



PRESS FILE

“THIS COLLABORATION ALLOWS US TO DEVELOP THE CAPABILITIES OF STUDENTS AS WELL AS TEACHERS, BUT IT’S ALSO A CHANCE TO TELL THE WHOLE WORLD ABOUT THE REALITY IN THE CITY OF MOSUL”

Suleik Salem Al-Khabbaz - department head at the Institute of Fine Arts

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ABOUT THE PROJECT



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After years of preparation, the Institute of Fine Arts in the war-thorn city of Mosul has started a structural collaboration with the Belgian theatre house NTGent for the creation of a Film Department. An ambitious project supported by and part of the UNESCO-program “Revive the Spirit of Mosul”.

In Summer 2016, [Milo Rau](#), artistic director of NTGent, and his team travelled for the first time to Kurdistan and North Iraq for the play *Empire*, the third part of the *Europe Trilogy*. At that time, Mosul was not liberated yet, but Rau and his team already tied relations with producers and artists in Erbil and other cities in the region.

When Mosul was liberated, the team returned and started working with the Institute of Fine Arts in the completely devastated city of Mosul. Between autumn 2018 and spring 2019 they created the first collaboration between the Institute and NTGent for the play [Orestes in Mosul](#) that toured the world, raised awareness for the needs of artists in North Iraq and was **the starting point for a first series of structural exchanges**.

After another two years of preparations, the Institute of the Fine Arts and NTGent now start a new structural collaboration, supported by and as a part of the UNESCO [Revive the Spirit of Mosul](#) cultural program. This program is funded by the European Union and aims to create employment opportunities and contribute to social cohesion through rehabilitation of historic houses and revival of cultural life in Mosul and Basra.

For the building of the Film Department in the Institute of Fine Arts, twenty students, girls and boys from Mosul, join a four month course that introduces them to the process that leads from an idea to a finished film. As a final objective, **nine short movies will be made, entirely set and shot in Mosul, and realized autonomously by the students.**

In an attempt to make the bound between the Institute of Fine Arts of Mosul and NTGent even tighter, an Iraqi-Belgian team of film teachers has been created: **Suleik Salem Hussain**, director of the Institute of Fine Arts in Mosul, and his collaborator **Sardar Saeed**, together with **Susana AbdulMajid, Eyas Almokdad, Daniel Demoustier, Johan Leysen, Ioana Mandrescu** and **Marijke Pinoy**. In October 2021, some of the teachers travelled for the first time from Europe to Iraq. Three more trips are planned in November, and in January and February 2022.



“Helping to create a Film Department in Mosul might seem like an exceptional move for a European theatre house”, says Milo Rau, . “And in a way, it really is. On the other hand, this is **a logical next step in a collaboration that has been going on for years.** For NTGent, sustainability is a very important value. This also means leaving something behind in the places we visit. In this case: creating new cultural opportunities in a devastated city.”

The teachers have developed **a program divided in five phases**, each dedicated to one of the main steps of a film production: brainstorming, scriptwriting and gaining insight into the field of movie production and organization, shooting, editing, and presenting the results to an audience in Mosul. Regular, constant,

updates accompany and document each phase of this apprenticeship of filmmaking.

Outcome of this five-phases process will be to leave all the technical equipment used by the students to realize their films in the Institute of Fine Arts. The same tools that have been employed for the learning process will thus become **the concrete fundamentals of a Film Department dedicated to the young generations of Mosul**. But even more important, the knowledge that will be achieved by those twenty boys and girls will mark only the beginning of structural film teachings at the Institute.

“THIS PROJECT OFFERS AN ANSWER TO THE MORAL ISSUE FACING PRIVILEGED ARTISTS IN PRECARIOUS AREAS. READ: HE WHO TAKES, MUST GIVE”

-- NEWSPAPER 'DE STANDAARD' (BE)

ACTRICE MARIJKE PINOY ON HER RETURN TO MOSUL (October 2021):

“THE OLD FAIRS ARE IN FULL SWING AGAIN”

I write all this with great reserve. I am only a momentary observer of a beautiful people who have suffered greatly. A people that must now move on with all its wounds. Only those who have experienced the horror can put it into words or feel the wounds. Who am I, with my western views, to put this into words just like that? With great restraint and humility, I describe what I have seen over the past few days.

At the same time, I am here, together with my fantastic colleagues, for a reason. And that reason is worth a lot to me. Exchange through art. Connecting. Debating. And hopefully - as far as I am concerned - encouraging young female students to bring art into the world.



