

## *artasfoundation Circular*

**November 2020**



*Our project partners in Armenia are working with children who have fled from Karabakh.*

*Photo: Shoghakat Mlike-Galstyan*

*Dear friends of artasfoundation*

We are glad that you are here! We don't have to tell you about these difficult times. Most of our projects are in a waiting position and – far worse – the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan is killing more and more people. There is a distinction between civilian victims (many!) and victims among the soldiers (many!), but if the soldiers are mostly very young men, such as we got to know in our projects there, it makes little difference to us. We hear from our partners and friends in the region that they simply want peace. They try to resist nationalist propaganda, but it probably takes a lot to not think in general terms 'we versus the enemies' in such a situation. 'Our' artists there draw, paint or make music with the children and young people of refugee families: artistic emergency aid on site. The borders are closed. Apart from sending money for material, there is not much we can do at the moment. At least not yet.

Bad news came also from Lebanon in recent weeks. But here, too, the artists we know are working with all their strength against desperation and misery. If everything works out, one of them will come to the sogar theater in Zurich in December to perform and also tell us more about the situation there. (More on this below.)

But we don't just want to tell you about difficult things! Here are some news we are very happy about: We were able to sign a contract with the Zurich University of the Arts to set up a special Center for Arts and Peacebuilding. Further, our project partners in Tskaltubo and in Abkhazia<sup>1</sup> are very successful in continuing the projects we started together. Then, a new small publication that we edited will soon be released. Also our further education course *Arts and International Cooperation*, which will start again next year, is attracting much interest! And: We noticed how openness for contributions of the arts to peacebuilding is growing. You can read more about all that in this newsletter.

Now a big request: We are preparing to start projects in the Caucasus as soon as the borders are open again. The need is great. More than usual, we are currently dependent on financial resources and therefore ask you for donations. Please contact us if you want to dedicate them to projects in specific regions. And – if you are in the vicinity: come by once in a while for one of our monthly 'Jour Fixe' talks – live or online. You can always find the program on our website.

To better times!

Our warmest wishes,  
your team from *artasfoundation*

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- [\*\*A performance and an \*artasfoundation\* information event at the sogar theater Zurich\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Center for Art and Peacebuilding founded\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Tskaltubo Art Festival 2020\*\*](#)
- [\*\*November issue of the \*Caucasus Analytical Digest\* on Arts in Society\*\*](#)
- [\*\*New further education course \*CAS Arts and International Cooperation\*\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Dance Project \*Wishing Wishes\*\*\*](#)

## A performance and an *artasfoundation* information event at the sogar theater Zurich



*Hanane Hajj Ali in the piece 'Jogging'. Photo: Marwan Tahtah*

Life as a woman in Beirut, as a lover, as a mother, as a citizen and artist: these are the topics the autobiographical one-person play 'Jogging' by the Lebanese theater professional Hanane Hajj Ali is about. She performed it herself in various places in Lebanon but also with great success at festivals in Edinburgh, Berlin and Hong Kong. Now she will come to Zurich with her play on 3. – 6. December to the [sogar theater](#). The sogar theater has developed an elaborate safety concept to help maintain cultural life during the corona period. We can highly recommend the performance of our long-time colleague and friend! After the performance Hanane will also inform us about the current situation in Lebanon.

**And important!** On Sunday, 6. December, we invite the friends of *artasfoundation* at 15:30 h, before the performance of 'Jogging', for a glass of glogg and a report on the work of the foundation. The topic: 'What impact can our art projects have in conflict-affected regions?'

Please order tickets quickly via this [link](#) – with the note 'artasfoundation'. Due to the corona safety concept, seats are very limited!

## Center for Art and Peacebuilding founded



We already collaborated with the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) on many occasions for our projects. Thereby the main aim was to give young people from Switzerland the experience of working with people in a conflict region. It is often difficult for outsiders to imagine their situation and it is a central concern of *artasfoundation* not to carry impulses one-sidedly into such regions, but to learn from each other. During the summer we put this cooperation with the ZHdK on an institutional basis and thus also created a Swiss platform for the currently strongly growing interest in the potential of art for peacebuilding.

The contracts for the Center for Arts and Peacebuilding have been signed, and now it is time to fill the structure with activities: By further involving students and lecturers from various disciplines in *artasfoundation*'s projects, by incorporating such experiences into the curriculum of art students and by creating new opportunities for research.

An official opening ceremony is still pending: We will keep you informed about the date!

ZHdK and *artasfoundation*

## Tskaltubo Art Festival 2020





*Live Zoom broadcasting of the band Peter Pana's concert from the artasfoundation office to the Tskaltubo Art Festival in Georgia*

This year, for the first time *artasfoundation* did not co-organise the Tskaltubo Art Festival. After eight years, the festival in the Georgian spa town, which still hosts many displaced persons from Abkhazia, is gradually standing on its own feet: In spring, we received the good news that the organisers, a team of three women from Tskaltubo and Tbilisi, were now able to find funding themselves. In September 2020, the festival, which is aimed at a local audience and includes workshops for young people, was held with success. The *artasfoundation* team could not travel to Tskaltubo due to the pandemic outbreak, but we were pleased to make some digital contributions nevertheless: Stefanie Manthey guided a mini tour on video in the Basel Art Museum for the festival visitors in Tskaltubo. The artist Albin Brun, who had been in Tskaltubo with *artasfoundation* in 2018 sent his greetings to his former workshop participants in form of a piece of music with the Schwyzerörgeli. On the weekend of the festival (25. – 27. September) we invited artists who had previously travelled to Tskaltubo with us to a party in our office. Here the Swiss band Peter Pana (Noemi Fricker and Jessica Gomes) gave a concert, which was broadcasted to Tskaltubo live. Was the music in the transmission as gripping as it was in our office? For sure, the people in Tskaltubo danced to it!

