

Where we are

2010...11...12

Much has happened in the world, let alone in Pittsburgh, PA in the last two years. However, ArtUp has tried to keep up with the shifts in the world. As people gather in squares in the name of democracy, risking their jobs, families, and lives, they organize virtually and yet are grounded in the roots of humanity, digitally guiding each other. This is inspiration.

Before Arab Spring, in the summer of 2010, founder and director of ArtUp, Tavia La Follette went to Egypt as an artist in residence to work on something she calls *Firefly Insight*:

Much of my work is about artistic vision, or rather, artistic language. My instincts as an artist are just those ... instincts. I depend on this ancient part of me to guide me through the artistic process. It is the part of me that I cannot name, or see, or pin down to dissect. I have attempted to capture this flickering of thoughts and impulses by naming this inner language humanity shares. I am proposing that *Firefly Insight* is accessible by all humans – as it is fueled by aesthetics and is what drives our passion. It is how we participate in society.

Firefly Tunnels are metaphorical passageways for the exchange of ideas through the language of Art. One could think of them as the Underground Railroad that crosses the border of language, a system of tunnels that does not believe in the barriers of countries or in the obstruction of segregated tongues. The tunnels celebrate the idea of *Firefly Insight* – this language of human communication, as an ancient language, which I believe, can be developed to create and understand peace.



Nouran Sherif, Darb 1718, photo by Aaron Hollan

Above, Firefly Tunnel Artist Nouran Sherif, summer 2012 at the final expose of La Follette's workshop. The show, SATURATED SOULS was mounted at Darb 1718, one of the only contemporary art exhibitions spaces in Cairo. The artists from La Follette's workshop exhibited

video, performance art, installation, 3D and 2D works. For many of them, this was the first time they have been exposed to such postmodern genres.



Rooftop Performance, Darb 1718, photo by Aaron Hollan



Self-portrait, photo by Aaron Hollan

While La Follette was in Egypt, she met Mohammed Abla a renowned and beloved Egyptian painter. Mohammad came to the exhibit and invited La Follette to comeback to Egypt and run a workshop out of his Fayoum Art Center. He encourage La Follette to bring her husband Gary Huck, a political cartoonist with her this time, as Alba runs the only political cartoon salon in the Middle East.



La Follette gets interviewed by Cairo media



The first Firefly Tunnel Artists, Darb 1718, Cairo summer 2010

When La Follette returned to Pittsburgh, she became the first Artist-in Residence at Carnegie Mellon University's Center for the Arts in Society. She saw this second residency in Egypt as an opportunity to bring some the of Pittsburgh based artist she knew she wanted to work with. Because of her position at CMU, she was able to invite two arts faculty members (Andrew Johnson and Sussanne Slavick) and one staff member (Dawn Weleski of the The Waffle Shop) to come with her in March. On her first trip La Follette brought Aaron Hollan, a young documentarian and Emily Laychak an ArtUp creative team member/babysitter. Now La Follette was organizing the next delegation consisting of CMU art Faculty, Holly Thuma, from the Theatre Arts Department at the University of Pittsburgh, performance artist Larry Bogad (former Pittsburgher), adding the prior three—The project brings 10 Pittsburgh artists to Egypt via The Firefly Tunnel Project.

Then the Revolution broke out...

The delegation was not naïve about their decision to go to Egypt. La Follette was in constant contact with Abla and the other Firefly Tunnel Artist in Egypt, skyping regularly, with eyes and ears pinned to the news reports. It was from one of the youngest Firefly Artists, who exhibited at the Mattress Factory museum in September, that La Follette found out that Mubark had stepped down. So after many meetings, and having to change their flights to fly through France as U.S. airlines were no longer flying to directly to Cairo, the Pittsburgh delegation packed their bags and embarked on a workshop of a lifetime!



Performance exercises run by La Follette



Tahrir Square on a Friday



Performers/Artists Holly Thuma and Tavia La Follette practice their ululation in Tahrir Square with an expert!

