

Precarious Celebrations

Artists: Ksenia Bilyk, Olha Marusyn, Olga Stein, Tamara Turlun
Curated by Oleksandra Pogrebnyak

Organized by VELYCHKO GALLERY in Paphos, Cyprus

Precarious Celebrations is an exhibition that takes place after an artistic residency on Cyprus, an island where tourist leisure unfolds against the backdrop of ancient myths. Archeological sites, old churches, monasteries with their chambers carved into mountains – have become part of a daily pilgrimage in search of big stories and catchy souvenirs. From these places we descend to the beach, where hotel staff have already adorned wedding arches with flowers and lined up chairs for another ceremony. Here, fantasies of marriage are easily realized in the “all-inclusive” mode.

The exhibition's central motif is a wedding that never took place, canceled by the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine. It is embodied in a spatial work by Olga Stein. This personal, yet far from unique, story – told within the atmosphere of a resort – creates a contrast between external readiness for celebration and internal states of suspension, fatigue, and the acceptance of loss. In the long mobilization of personal and collective efforts – emotional, physical, material – across days, months, years, every moment free from “useful work” seems misplaced. And then suddenly the body finds itself in a situation where nothing is required of it. Here, there is no need to be gathered, decisive, or efficient. It is a place of rest – though such a pause does not always bring peace, often it stirs an inner resistance.

From this tension unfolds a thematic line tied to the body as a vessel of experience and exhaustion. In Olha Marusyn's work, everything turns around the principle of the clam: the figure of a bather enclosed by the metal walls of a changing cabin, with the sea shimmering in the distance. The tin object continues her sculptural explorations, hammered into an expressive relief of dents and punctures. The piece is inherently performative – its pounding, clanging, and rattling echo the sea or another element striving to engulf the body. In her paintings, meanwhile, one depicts an amorphous, non-normative body, caught in a spiral of repetition; others take the form of shells. All interconnected, they carry encounters that momentarily mirror our own.

Another narrative thread runs through Ksenia Bilyk's work. It unfolds where contemporary reel culture meets the gaze of antiquity – through endless retellings, gossip, small talk. Her installation evokes the sensation of peering into a museum vitrine, which embodies both national pride and diplomatic gravitas. Yet her objects resist the aura of archeological treasure. About the size of a pebble, they might be used practically to weigh down the edge of a beach blanket against the wind, or slip into your pocket as a keepsake of a fleeting day. Suspended between the small and the weighty, they reveal how memory attaches itself to matter: how the smallest thing can become priceless, how a stone can weigh like an inheritance, how an object can both anchor us in the present and transport elsewhere.

Memories themselves grow heavier in Tamara Turlun's work. The luminous clusters of objects recall family vacations, sealed within lightboxes. These images sink and resurface, slipping beyond the horizon – a line that both separates and binds sky and water, or a dried-out steppe – while simultaneously becoming monuments to a place and a moment in time. They become acts of contemplation and attempts to remember even the smallest details of the artist's home region, Dnipropetrovsk, in eastern Ukraine. They preserve fragments of joy, encapsulating the paradox of memory: intimate and fleeting, yet solid enough to resist erasure.

The exhibition traces the space between differences: external festivity and inner fragility; between the automatism of leisure and the inability to retreat; between the memory inscribed in the body and longing to be free of the traumatic experience. It is an attempt to find a visual language for a state that resists articulation, and to grasp what to do with it, when nearby the sea is murmuring, everything is decorated for celebration, and warm gusts of wind are blowing.

The CARV_25 residency invited female artists living and working in Ukraine, and the exhibition was curated by a woman. This framework reflects the wartime reality: men of a certain age are legally prohibited from leaving the country, with many conscripted into the armed forces to resist Russia's war of aggression. Countless artistic practices have been interrupted or suspended due to mobilization. For women, military service remains largely voluntary, allowing greater mobility and participation in international cultural exchange. The exhibition highlights women's presence while acknowledging an absence that leaves an irreparable void.

STORIES BEHIND ART_SERIES

OLGA STEIN

The Scenography of a Great Epic Does Not End with a Wedding, 2025

SILVERWARE, TAXIDERMY

A sculptural installation of table silver crowned by a taxidermied bird, resting on a form that recalls either a cake or abandoned armor. The work evokes interrupted rituals of celebration, where festive objects become silent witnesses to absence and unfulfilled dreams. Suspended between grandeur and void, it reflects on how private and collective narratives are broken and reassembled in the shadow of war.

OLHA MARUSYN

Bather, 2025

OIL ON CANVAS

Wave, 2025

GALVANIZED STEEL, GELATIN

Shells, 2025

ACRYLIC ON PAPER

The painting *Bather* presents an amorphous figure enclosed by the metal walls of a changing cabin, establishing a sense of containment and stillness. This is echoed in the sculptural object *Wave* – a thin steel sheet set in gelatin – with its hammered surface marked by dents and punctures, catching the shimmer of the sea. Together with the paper pieces *Shells*, the work suggests an encroaching force, reflecting the delicate balance between fragility and resilience.

KSENIA BILYK

Christians Rumors Club, 2025

POLYESTER RESIN

The sculptures from the series *Christians Rumors Club* evoke archaeological treasures yet resist the solemnity of history. They appear as hand-sized stones – the kind one might use to weigh down a beach blanket or slip into a pocket as a keepsake. Small stories, gossip, and contemporary myths of Cyprus are engraved across the objects, tracing how memory clings to matter, anchoring us in the present while carrying us elsewhere.

TAMARA TURLIUN

Nature Reserve, 2025

CONCRETE MIXTURE, CLAY FROM THE ORIL RIVER, LED LIGHT, PHOTO, DIGITAL PRINT

Pathes, 2025

VINYL (ORACAL)

In *Nature Reserve*, a luminous family album contained within lightboxes, recalls memories of summer rest. The images drift between sky and water, presence and disappearance, becoming quiet monuments to a place and a moment in time, a symbolic reserve rooted in the artist's home region of Dnipropetrovsk in eastern Ukraine. The work *Paths* leads you elsewhere – assuming a quiet passage beyond the visible.