

Visit April 2018



Back in Gaza again! After being refused permission and having to postpone multiple times, I finally find myself back in the Open Studio. The first meeting on the agenda turned out to be quite illustrative for any following meeting I would have. On our way to our base in Khan Yunis we passed by Dr Bashar in Gaza City. In 10 minutes he painted out the situation in Gaza since the last two weeks. And it is really bad.

Around 30 people have been killed, thousands injured (of which a large part by explosive bullets, which results in an unprecedented number of limb amputations) and even the ambulance personnel has been targeted by life fire. On top of that, there have been irregularities with the payments to all employees from Palestinian governmental organisations. In short, this means a medical and financial crisis in a society which is already on the verge of collapse due to insufficient work, food, electricity, drinking water, medications and medical equipment.

Lets imagine any hospital near to you... Now imagine them suddenly having to deal with hundreds of severely wounded. Now imagine this hospital with half the doctors, unstable electricity, only half of the medication in stock and no health insurance for the patients. This is Gaza April 2018.

Every person I met since I have arrived, is either related to someone who has been injured or someone who is suffering from shortage of income (or both) and they all have a story to tell.

The only thing that makes all this bearable is that, no matter what the situation, the people

here are just truly amazing. They still show strength, they keep hope, they make jokes and there always is much laughter, singing, dancing and music. Although, I also must say, it seems to be moving through a bit thicker air this time.

Together we straighten our backs, decide to ignore the outside and plan to make this visit into a great time.



The team has been working hard on developing new ideas for their lessons. With great pleasure and enthusiasm they invite me to take part in some of the new activities. Together with the children we enjoy the outbursts of fun and creativity.



Besides the regular work in the Open Studio we organised some outings with the children and the team to other cultural organizations in Gaza.

For one of the outings we went to visit a great performance from the organization “Theatre Day”. They were performing in one of the schools funded by UNRWA and invited us to join them. We went with a group of deaf children (and a translator). The children started out a bit nervous to go to a “regular” school, but when they realized how included and accepted they were by the other kids, they truly had a great time and really enjoyed the show.



By the end of the trip I've got some Dutch company. A super short visit by Ingrid, who came to have some meetings, and a longer visit by Choreographer Pieter de Ruiter. Pieter came to Gaza for project Phoenix, a dance performance created by French choreographer Eric Minh Cuong Castaing in collaboration with Ballet National de Marseille. This performance uses dancers and drones to make a link between life in France and life in Gaza. With Pieter we worked with a group of breakdancers and freerunners to record a film that will be used in this performance.

The dancer from our Open Studio is also working on this performance. He is working directly with Eric though skype and will eventually also perform, live in France, using this technology. It is all very exciting and you will definitely hear more about this in my next blog.



As always, I ended my week with a group of kids showing me their new Dabke dance moves. There is so much energy and so much talent! Nowhere did I see the need and positive effect of art and dance so clearly as here, with these children in this environment of extremes. Although it is never really easy to be here, I can't wait to be working with them again.



(M.C. Esher in Gaza)