The Pittsburgh delegation traveled from Cairo to Alexandria to Fayoum and back to Cairo where every moment was devoted to making art. From walking down the street, to performing and exhibiting at the Altier Gallery in Cairo, the artists felt safe and welcomed in Egypt. As Bogad will later explain in his performance on 9/11 (the 10th anniversary), bringing La Follette and Huck's twins to Egypt was a beacon of hope, "People stopped traffic... and just so we could cross the streets safely".



Susanne Slavick performs at the Altier Gallery



Dawn Weleski performs on the streets of Cairo

Gary Huck traveled with 20 cartoons by 12 U.S. artists who drew on the Egyptian revolution. We believe that this is the first time U.S. and Egyptians political cartoons have been exhibited together. However, not every moment was about our creating art. The delegation got a personalized tour of the very uninhabited pyramids (revolution=low tourism). One of the Egyptians Firefly artist's girlfriend just happens to be a U.S. archeologist!



The Pittsburgh delegations get a private tour of the pyramids



Gary Huck and his son Max at the political cartoon opening

It was sad to leave Egypt at such an exciting time, but the U.S. artists were now charged with ideas, new friends and new thoughts about how to help their own country. As La Follette explained, "it felt like what was going on in the U.S. in the late 1950's and early 60's. There was energy in the air, a feeling of a new beginning, for a better way of life. However, people were also very cautious, and well aware of how quickly everything could be lost".



Lafollette (bottom) & Rffiat (top) Egyptian environmental artist



Amira (Egyptian/American writer) falls from the sky

Via desert installations in Fayoum and performances in Cairo- the artist build a bond through creating art together. In a group “jam session” Egyptian Firefly artists who were not able to come to Fayoum to work, came to Cairo to perform with the U.S. delegation. Without previously working together, they were able to perform live. This proved La Follette’s theory: after going through a common workshop, they were able to communicate and perform together through art—much like Jazz musicians.



Susanne Slavick, a Pittsburgh painter performs in public for the first time, Altier Gallery, Cairo

Coming back to Pittsburgh

A few last strategy “meeting of the minds” session and it was time to head back to Pittsburgh. There was much work to be done, including curate and run the Pittsburgh workshop. The website

was in the works. While in Egypt La Follette was working with Firefly tunnel artist Corey Sattler on different prototypes for exchanging large files, making spaces for the virtual LAB and STUDIO. A space that is artist friendly and intuitive.



Firefly Tunnel artists meet in their favorite office, a street café



Calder La Follette entertains himself on a long layover

The formula for the Pittsburgh artist workshop was exactly the same as the Egyptian one. La Follette sent out an artist call, curated the artists in, specifically looking for an eclectic group. The following is a quote from the call:

The Pittsburgh based collective will work together to build a dialogue based on perceiving that enunciates with space, body and cultural expressions. Hence, the need for a variety of mediums in which the artists work. Our topic of discussion will be around the issues of borders and identity with a common goal for peace. The project is seeking artists who are not naïve about human nature and see conflict as a necessary transcendental turning point. The major role of art in this project is to metaphysically investigate the concept of "peace". The workshop portion of the project will demand a commitment of 6-8 hours a day. This intensive schedule is needed to produce a tolerant and safe risk-taking zone of performance and installation.

With help from the Heinz Endowments, La Follette rented The Bricolage space downtown and in May of 2011, the workshops began. Just as the Egyptian workshops were



First day, Introduction of the Pittsburgh Firefly artists
Aaron Hollan.



Human installations begin by the second day. Both images by

run, La Follette begins inside to build trust through an exploration of performing in the space. Slowly the group moves the live human installations out into the landscape. The artists document the human installations and they are developed into Site-Specific Performances and shared on the website. The artists moved around Pittsburgh, from down town to out side the CMU art bilding.



Documenting outside the CMU art building, photo by Aaron Hollan

The artists moved along the river, up into Phipps Conservatory and into the city of Braddock, seeking new and interesting textures, building human installation and impromptu performances along the way.



Steffi Mayer, Braddock, PA



Hyal Willis, Phipps conservatory, Oakland

Like all of the workshops, the process is concluded with some sort of public exhibition. The group consensus was to do a consolidated performance jam session at the Bricolage space. ArtUp invited Pittsburgh Art Institute students to come and video some of the workshop and the final performance. A video montage of this can be viewed on the Firefly Tunnel website at: <http://fireflytunnels.net/pghworkshop>.

