

VOYAGE TO KYTHERA:

a photographic encounter of a different kind



Nicki Upstairs is the artistic alias of Nicki Panou, a conceptual fine art photographer, based in Thessaloniki, Greece.

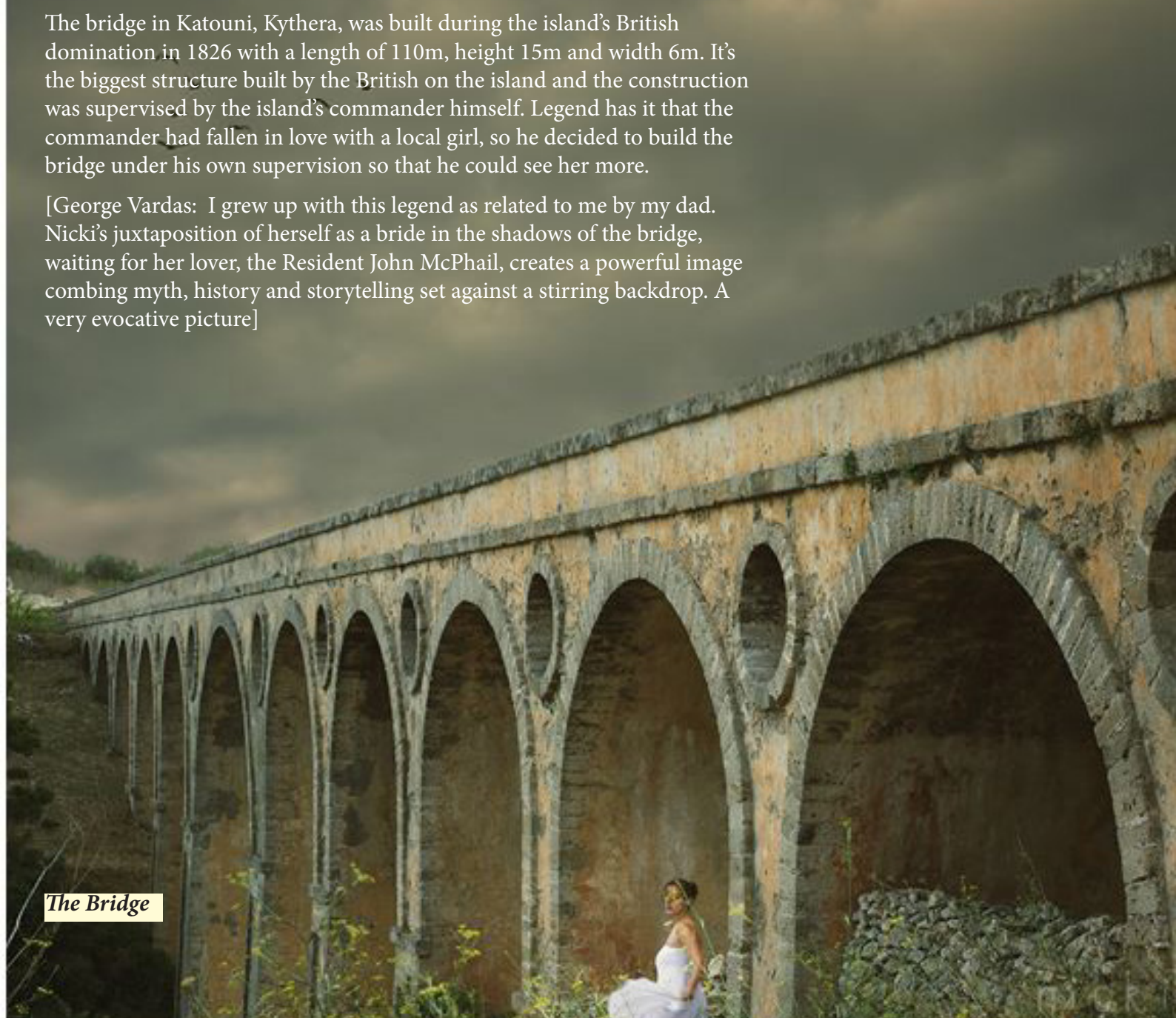
Nicki was exhibited at the 2014 Kytherian Photographic Encounters and her works (which were reviewed in the Kytherian edition of December 2014) were fascinating and well-received. At the time, Nicki spent a few days on the island and managed to produce a suite of photographs which reflected her focus of creating images that depict feelings, thoughts, dreams or nightmares through the use of symbolism and storytelling techniques. As Nicki herself has written, she chooses to photograph scenes that do not really exist, in an effort to capture a different kind of reality.

The Voyage to Kythera series certainly captures a different reality that maintains a symbolic connection with the stories and myths and attraction of the island.

Each of the photographs tells its own story and I have simply adopted Nicki's own words to convey that story and her impressions of the island as captured in her photography.

The bridge in Katouni, Kythera, was built during the island's British domination in 1826 with a length of 110m, height 15m and width 6m. It's the biggest structure built by the British on the island and the construction was supervised by the island's commander himself. Legend has it that the commander had fallen in love with a local girl, so he decided to build the bridge under his own supervision so that he could see her more.

