

Empowering the Next Generation of Creative Leaders in Gaza

Progress Report – March 2020

Introduction

About Dar Al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture

Accredited as a College granting two year diploma degrees in 2006, the Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture was reaccredited in 2013 by the ministry of Higher Education as a University College with programs leading to BA degrees. The only one of its kind in Palestine, then and now, the main focus of the Dar al-Kalima University College is the visual and performing arts as well as culture.

In a country with limited natural resources, Palestine's human resources are its most valuable capital. Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture, through a comprehensive system of human resource development that reflects Palestine's emerging needs, equips its youth with vital skills for the 21st century job market. It is our vision that most of the country's future artists, musicians, actors, journalists, IT professionals, tour guides, film makers and skilled technicians are alumni of the College.

Dar al-Kalima University College envisions equipping young people with academic and vocational skills as well as providing much needed jobs immediately. Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture provides young Palestinians with access to academic training that meets international standards in the fields of its specializations. In addition, the University College focuses on the standards necessary to compete internationally. By creating a forum where young Palestinians can study with people from different religious and cultural backgrounds, the University College actively promotes tolerance and respect for the thinking and beliefs of others, and encourages dynamic communication and the establishment of a professional network among actors, tour guides, film makers, musicians, and artists from Palestine and the rest of the world.

The Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture is dedicated to providing quality education that meets the social, cultural, and economic needs of Palestine. Through establishing an institution for higher learning, the Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture is committed to building a culture of democracy and free expression, thus contributing to the strengthening of civil society in Palestine.

The Context of Gaza

The Gaza Strip is home to 2 million Palestinian and is regarded as one of the world's most population dense geographic areas with 5,204 persons/km². Palestinians in Gaza have been living in an open-air prison since 2007 with Israel denying them free access to the remainder of the occupied Palestinian territory and therefore travel to anywhere else in the world.

Movement restrictions imposed by Israel since the early 1990's and intensified in June 2007, following the takeover of Gaza by Hamas, have severely undermined the socio economic and living conditions of Gazans. The isolation of Gaza has been exacerbated by restrictions imposed by the Egyptian authorities on the Rafah crossing as well as by the internal Palestinian divide. This blockade and related restrictions are against international humanitarian law as they target and impose collective punishment on the civilian population of Gaza. Major escalation of hostilities in the past years have resulted in extensive destruction within the Gaza Strip and internal displacement, in addition to furthering the collapse of the economy and worsening the living conditions. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) reported that unemployment is at its highest rate in Gaza reaching 52% in 2018. Fuel shortage restricts power supply within the Gaza Strip allowing for a very restricted power supply schedule that can be at times limited to 4 hours every 24 hours. The best case scenario for power supply in Gaza is the 8hr on/8hr off schedule. Studies also reported that 53% of Gazans live in poverty.

Despite the hardships described above under which the Palestinian citizens of Gaza live, they continue to develop unprecedented resilience. In Gaza, random artists are born out of the womb of suffering. They use art as an outlet for their distress. However, their chances for becoming competitive locally and globally are hindered by:

- The lack of interest in arts in general as the main focus for Gazans is their livelihood and their safety under the continuous threat of war and the ongoing blockade that has limited their employment opportunities and their chances of living in dignity.
- The lack of organizations fully dedicated to the promotion of quality art training and art production in Gaza. Currently there is one university offering a B.A. degree in Art education mostly focusing on the preparation of art teachers for primary schools.
- The societal misconceptions about art and professional training in art related fields as they are seen as the last resort for students who do perform well academically
- Societal misconceptions about art being a luxury and “not a way to put food on the table” . Art is seen as a limited income generating profession and artists are stereotyped to be financially disadvantaged.
- Their inability to travel due to the blockade limiting them from having opportunities for professional training, regional and international exposure and adequate recognition.
- While advances in communication technology has improved Gazans ability to get exposed to global art, this has negatively resulted in a culture of imitation of what is being done abroad rather than creative production.

By mid 2019, thanks to Act CoS and Sternenstaub, DAK University College was ready to explore the possibility of serving young and potential artists in Gaza to empower them through professional training, improved livelihood by increasing their exposure locally and internationally and through recognition & awards directed towards excelling young artists.

Initial Planning Meetings

The project planning process was initiated through several visits to Gaza to discover existing venues and activities for artists and to meet with artists to discuss their professional development needs in addition to the challenges they face. Course timings, and costs and other logistics and to discuss their needs and concerns in general.