The Sites of Passage Exhibit

There is not time to rest after the Pittsburgh workshop is over. While the artists are exchanging digitally, La Follette and co-curator Katherine Talcott start walking through the installation space at the Mattress Factory Museum. Firefly website designer and technician Corey Sattler works hard to finalize and tweak last minute uploading problems. The Pittsburgh/Egypt artists exchange ideas, images, video, and sound. Works are curated into the virtual gallery (<http://fireflytunnels.net/gallerie>) as well as the physical gallery. Thus, the installation begins!



Co-curators Talcott and La Follette walk through the space



Pittsburgh artist Hyla Willis plays during install

Although ArtUp and the Mattress Factory Museum had been working for over 3 months to get the Egyptian visas expedited, with the help of Pennsylvania Senator Casey's office, a former ambassador, and immigration lawyers, the visas were still denied. However, the Pittsburgh artist turned this frustration into ART. By creating a "processing performance" on opening night. Each visitor was processed and filled out the same paper work that the Egyptians had to experience. By the end, they received a United States of Sudan passport and were able to enter. This was the brainchild of Sudanese/Egyptian artist Amado Al Fadni.



The doors of SITES OF PASSAGE open on September 9th

To see a video montage of the "processing performance" please visit the landing page of the website at: <http://fireflytunnels.net/>. Here one can also view the 9/11 sunset performance in the

Mattress Factory garden, WELCOME TO OUR REVOLUTION: TESTIMONY FROM TAHRIR by Larry Bogad.



Andrew Johnson's video and sound installation, *Descention* (Pittsburgh) Mostafa Sleem's *The Power of Now* (Egypt)

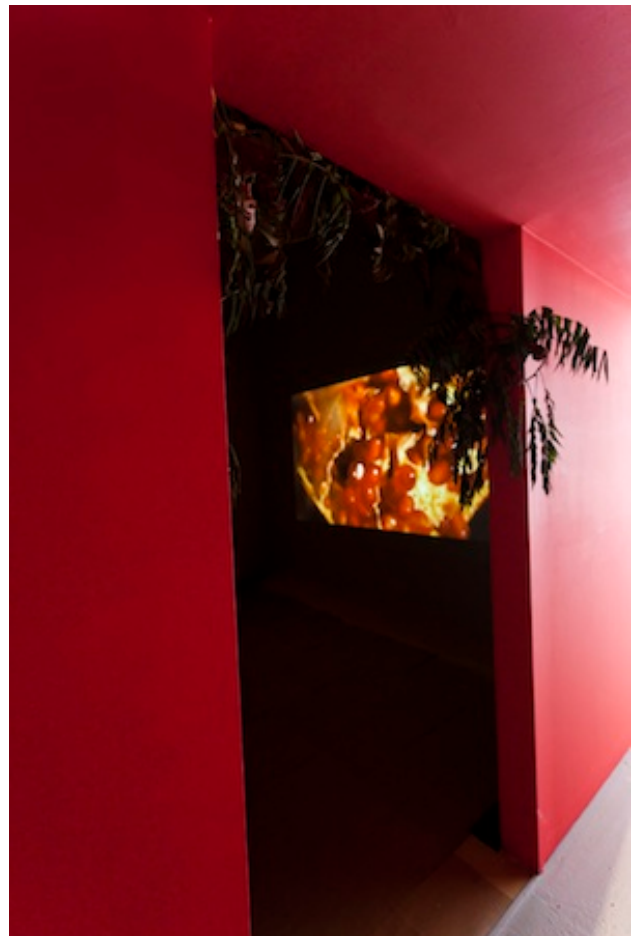
Above and on the following page are a few images of the various installations. The works consisted of video installations, sound installations, 2D, and 3D works. La Follette also programmed community outreach to move beyond the Mattress Factory walls, plus a performance series. The series included a new performance each month, to keep the show activated and bring crossover audiences to the museum.



