

# The Circus

## My Little Window in a Dark Locked Room



By Hazar Azzeh

The circus has become part of my life since I joined it 11 years ago. At first, I thought it was crazy to have a circus school in Palestine, but then I realized how unique and extraordinary it was to have a circus here. Everybody, in fact, thought that Shadi and Jessika were crazy for trying to start up a circus school. However, their faith in the abilities of young Palestinians and in the impact that a circus could have on them was much stronger than all the skepticism. Stubbornly following their own beliefs, they succeeded in contributing to a cultivated and liberal artistic society.

The story of the Palestinian Circus School (PCS) began in 2006, when Shadi Zmorrod from Jerusalem met Jessika Devlieghere from Belgium and shared their dream of establishing a circus school in Palestine. At first, there were only ten Palestinians who had signed up to take the first circus workshop that was held in a small room in Ramallah. The group of ten quickly grew, however, when they began to teach the first students in 2007. With the few skills they had learned, they were eager and able to pass on their knowledge to new generations. That was exactly when my brother and I joined this little magical place, which then became our second home and our second big family.

Throughout these years, the PCS has helped me become the person I am today, with all my failures and successes. It has accompanied me in every little decision I've had to make. It has taught me to love, respect, accept, and appreciate every person I meet, no matter the person's background. I could not agree more with Bob Sugarman when he says: "By turning you upside

down, we teach you to stand on your own two feet. By dropping objects, we teach you to catch them. By making you walk all over someone, we teach you to take care of others. By clowning around, we teach you to take yourself seriously."

The circus was born to make the impossible possible. The circus in Palestine was born because Palestinians need to learn to live everyday life. Reality in Palestine is one big daily circus, where people need to balance between life and death, where they juggle the many obstacles imposed on them by the occupation, where laughter hides a deep sadness, and where the right to be happy is an everyday demand.

Dignity, unity, respect, trust, and, most of all, hope are under serious threat. The occupation is devastating our

Our circus school aims to develop the creative potential of young people in Palestine to engage, empower, and strengthen their identity. We offer a safe space where people meet in equality, and by working together, we achieve meaningful results.

Through teaching kids from a variety of backgrounds, we encourage the development of a new form of cultural expression and a new generation of artists in Palestine – an art form that is dynamic and experimental, one that aims to challenge traditional perceptions of arts and artistic interaction. We offer an open space for creativity on all levels, enhancing the participation of all people involved: students, trainers, volunteers, and the community at large.

I have watched the PCS evolve into a professional institution, teaching



Challenging the barriers to freedom through circus performance. Photo by Milan Szytura.

lives, as individuals and as a nation. However, we continue to believe that a future Palestine is possible, with people who dream of a better life and invest positive energy in society.

circus all year round to more than 230 children and youth above the age of 6, from all over Palestine, with varying abilities and backgrounds (including ex-detainees, children with intellectual



▲ Exchange program between PCS and Circus Zonder Handen in Belgium, in front of PCS circus tent. Photo courtesy of The Palestinian Circus School.



◀ *Coffee In Town*, a family show by PCS. Photo by Ahmad Odeh.

▼ *SARAB* show by PCS, reflects the repetition of history with regard to refugees. Photo by Aivin Hans.



disabilities, and refugees) because we are convinced that we all have the right to access opportunities for learning, for improving our lives, and for experiencing joy. Each of us matters, and together we can make our society better. This is where we put our energy in order to create an inclusive society. Art is never made just for the sake of art inside the walls of our circus school. Everything leads to improving our society.

In addition to teaching, the PCS has created a variety of productions that have been performed in Palestine and abroad, reaching over 110,000 people locally and internationally. This is how we have been able to share our pride, our dignity, and our hope as Palestinians. By performing circus arts, we bring joy and laughter to the hearts of children who barely have a chance to enjoy a bit of childhood. We try to give our audiences the opportunity to think freely and dream as much as they wish, forgetting for a moment all the difficulties and obstacles

