

Women's History Month Celebrated with Poetry, Fellowship and Wine

By Eleni Kostopoulos

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NEW YORK – The women who gathered for an evening of Wine, Poetry and Conversation at a West Village Penthouse on March 17 are of different backgrounds and utilize different creative outlets as a form of expression, but they all seem to have one thing in common: passion. In honor of Women's History Month, seven authors—some of whom are published, some who write for fun—featured some of their work to an audience in an intimate setting graciously offered by Dr. Virginia Davis, SJD. There was a Hellenic flavor to the event, which was organized by Greek American Olga Alexakos, who introduced the imaginative women and served as an emcee throughout the evening.

New York City-based Aphrodite Désirée Navab, a Greek Iranian American artist and writer who was born in Iran, recited some of her poetry divulging struggles with her mixed identity from "Tales Left Untold" published in the anthology: "Let Me Tell You Where I've Been: New Writing by Women of the Iranian Diaspora (2006)".



Kalliope Constantaras recited work from her second poetry collection entitled 'Beyond Borders and Fragments.'

Navab's art has been featured in more than 100 exhibitions and film screenings around the world and is included in a number of permanent collections. Her solo photography exhibit: "She Speaks Greek Farsi" premiered in Athens in 2009 and opened in SOHO20 CHELSEA gallery on earlier this year (<http://aphroditenavab.net>).

New York-based Patricia Hinds - editor, educator and

publishing executive - contributed to an uplifting mood with passages from "The Good Sense Handbook", which she published in 2009 and serves its readers with "reminders of the big and small things that really make a difference in our lives." Hinds is the author of nine children's books, creator of Essence Books and founder of Mignon Communications, LLC, a full-service book producer

(<http://www.mignoncommunications.com>).

Katie Chatzopoulos who was born in New Jersey and holds a position at Goldman Sachs shared with the audience a few of her poems that struck an emotional chord. One was dedicated to a roommate and friend who died on September 11 and one was written for her brother who passed away titled, "In lieu of a poem". Chatzopoulos explained that she uses her poetry as a creative outlet. Having written more than 100 poems that she said she may one day publish, she shares her poetry with friends through her blog (<http://www.kchatz13.blogspot.com>).

Kalliope Constantaras, born and raised in New York, is a published poet and educator. Constantaras recited poetry from a second poetry book set to be published, titled, "Beyond Borders and Fragments" and paid tribute to her many great mentors at Brooklyn College, where she holds a Master in Fine Arts. Her bilingual book of poems, "Stillness" can be purchased online at Barnes and Noble. Constantaras also just finished the manuscript of a children's book, The Secret

Kingdom of Crocheted Dreams.

Maria Micheles, whose plays have appeared in various venues, including the Manhattan Theatre Source, Actors Studio and WAH Society, recited a piece that left the audience laughing out loud. "To China, With Love" captured the ups and downs of the crashing economy, in Greece and globally.

Aisha Kashgari touched the audience with her poetic flow in her native tongue. Kashgari, who was born and raised in Western China and is Uyghur by birth, has published poems such as "Daughter of the Silk Road", and "Heavenly Kashgar" in Uyghur literary reviews. Kashgari shared with the audience her personal tale of arriving to New York two years ago to escape the oppression faced in Western China that censors artists of all kinds and the struggle of having to leave her family - who isn't allowed to leave the country - behind. Last summer, an evening of her short comic plays, including "At The Diamond Shop" and "The Skin Doctor", was produced by Abdulkarim, one of the best known actors in Western China.

Visual artist Lydia Venieri presented her piece "Moonlight"

- both in English and in Greek - the first artwork released for the iPhone. The book was created in honor of her first husband, whom she referred to as her "soul mate and sweetheart", 10 years after his passing. Venieri was born in Athens, Greece and is now based in New York and is currently represented by Stux Gallery in New York, and Gallery Terra in Tokyo. Her work "Tomorrow ~ Phosphor Stars in White Nights" is currently on exhibit at the Venetia Kapernekas Gallery (<http://www.venetia-kapernekas.com/htdocs/current.php>).

Alexakos and the people she worked with believe there are tremendous resources and talents within the Greek American community. She said, "With these events we are bringing these talents and resources together to support each other, to network, and in general have great time." The focus is on women, but all members of the community are welcome. There will be more events like the one on March 17 and there is a more formal organization in the works, about which an announcement will be made in the future.