

# Iconic civilization of mind and matter

By Chris Morin  
Correspondent

*This is the first of a two-part reflection on Sisters art gallery proprietor Chris Morin's visit to the cradle of Western Civilization.*

"How will our most positive efforts be regarded in just a few generations? Will anyone remember me 50 years from now?" Unanticipated questions burst into my consciousness.

After 45 minutes of hiking through avenues, neighborhoods, and back streets of Athens, Greece, I've arrived at a one-acre, long-abandoned attempt of a tree-ringed park. Now trashy, graffitied, overgrown with weeds, and a home for the homeless in the underbrush, this northern corner of the block is a depression six feet below the sidewalk level because it was once partially excavated.

Arguably, this marks the spot where dawn broke on Western Civilization. Under my feet previously stood a school, known then as a gymnasium, that history books refer to as Plato's Academy.

Founded in 387 B.C., the overarching philosopher, theologian, idealist, and political theorist himself both developed and recorded the first respected concepts that served as the intellectual foundation for the most powerful civilizations humankind would ever come to know,

including the United States. I suppose that when you have a vast orchard not every apple makes it into the harvest basket. Such must be the case with Greece given the absolute plethora of respectfully conserved ancient sites, artifacts, and historical landmarks that do exist within this exquisitely traditional civilization.

Hallowed, well-preserved ground can be viewed from almost anywhere in Athens due to the cliffs of the Acropolis rising 250 feet above the engulfing city. Upon the flat seven-acre summit, the remaining columns of the Parthenon, the Temple of Athena, the Erechtheum, and Propylaea ascend beyond the fortress walls—so vast that legend holds they were built by a race of enormous Cyclops.

Estimates suggest this fortress may have contained 100,000 smaller "art" objects at its height, which does not include the vast number of utilitarian commodities required to support and sustain the population. Rather extraordinarily as it turns out, minute pigments of residue have revealed that the bronzes and marble sculptures were meticulously painted, with white marble the preferred surface.

Walking through the Acropolis, humankind's greatest achievement combining both art and architecture, simply overwhelms the mental faculties and certainly

goes beyond my ability to comprehend the grandiose scale of the citadel.

Despite the breadth and depth of antiquities, Greece beckoned to me because of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Commencing college at age 30, then being exposed to them time and again in various coursework, I immersed myself in their writings, beliefs, and the ramifications of what they started. Figuratively speaking, intellectual and emotional chains became unshackled, like the finally freed slave in Plato's "Allegory of The Cave."

Museums in Athens offer such an enormous volume of work from the ancient times that surveying exhibition after exhibition, hall after hall becomes mentally draining. Sculptures, friezes, sepulchers, gods and goddesses of the old myths dominate these collections, along with vases, gilded ornaments, pottery, small brass figures, tools, coins, and jewelry. Just describing the level of workmanship, design, detail, and ingenuity of the multitudes of once-flawless statues could fill an encyclopedia set.

The small objects made of gold, bronze, marble, copper, ivory, and clay cause me to envision ancient hoarder-like homes. Did they, and not us, first conceive the concept of downsizing? These pieces are intricate, delicate works that defy rationale about how people that long ago could



PHOTO COURTESY CHRIS MORIN

The site of Aristotle's Lykeion.

have had the understanding or technology to accomplish such things.

Many objects were created in workshops and guilds for the purpose of burial rituals or to be placed in temples thus honoring and appeasing the Grecian gods and

goddesses. Subsequently, temples overflowed with such works and each site of significance had treasury storerooms.

Three days after the museum visits, I hiked to

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