

artasfoundation Circular November 2022



Photo: Julien Fehlmann

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Dear friends of *artasfoundation*

What can contributing to peaceful coexistence through art in conflict regions mean in concrete terms in the war and crisis in Eastern Europe? The attack by Russian troops on Ukraine and the resulting dire war also challenges the political settlements in the Caucasus. In Armenia and Georgia, where we were active with projects this autumn, the situation is also far from stable as fighting flared up again between Armenia and Azerbaijan in September. In the streets of Tbilisi, Yerevan or Gyumri, we observe countless young people who have arrived from Russia. They look bewildered, staring at their mobile phones or computers in cafés. In Armenia, the locals hardly believe what they see: 'Instead of the usual imperial hubris, we now see claimants: Russians queue from 5 AM for naturalisation in Armenia!' In Georgia, Ukrainian flags are everywhere and trust in the government is low, just like in Armenia.

For our projects in Armenia, the resurgence of border clashes has meant daily weighing: The planned workshops take place in safe locations, but the participants come from the frontier region with Azerbaijan. Was it quiet in their villages in the last few days? Will they be open to artistic activity in such tense circumstances? Will the parents of participants accept to send their children to a workshop in a safer place or will they prefer to keep the family united at home? Will we be able to provide a glimmer of hope for young people at such a sombre time? We have gained experience with art initiatives post-conflict and to prevent violence. But what if violence is imminent or, in some cases, already underway? Deciding whether an art initiative makes sense here is a tricky balancing act. Opting to cancel, postpone or try amounts to walking a tightrope. This remains true even though we can rely on a good local network and trusted people.

So far, our decisions have paid off: We postponed one workshop and held three others (see the reports below). With very few exceptions, all registered participants took part in our programmes and resolutely engaged in artistic work. In the process, joy, laughter and togetherness emerged in spite of the worrisome climate. However, the question remains: Where to draw the line? Where can art nurture and where shall it leave fear and survival take precedence? Grappling with this conundrum has become our daily routine!

With our warmest regards in these challenging times.

The *artasfoundation* team

Dagmar Reichert, Julien Fehlmann, Sandra Suter
and our new colleague Mara Züst

Ukraine Youth Jazz Band: Internships in Switzerland



Photo: Julien Fehlmann

Late March, after the attack by Russian troops on Ukraine, we welcomed sixteen young musicians from a Ukrainian jazz band in Bern. In partnership with the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, we organised a music education programme in which the young people could study at the Swiss Jazz School and improve their skills with renowned local artists as part of a series of workshops. It was an intense period for the young musicians, and they enjoyed a well-earned rest during the sweltering Summer. As the new semester started, some students had to return to Ukraine to resume their studies while others are staying in Switzerland to continue their journey at the Swiss Jazz School and the University of the Arts of Bern. For these students, we are currently preparing the possibility of an internship at different organisations specialised in music therapy. We hope to open a new window for the young musicians from Ukraine, which they might find useful when returning to their homeland.

<https://www.artasfoundation.ch/en/project/ukraine-music-residency>

Building Bridges Between Dance Traditions



Photo: Dagmar Reichert

There was a magical moment in the recent dance project *Wishing Wishes* in Dilijan, Armenia. The 24 young people – girls and boys aged 12 to 17 – danced to warm up, danced to soft and wild music, their arms raised in smooth motions, circling each other in twisting movements, rhythms in their legs, and laughter on their faces. They had completed four workshops with the Swiss dancers and choreographers Meret Schlegel and Kilian Haselbeck, their dance teachers from the border villages of Berd, Ayrum and Koghb, the two musicians of the band Tiezerk from Yerevan, the interpreter Stella Loretsyan, and the founders of the Mihr dance company Shoghakat Mlke-Galstyan and her brother Tsolak. Everyone was now dancing together. A special moment of coming together across socially defined differences, whether age or nationality.

