

## *Artwork with Karin Haschler*

the art class took place in November 2013  
by Karin Haschler from Munich, Germany

In November 2013, I had the pleasure of offering arts workshops to the students of Naveen Primary School again. This time, I was able to specifically prepare myself for the local conditions and the needs of the children because I already knew what to expect after my visit in March. The financial situation of the school was very bad at that time. That's why the school administration asked me to try to create small "saleable" artworks to exhibit in hotel lobbies or how to potential donators. The survival of the school is a matter close to my heart so I was determined to do my best.



Still, I was worried about the discrepancy between my educational and artistic ambitions and the newly added commercial aspect. After all, that somehow contrasts with my aim of innocent, spontaneous, childlike artistic expression. The existing school system already counteracts any artistic drive because it often reduces and trivializes art to what can be marked and measured. Trying to produce "useable" art takes this tendency to extremes.

Thank God, children often help us escape this paradox because, unlike adults, they still have an open mind and are able to perceive and interpret the world in different ways. Because the world is a product of our imagination and, for children, nothing has to look like our adult "reality." Imagination does not respect any obstacles or boundaries. This is something that I found very cheering and inspiring in my work with the children.

So, for example, the little ones perfectly sabotaged my carefully prepared, educationally valuable starting exercise within minutes. I asked them to paint little mandalas made up of small squares. However, the children did not want to submit to my symmetrical suggestions. Instead, they just started to paint freely, following their own inner logic. The results were beautiful. Some of them even displayed a kind of dissonant beauty while still suggesting an internal childlike melody.

After careful deliberation, and taking into account the conditions, I had decided to focus on moving and sculpting this time.

I am convinced that creating art should also help to cope with future challenges. So I found the topic of movement



and moving appropriate to interrupt their monotonous daily routines.

India, and especially the Indian school system, are extremely rigid, dogmatic, old-fashioned, inflexible and suspicious against new things. I witnessed myself how severely violent teachers are tolerated in the school opposite. The Naveen School has devoted itself to a different, more progressive and open-minded pedagogical approach with small classes and individual tutoring for otherwise lost children of the lowest social classes. I wanted to provide these children with a glimpse on dreams and fantasies that might already have been buried under the weight of a harsh reality.

We started out with moving figures in the manner of Keith Haring, moving on to colour-reduced black-and-red moving figures made from newspapers, and then to laundry fluttering on the clothes line – everything shaped and held together by wallpaper paste, an indispensable cure-all.

The student's joy and enthusiasm was gigantic which again stimulated my own creativity. I often spent almost the whole day with ambitious artistic preparations and follow-up work. However, all this would have been impossible without the selfless support of Birgit Pratap. Although exhausted from her own workload she often spent hours accompanying me through a polluted, completely crowded, dirty, and loud city full of rickshaws searching for necessary equipment in one of the thousand tiny shops. Thank you so much Birgit!

An attempt to create pictures with moving colours in the style of Klee and Itten led to a less aesthetic work of art.

I also did a project on the subject of dirt and pollution. The older students were quite astonished when Divya (who, by the way, was a great help with translations and practical work –Thanks a lot Divya!) and I turned up one day with eggshells, tea and coffee dregs, sand, plastic, lots of "dirt" and other waste material and told the students to model their city or street out of these raw materials. However, initial reservations were soon forgotten and made way for a breath-taking eruption of creativity in a polluted city.



With the older students, I ventured the therapeutic experiment of a non-verbal group conversation. Considering the age and the size of the class (20-30 children), this bore a certain risk. The experiment quickly reveals the dynamics of a group, conveys group identity and shows how things and, especially, emotions can also be exchanged non-verbally. After a hesitant, insecure start, a few courageous students got the conversation going. Simon Pratap and I partly joined in the conversation and when we managed to end the experiment after



almost two hours, we had documented a wonderful, colourful conversation on the long piece of paper. At the end of the workshop, we held another group conversation with this class. Again, we had trouble ending it and the result of the experiment decorates the wall of the classroom. It tells the story of a happy class that feel very comfortable in their school and are sorry to know that this sheltered part of their childhood is going to end soon. (After grade 5, the children have to change to state school, if possible.)



The smaller ones made figures from papier-mâché. These were supposed to look like the school symbol but no way, the result were completely unique and individual figures!

Apart from balloons covered in paper and wallpaper paste and a few colourful peace balloons (most of which quickly went to the happy Varanasi hunting grounds), our traditional final project with grades 3 to 5 has always been a big group picture. The classes were asked to decide on a topic by themselves and, spurred by the memory of the big circular picture done by grade 5 in March, the students started their discussions with much ambition.

All three classes happened to choose the same topic: "our school." The results were pictures painted with much dedication and precision. The works of grade 3 and 4 adorn the walls of their classrooms. Being the oldest children and about to leave the school, the students of grade 5 had the privilege to decorate the front of the school again which made them very proud. (The picture of the previous year had been washed away during Monsoon season.)

Like in March, we exhibited most of the children's works of art everywhere around the school building. This sight naturally caused great admiration in both students and teachers every morning. The little artists experienced pride in their work and respect for the power of imagination. Amazing what you are allowed to think, feel, and even express – and even be admired for it! This might have planted a seed of silent hope in some of the children. What a joy!



Artistic expression also means expressing oneself and a lot of creative energy was positively thrown onto these little works of art. The inner world was made visible to the outside and for some, possibilities might have been revealed. The diversity of the pictures and the different expressions of the same topic illustrate that there is more than one existing truth. After all, "If there were only one truth, you couldn't paint a hundred canvases on the same theme," as Pablo Picasso already said.

With this in mind, I would be glad if I had been able to open up a few new perspectives to the children and to encourage them to trust in their own reality and the power of imagination.