The project met with a total of 40 artists at different venues including:

- Iltiqat
- Shababeek
- Atelier Gaza
- The Culture and Free Thought Association
- YMCA – Gaza
- Dr. Haydar Abdel Shafi Center for Culture and Development
- Qattan Foundation
- Civitas

Among the professional development needs identified by Gazan artists during these meetings were the following:

- Concept development
- The philosophy of art
- Theory of Colors
- Contemporary art
- Developing a professional portfolio
- Palestinian Art History
- How to become a curator
- Art events management
- International exposure and networking with international artists

In general, the focus was less on the technical skills but rather on the philosophical, conceptual and artistic marketing skills. The artists also noted that the courses offered need to differentiate between beginners who might need technical skills and those who have already experimented with art who will need advanced and more conceptual courses. The artists also emphasized that what they need most is exposure and opportunity, The pointed out that the fact that Gaza being under closure prevents them from having opportunities to travel and participate in international art internships and training opportunities and international exhibitions and also to be able to sell their art productions to the art community globally.

The design of the project was developed based on the understanding of the context and the initial focus groups held with the young artists and the art organizations in Gaza with the purpose of supporting and empowering them to the extent possible.

The main goal of the project was stated to **empower potential artists in Gaza through professional training and providing opportunities for greater exposure through local and international venues.**

The specific objectives of the project are:

- 1- Enhancing the skills of potential Gazan artists to improve the quality of their art through specialized training courses
- 2- Improving the livelihood of artists by creating networks and opportunities for exhibiting and marketing their productions locally and internationally.
- 3- Recognizing exceptional artists through local awards

Venue Rental

The initial stage of the project began by searching for a venue to establish a presence for the college in Gaza. An appropriate location was identified for rental during the first month and rental negotiations were established with the owners but unfortunately soon after the negotiations began, the facility that we were interested in was leased to another organization. Therefore, the search for an alternative venue continued until we identified the French Cultural Institute in Gaza as an appropriate venue to begin offering classes while we continue searching for an independent location. The college negotiated an agreement to rent a room at the French Cultural Institute in order to avoid losing more time in searching for a suitable venue. This remains a back-up plan as in order to be able to be well-established in Gaza, the college needs an independent space that is well-equipped and well-furnished to accommodate the needs of the various training workshops and their outputs.

Procurement of Equipment

Meanwhile, and while the search for a venue was ongoing, a list of essential equipment needed to conduct courses in photography and film art was prepared and a request for quotation was launched and eventually equipment was procured through three different vendors.

The total value of equipment purchased was approximately USD 30,000 including several camera sets with lenses and accessories, three laptops, in addition to sound and light equipment.

A list of all equipment purchased for the project is attached to the report in [Annex 2](#).

Launching Professional Training Courses

The courses

In addition to identifying a training venue and procuring the essential equipment to launch the project in Gaza, the initial course to be delivered were selected based on technical recommendations were:

- Principles of Photography
- Principles of Artistic Design

The local trainers were also identified for these two courses to be Fadi Thabet for Photography and Fayez Sersawi for Principals of Artistic Design. The two trainers were contracted and asked to develop the training schedule and content for the two courses.

The two courses were advertised using online networks created with the artists and organizations identified during the planning stage of the project. An online application form was developed that could be used by interested applicants to participate. Meanwhile the college also employed a field coordinator to begin the preparatory stages for the courses and setting up for the courses and contacting the registered students.

Following the registration deadline, an initial orientation meeting was held with the registered students to meet the teacher and to discuss the timing arrangements and other logistics with the students. Registration procedures were completed following the initial orientation. Some students dropped out as the timings were not suitable for them and other new ones joined after the orientation. It was agreed that each course was to include 45 training hours over fifteen 3-hour meetings. The courses were officially launched in December 2019 and concluded on March 3, 2020.

An additional third workshop in Video Art was launched in January 2020 for artists to develop ideas and produce video art clips by young Gazan artists to participate in the Third Gaza International Video Art Festival held in March 2020 under the theme “Oxygen”. The workshop was led by trainer Mohammad Harb with support from a montage and sound service provider. Artists were introduced to the concept of video art which is relatively new in Gaza and is not taught at local universities. In addition to learning about the camera and how to film and control light and sound, participating artists developed ideas for the films and worked with the trainer and the montage expert to deliver the final products.



