

New Art Studio Visit 2024



Reyhaneh Painting Flowers

Text by Tom Williams

About the Studio

New Art Studio is an Islington-based art therapy studio that AHMM have been partnered with since 2018. They are open every Monday, 11:00-17:00, and provide a small, safe, friendly, and respectful place for individuals who are asylum seekers or refugees.

The studio provides the materials, food and drinks, and an environment for open conversation. There are a variety of people from various backgrounds, each with their own set of circumstances and hardships that they find themselves in or are recovering from.

They came to visit AHMM on Monday 17 June for a tour of Morelands, as well as to have lunch provided by Syrian Sunflower on the roof followed by some sketching/painting in the sun. I was invited along to meet the group and get to know the different individuals that make up this art studio.

About the Artists

There is only so much you can learn about any one person in a couple of hours, let alone a group of people with stories as complex and varied as these individuals.

SK

One of the first people I met was SK. She had been living in the UK as a student, until her circumstances suddenly changed, and she found herself being informed by the British government that she must now seek asylum here in the UK.

SK spoke to me about how her art is reflective of what sticks in her mind; it is about those things she sees that she can't move on from until she expresses them through her work. SK has had opportunities to exhibit her art and fashion work in places like the Maritime Museum, the V&A, the Barbican, and Somerset House; opportunities SK believes arrived from her artwork's representation of her drive to take back control of her circumstances. Her confidence and determination were evident in the way she spoke about her art and the meaning behind why it is she creates the pieces that she does.

Amir

Amir was another artist I spent a lot of time talking to. Amir had been living in Swansea, where he had a studio in which he'd create realistic oil paintings of local residents, as well as celebrities.

Amir shared how he enjoyed the texture and layering that oil paints provided to his work, and how he liked to paint from life with his subject in front of him. He also spoke about his family: how his daughter had encouraged him to enter into Sky's Portrait Artist of the Year where he and his work appeared on TV. Amir's friendly attitude was not only seen through his approach towards AHMM employees, but also in his care for the other members in the group: he often spoke about the amazing work that the other members would create, as well as spent a lot of time translating for another member of the group, Hüseyin.



Amir's Portraits

Hüseyin

When the group went for lunch on the Morelands roof, within minutes of finishing his food and receiving a pen and paper, Hüseyin began creating a piece of art. Following this, within minutes of meeting an AHMM employee he expressed how he wanted to create a portrait of her.

Hüseyin's drawings, whilst playful in appearance, carry symbolism of corruption and critique of political and social issues. Hüseyin had to leave Turkey because of his criticism of Turkish officials and governance through his cartoons and caricatures. Whilst Hüseyin wasn't able to always fully verbalise his thoughts into English, the visual clarity of his art made clear what it was he wanted to say.



Hüseyin's Artwork

Reyhaneh

When I sat down with the New Art Studio group on the Morelands roof, I sat on the opposite side of the bench to Reyhaneh, who had already started her painting of the flowers that border the roof's edge. She encouraged me to join in with the painting and said that she'd teach me. She showed me a technique for painting flowers using the watercolours, as well as said to just put the brush on the paper and go for it, create lines, flick the paint – be free.

Amir and SK both spoke about her skill and versatility as an artist. She said how she used any medium to paint with because it allowed her to be free with how and what she painted. I also later learnt that Reyhaneh's work has featured at AHMM before: we had previously helped create a collage of portraits that she had painted at New Art Studio - you may recognise the collage from being on display in the Morelands refectory. Reyhaneh's view of using mixed media so that she is free in what she creates is translated into the message of the artwork that she makes: a message of freedom.



Reyhaneh's Art

Artists and Activists

The New Art Studio's visit was concluded with a speech given by SK about who this group is: she spoke of how they come together every week no matter what they're going through or what they are struggling with, how they share stories and support each other. She spoke of their shared experience they all possess, despite their differences, and how they connect through this unifying understanding of life as a refugee or asylum seeker. SK continued to talk of New Art Studio as a home and "a Disneyworld"; a place where they can escape from the stress and difficulties of what

they are going through and immerse themselves into their artwork. SK shared that herself and many of her fellow artists use their work to make statements or deliver messages, that their art is more than just something beautiful to look at, but also a symbol for what they believe and what drives them.

New Art Studio may present itself as an art therapy studio for asylum seekers and refugees, but beneath this lies a group of artists and activists, all individuals who express themselves through art that is impassioned by a collective hardship shared by the trauma they have each experienced.

New Art Studio with AHMMers



Huseyin's Caricature