

44 | EXHIBITION By Melissa Hekkers



Showcasing 9,251 km²

An exhibition of photographs of Cyprus as you've never seen it before

A journey by two friends to the less frequented areas of the island has led to a touring exhibition and a publication showcasing its beauty both on land and underwater. Showcasing the island's flora and fauna is a well-travelled road, as it has been captured innumerable times by both amateurs and professionals. The recent financial turbulence has also prompted more people to portray Cyprus as an ideal destination through the photographic lens as a boost for tourism. But these images are unlike any you have seen of Cyprus in the past.

The journey by Nikolas Michael and George Pantazi began years before the financial crisis engulfed the island or the need to pay attention to local realms emerged. Cypriot by birth, the duo were initially approached by Cyprus Ambassador to Germany, Minas Hadjimichael, who envisioned showcasing Cyprus in Germany, in towns such as Munich, Cologne and Berlin.

They have both come from different professional backgrounds, and it was their relationship with photography that ignited their friendship and eventually materialised into a passion for the medium. Nikolas more used to posing in front of a camera lens, as he has worked as an international model for more than twenty years. George, on the other hand, has always been behind the lens, photographing the projects his Limassol based architecture company have produced since 2003.

The ambassador's vision is what set both to work. For over two years, the two friends have set out to materialise a tribute to the natural beauty of the island, a journey with a goal to travel and experience the entire total surface area of Cyprus: 9,251 km².

"Some of the images are maybe even older (than



two years) because obviously when you start something like this you don't have a plan... and then slowly something happened," explains Nikolas reflecting back on the experience. "We travelled the whole of the island, which is also the title of the exhibition and book. We covered as much as we could find, we tried to find things that were interesting, that were not Petra Tou Romiou (The Rock of Aphrodite) for example."

Each captured the landscapes, culture and history with their own particular perspective, material they

believe celebrates the natural beauty of Cyprus in an elegant, polished and sophisticated way. "In the current climate, it offers a glimpse, at times literal and at times abstract, of forgotten places and moments of the island that will allow viewers a proud look at Cyprus' landscapes," says the announcement of the exhibition.

Flipping through the pages of the publication prior to the exhibition, it's clear that it was compiled with a combination of elements that go beyond a mere stroll through the countryside. "It's a mixture. When we started out a lot of it was about photography, and pushing and trying to find ways to look at things more interestingly with (photographic) techniques as

opposed to merely showing familiar places. We then wanted to include a little bit of history and also a feeling of our country. We found places that we didn't know about. It's a showcase about what we can do as photographers, and it's also a showcase of our island from a different perspective and it's an artistic view as well," added Nikolas.

Good photos have the ability to speak for themselves and so it's refreshing to find a publication which relies on that quality and offers no text on the subject matter. Perhaps this is what drives the viewer to want to 'see' further into the photos. As Nikolas admits, people are surprised that these photos are of Cyprus. A photo of a church submerged in water, leaving only its bell tower showing above water level depicts this elegantly. Although there is an index listing the locations where photos were taken, the stories behind images are personal to start with but also call for explanation, something perhaps only feasible by visiting one of the two shows.

It's only when Nikolas reveals one of the stories behind the photos, both technically and historically, that you realise the island's beauty has a lot to say for itself. "This is a place called Alassa (off the Limassol to Troodos road) which is an old village that was taken I think in the late eighties and re-built so that they could create the Kouris dam. They re-housed everyone but the initial village is below water level. Obviously the water has come to a point where the church can still be seen. And when it (water) drains out you can see it even better," Nikolas reveals.

Complied by both photographers, Nikolas is keen to point out that the work, of both photographic prints, and the photography book has been produced by Cypriots for Cypriots and people who are interested in the island. "We wanted Cypriots. We wanted to use



our home, to showcase what we are capable of here," explains Nikolas. "What we've noticed about people who have seen the book is that they internalise it as a story... it makes people feel more patriotic, maybe its more so because of what's going on right now, people have started looking at our home in a different way."

Their extensive time around Cyprus and the long processes and experiments the duo initiated to produce the 33 photographs on show and the ninety plus photos in the book are intentionally presented in matt. "In a country where you have so much light and so much light bouncing around the house, if you have gloss or even semi-gloss you have too many reflections. It's easier to view," says Nikolas.

The apparent manipulation in the photos is justified by the fact that the manipulation was carried out solely on location, something that Nikolas is quite open and philosophical about: "There's a lot of manipulation, in my bag I've got 15 filters. Is a filter on the front of a camera manipulation? Is turning on a torch to create light manipulation? It's pure photography at the point of taking the image," he concludes.

Despite the spectacular results of their efforts their experiences during the two years were not all

positive. Some of the home truths they witnessed were discomfiting. "When we did this, we saw a lot of things that we didn't like: we would drive up to a certain place and we would find a hill and at the bottom of it we would find fridges that people have thrown away. This hurts because it's our home. We forget that this (our surroundings) is our courtyard. There's a certain level of pride."

Spending more time on the island both to execute the project but also to showcase it in the coming weeks, its obvious that Nikolas carries a great deal of personal pride in his island. "I've always loved it here, whatever my or anybody's reservations, especially when they travel a lot, it's home. You can't get away from the fact that it's home. There are other interesting places around the world that I adore but Cyprus is home."

9,251km², Ermou 300 in Nicosia, May 30 - June 5 and at the Municipal Cultural Centre Panos Solomonidis, Limassol, June 12 & 13. The exhibition will be travelling to Berlin in July and then Cologne with further stops planned by not yet confirmed. The book will be sold at both shows for 35 euros.

