Art off the beaten beach

From Sardinia to Santorini, five Mediterranean island art spaces offer fresh perspectives and cultural depth far from the seaside crowds

By Cathryn Drake | Jul 30, 2025 | 5 min read

Every summer, almost as a ritual, Europeans decamp to Mediterranean island beaches. Most vacationers are satisfied with long days lolling by the shore, but contemplating contemporary art far from the madding metropolises can also be a delightful diversion – and on some islands, excellent exhibition spaces and cutting-edge public art are sometimes a welcome surprise. Here, an insider's list of art spaces and events to see – or stumble across – on your Mediterranean holiday.

CCA Andratx: Mallorca, Spain

Any mention of the Balearic island of Mallorca conjures images of mass tourism, German beer gardens, and hedonistic nightlife. A hive of artistic activity at the foot of the Serra de Tramuntana range, the CCA Andratx, founded by Jacob and Patricia Asbaek in 2001, is not far from Palma, yet it feels as if it is a world away. At the heart of its programming is a residency for international artists – to date more than 800 – who leave behind works produced here to be sold to support the center. The complex blends vernacular architecture with minimalist gallery spaces that host regular exhibitions. This summer's 'A Family Affair' features the locally rooted sculptural work of Danish resident Lin Utzon and her children, Naja Utzon Popov and Mika Utzon Popov. And a solo show featuring multimedia works by resident artist Kasper Eistrup, 'How to Expand an Ocean', runs from August 2 to October 19.

CCA Patio. Photo CCA Andratx. Courtesy CCA Andratx.

Installation view of "A Family Affair" by Lin Utzon, Naja Utzon Popov & Mika Utzon Popov. Works: Mika Utzon Popov.17.04.2025 – 03.09.2025. Photo Alex Forge. Courtesy CCA Andratx.

Exterior CCA Andratx. Photo CCA Andratx. Courtesy CCA Andratx.

Museo d'Arte Provincia di Nuoro (MAN): Sardinia, Italy

On an island famed for both luxury beach resorts as well as shepherds and legendary bandits hiding out in the rugged mountains of the interior, art might come as a surprise. Nestled in Sardinia's central hills, the city of Nuoro has evolved from a hub for outlaws to a cultural capital boasting several distinguished institutions. This includes MAN, housed in a 1920s palazzo with a collection focused on Sardinian artists such as ***Maria Lai*** and Costantino Nivola. This summer's show, 'Islands and Idols', curated by museum director Chiara Gatti and Stefano Giuliani, features ancient artifacts alongside works by Modern artists such as ***Joan Miró*** and ***Alberto Giacometti*** in an exploration of the totems and myths of islands and how they convey common notions of otherness and the cosmos.

View of 'Islands and Idols'. Photograph: © Alessandro Moni.

View of 'Islands and Idols'. Photograph: © Alessandro Moni.

View of the opening ceremony of 'DIORAMA - Generation Earth', 2024. Photograph: © Alessandro Moni.

Perasma: Leros, Greece
The decadent, enchanting Kandioglou Mansion, built during the Ottoman empire, houses Perasma, codirected by Turkish curators Burcu Fikretoğlu and Gizem Naz Kudunoğlu. For its third edition on Leros, the show 'Folding the Sea into Dresses that Dissolve Like Salt' engages with the fascinating colonial past of the Dodecanese island and its recent influx of refugees to contemplate the shifting identities tied to histories of migration and invasion. Works by 27 artists include Joline Kwakkenbos's luminous self-portraits, ***Lola Montes Schnabel***'s topographical ceramics, and ***Korakrit Arunanondchai***'s visionary film *With History in a Room Filled with People with Funny Names 4* (2017). In the courtyard of a Rationalist primary school in the island's Mussolini-planned town of Lakki, Gülsün Karamustafa's site-specific installation *Mother Tongue (I Must Not Speak My Mother Tongue At School)* (2025) conjures native languages forbidden by occupiers – just as Greek was banned when the Dodecanese islands were under Italian rule.

Gülsün Karamustafa's site-specific installation Mother Tongue (I Must Not Speak My Mother Tongue At School), 2025.

Opening cocktail at Perasma. Photograph: Fotis Vallatos.

Planeta: various locations, Sicily, Italy
Over several vineyards scattered throughout the popular Italian island, heritage winemaker Planeta has developed ongoing visual art projects and permanent installations amidst its vineyards in a program called 'Cultura per il territorio'. The neon installation *Fibonacci Sequence* (2002), by ***Mario Merz*** is integrated into the buildings of Planeta's Ulmo estate near the temples of Selinunte. And *Ettore Majorana* (2024), a neon by artist duo ***Claire Fontaine,*** is on view at Planeta's Sciaranuova estate on the slopes of Mount Etna (where, on August 1 and 2, you can catch the end of the annual Sciaranuova Festival, featuring theater and music in a natural setting). Open-air artworks – like *Vertebra* (2022) by Petra Feriancová – are on view at the Buonvini estate, near the UNESCO-designated Baroque towns of the Val di Noto.

Vertebra, 2022, by Petra Feriancová. Photograph: Ignazio Mortellaro. Courtesy of Planeta.

Piano del Sommacco. Courtesy of Planeta.

Claire Fontaine, Ettore Majorana, 2024. Photograph: Andrea Castaldi. Courtesy of Planeta.

Santozeum: Santorini, Greece
An otherworldly island formed by an ancient volcanic eruption, Santorini is often thronged with tourists toting selfie sticks. A rare oasis of calm with stunning views of the famed caldera, Santozeum is an art space housed in a 1950s Modernist complex among the whitewashed villas clinging to the clifftops of Fira. Founder Ileana Drinovan Nomikos hired Zurich-based architect Jörg Stollmann to renovate the long disused family property and opened it as a venue for shows, performances, happenings, and resident artists who leave their marks behind. Swiss artist ***Raphael Hefti*** has painted three rooftop terraces with mesmerizing geometric patterns. Gary's Bar, designed by Hungarian artist Gyarfas Olah, is managed by residents and features a rotating musical lineup. Inspired by two favorite children's books featuring animals, the exhibition 'Heaven or Earth' is co-curated with Fabian Schöneich and opens at the end of August.

Rooftop installation by Raphael Hefti. Courtesy of Santozeum.

View of an artwork by Megan Dominescu. Courtesy of Santozeum.

Credits and captions

Cathryn Drake is a freelance writer and editor.

Caption for header image: Roof installation by Raphael Hefti. Courtesy of Santozeum.

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