

Report of four Summer Camps in GAZA and West Bank June and July 2019



The core activity of the **Holland Office for Personal Encouragement (HOPE)** is creating self-improvement opportunities for children, teachers and artists in the West Bank and Gaza. HOPE is doing this by way of the arts and creativity. The results are shared online and, whenever possible, physically shown both in Gaza and abroad. We opted for this working method because the inhabitants of Gaza are completely cut off from the outside world. In this way, the organisation hopes to emphasise the human face of the Gaza residents and contribute to breaking down the prejudices surrounding the Palestinian people that others took years to carefully construct.

This not only applies to the inhabitants of Gaza, but also the people who are living on the West Bank. Through the years, Gaza has become an area that is unfit for habitation; it is only twice the size of the Dutch island of Texel and has no less than two million inhabitants.

It is delightful to note that the PRCS (Palestinian Red Crescent Society) leadership does not keep the developed knowledge and skills within their own walls, but generously shares it within the community. Five extra summer camps in tents on beaches spread over Gaza have been realized by the PRCS this year.

There was one Summer Camp held in Ramallah during the last two weeks of June the other four took place in Gaza in July. HOPE, in this case represented by Suzanne Groothuis, was invited by the Palestinian Museum for Contemporary Art in Ramallah to realise a Summer Camp related to the concept of *Intimate Terrains: Representations of a Disappearing Landscape*. The exhibition is described as follows: "*Intimate Terrains*" explores the changing representation of landscape by Palestinian artists, and their relationship to place and location through the themes of erasure, fragmentation, distance and belonging."



Intimate Terrains:

In Palestine, children's relationship to the land is fragmented; they hear about the sea, the great variety of topographies and geographic diversities, while, in fact, experiencing the same limited spaces. This workshop offered children the opportunity to reflect on their relationship to the land as well as to look at their environment and their surroundings in a new way. The workshop will take place in two phases, the first in Birzeit (West Bank) and the second in Khan Younis (Gaza). The children in these two different places have a strong relationship to the land, but their natural environment (the hills of the West Bank, and the coast of the Gaza Strip) and the psychological experience of their surroundings are quite different. The workshops are thus intended to build bridges between the children and the places in which they live. By carrying out the same project in each of the two sites, we have shed light on the differences, but, also, on the similarities and commonalities between these children.

In Birzeit, this Summer Camp project took place in the museum garden and was led by the visual artists Suzanne Groothuis and Manal Mahamid together with the poet Badr Othman. In Gaza the Summer Camp project took place on a piece of land owned by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS), situated between the sea and Khan Younis. Here, the project was led by the visual artist and dancer Mumen Khalifa and the poet Maher Dawood.



The results of the workshops exceeded our expectations and were very moving. They revealed the fact that these Palestinian children are enormously talented. The amalgamation of poetry, visual art and nature inspired many ideas, new insights and freedom of the mind. In the conclusive talks with the children we found that they not only completely understood the point of this workshop, but they also seemed to truly value this lesson and this new way of looking at their surroundings. One girl said that when she arrived in this new place it frightened her. But by exploring the space and creating something nice in it, she now feels comfortable there.

In Gaza the project was concluded with a presentation at the PRCS building in Khan Younis.

Recorded images from both working periods will be combined in a single film by Mahmoud Alhaj (filmmaker and digital artist) and Suzanne Groothuis. The film will be part of the exhibition *Intimate Terrains* in Ramallah.

For the participating artist of the West Bank and Gaza this will be a great opportunity to show the results of the two working periods in the Palestinian Museum for Contemporary Art in Ramallah. Especially since the museum has decided to dedicate a publication to this project. The workshop results can be seen by clicking on the attached link.

<https://bit.ly/2HvIhy1> / <http://www.palmuseum.org/education/what-s-on-june-july-2019>



MUYZ:

The second Summer Camp that was financed was a breakdance Summer Camp by Muyz in Gaza City. Together with four coaches, Muyz worked with more than thirty children in a sheltered location on the beach. The children were not only taught the basic principles of breakdance, but also the required conventions with regard to politeness and attitude. We arrived at the beach at a quarter to eight and everybody was already prepared. We noticed how dedicated, involved and disciplined everybody was. We say how the children were already able to perform a really good dance battle after a period of only three weeks. The fact that we were working with different age groups only added to the fun. A couple of times a week there were demonstrations in public locations such as the beach or a square. These demonstrations attracted hundreds of children and young people. Muyz's crew certainly performs an important exemplary role and is intensively followed, both live and through the internet. We will bring Muyz in contact with well-known Dutch breakdance crews who are operating internationally. Muyz indicated that he wanted to continue this camp. And after consulting with our treasurer and directly submitting a new budget, we were able to honour his request. In the link you will find the results of the workshop. Muyz also made a number of 'how to breakdance' films for the BeeHome website. <https://bit.ly/2ztxJtW>



Mohammed Alhawajri:

