

Article | Kids Create Artistic Bins

Kids Create Artistic Bins to Tidy Their Own “Street of Cairo”

By Ethar Shalaby

Governance Can art change the way you treat your neighborhood? This was what a group of Egyptian children experienced, as they created colorful rubbish bins in an art-workshop in the popular neighborhood of Ard El Lewa during “Streets of Cairo” festival.

The Danish artist Kenneth Balfelt is in the middle of a five-day workshop with 10-year-old children. He is reviving inside them what they like and dislike about their street. The Danish artist meets the kids on the roof of Artellewa, an art gallery in Ard El Lewa.

The workshop is held as part of the “Streets of Cairo” art festival, organized by the Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute (DEDI). The art festival, which is held for 10 days until June 19th, is founded on the idea that art plays a role in shaping and changing our societies. At the same time it aims at improving mutual understandings of the Egyptian and Danish cultures through art workshops involving artists, dj’s, and chefs from both countries.

The kids in Artellewa are allowed the chance to express themselves and generate ideas, and after brainstorming, they all confirm that their street needs to be cleaner.

“There were a lot of positive things they like and described, but there were also a lot of negative things. One of them is that there is a lot of rubbish everywhere,” says Kenneth Balfelt.

Red, Green, Yellow and Blue

The children come up with the idea of making rubbish bins and place them in front of shops and cafes in their street. With drills and nails they put sticks of wood together, and large baskets appear.

“We took the wood sticks from the ground floor up to the roof to start making our baskets. It was not heavy but putting them together and nailing them was tiring,” says the 10-year-old Amira, eagerly supported by her friend Mido.

Kenneth Balfelt explains that there was another suggestion to add some greenery to the area, but the children decided to color the baskets instead. Each of the little artists are assigned to color only one side of a basket, but most of them are enthusiastic to color many sides.

“I colored mine in green and painted a bird on one of its sides. It has a lot of colors: blue, green, red and yellow, see how colorful it is now?” says Mohamed, pointing at his wooden basket.

“And I painted mine in red, white and black which makes the colors of the Egyptian flag. I love my country and that’s why I painted in these three colors,” says Ahmed.

Will you encourage?

The next task after fixing the bins and painting them, is to ask the owners of the nearby shops to place them in front of their stores. The kids are all over the street, running hyper actively, loud and screaming. Kenneth Balfelt tries to keep up with them as they approach the first shops to ask them to take the bins.

"I am sure the shop owners will agree, it is their own kids who made the baskets and its the kids' own idea, its not my idea," he says.

"Hi, we made some baskets to encourage people to throw rubbish in them, rather than in the streets. Is there a problem if we place it near your supermarket?" Mido asks the owner of a small grocery, who is surprised to find the group of kids all around him.

The man embraces Mido's request: "Sure you can, but is there a way we can fix them so that they would not get stolen?"

Kenneth Balfelt explains that the baskets are designed in a way so that they can be fixed either in the asphalt ground or in the walls.

The herd of kids move on to other shops. Not all of them are supportive.

"No please. I do not want any rubbish bins here. That means that the garbage will be accumulating in front of my cafe and customers will not be happy," says an owner of a cafe while preparing the coal for a shisha smoke, spreading the bits of dark coal all over.

However, the children manage to find five other shops, who are happy to place the bins and even committ to make sure they remain in a good condition. After succeeding in the mission, the kids run giggling and laughing on the stairs to reach the roof of Artellewa, where the little project has finally seen light: They are changing their street.

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