What a difference from two and a half years ago, when we came here to work with young people for the theatre production 'Orestes in Mosul'. I was not allowed to leave the neglected pavilion where we were staying without permission from the fixers. Too dangerous and too risky. We were in Mosul with a large group of westerners and too much attention was to be avoided. Even in the school where we were teaching, we were advised not to hang around outside too much.

The previous school had been bombed, so we had to avoid too much attention here as well. In the normally busy street of the tea house where we showed some

images of our work to mums and relatives, the yellow taxis were not allowed to park, for fear of explosions. The population of Mosul was still in the midst of a post-war trauma.

Now, as a woman - wearing a headscarf out of respect - I walk the streets alone. The people look surprised. In Mosul, I suspect, we are still one of the few groups of westerners. But there is openness everywhere, and cheerfulness. We are warmly received.

In the same art school where we briefly taught two years ago, we now have twenty students: five young women and fifteen young boys. One girl is married and has a child, one boy is also married. Many of the students already have a job. There are two hairdressers, a make-up artist, an influencer,... they are studying and working at the same time.



It is not so easy here for girls to study at the art school. It makes me very happy that there are five of them who are following our workshops. I believe very strongly in the link between education and emancipation. One of the male translators told me that they expect a lot from what we do here in that area. **They hope, together with us, that the film classes will be an extra stimulus to attract more women to art education.** The social context in Mosul remains predominantly male. So all the more I am glad that the women can hopefully bring art into society. And make equality more evident through art.

We are staying in the same pavilion as two years ago. An old pavilion, with faded glory. Now repopulated. Our neighbours are almost exclusively wedding couples and their relatives. Every day there is a hustle and bustle of cars decorated with plastic flowers. The community needs hope, celebrations and fun.

There are children everywhere. The old fairs are in full swing again, fully lit in all colours of the rainbow. The eateries and tearooms are packed with men smoking shisha, playing cards and chess. The other day, I was the only woman, albeit accompanied by my male colleagues, in one of those huge, brimming bars with only men and boys. People looked up briefly. That was all.

The markets in the old part are fully open again, the market vendors hopeful that the tourists will return. They urge us, "Tell them it's safe here again." The fresh fish lies unpacked with the old bathtubs filled with water in front of them. Soldiers are still seen here and there, but few. Some streets in the old part of town have been made passable again.

The improbable number of bombed houses in many places in old Mosul still look like it happened yesterday. The bones of the buffalo and their horns are dried up and hollowed out, but they remain in one spot on the Tigris River, where IS fighters gathered the animals for food.

You feel as if you are in an open museum, created so that you never forget the terrible things that have been done to an entire community. How many innocent children and women and men were coldly murdered? How many beautiful buildings, libraries etc. have been destroyed? This city may never be completely rebuilt, there is too much money involved. But a street away you can see more fish markets. Fresh fruit. Tasty fresh juices.



A beautiful building that was empty for a long time has been taken over by a couple of young people. They have turned it into a cosy tea room, a small museum too, a puppet theatre and a place for children. A symbolic and hopeful place. There I meet a retired soldier who was a pilot and bomber in the war

against Iran. He has no regrets about what he did. He laughs at the question whether he does so much charity because his conscience is bothering him. For years, the veteran has worked with fundraisers to help people in the old part of town financially. Among other things, he takes care of a widow with seven children and helps to rebuild her house.

John, who was asked to shoot footage of the start-up of the film school, tells of the horror of the time. His best friend fought with IS but they have lost contact. That former friendship can never be healed. Too much suffering has been caused. John finds Mosul conservative. Yet John doesn't want to leave. Together with others, he gives art lessons to children so that they can come to terms with their traumas. His family lives here and he is part of it. It's that simple. Every family lives here together. **Little by little, people are hopeful and full of courage for life. So strong too. For years they have had harrowing stories but they cope with them. They have no other choice.** Taking care of each other. No one thinks about it. That is the reality here.

But the reality is also that life in Mosul is very hard for many people. In our street there is one restaurant after another. There are 1.8 million people living in this city but many families never go out to eat because it is too expensive. I see little four-year-old girls selling bottles of water amidst the busy traffic. The many boys walking alone are part of the street scene here. Our fixer tells us that many young boys are orphaned by the war and live on the streets. And of course, there are still the camps where people are staying who still cannot go back to their homes. They are refugees in their own city.

