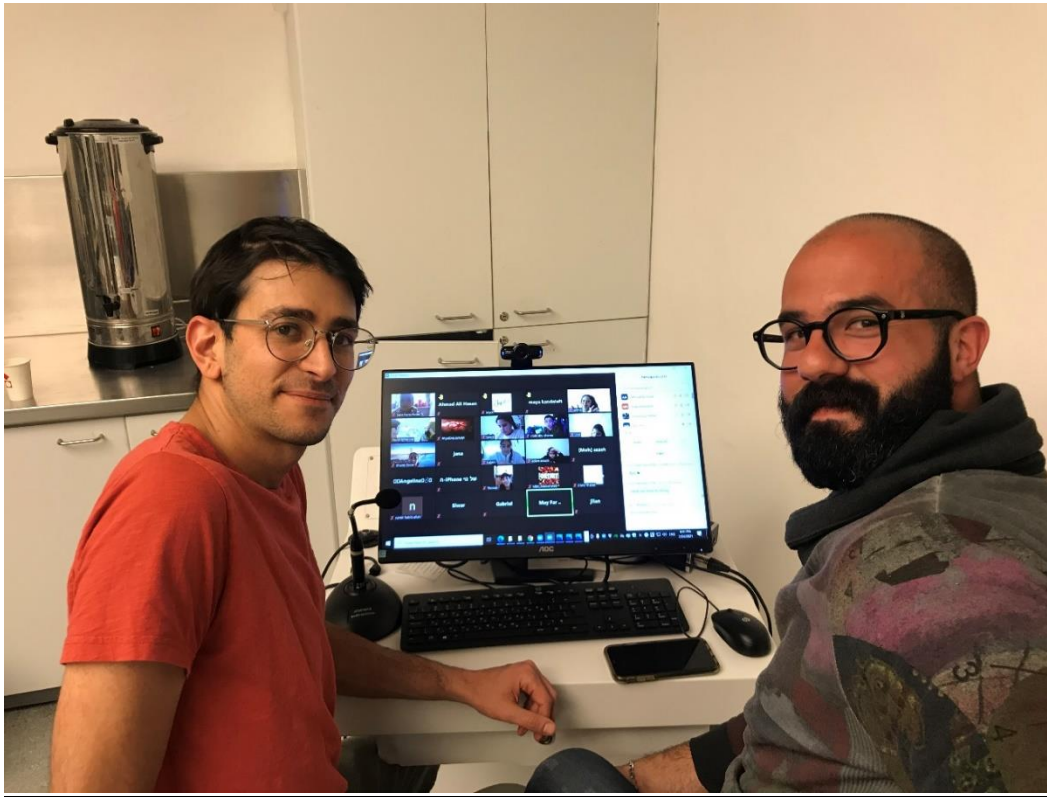


The Israel Museum, Jerusalem



**Bridging the Gap:
A “Shared Life” Program of the
Ruth Youth Wing for Art Education**



**Report to the Museum in Germany
for the 2020/21 School Year**

July 2021

About the Israel Museum

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, is Israel's foremost cultural institution and one of the world's leading encyclopedic museums with wide-ranging collections of art and archaeology of world-class status, numbering some 500,000 objects. Its three curatorial wings – Archaeology; Jewish Art and Life; and Fine Arts – offer a dynamic program of some 20 new exhibitions a year, and a rich annual program of publications, educational activities, and special cultural events which reach out to every sector of the population, attracting close to one million visitors annually.

www.imj.org.il

About the Ruth Youth Wing for Art Education

The Museum's educational arm, the Ruth Youth Wing for Art Education is renowned internationally as a model for art education in a museum setting, providing a dynamic and diverse program of exhibitions, activities, and special events intended to deepen the connection between the Museum and the public. The Youth Wing aims to make the Museum accessible and enjoyable for visitors from all walks of life, carrying an inclusive educational and cultural message to all sectors of the population, regardless of age, background, religion, ethnicity, or special needs. Its innovative programs cater to more than 100,000 children annually from schools and communities throughout Israel.

