



Bridging the Gap The Jewish-Arab Art Program 2013/14 Report

The Israel Museum's Youth Wing is about to complete another successful year of "Bridging the Gap". This important art program, initiated by the Ruth Youth Wing for Art Education in 1995, has been supported by the German Friends of the Israel Museum since 2010. Through the German Friends' active and generous support, the program has become a great success, both in terms of artistic quality and in its ability to create opportunities for dialogue between Arab and Jewish youth in Israel.

Program for the Current Year

Introduction

During the 2013/14 school year, 92 sixth and eighth grade Arab and Jewish schoolchildren from throughout Jerusalem took part in the program, divided into three groups of six graders and one of eighth graders. Each age group had a curriculum tailored to the maturity and characteristics of their age-group. At the outset, in September and October 2013, we met with school principals, teachers, parents, and administrators. Prior to September, we had formed a select group of students based on two major criteria:

- a) A demonstrated curiosity and commitment to dialogue with the "Other"
- b) An interest in and a motivation to create art

Children from both communities have seldom experienced meeting the "other" in person. For the most part, the Museum encounters constitute the first opportunity for the participants to meet children of their age from the other community. Therefore, most arrive at the first encounter with the beliefs, perspectives, and attitudes about the "other" that they have received from their parents, exposed to at school, or acquired through the local media.

Program Curriculum

November 2013: This year's program began in November 2013. The opening session was designed for children, parents, and teachers together. After the program was introduced, they visited the *ArTricks* exhibition on display, received a guided tour through the galleries and then participated in "Getting to Know You" activities. The children were introduced through games and fun activities to diminish the feeling of strangeness or awkward sensation often characterizing initial meeting with people from unfamiliar backgrounds. Toward the end of the month they embarked on a joint creative workshop where they painted their names on personalized shirts.



Sixth grade group

December 2013: Initial art exercises for individuals and pairs, guided tours of Museum exhibitions, and conversations about art in order to foster dialogue and exchange between participants. The younger age group explored the theme of masks and visited the African Art gallery. They were given the opportunity to choose one mask they especially liked and sketch its likeness at the gallery. Then they returned to the classrooms and created their own masks made of plasticine (as seen here). Throughout this time, while working together they found cross-cultural commonalities and shared interests.

January-February 2014: The younger groups were divided into mixed pairs so they could begin to learn to work together, and to foster dialogue and intimacy between them. We worked on a series of creative projects, such as casting masks from plaster. This encouraged students to get to know each other as individuals, and not merely as representatives of a certain group. This task required touching and feeling each other's faces, while casting the plaster, in a long and slow process. This closeness encouraged the creation of a very intimate friendship and the strengthening of their personal ties. It

forced them to overcome the barriers children often surrounded themselves when encountering the unknown "other".

During this time, the older age group began discussing the concepts of "togetherness" by working in mixed groups. The children were asked to create a three dimensional house from plasticine and cardboard where they can live together. Subsequently, they had to think of a national house for all of us to share. This taught the participants to work together, and conveyed the message that all of us can create a shared space where different individuals have a safe zone for all. Afterwards they were asked to imagine place that can house the entire nation.



A plasticine mask created by a participant

March 2014: A trip to Jaffa was organized, where all the children enjoyed a bilingual play on the theme of friendship by the Arab-Hebrew Theater which dealt with the theme of cross-cultural friendship. The next session brought the youngsters to the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo where they observed the animals and learned how to paint and draw the complex images. The group outing gave the children a comfortable surroundings to socialize. Here they also began working on a new theme devoted to animals, as preparation for the final project which was to create a Noah's Ark.

April-May 2014: Developing the concepts of "togetherness" by working in mixed groups, and planning the final project. The end-of-year artistic project was a summation of all they have worked on throughout the year. The six graders created an ark for all the different animals to live in harmony. The ark was chosen as a space where all must learn to get along and put aside their differences. The older groups' final project appealed to their creativity as they were given the task of expressing the ideal town, a place where they would want to spend their lives.

June 2014: The completion of the program was marked with an end-of-year celebratory event overlooking the year with the participation of the children's parents. The younger group was thrilled to host this year a number of the Museum's friends from around the world, led by Ms. Sonja Lahnstein, head of the Israel Museum's German Friends. This presented an excellent opportunity for the program's staff and participating parents to express their gratitude to the German friends for their support.

Staff

The 6th grade group was taught by Arab artists/teachers Abu Baker Nasreen and Ruwar Abu El Hawaa and by Jewish artists/teachers Yael Rubin and Ayala Landau and Anat Bar'el. The translators were, Hasnin Ranya, Alian Safa, and Alian Dua. The grade 8th grade group was taught by Arab group instructor Siwar Masarwe and by Jewish artist/teacher, Yael Rubin. The entire program was led by Eldad Sha'altiel, Senior Curator of Art Courses at the Ruth Youth Wing for Art Education.



The large scaled "Noah's Ark" created as the final project

Plans for next year

In 2014-2015 the "Bridging the Gap" program will be celebrating twenty years, and we plan to continue the same successful format that has marked these past two decades. For the next academic year, we will welcome four new groups; two for children in the sixth grade and two for eighth graders. The Program's curriculum will be enriched with special tours and new workshops developing the topic of co-existence inspired by the new exhibitions honoring the Museum's 50th anniversary. Additionally, we plan to hold a national conference on the topic of education and co-existence. Our idea is to invite relevant groups from throughout Israel who deal with various artistic mediums: for example, mixed Arab-Jewish youth theater groups and musical bands as well as other special mixed youth groups. We intend to offer in this conference a stage for these special initiatives, and an opportunity for discussion about the challenges that confront us.