

VANITY FAIR

JULY/AUGUST 2025

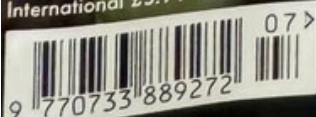
EVERYONE WANTS A PIECE OF

PEDRO

BY KAREN VALBY

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Greek REVIVAL

Along the Aegean, a cadre of major art players has been steadily setting up shop. Here's what to see—and where to be seen—this season *By Nate Freeman*

CONTEMPORARY ART HAS been thriving in Greece for a *long* time. Eleven thousand years ago, Ice Age scrawlers were making cave paintings of dwarf deer on the island of Crete. Remarkable figurative clay sculptures emerged in the Neolithic period, around 4000 BC. The art of classical Greece, in the fourth and fifth centuries BC, is where you get the good stuff: red-figure vases, the marble and gold Athena Parthenos, friezes, reliefs, steles, and amphoras.

But in all the millennia of Greek art history, one year stands out: 2009. That's because in 2009, Larry Gagosian, one

MUSEUM OF CYCLADIC ART

The hub for ancient Greek art also stages shows featuring contemporary works.



of the world's most celebrated art dealers, hung his shingle in Athens, opening a gallery in what was then pretty far-flung from the culture hubs of Europe. But he was committed. The first show consisted of four new paintings by Cy Twombly, one of the century's most devoted Hellenophiles, each drenched in the cerulean of the Aegean Sea. Eli Broad immediately snapped up one of the paintings, and now it resides in the museum that bears his name in Los Angeles.

More than 15 years later, Athens is at the center of a white-hot summertime

**STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION
CULTURAL CENTER**

A massive campus designed by Renzo Piano.



art odyssey. Each year, cavalcades of collectors, curators, artists, and critics make their way to the birthplace of democracy for a week of museum vernissages, old-world sightseeing, and fêtes in the shadow of the Acropolis—followed by jaunts to the many islands just a tantalizing day trip away.

This year the art schedule in the Greek capital is more jam-packed than usual, mainly because you've got two of the greatest living painters facing off against each other. At the George Economou Collection, a private museum established by the billionaire

GEORGE ECONOMOU COLLECTION

This summer's Charline von Heyl show took over three floors of the museum.



shipbuilder in 2012, a massive three-decade survey of Charline von Heyl, curated by former Whitney director Adam Weinberg and Economou Collection director Skarlet Smatana, opened in June. The same month, "Cycladic Blues," a survey of the artist Marlene Dumas, opened at the Museum of Cycladic Art, featuring her paintings alongside archaeological items handpicked by the artist from the museum's collection.

Speaking of shipping magnates, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center on the outskirts of town opened a show this year of work by Simone Leigh, who's been on a tear through the world's great museums, including representing the US at the Venice Biennale in 2022. There's also a show at the Benaki Museum in partnership with the New Museum and DESTE

Foundation, featuring all local Greek artists. And, intriguingly, the thoroughly downtown New York gallery Ramiken is opening a space in the harbor district of Piraeus to show work by Daichi Takagi.

After saying a quick yassou to Ramiken founder Michael Egan, you can hop a ferry to Hydra, a car-free island that's long been a freewheeling creative enclave—Henry Miller arrived in 1939, and Leonard Cohen bought a home in the center of town in 1960. Contemporary artists have summered there for decades, and since 2008 the collector Dakis Joannou has hosted exhibitions at the DESTE Project Space Slaughterhouse, housed in a former goat slaughterhouse a short walk from the main port on the island. The June openings are legendary—each year Joannou convinces a world-famous artist to create work specifically for

the unique space (recent participants include Jeff Koons, George Condo, and Maurizio Cattelan) and then throws a huge open-air party where every single person on the island is invited, with wine and lamb pita sandwiches for everybody. This year the artist Andra Ursuța brings her futuristic cast-glass visions to the exhibition space.

And yes, Larry is still leading the charge among galleries in Athens. In 2020, amid pandemic market upheaval, Gagosian opted against closing its Greek space and instead upgraded the digs, launching a new space with fresh paintings by Brice Marden. This summer in Greece, the gallery debuts work by Oscar Murillo, the polymathic painter and Turner Prize winner who had his first show at Gagosian last year. For at least one week a year, it's Gagosian's most important outpost of them all. ■

GAGOSIAN ATHENS

Larry Gagosian's Athens gallery opened in 2009 as his ninth outpost on earth.



BENAKI MUSEUM

The nearly 88,000-square-foot Pireos Street Annex opened in 2004.



DESTE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

Dakis Joannou opened his art space in a structure once used to slaughter goats.



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