The Bridging the Gap Program: Introduction

The Museum's "Shared Life" programs include the flagship **Bridging the Gap** project which brings Arab and Jewish youth together to work on joint art projects. As its name suggests, **Bridging the Gap**, which is generously supported by our German Friends, utilizes the universal language of art to bring disparate groups together who might not otherwise meet in their everyday life. Arab and Jewish youth meet in the Museum's galleries and art studios, and work together on joint art projects. All meetings, held in a welcoming, friendly, and safe manner, are conducted in both Hebrew and Arabic. The combination of a warm and safe environment, and a prolonged period of time to explore art and creativity together, fosters mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance.

2020/21 Program Overview

This year too, the program met with several challenges as a result of the continuing effects of the COVID-19 crisis, including a delay in the opening of the program due to the Museum being closed. Happily, after being closed for much of 2020, the Museum reopened on March 2, 2021. The "Bridging the Gap" Program was able to reopen on February 17, 2021, even ahead of the reopening of the Museum to the public, with the program taking place remotely by Zoom.

This year we offered the program for three age groups: Fifth Graders on Wednesday afternoons, from 3:00 pm until 5:00 pm; and Sixth Graders on Wednesday evenings, from 5:00 pm until 7:00 pm. Eighth Graders met on Thursday afternoons, from 3:00 pm until 5:00 pm.

Our main obstacle this year was recruiting participants – from both Jewish and Arab schools in Jerusalem. Originally, the elementary schools that took part in the program were the Hebrew-speaking Agron and Keshet Schools, and the Arabic-speaking American School in Beit Hanina. At the opening date, there were 10 Jewish and 36 Arab elementary school pupils.

The junior high schools that participated in the program were the Hebrew-speaking Arts School, and the Arabic-speaking American School in Beit Hanina. At the start of the program, there were 13 junior high students from the Jewish sector and 5 students from the Arab sector.

Our goal was to provide a total of 12 sessions for each group. Due to the prevailing circumstances vis-à-vis the COVID-19 pandemic, we decided to operate the program via Zoom.

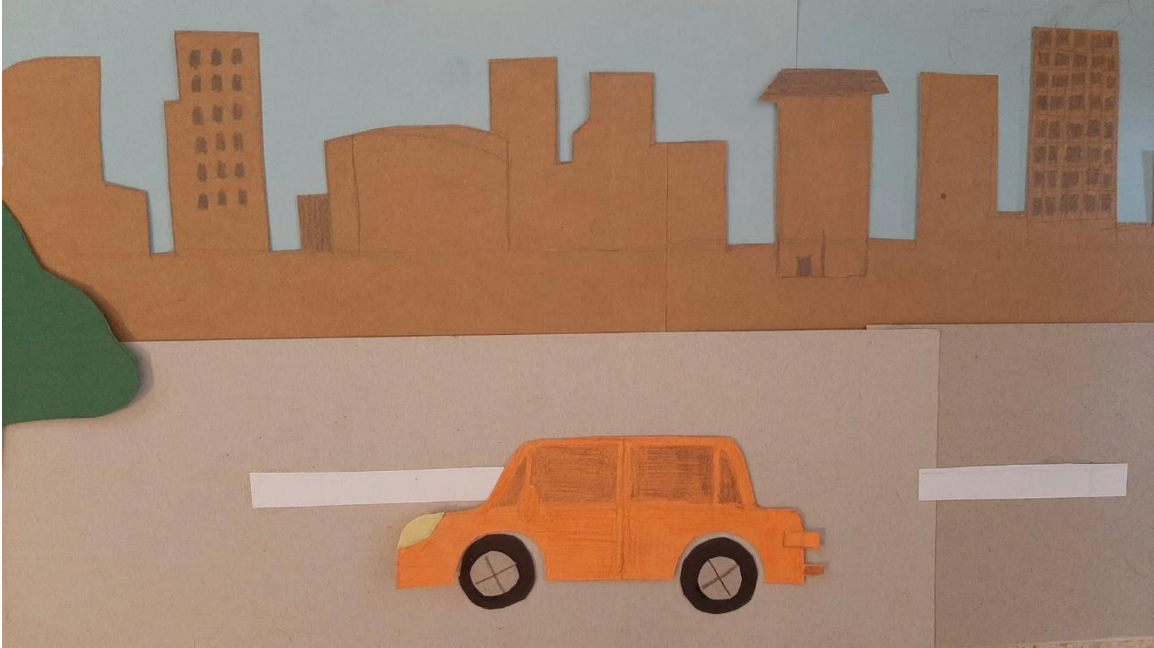
The Teaching Staff

The teachers of the program were both graduates of the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem: **Naser Hatab**, a Photography graduate, and **Daniel Cohen**, a Screen Arts graduate, both of whom are active artists.

