

### Katerina Soldatou, Deree alumna Because *Greece has Soul*



Meet extreme aerial dancer **Katerina Soldatou**, a Deree alumna, causing quite the sensation dangling off of Greece’s beautiful landmarks on billowing colorful fabric strips. She spoke to us about her motivation, her time at Deree, and her various initiatives and causes she believes in.

She takes your breath away. She really does. Whether she’s scaling the depths of the Vikos gorge, hanging over the spectacular Meteora mountain drop, or dangling over the Corinth Canal bridge, extreme aerial dancer Katerina Soldatou is sure to bedazzle you with her spectacular aerial shows.

Through her Greece has soul performances, Katerina wants to boost awareness of the bounty of natural, man-made and cultural treasures Greece has to offer, as she suspends herself using long fabric strips from bridges and gorges and other dramatic backdrops, magically dancing through the air, as crowds watch her – jaws-dropped – dangling from dozens of meters up high.

Katerina has also joined forces with Greenpeace performing on the Rainbow Warrior ship at the famed Rio-Antirio bridge to raise awareness of climate change this year, and also cooperated with acclaimed photographer Benjamin Von Wongh on Corfu to highlight the hazards of plastic use to our ecosystem, in 2018 (also supported by Greenpeace), among many other initiatives.

But, what motivates her to showcase her projects by dangling so high? Growing up her “two loves were dance and sports,” Katerina notes, adding, “I wanted to be two things – Superman and a ballerina. Every year, I insisted on dressing up like Superman to save the world.”

With her parents attending university in the UK, Katerina spent her early years in Birmingham, taking up dance lessons at a very young age upon coming to Greece. Following in the footsteps of her dad, a track-and-field athlete, Katerina became a track-and-field athlete herself, but soon

fell back to her favorites – classical and modern dance. She has an impressive array of certificates and diplomas, such as from the Royal Academy of Dance in the fields of Modern Dance and Jazz, and she is also, unsurprisingly, a certified Aerial Yoga instructor. Before she began dangling from bridges and other amazing backdrops, she founded the first Aerial Dance School in Greece, Aerial Ever After, which she has since renamed Beyond Aerial a decade ago, based at the Athens Olympic Stadium. “When I was 17, I used to teach English to kids and in creating Aerial Ever After, it was a recognition of my realization that I needed to go back to dance. It was a huge risk to start what is now-known as Beyond Aerial. I worked hard, then the media discovered me. The recognition of all my hard work didn’t come easily though.”

Her project *Greece has soul*, which has caught the attention of local and foreign media “is an idea whose main aim is to showcase the environment and history of Greece and motivate people to come closer to nature and boost environmental awareness,” she notes, adding, “We undertake various projects, mainly at bridges, which are symbolic because they bring people together, such as at the Rio-Antirio bridge. A group of people get out there, have activities out there; we are not alone there, and there are more who will come next. What I am trying to show is that one person can make a change,” Katerina says.

Through her work, Katerina also tries to prod people to get out of their comfort zones. “It’s important to get out of your comfort zone, to improve.

She says her studies at Deree – The American College of Greece, where she earned her Bachelor’s in Marketing, helped her get out of her own comfort zone. “What helped me was that I had to swim in deep water. When I went to Deree for four years, I was studying and at the same time doing extracurricular activities, but I didn’t need help. I swam at a different pace, very different to others, and all on my own. Studying marketing helped me as well, as it gave me the knowledge and confidence to take a risk, to create my image, to use marketing to promote those initiatives that I care about, to improve my English, to take my first steps. It was a time of firsts.”

Since then, Katerina has embarked on a string of firsts, and her projects express her “strong desire to remind everyone of the natural beauty that surrounds us, which we usually take for granted. The idea of the Greece has soul project is to create environmental awareness in Greece and abroad and raise interest in Greek history and natural beauty,” she says, while pointing out the importance of character. “Greece has soul showcases our evolution through the difficulties and adversities of life, as well as the great importance of everyone’s character, art and environmental awareness in our days.”

You may have seen Katerina in a number of videos, as in 2014, when Katerina also starred in the dancing in the air in the short film *Games of Trust*, which ranked among the ten best films of the Onassis Foundation Competition, organized by the Onassis Cultural Centre. She also starred in *The End of War*, a film that was nominated as an Official Movie for the School of Fine Arts of the University of Athens.

Speaking at a TEDxAUEB (Athens University of Economics and Business) in 2018, where she was asked to share her own interpretation of the "Blank" theme, Katerina spoke of what it feels like to be dangling up high or using one breath to free dive in big depths.

“I get rid of all the thoughts. I step outside and am completely confident. “When hanging from great heights or free diving in deep waters you get into a state of flow, where you are in the most creative phase, you cut out all the excess, your imagination is at its peak and you develop magically. That’s why I choose these extreme situations, so I can grow as a person, as a mind and spirit, but also as an artist. It’s a fine skill to balance in the air or smoothly move underwater, and keep balance in your body and your emotions.”

When asked by CG Connect which of her projects or activities brings her the most joy, she says, surprisingly, “Diving is my first love. When I was ten years old, I was writing poems about the sea. I find peace there. So I love the two extremes – the sea and the air.

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