

VIMA Art Fair and the Quiet Politics of a Nascent Regional Scene

Beyond its commercial ambitions, the inaugural edition of the fair carved out space to consider Cyprus' complex geopolitical position.

By [Naima Morelli](#) • 05/21/25 12:42pm





VIMA taps into Cyprus as a place of confluence of identities and a multicultural node, but the fair's founders are cautious about overtly calling it political. Photo: Daria Makurina

The days of the art world having a 'slow season' are over. And amid a never-ending parade of fairs, gallery weekends, openings and festivals—three planes in one week, artworks melting into one another, fatigue setting in—enthusiasts and professionals alike can find themselves unmoored.



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A serious collector friend confessed to me that somewhere over the Aegean, in desperate need of solace, she turned to the only podcast she had downloaded on her phone: an episode of France Culture dedicated to Algerian-French existentialist philosopher Albert Camus and his conception of the absurd and of the necessity of going on and finding joy in the struggle.

By the time she landed at Larnaca airport in Cyprus, she felt soothed. In her cab to Limassol, she noticed real estate billboards zipping past her window. “What’s up with those?” she wondered as her taxi stopped next to the former wine warehouse that was hosting the inaugural edition of VIMA, the latest addition to the May art fair calendar. Stepping out of the car into the hair-whipping Mediterranean winds, she made her way toward the artfully run-down and oh-so-cool venue. Once inside, she immediately noticed that VIMA felt different.

“This is not your typical art fair, which are identical everywhere,” she told me over abundantly sugared Cypriot coffee. “The vibe is easygoing, the blend of Middle Eastern and local galleries is quite unique—*bref*, there is a sense of Cyprus!”

Cyprus as a multicultural node

The second-largest urban area in Cyprus after Nicosia, the coastal city of Limassol has been dubbed “Limassolgrad” for the strong

But it is not only the Russians who have flocked to Cyprus. It's also the Lebanese, the Israelis and (perhaps most invasive all) the digital nomads coming to take advantage of Cyprus' tax status. This is a lot to handle for a country already split between the Greeks and the Turks, home to two British airbases and Europe's most eastern avant-poste, just a few short hours from Gaza and Beirut.

The trio behind VIMA Art Fair, [Edgar Gadzhiev](#), [Lara Kotreleva](#) and [Nadezhda Zinovskaya](#), is Russian, though all three have made their homes in Cyprus and are actively engaged with the local art ecosystem. To build VIMA, they worked closely with a team of local experts, including Cypriot cultural figures [Alexandros Diogenous](#), [Tasos Stylianou](#) and [Andre Zivanari](#).

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"We were doing long research, and it appeared that it is the right time to do the art fair exactly here," Kotreleva told Observer. "At the moment, there's a lot of private capital moving to Cyprus. And those people seem willing to collect art."

While the fair positions Cyprus as a place of confluence of identities and a multicultural node, the founders are cautious about calling the fair political. "We have Russians, Lebanese, Ukrainians, Israelis and English people coexisting here," Gadzhiev explained. "With the fair, we want to provide a safe space for the art." The wine warehouse was also part of the vision. "We feel that this could show other owners of

Gadzhiev stressed that VIMA is not just about commerce but also about building infrastructure. “We need a space of connection between the market and the galleries,” he said. “There’s no popular media telling art news here. People often don’t know where to go.”

For now, VIMA is an art fair on the margins

Stopping at the booth of the Nicosia gallery ΓΚΑΡΑΖ art space, I spoke with Cypriot artist Giorgos Gerontides, whose work consists of paintings and sculptures made from modified children’s toys and explores latent violence. “My practice is based on toys that represent animals or weapons and how children learn from them,” he said.

Gerontides grew up in Nicosia, studied in Athens and now lives in Thessaloniki. “In small places like Cyprus, you can work better—you are more concentrated,” he noted. “You don’t need to run to openings or to meet people. But of course, you need to travel to see and communicate.”

He found that VIMA had quality works. “I like the space, the architecture, the way they create exhibitions and performances.” He also commented on the necessity of context in a region where previous art fairs didn’t have a cohesive program. “Here you feel that it’s not only about sales, it’s also what we show and what we can learn from all these galleries coming to Cyprus.”

“We are particularly happy that we are in Cyprus, which we believe has potential. Maybe it needs time, but the size of the fair is already quite good—not too big, not too small. It’s right for the island.”



In a country shaped by migration, division and post-industrial transformation, VIMA offered a platform for layered cultural exchange. Photo: Daria Makurina

“I think this fair will put Cyprus on the map again,” said Maria Stathi from Art Seen. “At the fair, there are some incredible artists and strong galleries.” Based in Nicosia, the gallerist decided to present an all-women showcase of very engaged and political artists from Cyprus. That regional focus was echoed by Nika Gallery, which operates between Dubai and Paris, and presented Arab and Russian artists whose work is focused on migration. “We are aiming to be a platform, a bridge between totally different cultures,” said founder

different participants.”

Maria Stathi emphasized the diversity of the fair’s audience. “I saw some of our local collectors, but also collectors from abroad,” she said. “It’s exciting to see people flying over, especially for the first edition.”

The obvious question is whether the local techno expats will pump money into the fair, as has happened in places like South Korea. VIMA’s founders said that although they are not relying on tech wealth to power their collector base, they acknowledged the potential of certain audiences to propel the fair forward. “Some support culture—our main sponsor is from the IT sector. He’s a passionate person, and his company is very corporate social responsibility-driven.”

Building a platform for layered cultural exchange

Every art fair is commercial, but in the panels led by curator and writer Nadine Khalil and a lecture by artist collective Slavs and Tatars, VIMA tackled socio-political questions head-on. In a more subtle way, similar explorations also emerged in “The Posterity of the Sun,” a group exhibition curated by Ludovic Delalande and installed in an open space near the site of the former winery. Left deliberately raw, the show made full use of Cyprus’s stark light and elemental setting. “I thought it was better not to pretend it’s a white cube, but to

The selection spanned generations and geographies, with artists from Palestine, Lebanon, France, Tunisia and beyond. The works—from monumental felt installations made in the wake of the Beirut port explosion to delicately pigmented ceramics encoding the memory of sunsets—formed a meditation on temporality, fragility and the materiality of art. “I wanted to create a dialogue between Cypriot artists and artists from abroad... and to start from here, to look at the world from Cyprus,” the curator said.

The title of the show comes from a 1950s book of poems and photographs by Albert Camus and René Char—a tribute to their friendship and the sun-drenched landscape of the South of France. “The sun is something we need to live, but also something we must be protected from,” Delalande mused. “It reminds me of the human condition—we are all under the sun, and we will all disappear.”

Recalling her avian journey into Camus’ absurd, my collector friend found those thoughts echoed surprisingly directly in the fair. Standing before Adrian Pepe’s large felt installation that hung like a golden fleece in the setting sun, she found closure along with a rare sense of resonance between a broad philosophy and a small slice of the art market inspired by the spirit of a place. “We are already planning the next edition,” concluded Kotreleva. “For us, it’s about building a cultural ecosystem.”

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