Mara Züst

P.S.: Due to the tense political situation, we did not hold performances in the home villages of the young people, but arranged a bus service for friends and family members to the performances in Dilijan and Yerevan. These performances were a complete success. The young people presented the piece with great self-confidence, which combined elements of traditional Armenian dance and improvised contemporary dance spiced up with personal touches by the participants. The audience was enthusiastic.

<https://www.artasfoundation.ch/en/project/wishing-wishes>

Supporting Quality Education in Public Schools



Photo: Céline Brunko

How big the difference is between the poor and the rich in a „poor country“ can be seen when visiting different schools. In September, as part of an exchange project for art education students from Georgia and Switzerland, we visited one of the very expensive and well-equipped private schools in the city of Tbilisi as well as several public schools. While we were shocked by the conformist and profit-oriented climate of the private school, what became clear was the unflinching commitment it takes for teachers to ensure a good education in ill-equipped public schools. As part of the project, twenty art education students from Switzerland (universities of Basel, Lucerne, and Zurich) and Georgia developed art lessons that they delivered at public schools in Tbilisi. The intensive two-week programme in Georgia was complemented by visits to exhibitions and lectures. Next February, the Georgian students will travel to Switzerland for the final workshop at the University of Lucerne.

<https://www.artasfoundation.ch/en/project/kulturelle-bildung-inter-kulturell>

Synergies with Zurich University of the Arts



Photo: Bettina Ganz

The Centre for Art and Peacebuilding (CAP) was founded in 2020 by *artasfoundation* and the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) to give the long-established partnership a formal framework. Now the COVID-19 pandemic is over, we are meeting employees from various departments of the ZHdK and representatives of its student organisation to develop an offer for the CAP with the International Office of the University. Doing so, the CAP builds on existing collaborations between *artasfoundation* and ZHdK such as the CAS *Arts and International Cooperation* and various exchange projects with students in the South Caucasus. The lively exchanges have shown that the range of topics that concern our foundation is also being worked on in different ways at the ZHdK. Our aim is to consolidate the information that we have gathered so far by the end of the year. Two different needs seem to emerge: a mentoring offer for members of the university who are planning a cooperation project in conflict-affected regions and a network to exchange best practices.

<https://www.zhdk.ch/en/international/center-for-art-and-peacebuilding-cap-8313>

An Exceptional Art Teachers' Retreat in Armenia



Photo: Andrea Wolfensberger

The August sun was blazing when our team, made of visual artists, teachers, and partners from the Armenian State Pedagogical University, drove to a Soviet-style guesthouse. There, 40 elementary school art teachers from the country's periphery studied a diversity of art-teaching and art-making approaches. In effect, in some remote regions, qualified art teachers are in short supply. The project, therefore, aimed at enriching the teachers' art lessons through a continuing education programme. During the first workshop, new friendships were made, inspiration had been running both ways, and a few weeks later, everybody would convene again for the second part of the project. Then, in mid-September, fightings with Azerbaijan reignited again creating creeping uncertainty. Despite all odds, we could run the programme as planned since it took place far away from the conflict zone. The participants' mood was a blend of relief to be in safety mixed with worries about what was happening at home. As more and more art was created, however, smiles turned into sincere laughter, and we all felt that our work here was meaningful.

