

44 **BOOK LAUNCH** By Melissa Hekkers

The History of Cyprus

The island's rich history presented to young readers through a beautifully illustrated series of four books

Cyprus has a rich and complex history and, being at the crossroads of the east and west, its past is intertwined with both mythology and politics. What then does it take to tell this story? More importantly, how would one go about telling this story to a generation that is yet in the process of shaping its historical consciousness?

A joint endeavour by local artists – actors, illustrators, musicians and authors - has resulted in a wide-ranging, four-volume illustrated history for children and young people entitled 'The History of Cyprus', published by the Phileleftheros Group.

Written by Ira Genakritou, a familiar figure in youth literature, who has written columns for children in the Phileleftheros group's newspapers for decades, the book uses easily-accessible language to depict the moments that have brought the island to its current standpoint. It is this simple storytelling approach that has allowed two local talents, Louiza Kaimaki and Kyriaki Costa, to give visual support to this effort.

"Although the great job Ira did with her simple sto-

rytelling made it easy for me to understand the more complicated parts of the (Cyprus) history and therefore illustrate them, it was not enough," said illustrator, Kaimaki. "I wanted to speak to real people and share their true stories. I am fascinated by stories told with passion by people who have personally experienced a certain event in history themselves. This gives me access to approach my pictures from a more

realistic point of view."

The process of evaluating these events in order to 'bring them to life' is a journey that touches the building blocks of one's identity. "It was pleasant because I got to learn history through Ira Genakritou's simple and concise words... but very difficult in phases because I revived the pain and agony of the peoples of my beloved country through my images," says Costa.

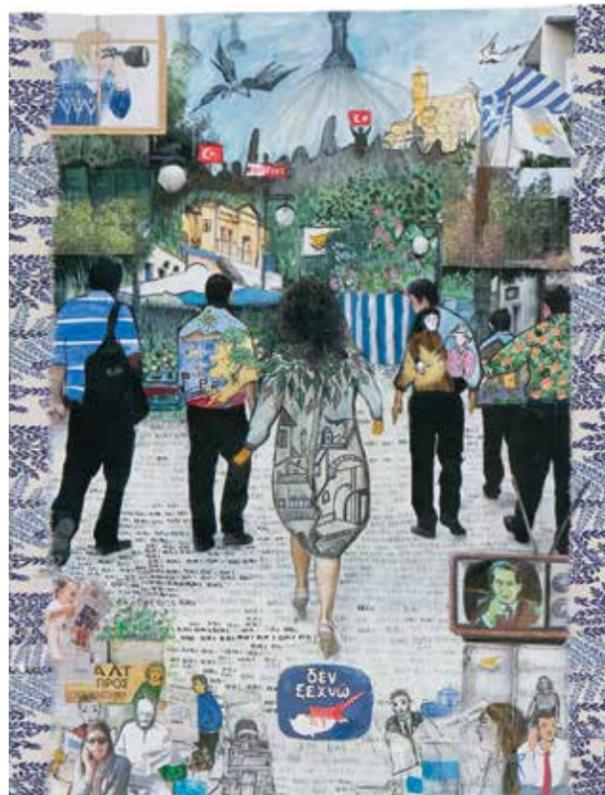
It's undeniable that bringing an already-written story to life is a huge responsibility. As Kaimaki states, "illustrating the history of my country was a great honour and a challenge of course..."

Grasping a personal account of the "story" seems to have been the way forward for this project. Kaimaki believes that by approaching history in this personal manner, she gives authenticity and originality to her work and thus reveals the soul of the story, the truth of it, rather than just making a picture for the sake of filling up an empty page.

This personal approach seems to have been part of Costa's experience too. "Every new job is a challenge," says Costa and this challenge is what "activates and animates levels and worlds in me that would have otherwise been locked away."

A total of sixty-six illustrations have been used in the books which will be on the stands every Saturday with Phileleftheros newspaper from November 17. These were divided between the two artists who have worked together before and have built a close friendship over the last 10 years. "We chose titles that we each could relate to, so this would make the process easier. As we started working in this manner, we felt more comfortable and productive. So we continued illustrating by choice," explains Kaimaki.

