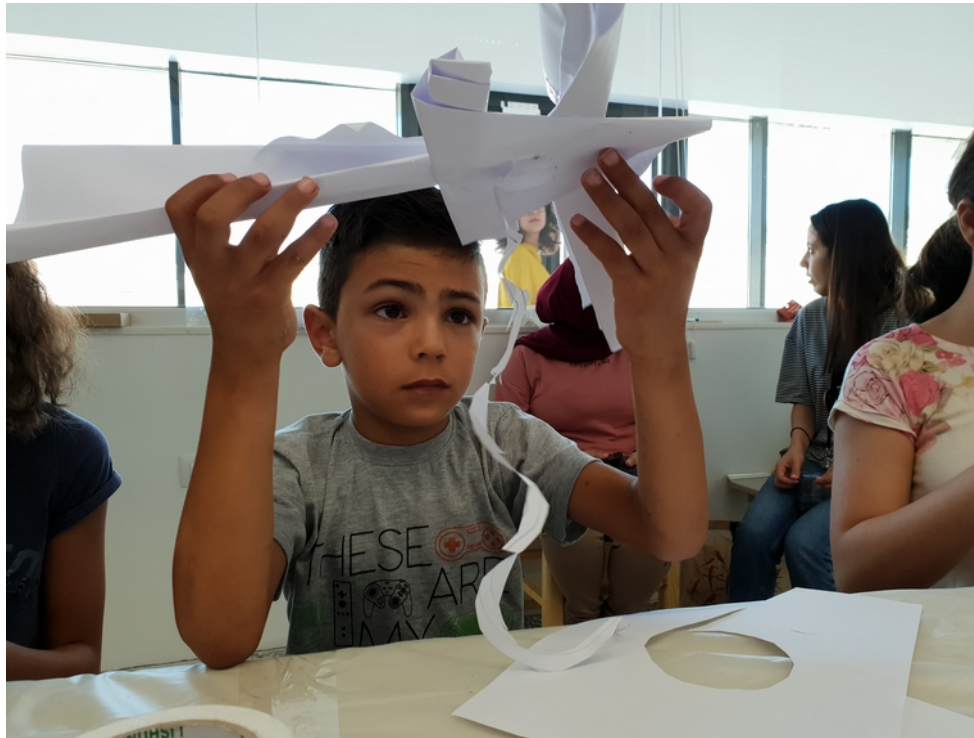


Blog Visit summer 2019

Part one

It is the start of a busy summer for Hope. There are many great plans and we are super excited for all of them. On the program this summer are: A summer camp for talented youth in Gaza given by a team of professional artists, a summer camp for breakdancing, a sculpture build by the Dutch artists Rob Voerman, many summer activities in the Open Studio and a land-art project in collaboration with the Palestinian Museum in Ramallah. <https://www.palmuseum.org/language/english>



My personal visit started with this last project. The Palestinian museum is the first museum of modern arts in Palestine. At the moment they are running a big exhibition, called “Intimate Terrains”, an exhibition that addresses the issues relating to the Palestinian landscape. Taking this exhibition as a source of inspiration, we created the idea to make a one week land-art and poetry workshop for children. In this workshop we provided children with an opportunity to think about their relationship with the landscape surrounding them, and to view their environment and surroundings in a new way. Emphasizing the relationship between earth, personal stories and society. To embody the relations between thoughts and landscape we used both visual arts and poetry.

One other aspect we wanted to bring into this project was to strengthen the connection between the children in Gaza and the Westbank. These children are all living in Palestine, but have no chance to ever meet each other because of walls, checkpoints. To establish this connection we decided to do the exact same project both in Ramallah and in Gaza. The two workshops were filmed and will form one art film that shows the similarities but also the differences between being a child in the hills of Ramallah or the coastline of Gaza. The film will be screened in the Palestinian Museum and on several websites and places in and outside Palestine.

To really get into the concept of the Palestinian landscape you have to be Palestinian. So in both locations we asked Palestinian artists to work with me to realize this project. In Ramallah these were visual artist Manal Mahamid and poet Badr Othman in Ramallah and in Gaza visual artists Mahmoud Alhaj and Mumen Khalifa together with Poet Maher Dawood.



The first chapter in Ramallah was truly amazing! We gave introductions about land-art, experimented with different techniques, had sessions of creative writing and build an outdoor "museum" containing 4 large land-art pieces.