Photos from the training workshops

Students demographics

The college accepted participation of both genders and ensured that female artists have access to these training opportunities to the extent possible. About 50% of the students who participated in the three courses were female. The table below reflects the number of female and male students who have registered and completed the training course.

	Total	Male	Female
Principles of Artistic Design			
Registered	25	12	13
Graduated	21	10	11
Principles of Photography			
Registered	27	17	10
Graduated	25	15	10
Video Art Workshop			
Registered	15	8	7
Graduated	12	6	6



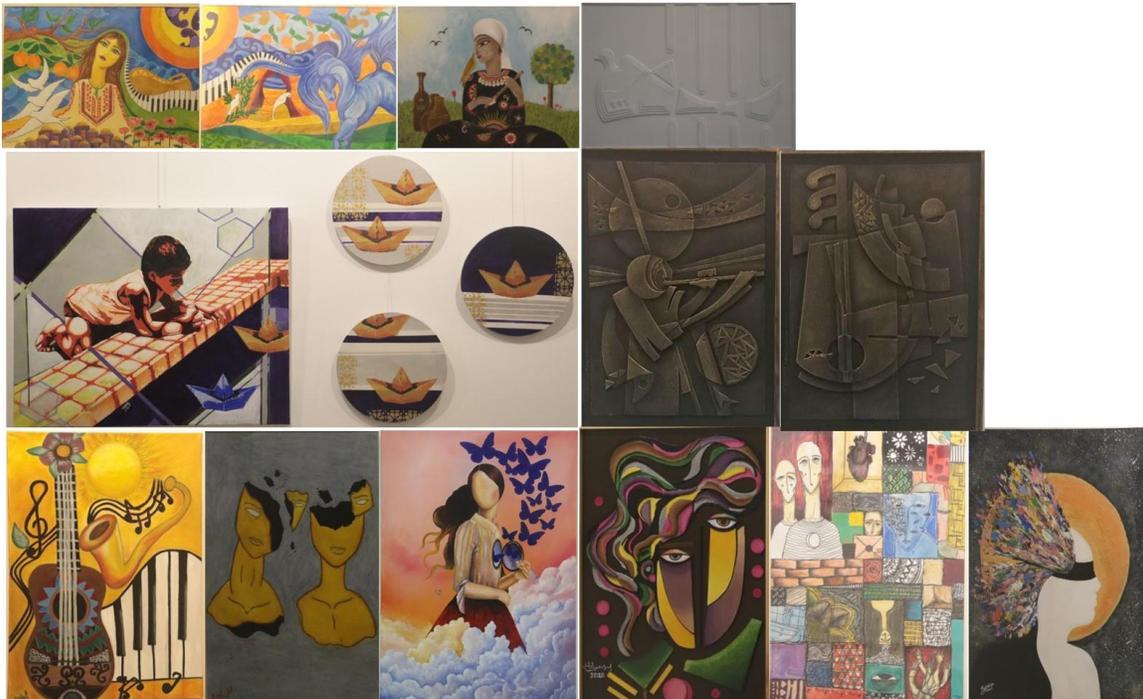
Participants of Training Courses launched by the College in Gaza

First Exhibition in Gaza: Eye on Gaza

As part of their training, students in each training course were asked to work on a project to be considered their graduation project and displayed in an exhibition in Gaza. The name of the exhibition was EYE ON GAZA and the students participated with 66 photographs captured by the students from daily life in Gaza and 33 art works by the Design course students. The exhibition was launched by the French Consul in Gaza at the French Cultural Institute and was attended by several cultural and art centers representatives in Gaza in addition to the trainers, students, their families and their friends and spanned over three consecutive days starting March 3, 2020. For some students, this was their first exhibition and they were very excited to participate and show off their work.



Eye on Gaza Exhibition Opening



Some artwork by the Design course participants



Some Photos from photography course students

Gaza International Video Art Festival – Oxygen

The outputs of the video art workshop were twelve video art films that screened on the first day of the Gaza International Video Art Festival launched on March 4, 2020. The first day also featured a video conference address by renowned artist Steve Sabella who encouraged the effort invested in organizing this effort in Gaza and spoke about his video entitled “Great March of Return” and spoke about his new upcoming projects.