[George Vardas: I grew up with this legend as related to me by my dad. Nicki's juxtaposition of herself as a bride in the shadows of the bridge, waiting for her lover, the Resident John McPhail, creates a powerful image combining myth, history and storytelling set against a stirring backdrop. A very evocative picture]



The Bridge



The Mill

I stumbled across an abandoned windmill. It was at the end of a row of houses and it was standing there all alone and empty, so I stepped out of the car to take a look. Without much thought I decided to take some pictures. Where would I ever find a windmill all to myself?

I confess it was not easy, seeing as I had to set the camera at the mill's entrance and then go up and down many, many times on the almost collapsed stairs, so I could get a nice frame. All this while I was barefoot and hoping no scorpions or snakes were around! However, it is a unique experience to be able to sit on top of a windmill and to feel absolute calmness and the cooling breeze.



The Beach



This image was taken in one of the island's most famous beaches, Kaladi beach. It is a rather secluded beach, so I had to drive on dirt roads and climb down several stone steps to reach it, but its beauty is well worth it! Unfortunately, on the day I went there it was really windy and the sea was not so inviting, so I preferred not to take a swim. This beach actually consists of

three smaller beaches, which are linked. There is even a cave that leads from the second to the third beach and that was the main reason I absolutely wanted to go. But I could only see the cave from the first beach, since the waves made it impossible for me to go there, even without my camera. This is how the cave looks. Inviting, isn't it?

There was such wild beauty in this place, I loved it instantly! I would have loved to stay there and just stare at the sea, but as I said it was a secluded area and, except for a couple that defied the waves and was enjoying their swim, I was alone there so I got spooked. I took some pictures and then I left, hoping I can someday return and pay a visit to that cave!

When I started editing my picture I realized I had made some mistakes while shooting, which could not easily be fixed and I got very disappointed. I thought about burying the pictures, but then I remembered how wonderful it felt to stand on that magnificent beach and I decided I wanted to share that. It might not be a masterpiece, but it brings back a nice memory for me and that is enough. Also, you might have noticed that the frame is not square this time! That's a first for me, maybe it will happen again in the future, who knows?



The Watermill



I cherished my time on Kythera because it felt as if I had the whole island to myself. This feeling was particularly strong when I visited the old watermills. It is a small canyon, submerged in beautiful nature, where dozens of watermills used to be in the old days. There is a hiking path you can follow, that takes you along this amazing scenery. Even though I wasn't prepared for a hike (I was wearing a dress and sandals!), I started walking along the path, drawn by the beauty and calm of the surroundings. I ended up to this spot where the stream created small waterfalls that poured into calm little ponds. There was not a single sound. Only the water endlessly flowing.

I wanted to capture the water flow, so I had to use a long exposure time. That however meant that I had to be completely still during the exposure, which can prove to be rather hard when you are standing in ice cold water practically barefoot. After a couple of test shots and some breath holding, I managed to get the result I wanted. In post, I expanded my frame using an extra shot I had

taken and I tweaked the colours so I could give the image a more nostalgic feel. What inspired me most about this place was the contrast between its very busy past, being a place full of life and activities with all those watermills that were vital to the island, and it's very quiet present, that I was lucky enough to experience. A place that's been forgotten by people, but that is still alive in its own way.

After taking the picture I decided not to go any further, because not only did I not have the proper clothes and shoes on for the hike, but I also had no mobile phone reception, nobody knew where I was and there was not a single soul around, so I got scared that if anything were to happen to me, no one would know where to find me! That thought was really frightening, so I headed back with a heavy heart, knowing I was missing out on the great beauty that lied ahead. I think this was my favourite spot in the whole island and if I ever manage to visit it again, the watermills are the first place I'm going back to, with proper shoes and some company however!



The Shipwreck

This one was taken on my last day there. I was driving around exploring parts of the island where I hadn't been yet, when I arrived at the island's port, Diakofti. As I was driving down towards the village, I spotted this shipwreck. I remembered reading somewhere about it, but I had completely forgotten about it. The moment I saw it from above, I was more than excited! The sky was full with beautiful clouds, it was windy and the light was perfect. I drove as close to the shipwreck as I could, and got

out of my car.

The area was completely empty, there wasn't a single soul to be seen. This can be a little frightening, but at the same time so liberating! I set my tripod and camera and then I realized I had left my remote in the car. I decided to just use the 10 second timer, which proved to be more difficult than I imagined. You see, I was standing on what appears to be some kind of salt formation. There were even some signs that informed people not to damage the salt. At first I couldn't choose between the two poses. I liked both of them for different reasons. When I asked my boyfriend for his advice, he proposed I combine them and so I did. I think having them both in the picture adds to the mystery. And these clouds... I can't get over how beautiful they were that day!

Neraida

The following picture was taken near a waterfall that is called "Neraida", which actually means fairy, or "Fonissa", which means murderess. I am not quite sure about the origin of those names, but the place was really beautiful and immersed in nature. When I got there, there was no one else around except one guy sitting in a bench and drinking a beer by the waterfall. I snapped a couple of pictures there and then I decided to further explore the area. I walked around and I discovered some stairs leading up to the road. There were a few abandoned buildings there and as I was wandering on my own, it felt as if the place was haunted. I stopped and set up my tripod and then I started my usual weirdness. I believe this image fully demonstrates the feeling I got while I was there.

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