

The Magic Carpet Mosaic Project

14-18 May 2017, Mytilene, Lesvos Island, Greece

Valérie Nicoladzé, mosaicist in the south of France.

She dedicates her work to mosaic creations, trainings, community projects and international events.

Kalliopi Kalaitzidou, mosaicist, Greece .

The Magic Carpet Mosaic Project was prepared jointly with my friend Kalliopi Kalaitzidou, who lives in Lesvos, Greece. It was developed thoroughly and aimed to create a mosaic mural, based on a community patchwork project, involving the participation of refugees settled in Lesvos.

Kalliopi Kalaitzidou wished to develop a project to celebrate the city of Mytilene, where refugees are bravely and continuously hosted and sheltered since 2015, despite the well-known difficulties of it. We both wanted to join our expertises as mosaicists to implement an artistic project that would benefit both the refugees and the city, also as the first mosaic mural in Lesvos. On one hand, it would offer to refugees a creative practice and its related positive therapeutic impact. On the other hand, it would create a master piece of art that would be the symbol of the assistance that the city is offering to manage migration flows.

This mural would be made with individual mosaic squares, put together as a giant patchwork to form a complex mosaic, meaning to represent a giant carpet, symbol of the Mediterranean and would be installed on the wall of the municipal theatre of Mytilène .

The concept of « woven squares » is a technical and artistic process which I tested out in many occasions, for community projects, as it allows creating a joyful, coloured and lively patchwork. Through a specific guidance –many times experimented these past years– it gives participants the opportunity to express their own creativity, no matter their age, culture, abilities and rhythm. It is this specific diversity that brings a kind of mixed weaving, and reflects our multicultural world enriched by our differences.

The first three days of the project, the participants (refugees and respective volunteers in charge of their participation) were invited in a quiet and respectful way to work on one piece of square (or more). The technical package and the material available inviting each of them to put together the elements to create one square that reflected their own artistic perception.

Mosaic practice allows handling various materials, and the mosaic result always reflects the participant's emotions and personality. The squares created during these days were full of symbols and feelings. They were reflecting the participant's moving stories, pains and hopes. 60 people participated in the project, ranging from 4 to 55 years old.

The final shape, was decided by the mosaicists in order to ensure visual coherence and art aesthetic. All the 98 squares, achieved with different degrees of creativity, were reunited into a complex design with addition of bigger detailed mosaic squares, pieces of glass, tiles and mirror. The international team of humanitarian volunteers formed a great team. They were fully receptive and involved in the success of the project. Here as well everyone's abilities came to be a mosaic of talents, allowed a true team work and, as always in this kind of project, an exciting and stimulating opportunity for time-sharing.

The project's schedule did not suffer from any technical problem, and, even if all goes according to plan, as in all projects, we had to accommodate ourselves with the place, time-planning, weather, emotions,...The assistance of each person of the team was more than useful but essential and efficient.

This was true not only during the first 3 days , working with the refugees, but also during the 2 days when the mural was installed. The team didn't spare its effort and worked extra hours. I am really grateful to the 10 people who assisted us; the project could not have been achieved with so much success without their involvement.

The work performed beforehand during the project conception was of course important in terms of artistic preparation and logistics, for Kalliopi Kalaitzidou and for myself.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Kalliopi Kalaitzidou and express my gratitude for what she was able to arrange in order to ensure a smooth implementation of the project: connections with officials, locating the place of work and the wall for the mural, putting together a great team, her reactivity and the way we could share our ideas, and the pleasure we had to, working together in a real harmony, aiming at a same goal, not to say our understanding and enthusiasm concerning the mosaic work itself .In one world : a successful collaboration !

I also have to thank the municipality of Mytilini who made it possible, the Swiss Cross who funded the project and Iliatchida for providing the breakfast to the participants .

Now that the project has been achieved, I am deeply happy not only with the result but by the meaning of it. I was very moved first to share these moments with the refugees, to give them an opportunity to express themselves, to exist, a way to thank the city , to let aside for a moment the tragic events they went through, and second to note that once again, beauty comes from the efforts deployed by all. Indeed, the aesthetic of each square could be different, the fact is that , put together they form a huge and strong mosaic, a unique and beautiful piece of art. It is a exceptional metaphor and a powerful invitation for people to live together and share .

I wish Kalliopi Kalaitzidou many other astounding adventures as the one we shared, and lots of coloured mosaics and team projects, in her country or abroad , that I will definitely be happy to join again if I have the opportunity.

I am today fulfilled by the experience. It represents a special achievement of what I have developed during these past 15 years of professional practice. It has given a meaning to my experiments, doubts, difficulties, long working hours with a never dampened enthusiasm.

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The Idea: Creating a symbol of memory and unity on the wall of Municipality Theater of Mytilene, (Lesbos capital) Assembling mosaic squares to form a Mediterranean carpet!

Team: Valerie Nicoladzé (Esprit Mosaïque -France), Kalliopi Kalaitzidou (Calliope Mosaics-Greece),

Team of volunteers from : Greece , Germany , England , Spain : Mira Salomori, Omar Al Said, Danae, Lenio, Leon, Podromos Cajon, Maria Prak, Nikos Chatzilas, Spyros Myron Pavlis, Inge and Pete Wilson .

Participants: Migrants and Refugees from various countries: Greece, Syria, Afghanistan, Marocco, Irak, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, States, Nigeria, Netherland.

Main sponsor: Swiss Cross,

Materials sponsor: Esprit Mosaïque, catering provided by Iliachtida.

Video making: Spyros Myron

THE MURAL : a 5 days project : 98 individual squares , 60 participants, 4,5m² mosaic ,15 countries represented



Kalliopi Kalaitzidou & Valérie Nicoladzé



Some of The team : Pete, Spyros, Omar, Pedromos, K&V, Maria, Mira, Leon