The third Summer Camp that was financed, was led by Mohammed Alhawajri. Mohammed had suggested to organise a Summer Camp for talented adolescents. However, during the preparation phase he adjusted his ideas. Mohammed rented locations in three different areas in various camps. Apart from offering art lessons, his concept was to create awareness for the surroundings and the origins of materials. An example of this is that he hired a bus to take the children and staff members to a clay quarry and afterwards to a pottery where the clay was processed. They only started to make things themselves on the following day. In this way, the Summer Camp turned into a real feast. Artistic interventions and education took turns with trips, ice cream and loads of fun. The locations were picked carefully in order to reach children in underprivileged areas. They made sure the locations offered shelter and shade. This was certainly not unimportant with temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius. The third week turned into a week for talented children. During all three camps, moments were introduced for playing various games, which were followed with great public interest. The link will give you access to the realisation process of the three camps in the three different locations. <https://bit.ly/2Hxa0xh> / <https://www.facebook.com/artofgaza/>



PRCS:

Although the *Land Art* project with the PRCS took place outside, the other activities were organised within the walls of the building in Khan Younis. The PRCS had made a choice not to develop any new activities, but to improve the existing ones. Old games were adapted and updated, for instance. In the library, special books were made, and poems were developed in further detail. A special floor was installed so the children would not hurt themselves while playing rough games. The atmosphere was cheerful and positive. The classrooms, the Open Studio, the library, the games library and the Debka classroom were filled to the brim with 80% more children. The teachers all started to film their activities, and that is a great development. These films are posted on the joint Facebook page, so everyone can see what their colleagues are working on. The purpose of the closed Facebook group to 'learn and inspire' is beginning to work, among other things because of these good quality, inspirational films. <https://bit.ly/32fi7GR>



Conclusion:

HOPE has financed four Summer Camps in Gaza and has operated within the appointed budget. The summer of 2019 was extremely hot, which definitely made the work more challenging for all parties concerned, although it also meant that it was all the more important that something exciting was happening.

During our visit to Gaza, Frank Roni of the Netherlands Red Cross worked on realising five camps spread across Gaza. The Dutch Red Cross is using the money they received from the Dutch radio station 3FM for spreading the working methods of the Open Studio in Khan Younis and implementing these throughout the Gaza Strip. Now, the Open Studio staff will have to show what they are capable of with regard to the transfer of knowledge and coaching.

An important aspect of realising more camps in the future is involving more volunteers and creative and artistic specialists. During this last visit, Suzanne Groothuis and Ingrid Rollema therefore worked on intensifying contacts with various cultural institutions. For instance, they visited Shababek for Contemporary Art <http://shababek.guccpal.org/index.php>, where Ingrid gave a workshop and a lecture for art students specializing in sculpture. Also, a visit was paid to the Tamer Institute <https://www.tamerinst.org/en/>, an organisation that publishes books for children and young adults and commissions young writers and illustrators to create works. They also publish a newspaper. We also visited the Edward Said Institute, the National Conservatory of Music. <http://ncm.birzeit.edu/en/gaza>. And our contacts with many individual artists were further intensified. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to visit Theatre Day <https://www.theatreday.org/whats-on/> and Sirb Theatre or Eltiqa Gallery <http://eltiqa.com>.



The fact that Rob Voerman did not get permission from the Israeli authorities on time to enter Gaza cast a shadow over the visit. Rob, who is supported by the Mondriaan Fund, intended to start quite an intensive project. This project involves an outside space where children can be read to, and a statue named *Spaceship Gaza*. Both artworks are meant to be shelters and feature a natural, fairy tale-like light on the inside. Jemad Ahmad of the PRCS will be coordinating this project for Rob. When Suzanne and Ingrid arrived back home, Rob all of a sudden could enter Gaza and could start the preparations for his artwork with Jihad. The previous art projects during which we collaborated with Marjan Teeuwen and the Ballet de Marseille managed to put the problems of Gaza to the forefront in a penetrating way. We now hope that Rob will be given an opportunity to follow in their footsteps.

The situation in Gaza is simply depressing. In many places the smell is terrible. Everywhere in the streets you will see people with missing limbs. The quality of the water is so bad that people are walking in and out of the hospital with conditions related to the contaminated water. Children are furtively begging in the streets. And a growing number of children looks neglected. This is food for thought, because these people usually raise their children so lovingly. Many families are swamped with financial worries, and these may even lead to prison sentences. In many places, the seawater is so contaminated that swimming is strongly discouraged. Traveling in or out of the area keeps getting harder and harder. Fruit and vegetables are rotting away because the population cannot afford to buy them. When we first started this project 27 years ago, we would never have imagined that these people would be deserted by the international community in this way. To be continued...

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HOPE foundation greatly thanks everyone who generously shared their photo's for this report.

Numbers summer camps 2019

name	Muyz	Museum project	Museum project	PRCS project	Mohammed Alhawajri
summer camp	Breakdance	Intimate Terrains	Intimate Terrains	Art and games	Talented children
place	Gaza	Ramallah	Khan Yunis	Khan Yunis	Gaza
number of children	30	20	15	943	125
number of coaches:					
artists		2	3	2	4
performers	3			9	
poets		1	1		
volunteers				30	
others,				6	3
duration	8 weeks	1 week	1week	4 weeks	still ongoing
outreach					
live audience	250	20	30	200	
online views	+/- 2500	+/- 25.300	+/- 16.400	+/- 17.600	+/- 200