

**Interview by Frosso Efthymiadi-Menegaki to Dimis Apostolopoulos
on the radio programme *Art and Science Hour*
Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation, Thursday, December 16, 1954, 18:00
about her solo exhibition, *Terracottas*, at *To Vima* newspaper exhibition space**

- D.A.: Mrs Efthymiadi, would you like to guide our listeners through your exhibition?
- F.E.M.: With pleasure.
- D.A.: Where would you like to begin? We noted that your works are listed in chronological order in the exhibition catalogue. How about doing the same for our visit?
- F.E.M.: Yes, let's begin with the first two works in the catalogue, which are the oldest: the goat kid and the wild goat. You can see how different these works are in style. The kid is realistic; the wild goat is completely abstract. I had already started to seek abstraction back then. Contemplating this basic problem, however, convinced me that I first had to get a long-term experience in the realistic style. I am convinced that if an artist doesn't benefit from this experience, there is a risk that abstract art can become a hollow shape.
- D.A.: What period are you referring to?
- F.E.M.: My earliest explorations, right after my studies.
- D.A.: Where did you study?
- F.E.M.: I studied ceramics and pottery at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts.
- D.A.: Is this why you have chosen this area of sculpture?
- F.E.M.: That's because I saw how the tradition of this art had become almost extinct in Greece and I wanted to work towards its revival. I also love this material, terracotta, because I believe it lends itself very nicely to current interior decoration trends.
- D.A.: I see that your work has all the freshness of the outdoors, the garden (starting from your topic themselves).
- F.E.M.: I do love themes suitable for garden decoration, and think that animals are most suitable for this. As you can see, all my animals – goat, donkey, calf, deer and horse – are realistically modelled, as dictated by their intended use. I sought to capture each animal's characteristic movement and expression. In fact, I had to bring a live model to my studio each time. I let it run in my garden. I especially love young animals, and they had to be accompanied by their mothers. I had a baby

deer and its mother, a little donkey, its mother and the donkey keeper to take care of them.

D.A.: So cute! Your love of new-born animals is evident. You have given them such tenderness and a certain uncertainty in movement that makes it seem as if the kid, for instance, is ready to jump around. Of course, they are in fact meant for the garden.

F.E.M.: Yes, my aim is not monumental sculpture but art that accompanies people in their everyday life – something I think is missing in Greece.

D.A.: But how are these large pieces fired? In one piece?

F.E.M.: Yes.

D.A.: I've never seen such large terracottas, either in Greece or anywhere.

F.E.M.: I'm happy you raised this point. You alone and a Swedish sculptress who visited my exhibition yesterday have noticed this fact. It is one of the greatest challenges in the ceramics craft. I will tell you something: my professor was proud of my achievement.

D.A.: Would you like to share a few words about the way you work?

F.E.M.: First, an iron-rod framework is made according to the shape of the work, which is then modelled in clay. At this point, you would think that the work is finished because it is identical to what you see now. But it is not finished; this is just the beginning, as you must produce the plaster mould, its negative in other words. This mould is not an easy task at all because it requires meticulous attention to how these pieces will behave later, when the end-work comes out, made of raw clay and necessarily hollow so that it can be fired. And you can imagine how difficult it is for e.g. the little horse to stand on its four legs at this stage. Of course, the initial iron-rod framework is of no further use. Only the second will be fired in the kiln.

D.A.: Do you make a mould for every work?

F.E.M.: No, for example the bust of Kazantzakis was made without a mould, using another technique.

D.A.: Are you also interested in portraiture parallel to your other work?

F.E.M.: Very much so, even though it is a different genre. In this case, the artist must capture, in addition to physical features, the sitter's inner world. This is not always easy because the usually complex personality requires its specific expression. For this reason, in busts I avoid too much abstraction and, for some busts, I believe you need to preserve documentation to a certain extent.

- D.A.: I see that you are also interested in the human figure, not only in portraiture. For instance, these nude dancers.
- F.E.M.: The study of nudes is especially appealing for me. However, dance is a very moving subject.
- D.A.: This is evident in all your works, not only dancers. The plasticity of movement is the main element of their expression even in your abstract works; there exists movement in their stillness. What made you change style?
- F.E.M.: My intent from the very beginning was to arrive at abstraction and, naturally, at one point, the time came. Take, for example, my roosters. I took a rooster as my starting point and repeated it in different forms of little resemblance to our familiar anatomy of a rooster. I sought to eliminate its naturalistic form and to re-create my subject based on the concept that true artistic creativity is not copying nature but re-shaping it. This, of course, could result in an unspecified multiplicity. In this approach, the plastic values take priority. I would like to point out here that this requires studying the natural form and liberating yourself from it.
- D.A.: How did the public respond to your latest work?
- F.E.M.: I am delighted that the public has responded with such enthusiasm. It reinforces my faith in following this course. Even elderly people, whom one would expect to adhere to old perceptions, have shown a wonderful understanding. So, it's not correct to say that the public cannot connect with contemporary trends in art.
- D.A.: It is true that in your abstract works you never lose touch with reality – as, of course, should be the case in all meaningful abstract art. I can see the same thing in your figures, such as *Moroccan Women*, your *Cat*, your *Birds*. Despite their complete abstraction and stylisation, they barely lose the feeling of their natural forms. And in your *Pitchers*, their anthropomorphism has probably something to do with this characteristic quality of your work.
- F.E.M.: I love the subject of pitchers, both because even now they have not disappeared from everyday use in our country and because they have a functional shape that offers endless possibilities for producing many different forms – human figures, birds, animals.
- D.A.: I especially like your pitchers which are decorated with carvings and colourful ornaments.
- F.E.M.: I like to go beyond the possibilities afforded by my material. These decorative carvings, for instance, feel almost necessary while the clay is still fresh. As for the colours, I recently started to study how to paint sculpture. It was very common for the ancient Greeks, of course; for

us, however, it presents a very complex challenge. My painted figure you see here is very elaborate, so as to be suitable for painting, as it is extremely risky to paint a realistically modelled figure.

- D.A.: In addition to your terracottas, you have a few bronzes and a hammered piece. Would you like to tell us how you made them?
- F.E.M.: Metal sheets are cut using oxy-fuel cutting, forged on the anvil and then welded together. It is the first time I have taken up this kind of work and I look forward to producing other such works because working with sheet metal – the Paris-based Greek sculptor Costas Coulentianos introduced me to many of the secrets of this technique – preserves all the qualities of handmade art, being very fulfilling for both the artist and the viewer. I find that this material, similarly to terracotta, projects warmth and additionally it is very suitable for outdoors. It is particularly suitable for my recent style, and for this reason I am trying to make larger pieces, suitable for contemporary architecture.
- D.A.: I am happy to see in that as your work evolves, it preserves its wide range. Not only your works for interior placement, but your outdoor works are also abstract. It would be great for young people, pupils and students, to visit your exhibition, all the more so as it is so elegantly displayed.
- D.A.: Thank you so much, Mrs Efthymiadi-Menegaki, for giving us this opportunity to enjoy your exhibition through the artist's eye.