**November issue of the *Caucasus Analytical Digest* on  
Arts in Society**



*How is music being used for idealisation and glorification of war? An article in the Caucasus Analytical Digest deals with this question. Photo: Kerstin Klenke*

*artasfoundation* is now also available for reading! In the November issue of the *Caucasus Analytical Digest* on the topic of 'Arts in Society', some of our project partners from Abkhazia, Georgia and Armenia report in analyses and interviews how artists seek exchange with the international art world while considering local traditions and conditions. How can the Soviet-influenced accessibility of art for broad sections of the population be maintained under different political and ideological conditions and be used for the development of artistic and social diversity? All contributions emphasise the desire for and the necessity of exchange. But the authors also point out how unevenly the rapprochement often proceeds because privileges are not evenly distributed. They argue for the simultaneous recognition of different forms of knowledge and different concepts of art, and look for ways in which these can enrich, rather than exclude each other.

The issue of the *Caucasus Analytical Digest* was edited by our project manager Sandra Frimmel and includes contributions from Nasta Agrba, Asida Butba, Philomena Grassl, Olivia Jaques, Kerstin Klenke and Shoghakat MLKE-Galstyan. It will be available for download [here](#) as a PDF file at the end of November. In advance, here is a small sample from Olivia Jaques' interview with the music ethnologist Kerstin Klenke on the topic 'War, Music, Memory – Ethnomusicological Explorations in Abkhazia':

**How does the fusion of sound, vision and performance in Abkhaz events for remembrance of the war look like, what are the formats of memory?**

There is a repertoire of war songs that crosses genre boundaries and is performed by various artists. Yet the film trilogy 'Songs of our Victory' by Emma Khodjaa – at least in the pop field – has become a kind of template for war-related remembrance music. Songs that played a role in the war were covered as rock versions and war was staged in accompanying video clips for these films. Children and young people often re-enact film scenes to the soundtrack of 'Songs of our Victory' on war-related holidays. When children perform war songs at such events and re-enact war scenes in camouflage clothing, I think it is about them learning a very specific version of history.

**Does music possibly have the potential to come to terms with the past?**

In my opinion, it's not about coming to terms with something on holidays or mourning days in Abkhazia. Mourning here is rather a revitalization of memory, a re-presencing of war. One should not overestimate the potential of music to have a socially positive effect. Music is often seen as something genuinely positive, something socially unifying across diverse forms of differences. But music is first of all neutral. Music is what you make of it, it does not always promote community, it does not make people happy per se, on the contrary, it is also used for torture. So, it can contribute to peace building, but there is also a lot of music that divides and separates, and thereby spreads hatred.

**Are there any efforts to define the Abkhazian state through music?**

The question would be, what does one need musically in order to be considered an independent state in the global community of states and to finally be recognized? In the cultural sphere, that would be – also due to the Soviet influence – ballet, opera, classical dance, classical music. Above all, the desire for a symphony orchestra came up again and again, when I talked to people in Abkhazia. The big question, however, is for whom a symphony orchestra should play at present, because Russian tourists are mainly interested in Caucasian folklore and Soviet or post-Soviet Russian pop. But as I said before, one should not overestimate the power of music in general, so I am cautious about the nexus between music and identity. With the exception of dance, which is very much defined nationally, it seems to me to be more about something like the musical insignia of statehood.

**New further education course *CAS Arts and International Cooperation***



*Visit to the theater initiative Shift in Tripoli, Lebanon, during last years further education course*  
 Photo: Marcel Bleuler

This coming spring the 3rd edition of the one-year part-time Certificate of Advanced Studies course, which *artasfoundation* is offering together with the further education department of the Zurich University of the Arts will start. This time, the experienced Syrian cultural manager Rana Yazaji will engage as a co-director together with Dagmar Reichert.

The course is particularly concerned with teaching partners in international art projects the language and needs of each other: These are, on the one hand, artists as partners of representatives of organisations and, on the other hand, active people from the Global North as partners of agents from the South. A central role in the further education course is played by visiting and analysing current art projects – this time also in the context of a study week in Tunisia.

Information events take place on 7. December 2020 and 26. January 2021 via Zoom. Please register [here](#).

Registration deadline for the course is on the 31. March 2021.



## Dance Project *Wishing Wishes*



Photo: Natela Grigalashvili

Everything is ready and we can start as soon as the borders in Abkhazia/Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan open again: In the *Wishing Wishes* project we invite young people from conflict-affected communities far from the capital cities to a series of dance workshops. Together with the dancers and choreographers Meret Schlegel and Manel Salas Palau from Zurich and with local dance teachers, we want to create a space in which the young people can express their own wishes and visions through dance. The non-verbal language of dance and the body's manifold possibilities of expression seem to us to be ideal for testing things that are not (yet) possible in everyday life. We want to encourage the young people to develop an independent attitude towards the social expectations of their home environment and to trust their own wishes.

And our wishes at the moment? To finally be able to start the project!

## **We depend on your support!**

*artasfoundation* can only carry out its projects because of the generous support of friends and patrons of the foundation. Besides contributions from other institutions and

foundations, private donations make up the majority of our budget. Many thanks to all who have already donated larger or smaller amounts this year. We are thankful for your support!

**Bank details for individual donations:**

Artas Foundation, Raiffeisen Bank, 8001 Zurich, IBAN: CH56 8148 7000 0412 5940 4

If you would like to become the patron for an entire project, please get in touch with us.

*\* artasfoundation would like to underline that its use of names and titles particularly with regard to the conflict regions should not be construed as implying any form of recognition or non-recognition by the foundation or as having any other political connotation whatsoever.*

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