants live on in prints, lithographs and publications, or adorn the porcelain of Limoges and Royal Copenhagen and also the coveted silk scarves of Hermès.

What of the Museum’s future? Angelos and Niki Goulandris loved the Museum and it was their child born out of vision, dedication and hard work. Affection always endures. The Museum has proved itself and, besides being an important centre of ecological research and education, has introduced hundreds of thousands of children to love and respect nature. To understand its unique character one can do no better than to view the video presented by the Museum to celebrate 50 years of founding in 2014 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtDAtcGQxEc&feature=youtu.be>). The *Flora of Samothraki* was also published on the 50th anniversary with a foreword from Niki in which she expressed her great surprise and delight to learn that a trans-European mountaineering trail (the E6) started from faraway Kilpisjärvi in NW Finland and ended on Mt Fengari in Samothraki, commenting that “this provides a warm feeling of a link, a connection with other cultures and other people in other countries in Europe”. She also wished that the philosophical quote from Aristotelis of Stagira (384–322 B.C.) on the half-title page of this book (Ἡ φύσις ἴσῃ μὴ δέει λόγον *Nothing is created by nature without reason*) could be carved at the entrance of the Museum.



Niki Goulandris at work in her office (photo by courtesy of the Goulandris Natural History Museum).

A brief background on the latter follows.

The Goulandris Natural History Museum is situated in Kifissia, 14.5 km north-northeast of Athens. It was formerly a large private residence built in the neo-classical style in 1875. It was in a derelict state when acquired by Angelos and Niki Goulandris in 1963. Their plan was to convert the building into a museum for the public, one that would be beautiful, educationally and scientifically valuable. In this they succeeded – it now contains research laboratories, a large herbarium, and extensive entomological, ornithological, malacological, paleontological and geological collections, a lecture theatre, library and exhibition galleries. The work of renovation, adaptation and extension of the original building was designed and supervised by Angelos Goulandris. On 1 May 1974 the Museum opened to the general public for the first time. The Museum was, and has remained, unique in Greece. It is the only institution in Greece and perhaps in the world resulting from private initiative and exhibiting natural history collections to the public in attractive and informative displays. It was the first museum in Greece to run a program of environmental education for the public in the spirit and belief of the founders that the preservation of the natural heritage of Greece must be based on knowl-

edge and education. Thus the public must take on a responsibility to protect the natural resources of Greece against irreparable loss.

The Museum received the European Museum of the Year Award in 1983 from the Council of Europe and was elected Museum of the Year in 2012 by the International Council of Museums. In 2001 the establishment of the GAIA Centre for Environmental Research and Education celebrated the new millennium and expanded the Museum's capacity with a total floor space of 12,500 m². Its two symbols are Gaia, ancient goddess of Earth, and the Ammonite, one of the most successful life-forms that ever evolved. In 2003, at the European Museums Forum in Copenhagen, the GAIA Centre received a special recommendation for its achievements. With this development the outstanding contributions of Niki in promoting awareness and protection of the natural environment are fully recognized.

Constantine N. Goulimis (1886-1963) had bequeathed his private collection comprising 26,000 gatherings of plant specimens to form the nucleus of the herbarium. Today the herbarium has a considerable number, over 100,000 Greek specimens and is extremely important for taxonomic studies on the flora of Greece and the Balkan Peninsula. It was widely

consulted for *Flora Europaea*, *Mountain Flora of Greece* and *Flora Hellenica*. Kiki Dimas and the late Elli Stamatiadou, together with Dionysis Mermygkas, have assembled and curated in excellent condition, material for present and future research. The European Union supported the data-basing of the herbarium specimens, a task completed by 2006. Kit Tan is honoured to be appointed Honorary Curator and scientific Botanical Advisor by Niki Goulandris, and Vasso Kousoula is glad to be her personal secretary for more than five decades. They share some special memories.

Dionysis: From Niki I treasure the moments working with her for the translation of *Wild Flowers of Greece*. I was impressed not only by her professionalism and dedication, but also by her support of colleagues and her love of Greek plants.

Vasso: It was raining heavily, we had to attend an appointment at short notice. Niki's BMW was not available and we could not catch a taxi. So we decided to go in my little car which had a leaking roof. I drove, and Niki held an umbrella over my head. All went well until we reached the city centre and were held up at traffic lights. It was the social hour and we had to bear the amazed glances of socialites in their fine clothes and grand cars to our left and right. "Good evening Miss Niki", they chorused. Niki was not embarrassed, remaining calm and graciously returning their greetings. I felt we were the topic of conversation in several houses that night.

Kit: On a visit to Niki's office. "The Patriarch is waiting at the entrance", she said in a conspiratorial whisper, "Quick, tell me what to say to an Archbishop?" "You can talk about the giraffe", I suggested helpfully. "The giraffe?" she looked puzzled. As I slipped out of the door a little later, I saw her standing at the giraffe in animated conversation with the Patriarch. No doubt he had asked her how they had taken the creature in with its long extremities of neck and legs, and she had explained they had to take down the wall. The giraffe was the perfect icebreaker.

Niki had once mentioned it was not easy to be president and director of a large well-functioning Museum. One needs both courage and conviction, and throughout the years, the welfare of the Museum has always been her first priority. Although deeply interested in politics, except for serving her country for a year as a deputy minister and secretary of State, she aligned herself with no political party. Like Marie Curie, she was one of the few who had remained uncorrupted by fame or fortune. She will always be remembered by all who have known and worked with her.

by **Kit Tan**

Institute of Biology, University of Copenhagen, Øster Farimagsgade 2D, DK-1353 Copenhagen K, Denmark and

Vasso Kousoula

Goulandris Natural History Museum, Othonos Street 100, Kifissia, Greece
