

Visit June 2018

This June I made a short visit to Gaza. I was there only for 11 days but with a double goal.

Like always, my first goal was to work with the team and the children of the Open Studio.

This time I brought with me a book called "Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey". It tells a story about a migrating family and is illustrated by Syrian artist Nizar Badr who only uses stones to make his illustrations. The team of the Open Studio was so enthusiastic about this book that we decided to make it into an activity with the children.



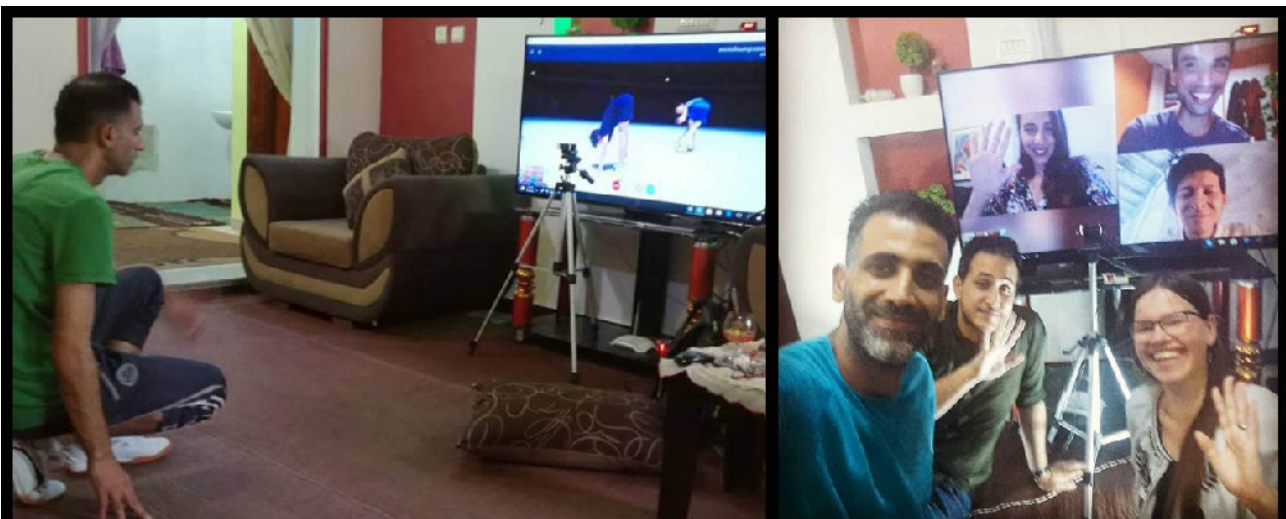
Of course, the best place to collect stones and shells is at the beach. The children were ecstatic to go there, but one thing was different from the previous beach trips that we have made. For almost a year now, the amount of electricity coming to Gaza hasn't been enough to keep the sewage system running. By lack of other solutions, the dirty water is dumped directly into the sea which has gotten highly polluted. So now, the refreshment of swimming in the cool water is not anymore an option for anyone.



The rest of my time with the children we spent on making marionettes. They created many characters and the children had a lot of fun playing with them. After the marionettes were finished, we used the puppets to record a new film. There are some real talents in this group of kids and the filming was a big success (results coming soon).



My second goal of this trip was for a whole different project. Since November 2017 we have been collaborating with Choreographer Eric Minh Cuong Castaing (Ballet National de Marseille) who created a performance about the use of drones in different parts of the world. This performance takes place partially in France and partially in Khan Yunis where dancer Mumen Khalifa dances life (though Skype) with dancers in France. It was a big challenge to get all this organized (with the limited electricity and internet speed) but with artist Mahmoud Alhaj behind the scenes as an all-round theater technician, we have overcome all obstacles. It was certainly worth it.



During my visit, the show premiered in Marseille. There, Ingrid was present in the theatre to see what it looked like on the other side. First the French dancers danced with drones. They slowly disappeared and Mumen Khalifa came into the picture. After an interview and a combined dance with the French dancers, Mumen was taken over by the Breakdancers (Myuz) and Free Runners, until they became smaller and smaller. The breakers and runners also worked with drones and they showed how the artists from Gaza dance on the ruins of their existence. It gave a tremendous feeling that the arts had managed to break through the blockade of Gaza in a peaceful manner.

The coming season this show will tour in at least five different countries, and will let people in on a small part of life in Gaza. Everybody welcome at "Phoenix" (<https://vimeo.com/276766315>)



Altogether it was another great visit. We worked hard, got inspired, made beautiful things, learned a lot and also had a lot of fun. We pushed boundaries without doing harm. And for some moments, we all forgot the constantly increasing difficulties of daily life in Gaza.

A huge thanks to everyone in Khan Yunis for all your help, support, enthusiasm, great collaborations and valuable friendships. Stay strong, and I hope we meet again soon!



A special thanks to the Roberto Cimetta Fund who supported us in realising this visit

