

Spring, 2002

## Rites of Spring... and Greek myths



Ah! Spring, glorious spring...blossoms, singing birds, marvelous weather...and best of all, the festivals and rites that mark this most marvelous of seasons. Long, long ago, seasons must have come and gone – nameless, but not unnoticed. From the beginning of civilization, though, people started weaving “myths,” ways to figure out these natural processes, and accompanied these with “rites” and festivals to try to control the unexpected.



Alecos Fassianos, “The Little Wall” ...where a latter day Athenian, pomegranates at hand, waits for his Persephone...

Early Greeks infused their myths with the most colourful (and most human like) of gods, gods that made it to the shores of Greece from as far east as Persia and India. We all know of course of **Zeus**, that randiest of Gods, and his many conquests. One of them was **Demeter**, the goddess of fertility and agriculture whom **Zeus** found irresistible – and as was his habit, he seduced her. **Persephone** was the result of that union, a most beautiful and care-free girl, admired by many... but abducted by **Hades**, the god of the underworld. And as Greek gods go, he took her as his wife—must have been lonely in that dark and cold kingdom.

Of course **Demeter** was distraught with her daughter’s disappearance, so, she began travelling to look for her; and being the goddess of fertility, she shared her agricultural secrets along the way. Being a major goddess, a mistress of the god of gods, she both had connections and could exert some influence. **Zeus**, being **Zeus**, came to the rescue of his daughter and ex-lover: he asked **Hades** to send **Persephone** back to earth. **Hades** reluctantly said yes, with a proviso (remember, he too was a god) that **Persephone** would have nothing to eat while in the underworld. What

**Hades** failed to disclose to **Zeus** was that **Persephone** had already eaten seven seeds from a pomegranate. (Of course one cannot avoid wondering why **Zeus** being **Zeus** failed to know of this “nibbling” incident!)

To make a very long story short, they worked out a compromise: **Persephone** would spend part of the year in her husband’s abode, which allowed her mother to spread famines and pestilence to show her grief. So winter as a season came to be named. When **Persephone** returned to earth, her mother rejoiced – flowers

blossomed, plants, trees grew, and crops later ripened (and spring, summer and fall took place). A series of festivals were initiated around this myth, most of which took place in and around Athens, festivals that were centered around the annual cycles of vegetation. To this day, the pomegranate in Greek folklore is associated with rituals and practices that celebrate an accomplished cycle. Along with the number seven they have come to symbolize perfection, plenitude and positive renewal.

Travel with The ArtExchange to Greece in August for our special Clay Workshop on the Sporades, where you'll work alongside accomplished ceramists and beginners alike in a studio overlooking the Aegean. Or, come with us this fall and find out more about how these early fascinating "myths" are part of our modern life. Take in our "Artful Escape" tour to Athens and the charming island of Tinos, home of the god *Aeolos*, and playground of the *Angelouthes*, the Naiads or Dryads of mythology....**maybe you would like to have the gods guide your hand at marble carving on Tinos in this participatory tour!** Or, perhaps you'd rather learn about Greek myths while touring some of the most exquisite vineyards in Greece – in Attica and on the stunning volcanic island of Santorini. Our fall wine tour traces "the Footsteps of Dionysos" in his travels to teach viticulture...and save abandoned wives! In the meantime you can take in some of the following events to creatively "fill" your waiting period:

The ArtExchange invites all of our friends to visit us under the big white tent during the **Calgary Greek Festival**, an occasion that is bringing a part of Greece to The Canadian Rockies in the city of Calgary—our base. The Hellenic Community is again staging its most successful and very "Greek" event from June 13 to 16, 2002. Come and experience Greece at its best: food, music, dance, or maybe win a trip for two to Greece, or a Mercedes.. and much more. **While there, be sure to visit The ArtExchange's booth and see the art of some of Greece's most loved painters.** Check out our unique programmes to Greece—and if you sign up for one of our journeys at the festival, we will donate 20% of your deposit to The Hellenic Community of Calgary, one of the oldest (its centenary is fast approaching) and most active Greek communities in Western Canada. To find out more check their website: [www.calagryhellenic.com](http://www.calagryhellenic.com).



Alecos Fassianos, "Pensive Woman"  
...dreaming of the good times ahead...

For those who can only vicariously visit us at the Greek Festival, we invite you to look at these photos of two paintings by Alecos Fassianos, the quintessential painter of Athens and its environs, an artist who has celebrated the excessiveness of "greekness" in the most imaginative and colourful way. Enjoy!

We still have seats available for all of our journeys to Greece this fall – and the "Early Bird " has landed!! Sign up now, and check out how much you can save by paying early!!

**Recharge your creative energy**

**Immerse yourself in the explosive colours of the Aegean**

**Unique travel for artists, art lovers, and wine connoisseurs**

**All levels of artistic experience welcome**

**The ArtExchange, Spring 2002 (403) 251-5297 Calgary, Alberta Canada**