The college honored the participating artists with three prizes for the best three films based on the evaluation of technical committee. The three winning films were:

- 1- O2 by Mohamad Nayef (m)
- 2- Poker by Khaled Jarade (m)
- 3- Unkonwn by Jihad Jarbou' (f)

The second day of the festival featured films produced by several local and international artists

International Video Art Festival – Gaza III
 مهرجان الفيديوآرت الدولي – غزة (أوكسجين)
 (Oxygen)

الفنانين المشاركين بورشة و مهرجان الفيديوآرت الدولي

02:11	(عُتْسَر)	1- براء الصاوير
04:44	(الفهمول)	2- جهاد صبريوع
01:51	(بوكس)	3- خالد جبرارة
04:00	(هوليس)	4- تيماء سلالمة
03:43	(نازة غزة)	5- روان الخزريق
04:45	(جرعة أوكسجين)	6- نداء أحمد
04:03	(مراة)	7- عزة للشبح أحمد
04:01	(القنبرت)	8- سها الدعايس
02:12	(القدر والبشر)	9- مروان نصار
03:40	(O2)	10- محسنه زكريف
03:10	(لا تيسا)	11- محسن زقوت
02:40	(العينة لاكثر خطورة)	12- مؤيد ابوالمهنية
04:40	(طيشورة)	13- خارس عياش



The Karimeh Abbud Photography Award and Exhibition

During the first few months of the project, the Karimeh Abbud Annual Photography Award was launched in August 2019 under the theme: “We Shall have Life on This Land”. The award aims at honoring the first Palestinian Photographer Karimeh Abbud who started her own photography career early in the 20th century in times when the profession was by dominated by male photographers. Young photographers 18-40 years of age could submit their photos over a period of one month. A total of 104 submissions were received from all over Palestine. Interestingly, about 64% of all submissions were by Gazan photographers. The submission all featured element of life in Palestine be it in the form of children playing despite the miserable environment, families caring for their children, elderly holding on to life, market places, landscapes, confiscated villages longing for their people, resistance and symbolism of the flag and the traditional dress.

The college formed two committees of 7 members to select the top 20 photos. However, there were 26 photos that were selected for the final stage of the competition and were displayed in a special exhibition for the award. An award ceremony was held in Bethlehem to honor the participating photographers and announce the winners of the three prizes who were young photography students from Jerusalem. Given that 70% of the photos that qualified for the final stage were from Gazan Photographers, the college held another award ceremony in Gaza to honor the photographers who could not participate in the award ceremony in Bethlehem and three additional prizes were awarded for Gazan photographers. The names of the winners from both events are listed in the table below.

Award Ceremony	1 st Place	2 nd Place	3 rd Place
In Bethlehem	Mohmoud Abu Tair (m)	Wa'ad Ahmad (f)	Mustapha Ghrouz (m)
In Gaza	Hammm Al-Nazle (m)	Ayesh Haroun (m)	Samar Abul Ouf (f)



Strength/kindness – Mahmoud Abu Tair



Dancer in Suba – Wa'ad Ahmad



We deem it nearby – Mustafa Ghrouz



Childhood and misery – Hammm Al-nazle



Joy is her name – Ayesh Haroun



Children not afraid of the dark – Samar Abulouf

Winning Photos



Karimeh Abbud Award Ceremony and Exhibition in Bethlehem and Gaza

Future plans

The college will continue to implement the project as planned by offering training courses and professional development and exposure opportunities for young artists in Gaza.

The current state of emergency declared in Palestine due to COVID-19 will present a challenge to conduct project activities during the shut-down of all facilities and the inability to hold meetings and exhibitions during this period. If the closure is prolonged, the college might revert to offering virtual classrooms using an online platform to mitigate the situation.

The project launched the 2020 Ismail Shamout Award advertisement in January and received 87 participations from Artists throughout Palestine. The exhibition and award ceremony were supposed to take place in April 2020 but will be delayed until the emergency situation is lifted. Meanwhile the jury are rating the participation to identify the top 10 paintings.

To maintain contact with the artists in Gaza, the College also launched a call for participation in a virtual exhibition called Pandemic to depict the current situation due to COVID-19 and is currently collecting participations from photographers and artists.

Stories from the Students

Ismail Matar, 21 years – Principles of Artistic Design Student

I was able to join the course last minute as I had missed the application deadline but I was sure that I was going to benefit although I rarely participate in courses in Gaza, and I am glad I made it into the course. I learned a lot from our teacher Fayez Sersawi and I applied it using my own artistic way. It was a new experience for me. I experimented a lot based on what we learned and I was finally able to produce my



painting for the final exhibition: Eye on Gaza, organized by the College which I was very happy to be part of. As the day of the exhibition passed, I was approached by an American person who asked to purchase my painting and I sold it for \$500. That was the culmination of my participation in this course and I felt very proud to have achieved this on my 21st birthday.

