

The new Wall posters and Sumud and Freedom, 2017

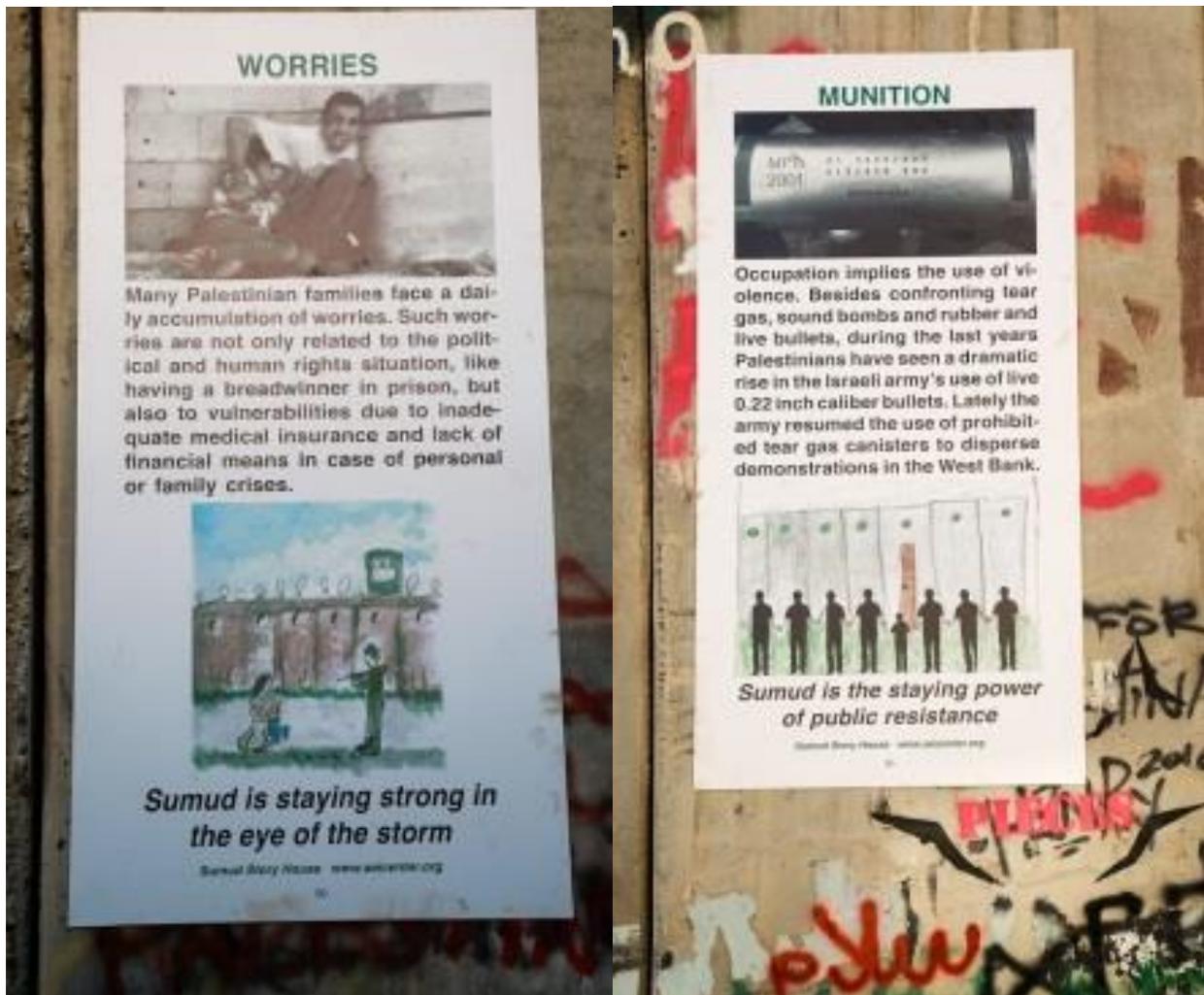
Report to Friends of Young Bethlehem

During 2017, the year in which 50 years of Israeli occupation in the West Bank, East-Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip was commemorated, AEI presented posters and arts work of Palestinian youth and women from the Bethlehem area.