PRESS LINKS

- * 2021/10/20 – **SWR.DE** – [interview with Milo Rau \(GERMAN\)](#)
- * 2021/09/17 – **AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)** – press release (FRENCH), published by several media: [Libération \(MAR\)](#) /// [Arabnews \(FR\)](#)
- * 2021/09/18 – **DE STANDAARD (WEEKBLAD)** – essay (DUTCH) in national Belgian newspaper online and in print: [READ ONLINE](#) /// [FULL TEXT](#) (PDF)
- * 2021/09/19 – **VERTIGOWEB.BE** – [news article \(DUTCH\)](#)

SCENARIOS OF THE SHORT FILMS (SUMMARY)

The Son of the River – by Anas Khaeel & Osman Muwafaq

A movie about the street children of Mosul trying to make a living anyway they can.

A child lives in a metal shack at the bank of the river Tigris. Both of his parents died in an accident. To survive, the child works in a car workshop but when he arrives late for work and slips on the oily floor, his employer hits him on the head and fires him. For comfort, the boy turns to his new friend, a dismembered teddy bear he found in the river. Together they play soccer and spent all their money in an amusement park. “Tomorrow, we will need to find a new job”, the child says.

Blood Money – by Firyal Ahmed & Youssif Radhwan

A movie about a girl being sold by her grandfather to a man she never met.

Badawia comes home from school to find her family arguing. Her grandfather is dead silent, her uncle is talking furiously, Badawia herself has no right to speak and is sent to her room. Her family has arranged a wedding for her with a man she never met. Although her grandfather is deeply saddened, he pays a big amount of money to the groom. After the wedding, Badawia is taken away to her new house. The family she leaves behind is in tears.

The Other Face – by Tamara Jamal & Kadhim Fathi

A movie about a girl troubled by the abuse of her mother.

A young girl Maria is home alone. She is playing with her doll when someone tries to enter her house. The girl is scared to death. Suddenly, she sees her mother, her face full of bruises. When Maria tries to hug her mother, the woman disappears. Later, a strange man with a hideous face appears. Maria screams and then wakes up.

Candies – by Mustafa Khalid & Diana Faisal

A movie about the horrific fate of children trying to make a living in the streets of Mosul.

A young boy works on a crossroad in Mosul, trying to sell small goods to car drivers. One day, he meets a man in a fancy car promising him a better life. Ali, only 7 years old, gets in. Moments later, he realises he is in grave danger, but it's too late. In the final scene, we see the rich man coming out of a destroyed house. He's fixing his pants. The boy comes out after him, his eyes filled with tears.

My Shoes – by Hathal Thakir & Hassan Taha

A movie about the power of imagination and the joy of a new pair of shoes.

A boy named Youssif is depressed because he only has worn-out clothes and torn-up shoes to wear. He's walking around in the park when he sees Khattab, a nicely dressed stranger, sitting on one of the benches. Magically, the boys take each other's places. Youssif is now wearing brand new shoes, Khattab dirty clothes. Strangely enough, Khattab is amazed and happy.

The Destroyed House – by Rayan Shehab & Ahmed Shamel

A movie about the new-born friendship between two street children.

A boy being shouted at by a stranger in the streets gets rescued by another boy he doesn't know. The two boys share a packet of crisps and then decide to join forces. Together they come up with a smart plan to steal a box of fresh vegetables.

The Step – by Mustafa Dhurgham & Muhammad Fawaz

A movie about two lives destroyed by one fatal step.

A man and a woman get married. Their families gather for the wedding party in the old city of Mosul. They dance, clap and shriek. Later, the bride Maryam is brought to the groom's house. There, in her new bedroom, she waits for her husband to arrive. When he doesn't, she goes outside and finds him smoking in the streets. The bride and groom smile. They feel elated and start to walk towards each other. Suddenly, Muhanad hears a clicking sound from under his foot.

Soccer Girl- by Abd Amo'men Bashar & Ahmed Abdulrazaq

A movie about a girl being with a strong personality and golden feet.

Mary loves to play soccer but the boys in the soccer yard won't let her play along. When the ball accidentally comes her way, she decides to head towards the goal. None of the boys can stop her; she scores. The boys now fight who gets to play in Mary's team. A group of girls approaches and looks at Mary's skills in admiration.

BIO'S TEACHERS

DANIEL DEMOUSTIER

Daniel Demoustier is an experienced Belgian cameraman and filmmaker. As a journalist he covered the first Gulf war in Baghdad for Belgian tv. Later he moved to the BBC and ITV and continued to film conflicts and natural disasters all over the world. At the same time, he worked on contemporary dance projects for Rosas (Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker) and Ultima Vez (Wim Vandekeybus). In 2019 he was invited by Milo Rau to work on the "Orestes in Mosul"-production in Iraq and in 2021 he filmed and edited the theatre film "Yellow" for Luk Perceval.