Samah Al-Qeshawi, Principles of Artistic Design Student



I am an Engineering graduate but due to the difficult situation in Gaza, I was not able to work in the engineering field. I had artistic inclinations and I used to sketch with pencil and publish my sketches on Instagram. I heard about the principles of artistic design course and decided to join. I gained a lot of confidence by learning the principles of design professionally from our teacher. It was the beginning of a new stage for me. I participated in the final exhibition and it was the first time for me to overcome the fear of using colors in my

sketches and to show-off my work in an exhibition. I was able to produce my first colored painting and my family who came to the exhibition were very proud of me. Soon after the exhibition I started painting colored portraits and many people are asking me to draw them. I feel very proud to have gone through this experience.

Ali Al-Aswad, Photography Student

I am currently studying English at Al-Aqsa University but have started liking photography in 2016 but I knew very little about the technical skills needed and that is why I joined this photography course offered by Dar Alkalima University College of Arts and Culture. During the workshop, I did not only learn the technical skills but also the



understood the power of photography to serve a humanitarian cause and I gained passion for developing this aspect. This was not only a workshop, we became friends and established a Whatsapp group through which we exchange information and ideas and socialize as well. After we finished the course, we participated in the exhibition Eye on Gaza and this was the first time I participate in an exhibition and that by itself gave me a big boost to further work on my skills and develop myself. Standing there by my photos during the exhibition and watching people look at your work is exhilarating and takes you into a whole new world of hope.

Jehad Jarbou', Video Art Workshop



This was the first time I experiment with video art. I wanted to know what video art really meant as this course is not available at local universities. It is a different kind of art that we are not exposed to. I benefited a lot from this workshop. I learned a lot about filming and montage and final production. I also learned the difference between regular videos and video art. This workshop was a challenge and a dream for me to produce a film to be screened during a video art festival in Gaza. With all the

equipment and resources available we exchanged ideas with each other with support from our trainer and I produced my first video art film called: The Unknown which reflects the illegal migration of youth to escape Gaza and the challenges they face along the way. On the first day of the Gaza International Video Art Festival, my film was screened and I won the third place among the 12 artists who participated in this workshop. I felt very proud of myself and was happy I had the chance to participate in this workshop with Dar Al-Kalima University College.

Links to Videos of the Training Workshops and Events

Karimeh Abbud Award Ceremony and Exhibition – Bethlehem

<https://www.facebook.com/Karimeh.Abbud.Photography.award/videos/452381492085176/>

Karimeh Abbud Gaza Award Ceremony

<https://www.facebook.com/PalestineTv/videos/1816838818441256/?t=15>

Photography Course

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sxfckl-Ukc&t=53s>

Principals of Artistic Design Course

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1xSMfcX4tA&t=111s>

Video Art Workshop

<https://www.facebook.com/hmohamedharb/videos/10221865084524528/>

Eye on Gaza Exhibition

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxhPOoxOEW0>

Video Art Festival

<https://www.facebook.com/hmohamedharb/videos/10221865084524528/>

Annex 1: Progress Against Performance Indicators

	Indicator	Planned Y1	Achieved
1	Number of courses implemented	2	2
2	Number of Students participating in courses	40	46 (2 courses)+12 (2020)
3	Percentage of students satisfied with the courses		
	Photography:	80%	73%
	Principles of artistic design:	80%	100%
4	Number of local exhibitions held	1	1
5	Number of Awards organized	1	1
6	Number of Artists benefiting from awards	3	6 +3 (2020)

Annex 2: List of equipment purchased under the project

	Item	QTY
1	XDCAM Super 35 Camera System	2
2	FE 24-70mm f/2.8	1
3	LS C120d 120D II 180W LED Continuous V-Mount Video Light CRI96+ TLCI97+ 2.4G 5500K Bowens Mount Daylight Studio Light	3
4	Ace M Fluid Head with 2-Stage Aluminum Tripod & Mid-Level Spreader	2
5	4Bank Ballast	1
6	Extension Cable for 4-Bank Fixture - 25'	1
7	F8n 8-Input / 10-Track Multi-Track Field Recorder	2
8	MixPro Audio Bag for MixPre-3, MixPre-6, DR-70D & DR-701D Recorders	2
9	FE 35mm f/1.8 Lens	1
10	Canon 80D (2)	2
11	Laptops	3