

I developed a project in Japan that involved depicting a central individual figure and their social background all within the same image, just like in a traditional Buddhist mandala. There came an unexpected call to create this kind of artwork in Cyprus. For that purpose, I came to spend almost a year engaging with this country. The green line separates Cyprus into two parts, north and south. During my on-site research, negotiations were in process between the northern and southern authorities in order to find a solution to Cyprus problem. As an artist, I was interested in this situation, and I began consultations with people from Cyprus about what kind of photographs I could create. In my work it is very important to have a process of conceiving of the work together with the participants of my photographs, and creating the artworks in dialogue with them. I never digitally alter the artworks with Photoshop. For this project, I decided to create artwork on the theme of unravelling the history of the two communities, in an attempt to overcome the sad memories that had occurred as a result of the conflicts, and offer a representation of the strong, beautiful living people of Cyprus.

However, actually undertaking the photography of this theme proved to be harder than I had imagined. I learned that many people do not wish to cross the checkpoints between the two regions of Cyprus, even though if you simply show your passport you are able to pass back and forth. I felt like I had a glimpse of the complexities that lie in the hearts of everyone in Cyprus, even today. Most people were in favour of the proposals for my photograph, but it was hard to find people actually willing to participate in the shoot itself. I saw at first hand how for the local people, the conflict is not something that is completely over: it still feels like a temporary ceasefire. Both authorities are continuing peace negotiations, a process which is painful and time consuming. It seemed like they made a step towards the solution, but at the end the negotiations have been temporarily suspended. I was rejected when I applied to the UN for permission to photograph in the Green Line.

I began to think that the idea I depicted, of Cyprus becoming a united country again, was just the self-righteous plan of a foreigner.

However, little by little I managed to find people to participate, and the project progressed—even if slowly. It was like trying to pass through the eye of a needle. There were times when, just as I was giving up, miraculously I would have a wonderful encounter. My plan was to evoke the painful past of the conflict. I respect all the people who cooperated—even if they had not directly experienced the time of conflict themselves—in understanding the significance of this sensitive content and participating in the photography, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

Finally—this work has become a different one to what I had initially envisaged. However, having contemplated the artwork and created it together with the people of Cyprus, I think it has become an artwork which includes the traces of that process, within a depiction of contemporary northern and southern Cyprus that is also an expression of hope for the future. Thank you, Cyprus.

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On the return flight back to Japan  
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