"This process was amazing, every time I met with



The History of Cyprus, Books and CDs

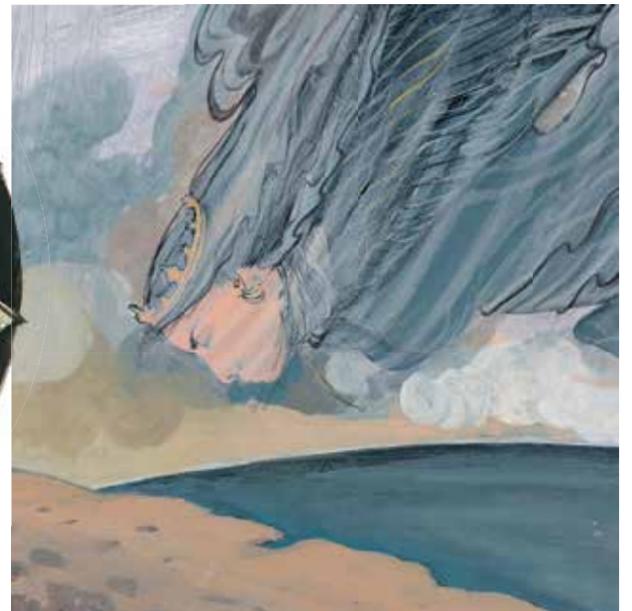
Published by: Phileleftheros Group
 Written by: Ira Genakritou
 Illustrated by: Louiza Kaimaki and Kyriaki Costa
 Narrated by: Christina Pavlidou and
 Achilleas Grammatikopoulos
 Music composed by: Giorgos Hadjipieris
 Orchestrated by: Marios Takoushis
 Edited by: Petros Papoliviou and
 Irini Modestou
 Designed by: Christos Arvanitis



Louiza Kaimaki



Kyriaki Costa



Louiza it was like a ritual, surrounded by the past, along with the protagonists of our country that we both love so much," added Costa.

Certainly, each artist had her own approach to text and image. Kaimaki, who studied Illustration and Animation in Manchester, uses acrylics and gouache, combining the stability, transparency and rough textures of acrylics, together with the silky, vividness of colour and the matt texture of gouache and eventually focusing more on the fictional aspects of the books.

"Illustrating some particular parts of the history was a difficult task, especially when it came down to illustrating moments of the recent war and political issues.

"The mythological part of the history was of greater interest as I could relate to it since it includes more imaginary parts and it's not a fixed history," says Kaimaki.

In contrast, Costa has established herself as a fine artist, and took on the challenge of illustrating a children's book after an invitation by Phileleftheros group publisher Nicos Pattichis, the driving force behind the publication. Having studied Fine Arts in England and Byzantine Art in Greece, Costa undeniably takes a different approach to her work.

"I worked with collage and painting. In my images, there are symbols and elements that create the spirit of each era and character; there are images that may at times need a second reading since they have hidden patterns and characters..." explains Costa. This marriage of aesthetics is perhaps what makes it all the more special.

"At no time did I doubt my artistic coexistence with the work of Louiza. I don't know how to describe it," says Costa. "Although we don't have the same language with regard to technique, the result is as if I see Louiza in my pictures and myself in Louiza's."

Costa's approach plays with a repetitive motif/character and collage, creating images with multiple hidden meanings. "My work is more direct and subtle; depicting a clear moment in history in a simple line with no particular hidden images. Because of this great contrast the final result is well matched," concludes Kaimaki.

Both were given the rare opportunity to have the freedom to choose what to draw, and although this may be "every illustrator's dream" as Kaimaki admits,



this freedom of artistic choice was a daunting one. Both had to play with the notions of finding a balance between artistic freedom and their responsibility as illustrators.

Bearing in mind the target audience of these four volumes, this country's next generation, the books went further than merely providing a hard copy of this effort.

"The history book is targeted at children in their formative schooling years and aims to shape conciseness about history, in a simple and friendly manner, all the while being educational. This is done through four visually vibrant volumes which are also narrated on CD and accompanied by authentic music.

"A DVD-ROM will be available to the public with the fourth volume, an electronic version of the whole project, a tool that can eventually be used by children, teachers and parents," explained the publishers.

The social responsibility of this project is fundamental.

As Kaimaki succinctly states: "I felt a responsibility towards the young...I could go wild and do my own thing, but this is not the case here. It's about respecting and serving the real purpose of this project, which is educational and informative for the new young generation of this country."

History of Cyprus in four volumes:

- 1: From the prehistoric period to Ancient Salamina
- 2: From Alexander the Great to the Knights
- 3: From Frankish rule to the 1821 Revolution
- 4: From British Rule to the European Union

Coming soon in English