



Photo: Dagmar Reichert

Everything is prepared, the cold season is over and it is time to commence our projects. In the village of Tavush in Armenia, Hermine has prepared her garden. We visited her three weeks ago because we too were preparing. We were meeting partners for a dance project that should have started long ago and for another project, an exchange among art teachers. We asked Hermine how she sees the future, now that the war with Azerbaijan is over. 'I can't think yet,' she said. 'My head is in turmoil. And the future? There is still a big emptiness for me.' In the small town of Berd near the border of Azerbaijan, Armen Melikyan, the director of the local cultural centre, describes how 'now in the post-war depression', the interest in art has increased. 'Parents want something uplifting for their children, we have more requests than usually,' he says. The invitation to our dance project comes just at the right time. This is also the impression of Shoghakat Mlke Galstyan, with whom we have already worked on several projects, and whose art initiative for refugees from Karabakh we supported when the borders were still closed for us due to Covid-19. Shoghakat shares our desire to deconstruct images of the enemy through art activities. But she reports how difficult this is at the moment: 'You should see the horror images that are being spread on social media right now. All our young people see them, and then we try to tell them that on the other side of the border there are people like us.' How easy it is to destroy and how much time and patience it takes to rebuild!

Dear friends of artasfoundation, we are not discouraged by this! Here we are telling you about the steps that we currently take to support such rebuilding.  
Thank you for your interest and your contribution!

The *artasfoundation* team

- **Dance and art education in Armenia**
- **Further education Arts and International Cooperation**
- **Online course for activists from African countries**
- **Art as a means in peace mediation?**
- **Therapeutic work in art lessons**
- **An owl in the office**
- **Bags for artasfoundation**

## **Dance and art education in Armenia**



*Dance teacher Gayane Vardanyan from Kogh with her group of children warming up. She will be taking part in the project with her youth group. Photo: Dagmar Reichert*

These are our plans in Armenia: conducting a dance project for young people in a collaboration between the Swiss dancers/choreographers Meret Schlegel and Kilian Haselbeck and dance teachers from Armenia in June, and an exchange between students of art education from the Pedagogical University in Yerevan and art universities in Basel, Lucerne and Zurich in autumn. We are very much looking forward to both! In the last few weeks, the third corona wave has also reached Armenia, but we still hope that the first project can take place in June, regular corona tests for all participants included.

## Further education Arts and International Cooperation



*Poster for a music project of the Tunisian Kamel Lazaar Foundation*

In the beginning of this year, we were not sure whether this year's CAS course 'Arts and International Cooperation – Collaborating in Fragile Contexts and in Processes of Peacebuilding', which we designed, would find enough participants under the current conditions. About half of them would be coming from abroad, but the travel situation was still difficult and there is a fee for the course. Now, however, with the support of the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), it became clear: the further education course will take place! Its first module at the end of June will be a 'hybrid', i.e., on site and on the internet, and for the second module a study trip to art initiatives in Tunisia is planned in autumn. The Kamel Lazaar Foundation, from whose music project '#Système Derdba' the picture above is taken, is one of the organisations we will visit. We will report to you in the fall newsletter!

If you live in Zurich, there is one request that we would like to make now: For 24–28 June we are still looking for hosts for some course participants in Zurich. Please contact us if you can provide a room!

By the way: There are still two places available for the CAS course. More Information on our website.



## Online course for activists from African countries



*Left-hand drawings: an introductory warm up exercise in the Tanaghom online course*

One of the graduates of the last CAS course, Doaa Abdeen from Cairo, dedicated her thesis to the development of an online course on art and peacebuilding for artists and activists from African countries. At the beginning of this year, the first course took place, and together with former staff member Maja Leo, artasfoundation was able to contribute to it. Poor internet connections, cell phones instead of computer screens, coordination across different time zones and time concepts: it was not easy. And it also became clear how the privilege of good internet access creates new inequalities. Equalities, on the other hand, were found on another level: when asked what kind of music they like to listen to, the participants from the different African countries pointed to early songs by Bob Dylan, or John Lennon and Yoko Ono: to please us, perhaps?