The new Wall posters

Fifty new weather-resistant posters, 1 by 2 meters each, were fixed on the Wall around Rachel's Tomb in North-Bethlehem. They were made possible by the fundraising action of the Friends of Young Bethlehem in the Netherlands. Each new poster is a kind of explanation of or background to an existing story poster within the "Wall Museum" which now consists of over 260 posters.





The 50 new posters have the following elements in common:

- Each poster deals with an *occupation* theme and a related *sumud* (or steadfastness, resilience) theme.
- On top of the poster is a *news story* with hard facts and figures about a specific occupation theme, like 'curfews', 'permits', or 'humiliation'.
- On the background a black-white *photo* shows the visual reality of the occupation theme.
- Below that photo is the painting or drawing as made by the youth or women. The arts works, in color, illustrate the occupation theme, or give some kind of comment. The paintings are signed with the first name of the painter.
- Under the paintings is a short definition of sumud in relation to the theme.

Many of the posters' paintings or drawings express the idea of a *mental map*. Unlike geographical maps which orient ourselves in the environment, a mental map builds upon creative and artistic efforts. The map is not an objective representation of the environment, but a subjective imaginative interpretation.

In several workshops at AEI and a Beit Sahouri educational NGO during the second half of 2016 and the first half of 2017, two volunteer artists, Ada Krowinkel (Friends of Young Bethlehem, Netherlands) and Angela Blackwood (arts teacher, UK), facilitated the making of the drawings and paintings by dozens of Palestinian youth and women following the idea of the mental map.

After design and production, all 50 arts posters were fixed in-between existing posters in the area stretching from the military watchtower at SSH, around Claire Anastas' house up to the Banksy hotel. The (majority of the) posters were ready and displayed during the commemoration event. Some posters were delivered a few weeks later.



Sumud and Freedom events

"Sumud and Freedom" was the slogan of AEI's Monday June 5 public meeting in commemoration of 50 years of occupation. It took place in front of the Wall where the 50 new posters were fixed. A few hundred people, including the mayor of Bethlehem and a visitor group of Pax Christi Germany, participated in a program that extended into the Tuesday when a community *Iftar* [Ramadan evening meal to break the fast] was held in the same place.



Inad Theatre

The Palestinian concept of *sumud*, literally steadfastness or perseverance, emphasizes the connection with the land, the people, the traditional culture. A children's program by 'Inad Theatre from Beit Jala featured hilarious conversations between a grandfather and his grandchild who among other things learned about the healthy effects of eating fresh fruits from land now largely stolen. The women of the Bethlehem Sumud Choir showcased the heritage in their songs and traditional red-embroidered dresses. How to rhythmically connect to the land was shown by a youth *dabkeh* [traditional dance] troupe from the village of Wadi Fouqeen near Bethlehem. The call for freedom was loudly heard in the swinging music of Bethlehem singer George Thalgieh and AEI's youth music group Sawa [together], the last singing the Human Rights Song, "The world should be a fair place, where we can all live in peace..."

Twenty international artists or groups of artists contributed to a rotating digital exhibit displayed on a screen behind the stage. They expressed visions of occupation and freedom. The artists drew abstract forms of shrinking space, brought out the fate of Gaza in sensitive drawings, painted the soul of the Palestinian people, sung the poetry of a bird on top of the Wall looking both sides, presented the terrible conditions of refugee camps in Greece (one automatically thought of Palestinian refugee camps), sung a Biblically inspired peace message.

Dutch painter Marlies Verda was present at the occasion and told how she, as a visual artist, had been looking for the human faces of her ancestors who perished during the Second World War in Europe, and whom she doesn't know. In a series of self-portraits she recreated those faces yet in a way that all were invited to project their own names and faces and humanity in them: "it may be me, it may be you." Human connection is key.