Lessons Learned Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

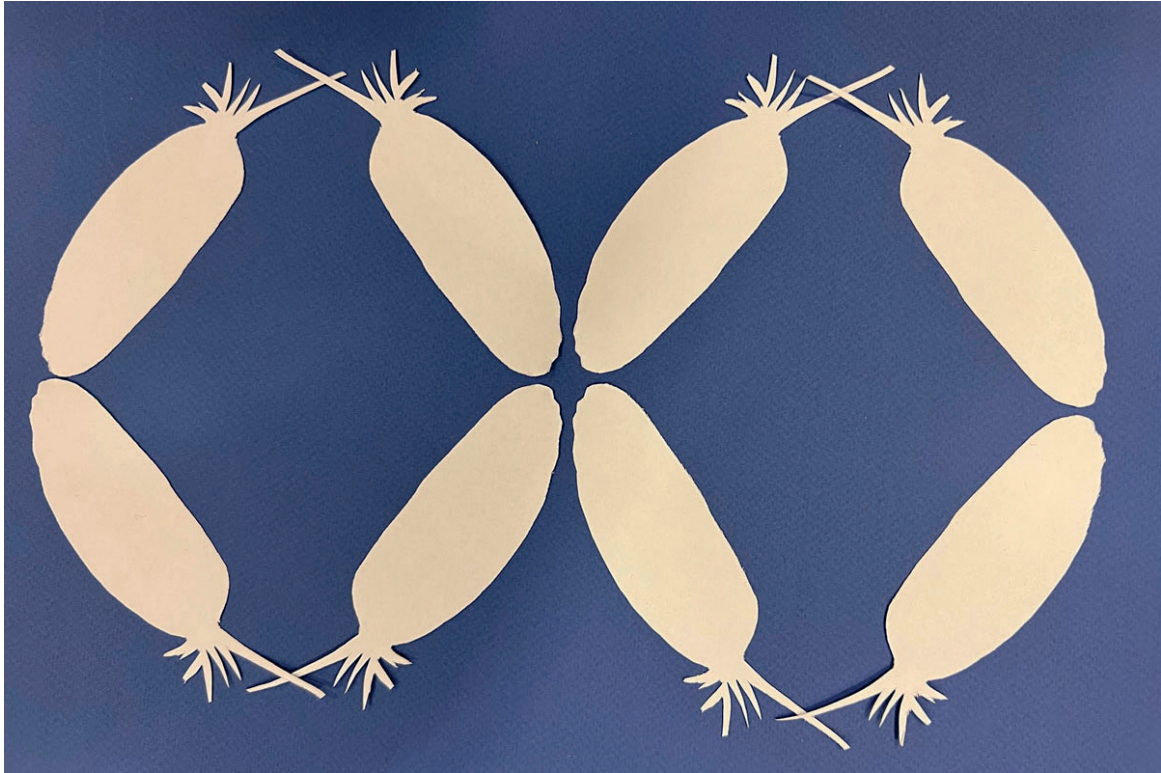


Photo: Martin Brun

In recent months, a project supported by the Canton of Zurich gave us the opportunity to reflect on and test the general relevance of the possibilities of virtual communication for the Foundation's work, which we were forced to resort to during the Corona pandemic. The focus was on the possibility of supplementing projects carried out in conflict-affected regions with regular online mentoring. We also tested the creation of an internet platform that allows for exchange among artists who cannot meet face-to-face because of political conflicts. Ensuring the security of such online space became a key focal point for us. A positive outcome we did not foresee was that the project opened the opportunity for us to use virtual communication in the office as well as for more egalitarian cooperation with trusted partners abroad. This is an ongoing process. Yet, however useful avenues technology permits, face-to-face encounters remain indispensable for us!

Invitation to a Discussion and Exhibition



The exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur also features Gerhard Richter's painting 'Bomber' from 1963.

Despite the current war situation in Eastern Europe, we were able to carry out our projects this autumn with only minor adjustments. We would like to tell you what we have learned in the process and invite you to join us on **19 November 2022 at 14.30 at the Art Museum of Winterthur**, where the exhibition „War in Art“ is currently taking place. It covers a selection of artworks from the Renaissance to the present that question the relationship between art and war not through propagandistic battle paintings but through a 'reflection of the unrepresentable'. The event will start with a guided tour with the exhibition curator followed by a conversation about our work during an aperitif in the foyer of the museum. We look forward to a relaxed exchange with you in which we will discuss your questions and ideas!

https://www.kmw.ch/en/exhibitions/war_in_art/