

EXHIBITION GUIDELINES

Dear Exhibition Organiser,

Here is a run down of the most common issues around setting up the "Loss of Innocence - Art from the Children of Gaza" Exhibition:

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

The Exhibition comprises about 50 pictures, drawn, painted or crayoned by children in Gaza, some immediately after, or even during the Assault by Israel on Gaza over the New Year 2008/9, and some drawn a little later. The later pictures were either drawn as part of a programme of Psycho-Social Help for the Traumatized Children, or by children who were specifically asked by me to set out their feelings for the benefit of Westerners understanding.

The pictures show the idealised life that children have of life in a peaceful Gaza, and panel by panel shows the assault develop, the deaths and trauma, and the aftermath, culminating in expressions of Resistance, and what we can do to help - make contact and show that their suffering has not gone unnoticed.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

I went to Gaza in 1970, before settling down to the usual family life in England. But the constantly deteriorating situation eventually drove me back to Gaza on the second FreeGaza Boat, and then again after the Invasion on the overland convoy that arrived in early March. I realised that it was not really enough to go there and show solidarity - although it is a lot, and warmly loved by Gazans. What is necessary is to get the reality of life in Gaza out to ordinary folk in the UK, and I resolved to do this by collecting pictures by children, since they have a raw emotion, simple to understand, whether they are 'Works of Art', in a western Sense, or not.

In the two months that I was there on that occasion, I became more involved in the trauma management side of life, and the peeling back of the extremely friendly, polite and hospitable exterior of almost all Gazans, convinced me that this was an aspect of Israel's punishment of Gaza that must be shown, and that the kids pictures would do it best.

I filled a large van with Art, but was not allowed to take it out of the country by the Egyptian Authorities, and so I simply carried what I could, and the Exhibition and its commentary, are the result.

SO, WHO IS ROD COX THEN?

I first spent a year in Israel to escape a failed marriage, because I knew that I could work on a Kibbutz or elsewhere. But arriving in 1970, I was also able to take extensive trips through newly occupied Gaza, Sinai and the West Bank. I also saw the hierarchy of treatment of Kibbutz workers, being Israeli, free foreign labour, and last the heavy manual labourers who were all Arabs. I spent happy days debating politics in Dizengoff, Tel Aviv's smart cafe area, and was surprised at the wide diversity of Jewish opinion - there were many who agreed with me that the Arabs treatment was poor, but compared to what I found when I eventually returned to the West Bank in 2003 to set up an overland trade route for Olive Oil, it was paradise.

In the West Bank, a docile population toiled without resistance under a light touch Israel Occupation, and except in Jerusalem, I had not heard of a settlement, nor a road block. What

was there when I returned: roads destroyed or commandeered for Israeli only use; main routes being forced across fields to get round such closures; the impossibility of actually getting between most towns in a single vehicle; and the constant creeping dispossession of Arabs by (often American) Jewish Settlers in 'illegal' settlements that were nevertheless protected by police and the ubiquitous army against attempts by the original inhabitants to reclaim their land; these all made me realise that Israel was not occupying to maintain calm on its borders, but to steal land.

To get some high profile personnel to the UK I invited the Palestine National Youth Football Team to England, and set up several games, including at Blackburn Rovers, but the British Government refused to grant visas, saying that the Israelis would not allow them back in, and they would become refugees. So when the opportunity arose to go to Gaza, I was determined to go. Gaza had always been worse than the West Bank, and I was arrested twice in 1970, just for being in that area, even though there was no siege at the time.

The City has grown since then. Every Refugee camp is now a tall housing estate, the population being one of the very densest in the world. Many people have told the story of Gaza in facts: deaths, bad water, siege, imprisonment, medicine, but I hope that I have chosen a way that touches the hearts of those who see it, and more than that, that it will inspire them to change what they see.

WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL ISSUES WITH STAGING THE EXHIBITION?

The exhibition pictures are on a variety of paper, including computer print-out, but they are all laminated for protection. However, their fragility means that it is inadvisable to constantly instal and re-install them, so they are all strongly fixed by velcro to 11 Exhibition boards that are 1 metre wide, by 2 metres tall. These boards are click-fitted together, and are self supporting, so long as there is more than one. They arrive numbered and so can be snapped together in minutes in the correct order. A twelfth board carries a list of dead children.

When packing the Exhibition, the boards should be transported each face up, with a sheet of fabric in between, and it is important that the boards do not slide over each other in transit, so as to avoid tearing the pictures. They have been travelling constantly for over a year now, and have survived well.

Travelling with the exhibition is a DVD of two of the artists' - Mohanned and Ibrahim's - interviews, and an insight into the psycho-social attention they receive. This is ten minutes long, and is programmed to automatically loop endlessly. The venue will need to provide equipment to play this, usually a lap top or similar size on a table in front of the middle board (6), at a volume that is easily audible there, but not overloud elsewhere.

Some galleries have played the DVD on a large screen, and have grouped the panels in triangles, or squares. Options depend on the size and shape of your venue, and the artistic resources at your disposal.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS?

Each venue must pay the cost of transport from the last venue (a moveable feast) and that is all. Rod Cox will speak about the Art for about an hour at an opening or similar, and in that case train fares are due, plus bed and food as required. The panels are too big to fit any car, and need a people carrier or transit van. The organisers can arrange transport for the cost of van hire plus petrol, plus being nice to the van driver, who isn't getting paid by anyone. But if you have your

own (clean) van, that will almost certainly be cheaper, and if you arrange a tour in a neighbouring area, then perhaps you can share the costs more widely.

There are posters for sale with the Exhibition, £10 each, and if a venue sells ten they cost £80 only. The posters travel with the Exhibition, please take care of them, and they circulate on an honesty basis.

CAN YOU HELP ME PUBLICISE IT?

There is no substitute for local people working with their local press, and especially with MPs, MEPs or MSPs or AMs (we haven't been to Ireland yet). PSC nationally do not respond to lists of events, having other priorities, but there are many email lists and so forth. There is a leaflet on our website which you can download and print; the address is below. Hidden behind the image, if you click on it, is also a ten minute video of me talking about the Exhibition on the first day it was set up. We can let you have some of the images to make up posters, and we would like you to take some photos and feed back to us.

FINALLY: Schools are sometimes receptive, and sometimes not, but we would always like to work with young people. It is our failure that despite touring well in the UK, we have not managed to generate any lasting links with Gaza. Many people want to send pictures from the UK, but there is no-one who can use them on receipt, unless preparatory work in making a more permanent link is done first. A link between schools involving the Children would be the right context into which to send some UK children's Art.

Hope that is helpful, and good luck.

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