The Curriculum

The curriculum of the remote learning program on Zoom was implemented as planned. The first classes focused on the participants becoming personally acquainted with each other. Since a physical meeting was not possible due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 crisis, our inventive and resourceful teachers instructed the students to take photographs of the inside and outside of their own homes as a visual and personal introduction (Lessons 1-3).

In the following sessions, the participants learned how to use special stop-motion software – called “Stop Motion Studio” – and as an initial tutorial, edited a short animated video of a worm made from Play-doh (Lesson 4). Lesson 5 focused on combining photography with animation, with the students preparing an animated video of a hand picking a flower. After mastering the software, the students applied what they learned to creating an animated video clip about a driving car (Lessons 6-7).



Two major religious holidays – Passover and Ramadan – took place during the month of April. After the vacations and celebrations ended, the students returned to the program. However, during the military conflict that occurred from May 10 to May 21, the schools were closed and the situation caused considerable tension between Arabs and Jews in Israel.

The Fifth and Sixth Graders continued to meet on a regular basis apart from the period of cancellation due to the conflict. Thereafter, the number of participants drastically declined, as can be seen from the attached table. This decline can be explained by a combination of the political climate, as well as pandemic-related fatigue of digital/remote learning by the students in these age groups who were almost the last to return to physical learning in school and therefore suffered from social and emotional regression. We reached out personally to each participant, urging them to return to the program, but this proved only partially successful. One positive effect of the Zoom meetings was the intimacy and exposure of the home and family environment revealed on-screen by the participants.

In the final session, there was a total of six participants: 4 Arab and 2 Jewish. Despite the low number of participants, we believe the program can be considered a success by its very existence in such a challenging year. The children who participated in the final conversation expressed their wish to participate in the project next year as well. Education is all about hope, and therefore even this small manifestation of optimism and desire for coexistence among the next generation is something to emphasize and be proud of.

The Eighth Grade group did not resume its meetings after the Passover and Ramadan festivals. Regrettably, all of our outreach efforts and actions did not help in this case, but we remain optimistic for the future.



Summary

- We were able to carry out this year's program despite the enormous challenges we faced vis-à-vis the Coronavirus crisis on the one hand, and the conflict in Gaza on the other. Under such circumstances, we consider the very fact that we were able to implement the program a great success in and of itself.
- The decision to move the entire program to a digital platform proved itself and enabled the program to take place. The Zoom classes enabled the participants to become familiar with the interior of the participants' private homes and to get to know other family members, such as parents and siblings, which added an important level to the friendship between them. The use of Zoom made it possible to continue the program even during the fasting period of Ramadan.
- The decision to continue the program after the military conflict was extremely important, conveying to the participating students the message that coexistence and dialogue are an alternative to violence.
- The integration of a new school in the program initially resulted in an additional number of participants (36), but more than half of them later dropped out.
- The hiatus in the program during the spring break and Passover, together with the political tension and fatigue from Zoom classes, led to a dramatic drop in the number of participants in the program after the schools reopened physically.

- We were unable to continue with the Eighth Grade group. It will probably be necessary to revise the way we reach out to them if we wish continue with this age group in the future.
- The prevailing political situation makes it very difficult to recruit participants to the program, as seen by the fact that just before the start of the program, the students of the Silwan School withdrew from the program, although we were able to recruit the Beit Hanina School at the last minute.

Towards the Future

As previously mentioned, this was a particularly challenging year, and there are signs that next year will also have its challenges. Towards next year, we have already contacted the partnering schools from last year and from previous years in order to create a suitable dynamic for the continuation of the program. This is already producing results: for example, the Yafe Nof School, which did not participate in the activity last year, has already announced that it will return and join the activity next year. Next year we will also return to working with elementary school students and it already seems that working with them will be more successful next year. We are cautiously optimistic that the prevailing health and security situation will allow us to return to the full scope of activity that we had in past (pre-Corona) years.

Thank you!

We would like to express our deepest appreciation once again for the ongoing support and encouragement of our German Friends that enables this important program to take place and contributes to coexistence and understanding among children and their families in Jerusalem.