Bogad rehearses for his September 11th sunset performance in the MF garden

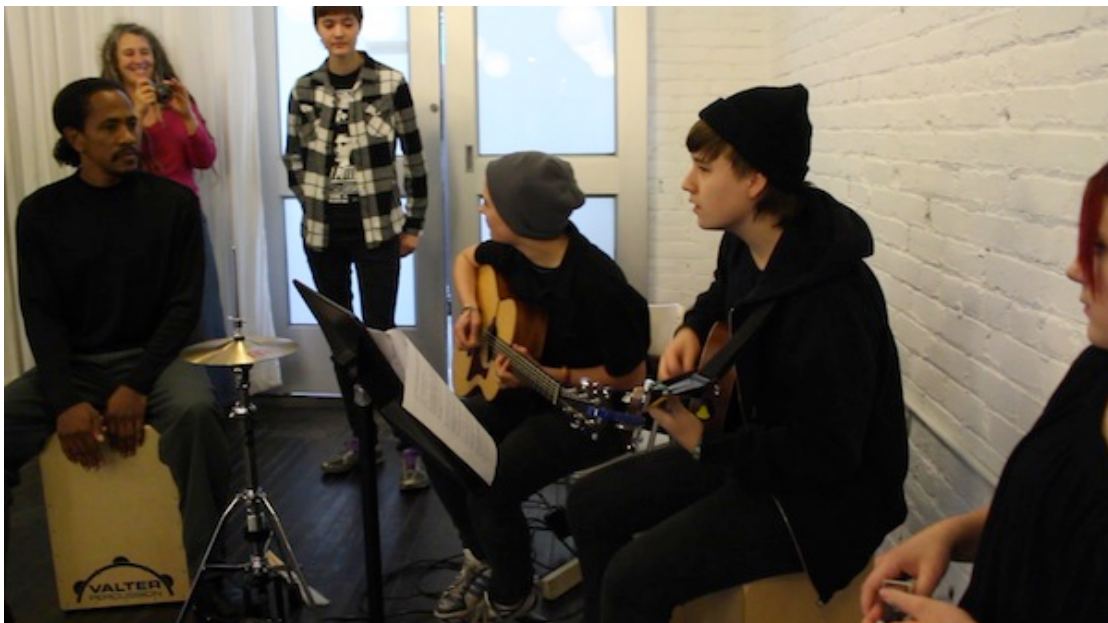


Macaroni Harmony by Hend Samir (Egypt)



Grenade by Hyla Willis (Pittsburgh)

Although the exhibit is no longer open, both the virtual and the final tangible exhibit can be viewed on the website at: <http://fireflytunnels.net/gallerie>. Videos of the most recent performances are currently being edited and will be up on the website soon. Below are some images of the artists and the performances that were brought to the museum because of this project. You can see some of these performances on the News page at <http://fireflytunnels.net/newz>.



Hope Academy HATCO students warm up for a performance in the Lobby of the MF



HATCO students performing *I COME FROM A PLACE*



Muslims, Mennonites, and Mommies by Anya Martin

ArtUp worked hard with the Director of Education, Liz Keller to program this performance series and would like to extend an extra THANK YOU to the museum staff who was so supportive. Without their patience and devotion to the project, this series would not have been possible.



OLD LADY LEAF a performance by Mark Staley, inspire by an Egyptian poet

The Egyptians are here! The Egyptians are here!

After much red tape and support from both the local and international community, ArtUp gathered enough letters of support to get approval from Homeland Security to bring the Egyptians to town for the closing events. Because of the expensive paper work for special visas and Amado Al Fadni's ticket, the organization reached out to their audience/supporters to help finance the closing events. Unlike in the U.S., if you are born in Egypt, that does not mean you are an Egyptian citizen. One of the artists, Al Fadni carries a Sudanese passport and could not have a layover in Europe without a time absorbing and expensive transit visa. Without the generous donations of our audience, Amado would not have been able to participate in the final closing events. Thank you ArtUp supporters for making this possible.