The first piece were houses made from stones with silver doors and windows. By making these houses we claimed the land as ours. As the sun was reflection on the silver stones it looked like light was shining from within these houses.

Then we made clay from the earth and used it to spell the four words that the children found most important. To make these words stand out we used flour to make a contrasting a background. Flour is material that comes from the land and feeds the people. To many it reminded them of their mothers who would bake fresh bread at home.

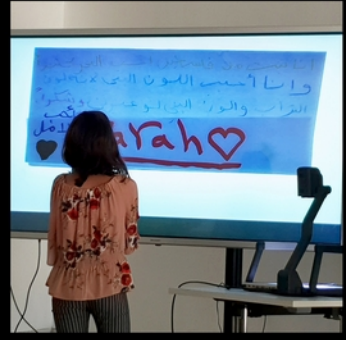
Then the children made small icons of the land and placed them in a "river", hoping that their images would float all the way to the sea which is so hard to reach for most of these children. For the last piece the children used straw and waste materials to weave their faces in a gardening net. The net was then placed in the air on the side of the fence so the faces would look out over the wide landscape of Palestine.

We ended the week with a public presentation combining visiting the art works with reciting of the created poems.

The children really enjoyed exploring the land and learning new ways to use materials and to think about their surroundings. Even though it was terribly hot, we really had a great time together, we learned a lot and created some wonderful artworks.

The best way to get an impression of this project is trough the photos on the next page.

Next part from Gaza!



Part two.

After a few days of finalizing things in Ramallah I have arrived in Gaza. It is always great to be back here and meet all the people who I've got to know so well over the last years. They just started the summer camps and making activities for an average of 400 children every day. Wow!

There are a lot of new ideas and everyone is working hard. The whole building is filled with happy kids voices.

In the first days I started with the team by making Kamishibai theatres. This is an old Japanese technique that uses images in a small theatre for storytelling.

The children really loved it and for the team there are many ways to use it. The rest of the week I continued working with this technique in its different forms and functions.

No matter how many times I have been here, it still shocks me when I see a group of seemingly happy girls busy drawing stories about their lives and then to realise that the drawings contain bombs and destroyed houses.



After the weekend it was time to start with the Gaza part of the land art project. We tried to keep the same schedule as in Ramallah and adjusted the activities according to the children, the place and the team. In Gaza I worked with two artists from the Open Studio and a poet and writer called Maher Dawood.

The first day started by introducing the children to land art by presentation, writing activities and exploring new ways of working with simple materials.

The rest of the week we worked outside on location.

It was boiling hot, but the children here seem very resistant to it and were having a great time even though we worked in "the desert".

We spoke a lot with the children about their environment and their connection with it. They looked for their favourite stones and shared their thoughts with it and they explored many different materials and techniques to make something out of nothing.

The two topics that kept coming up in the discussions were the sea and traveling (which is impossible for these children). Inspired by these conversations we decided to build a ship and an airplane. In the sails of the ship they hung leaves on which they wrote small poems. From sticks and waste materials they made puppets that represented themselves and placed them as being fished up by the nets of the fisherman.

After shaping an airplane out of stones they all painted their name on decorated stones and placed them where the windows would be.

For each child a stone seat in this stone airplane.

One of the girls looked at this airplane that would never take off, then spread her arms and pretended to be an airplane herself but only thing actually in the air was a drone who came flying over extra low this day to watch what we were doing.



I was amazed by the closing conversation with this group. Not only did they completely get the point of this workshop (to be connected to the landscape and see its possibilities), but also they seemed to truly value this lesson and this new way of looking at things.

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. There was also a boy who experienced great difficulties at home. His father had taken off and left mother with children at home without income. The poverty and responsibilities that came with that were weighing heavy on this 12 year old boy. After we finished the project he told us that during this whole week he didn't think about any of these problems and felt like a normal kid again.

Although a project like this can't solve the practical problems of these children, we truly believe that it gave them some insides or at least some renewed energy to face the hard lives that they are living. We couldn't have wished for better result and I feel very grateful to have been part of this experience.

To close this blog I want to give a great thanks to the team of artists in this project (Ramallah and Gaza). It was by closely working together that we all had this amazing weeks, that we all learned a lot from each other (artists and children) and that we reached this great result. Shukran!

(More photo's on the next page)