EYAS AL MOKDAD

A Syrian Belgian filmmaker and Choreographer, Al Mokdad holds a Master in Audiovisual Arts (Film) from The Royal Academy of Fine Arts (KASK) 2021, and an Advanced Master Degree in Audiovisual Arts from Luca school of arts Brussels, (2013). Al Mokdad's work focuses on experimentation, to explore contemporary forms of art in cinema and performing arts. In recent years, he has worked on a number of films and performances that deal with political and social issues.

IOANA MANDRESCU

Romanian sound artist and musician Ioana Mandrescu lives and works in Brussels, Belgium. She completed her studies in Romania, at the National University of Music, in France at École Normale de Musique 'Alfred Cortot', and in Belgium at Koninklijk Conservatorium. In 2018 she graduated from KASK, Ghent. As a musician she has founded several contemporary music groups: The unDefined Quartet, Quivir Ensemble and Opia Ensemble. In March 2021 Ioana collaborated as sound editor and sound designer with NTGent for the creation of Luk Perceval's cinematic rendition of the theatre play "Yellow - The Sorrows of Belgium II: Rex".

JOHAN LEYSEN

Johan Leysen, born in 1950, has appeared in more than 130 films and television programmes since 1977 and has received several prizes such as Golden Calf for Best Actor for his role in the film "Felice...Felice...". In "The American" (2010) he appeared as Pavel, the murderer of George Clooney, and in "Le tout nouveau Testament" (2015) he played the husband of Catherine Deneuve. Throughout his film career, Leysen always remained committed to the theatre. His collaboration with directors such as Guy Cassiers, Johan Simons and Heiner Goebbels made him one of the most important and prominent performing artists in Europe. In 2022 Leysen performs the integral version of "Texts For Nothing" by Samuel Beckett at NTGent.

MARIJKE PINOY

Marijke Pinoy, born 1958, has worked for various Belgian theatre companies as an actress, director and/or member of the artistic team: Theater Zuidpool, De Werf, Arca, Theater Malpertuis, Cie Cecilia, FC Bergman, Action Zoo Humain and NTGent. She has performed at several major theatre festivals including Avignon, Paris, Lausanne, Reims, Lille and Berlin. Marijke has been on all kinds of television series and in many films such as "Vidange Perdue", "Ben X", "Belgica", "De Smaak van De Keyser", "In Vlaamse Velden" ("In Flanders Fields"), "Red Sonja" and the international series "The Team". She also teaches at KASK – School of Arts in Ghent. In the 2018-2019 season, she was part of the cast of *Orestes in Mosul* at NTGent.

SARDAR MOHAMMED ABDULLAH

Sardar Mohammed Abdullah, collaborator of department head Suleik Salem Hussein at the Institute of Fine Arts in Mosul, is a bachelor in political sciences (2011) and an experienced production manager, fixer, coordinator and translator. He has worked for various foreign teams from different fields: artists, journalists, film makers, humanitarian organisations,...

SUSANA ABDULMAJID

Susana AbdulMajid was born in 1990 in Berlin. After studying acting and cultural studies, she first performed street theatre across Germany, taught at the Goethe Institute and worked in various asylum centres. In 2014 she worked with Thomas Bo Nilsson and Julian Wolf Eicke at the Schaubühne Berlin, followed by further engagements at the Schauspielhaus Wien, the Schaubühne Berlin and the Berliner Ensemble. She was also part of the collective *Zentrum für Politische Schönheit* from 2014 to 2016. In 2018, Susana starred in the film *JIBRIL* by Henrika Kull, for which she was nominated for the Götz George Nachwuchspreis as best actress. In addition to her theatre work, she studied cultural studies at the Free University of Berlin, specialising in Arabic literature and theatre.

SULEIK SALEM HUSSEIN

Suleik Salem Hussein, head of the Institute of Fine Arts in Mosul, was born in Mosul in 1977. He has a bachelor's degree in Acting and a master's degree in Theatre Directing. In 2003, Suleik joined the Institute of Fine Arts in Mosul as a teacher, since 2017 he is the head of the Theatre Department in the Institute. Suleik also works as a lecturer in the Open Educational College / Nineveh center and is the founder of the Nineveh Ensemble for Theatre of the Oppressed (2013). Since 1997 he is a member of the Iraqi Artists Syndicate. In 2017, he established the Soprano Center for Arts in Mosul. Throughout his career, Suleik created more than forty theatrical works, ten films, and a large number of songs, melodies and poems.