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culture # Nicosia

BE OPEN champions Cypriot handicrafts through workshops for children



newsroom



Over two days on April 22 and 23, the Centre of Visual Arts and Research in Nicosia welcomed 160 schoolchildren from Cyprus public schools who took part in the educational sessions organized by the BE OPEN Foundation dedicated to *Cyprus Handcrafted Heritage*.

This initiative was devised with the aim of popularization and preservation of traditional Cyprus fabric production techniques. Each session consisted of a lecture on craft-related entrepreneurship and a master class on traditional Cypriot weaving.

The lecture was prepared by a young entrepreneur Andreani Panayide, who shared her journey from starting to explore her cultural heritage to establishing a fashion brand that trades in accessories and clothes internationally. She said, *“I am glad to be part of this project, and I thank BE OPEN and Mrs Baturina for the opportunity to share my fascination with Cyprus’s traditional fabrics, as well as my experience of building a contemporary fashion brand with love and respect for the craftsmanship that embodies an important part of our cultural heritage.*

It is vital to teach children that these traditions still exist, and that exploring them can be as exciting and rewarding as ever.”

Elli Filokyprou, a weaver of over 20 years of experience, who runs her weaving workshop in the village of Gourri, taught the children master classes of actual weaving on small transportable looms and helped them create their pieces of fabric with colourful patterns.

The classes titled *Cyprus Handcrafted Heritage – Classes with BE OPEN and CVAR* were supported and inaugurated by representatives of Cyprus’s cultural and educational authorities and institutions. The Deputy Minister of Culture Vasiliki Kassianidou commented: *“I strongly believe that the promotion of traditional crafts is one of the most important ways to preserve cultural heritage. All hand-crafted objects are a tangible link to our past and our ancestry; they represent the traditions, history and values of the people of Cyprus. By keeping traditional crafts alive, and inviting young people to explore their beauty and variety, we ensure that future generations have access to these essential aspects of their heritage.”*

On behalf of the Minister of Education, Sport and Youth of Cyprus, Permanent Secretary Marina Ioannou Hasapi took the floor to thank all of those who have worked to prepare the workshop and come to appreciate and preserve Cyprus’s rich cultural heritage. She added that to do so, the Ministry *“welcomes collaborations with institutions like BE OPEN who are already making a deep impact with this initiative. I congratulate all the students who have and will come to participate, and hope that they will come to an understanding of our past, so as to better shape our future.”*

Mayor of Nicosia Constantinou Yiorkadjis congratulated everyone on the “wonderful opportunity to learn our traditions, and learn them by practice which is the best way.” I believe it will be great,” he added, “assuming that you like these classes if some of you create some of the future wear for us.”



After words of encouragement from Anna Zavou Christoforou, the Internal Audit Commissioner of the Republic of Cyprus, CVAR Founder Rita C. Severis expressed her joy to be able to offer children the chance to learn about their traditional handicrafts, “*much appreciated and many thanks to BE OPEN for making this possible and bringing so many children together,*” she concluded.

Finally, the Founder of BE OPEN Elena Baturina welcomed the children, thanked the project supporters and explained why keeping the handcraft traditions alive is so important for people of all ages: “Craft is about connection – to one’s history, culture, nature, to one’s place and oneself. While surrounded by mass-produced items that lack individuality, to keep us grounded in our heritage we long for handmade things with unique character that help us build and preserve our own individuality. And it is our duty to share this connection with new generations *because for them it’s the perfect gateway into their own history and culture, the geography and nature of their homeland, and an exciting opportunity to explore their artistic talents.*”

After the speeches were over, BE OPEN announced that both the professional transportable looms used for demonstration in the master classes would be passed over to the authors of the workshop as a gift from Elena Baturina, to *“help them continue doing what they love, and get even more creative and inventive.”*