There was such an outpouring to see the Egyptian artists, ArtUp had to turn down offers to visit, artists, organizations, and institutions. There simply were not enough hours in the day. However, the Egyptians got to see snow for the first time and toured local schools, art studios, museums, and organizations. The following is a picture book story of the Egyptian's time in Pittsburgh...



Amado has breakfast at Pamela's with Heinz!



The artists finally get to see the Mattress Factory Museum!



One of the first stops is CMU's Create Lab and a ride in the electric car!



Egyptian artists also get to play with the giga pan camera at create Lab. Thank you Dror Yaron!
For the full image visit: <http://gigapan.org/gigapans/98077>



Pillow Pets becomes an Egyptian phenomenon!



Visits to the Carnegie Museum!



Quite contemplation about bridges, Nouran Sherif



Artists visit Amish country and a fellow painter/Egyptian, Kamal



Charlie Humphrey tours the PCA, Filmmakers and the Glass Center



Egyptian artists visit Ellis School's 5th grade that are studying ancient Egypt plus the High School art history class.



Director of the MF and president of the World Affairs council
Michael Olijnyk & Steven Sokol



The closing panel, Culture Crossing: Art as Dialogue for a Global Society



Amado Al Fadni gets to explain his installation and performance in person during the last curator's tour.

What next?

ArtUp is proud to announce that the organization has been invited to Palestine to continue this work by building a “tunnel” between Palestine and Israel. The organization is not naïve and knows this will not be an easy project. However, the MF museum has invited La Follette to return with this new endeavor. Charlie Humphrey of Pittsburgh Filmmakers has also invited the new Firefly Tunnel Project, **SITES OF PASSAGE: Palestine to Israel** to exhibit all the 2D work and video at the mini Melwood screening room and in the gallery. Once again, the organization will be cross-pollinating with other Arts organizations, expanding the community it is exposed to, and building new partnerships.

Tavia La Follette has been invited to be a part of the Interfaith Peace-Builders (www.ifpb.org) delegation, traveling to Israel and Palestine to hear from many different perspectives of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Although, it is not La Follette's mission to act as an intermediary in the conflict, the project does take place in and use artists from both countries. Therefore, she believes she needs to educate herself on the various perspectives she may be encountering. These frames of reference and interpretations will certainly be woven into the artistic dialogue and the fabric of the project.

While in Palestine and Israel La Follette will be meeting with religious leaders, civil society groups, grassroots organizations, as well as artists, and Dr. Mohammed Dajani who has invited **Sites of Passage** to come to Palestine.

SITES OF PASSAGE: Palestine to Israel has also recruited two lead artists who have committed to help organize artists and working spaces:

Hanna Eady (<http://imeu.net/news/article005759.shtml>), a Palestinian actor and playwright who is based in Seattle, WA and runs the New Image Theatre.

Dror Yaron (<http://www.droryaron.com/index.html>), an Israeli photographer who now lives in Pittsburgh and is the Community Outreach Coordinator at CREATE Lab, out of CMU's Robotics Institute.

Both Eady and Yaron will be traveling to Israel and Palestine ahead of La Follette and will be setting up artist meetings for her. La Follette felt it was important to have an Israeli and a Palestinian artist to help make connections for her and be leaders in the project. Both Yaron and Eady have experience working on artistic projects that cross the border of Palestine and Israel.

As ArtUp moves forward with its next stage of metamorphosis, so must its mission statement. Through working with more mature organizations, for the past few years ArtUp has been refining a new model for itself. Originally it was founded by the 5000 square feet of raw space that the organization was known for, now with the help of or new creative team and board members, the organization is focusing on its networking skills and reinterpreting the concept of "space".

Old Mission Statement: Artists Upstairs is a multidisciplinary arts organization concerned with exploring the contextual inter-relationship between movement, dance, theater, media, visual arts and sound. As professional artists living and working in Pittsburgh, we are committed to revitalizing the Pittsburgh community by providing an experimental space for creative exploration, collaboration, exhibition, rehearsal and performance.

New Mission Statement: Bridging a language of peace through the actions of Art.

Please keep your minds and digital receivers open as we keep you updated on the next project and the re-habing of our ArtUp website.