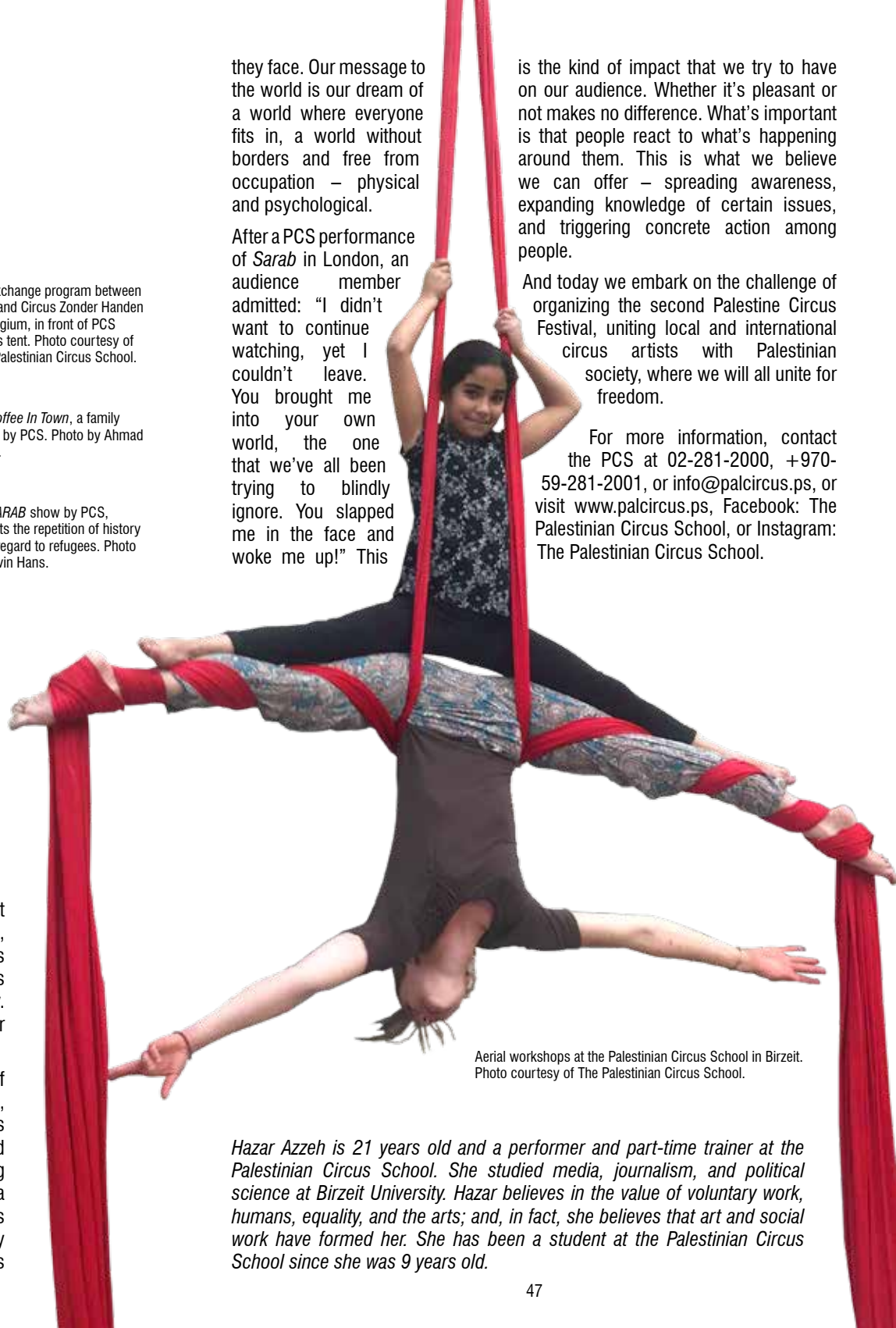
they face. Our message to the world is our dream of a world where everyone fits in, a world without borders and free from occupation – physical and psychological.

After a PCS performance of *Sarab* in London, an audience member admitted: “I didn’t want to continue watching, yet I couldn’t leave. You brought me into your own world, the one that we’ve all been trying to blindly ignore. You slapped me in the face and woke me up!” This

is the kind of impact that we try to have on our audience. Whether it’s pleasant or not makes no difference. What’s important is that people react to what’s happening around them. This is what we believe we can offer – spreading awareness, expanding knowledge of certain issues, and triggering concrete action among people.

And today we embark on the challenge of organizing the second Palestine Circus Festival, uniting local and international circus artists with Palestinian society, where we will all unite for freedom.

For more information, contact the PCS at 02-281-2000, +970-59-281-2001, or [info@palcircus.ps](mailto:info@palcircus.ps), or visit [www.palcircus.ps](http://www.palcircus.ps), Facebook: The Palestinian Circus School, or Instagram: The Palestinian Circus School.



