

CompetaArt in Morocco

It is an exciting time for the members of CompetaArt. We have just finished a very successful exhibition in the Sala de Exposiciones Municipal in Nerja. We had a very fine opening with over 200 people and the mayors of both towns in attendance. We had more than 4.000 visitors in the following month with tremendously positive feedback for the multi-disciplinary exhibition of our artists and craftspeople.

After the exhibition in Nerja, the members of Competaart became involved with a charity project helping street children in Kénitra, a city in the southwest of Morocco. The project, to help the privately run centre named "Dar Lekbira", was started by Manuel Dominguez Martos (Manolo) of the glass shop Vitral in Torre del Mar. Competaart founder-director, Wayne Newman, was doing his glass art work at Vitral and brought the project to the attention of the Competaart group. The group was excited to be able to help and over 18 artists donated 24 pieces of art work to be sold to raise money for the centre. "Dar Lekbira", on seeing the broad range of nationalities represented, decided to have an international exhibition and to start a cultural museum for the children. This past weekend, five of us from Competaart, went to the inauguration of the exhibition.

The centre, a school, workshops and living centre for homeless street children aged 6 to 16 who have been abused, addicted to drugs or suffered violence in the streets. All children are accepted and not discriminated against because of religion, gender or race. It has been in existence for 5 years although it had the official opening of its new centre last spring. It is located in the city of Kénitra, south west Morocco, 2 ½ hour drive from Tangier. It has a population of about 400,000 people divided into the rich and the very poor. The centre is a non-governmental non-religious centre relying on private donations for survival. It has 40 children in residence and many more who come daily for classes. We were housed in a new accommodation which will shortly open its doors to homeless alcoholics and addicts aged 16 to 21. It has plans for a drop in centre for the homeless and another building under construction to replace a centre currently at Kenitra hospital for abandoned babies and up to 6 years of age.

It was an incredible experience for all of us. We bonded quickly with the children, the staff and many other Moroccans. Everyone was friendly and caring. We had a chance to experience some great Moroccan food sharing the dining room with the children and staff. We worked along side them in preparing the place for the exhibition. It was fascinating watching the children learn so quickly and just as enjoyable playing with them. We were privileged to a view of Moroccan culture seldom seen by tourists.

After the success of this week end, they are looking forward to making the exhibition an annual event. We, Competaart members, are already working on ways we can further help this great project and are looking forward to returning there.

For more information and photographs, see www.competaart.com