Now, with the support of the Canadian organisation She Builds Peace and with inputs from artasfoundation, Doaa's initiative will be continued with a workshop in physical space. The online course will be used for the participant's preparation.

## Art as a means in peace mediation?



Taryn Simon, 'Memorandum of Understanding Between the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Geovernment of Australia Relating to the Settlement of Refugees in Cambodia, Ministry of Interior, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, September 26, 2014', from the Series 'Paperwork and the Will of Capital', 2015

In 2015, when the British artist Taryn Simon became interested in signings of political agreements or treaties, where 'powerful men flank floral centerpieces curated to convey the importance of the signatories and the institutions they represent', she decided to botanically analyse, recreate and photograph these flower arrangements. While enjoying her work, our own interest in political agreements goes in another direction: We are inquiring whether artists could support political mediators in the very processes of negotiation that would lead to such accords. In this, we just received a mandate from the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs to organise a series of seven webinar discussions between artists and mediators who want to explore the possibilities of such collaborations. While the first exchange compared the ways, in which two guests – a poet and a diplomat – use language, the upcoming webinar will focus on the issue of creating trust.

## Therapeutic work in art lessons



*Tina Chkheidze and Asta Kvadzba work with children from socially disadvantaged families at the Panorama Center in Sukhum/i. Both teachers will participate in the art therapy training. Photo: Nasta Agrba*

A group of art teachers from Abkhazia<sup>1</sup> had asked whether artasfoundation could organise a further education course on art therapy for them. They work in schools and social services centers with children whose families suffer from alcoholism, drug addiction and unemployment – sadly typical issues of the post-war Abkhazia. We were very happy that this initiative was formed by the teachers themselves, who were eager to gain new skills. We suggested a training in intermodal therapy, a well-known practice of working with psychological trauma. At the moment, we are collaborating with Nasta Agrba, a cultural manager from Abkhazia, to prepare two training workshops on art therapy by international professionals and a year-long web-support to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability. The participants will then include the gained knowledge into their daily curriculum and also pass it on to their colleagues (train the trainers approach).

We have got everything ready and are just waiting for the support of a donor to then give it a go and make art work!

## An owl in the office



Photo: Sandra Suter

Because of the corona safety measures much of the work of artasfoundation had to shift into virtual space. During the last year we experimented with virtual and semi-virtual formats. Discussions in the *artasfoundation* office were joined by participants via zoom. This way we were able to welcome discussion partners from the countries in which we realise our projects, which turned out to be a whole new opportunity.

Based on the positive experience, we decided to continue with a mixed form of discussion rounds in the future. We are using a so-called Meeting Owl with a 360° camera, which ensures that everyone present in the office can also be seen online. And we are already planning further online projects to get people talking to each other – even across the borders of hostile states.



## Bags for artasfoundation



Photo: Lena Good

Our projects in Abkhazia<sup>1</sup> and Armenia are finally in the starting blocks. Those projects are possible thanks to your generous support: private donors, along with contributions from other institutions and foundations, make up a large part of our budget. Many thanks to all of you who have already donated this year! In this context we can make you a very special offer. Student Lena Good wrote to us this spring:

*'My name is Lena, I am 19 years old and I study International Relations in Geneva. As I am interested in Switzerland and the world, I am concerned with conflicts and wars – and I also feel the urge not only to understand, but also to do something for people in need. That's why I sew and sell bags for artasfoundation.'*

The self-sewn bags cost CHF 25 each. Lena takes 5 CHF for her work and the material costs and donates the remaining 20 (or more) CHF to artasfoundation. Thank you very much, dear Lena, for this initiative! Please send your orders with the amount you would like to donate to: [lena.good@bluewin.ch](mailto:lena.good@bluewin.ch)

And if you don't need a bag, but still would like to donate, here are our bank details:  
Artas Foundation, Raiffeisen Bank, 8001 Zurich, IBAN: CH78 8080 8006 3681 9381 2

<sup>1</sup> 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.