Aerial workshops at the Palestinian Circus School in Birzeit. Photo courtesy of The Palestinian Circus School.

*Hazar Azzeh is 21 years old and a performer and part-time trainer at the Palestinian Circus School. She studied media, journalism, and political science at Birzeit University. Hazar believes in the value of voluntary work, humans, equality, and the arts; and, in fact, she believes that art and social work have formed her. She has been a student at the Palestinian Circus School since she was 9 years old.*



# palestine circus festival United for Freedom 2018



Opening night of the Palestine Circus Festival 2016 - United For Freedom, in Al-Istiqal Park.  
Photo by Ahmad Odeh.

Following the success of the 2016 festival, people from all over Palestine approached PCS to request circus shows at events and schools in their communities. In addition to offering regular performances around the country, the Palestinian Circus School decided to organize The Palestine Circus Festival on a biennial basis.

United for Freedom – Palestine Circus Festival is a nine-day event that will take place from September 27 until October 6. This year's festival will host nine local and international circus companies and groups, totaling 30 performances that will tour Birzeit, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem, Gaza, and Amman. It's sure to be a journey filled with laughter, excitement, and lots of adrenaline!

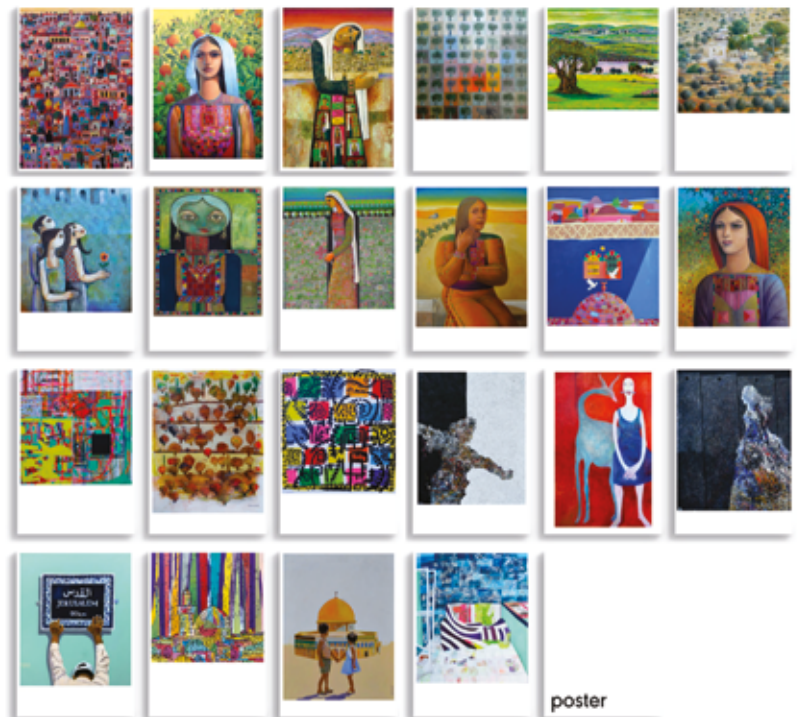
The festival embraces the diversity of Palestinian society, shares its narrative, preserves its culture, empowers the community, and raises awareness about the role of circus in Palestine. It is a portrayal of freedom of expression, trust, and emotional connection with the audience.

**Bring your family, your friends, and your Circus Pass!**

**The Palestinian Circus School**

## POSTER: Making Palestinian Art Accessible to Everyone

Zawyeh Gallery, Ramallah, introduces its latest initiative, Poster, a project that aims to make Palestinian art accessible to everyone. Through offering a wide variety of art prints that are available in sizes A3, A2, A1, and A0 on the highest quality paper, with over 30 different affordable artworks to choose from, Poster makes it easy to decorate every room in your home, business, or organization, thus broadening public appreciation for and understanding of the rich and captivating variety of Palestinian art. The initiative includes contemporary and modern styles that comprise abstract, figurative, political, and landscape artworks by a wide range of artists, including Rana Samara, Fouad Agbaria, Ibrahim Nubani, Tayseer Barakat, Nabil Anani, Sliman Mansour, Khaled Hourani, and Ibrahim Mozain. The featured artists present unique perspectives on Palestine – its symbols, culture, people, social norms, political situation, landscape, and land. Viewers and art enthusiasts can now have these exceptional works, which were previously primarily available in art galleries, museums, and private collections, close at hand.



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