

Motaz Alaaraj



Motaz Alaaraj (born in 1990) is a photographer and filmmaker from Gaza. His journey in photography began at the end of 2010 with his desire to take snapshots of life. He was initially interested in showing the tenacity and beauty of Gazans, the colorful nature of his surroundings – the abundance

of flowers in spring and the beauty of Gaza's sea – and Gaza's children. But more and more, he began to portray and document the destruction of Gaza through the ongoing siege and frequent assaults, revealing the suffering of its people. His work conveys the message that Gazans are standing strong despite the hardship. But while he cannot or should not turn a blind eye to the social impact and the economic difficulties that are prevalent in Gaza, Alaaraj notes, "We always find that there are some details that fill us with joy and hope, and I aim to show this in my work and through my photographic lens."



Since late 2013, Alaaraj has focused more on filmmaking, teaching himself all aspects of video production through online tutorials and hands-on experience. The lack of formal training available in Gaza, the difficulties of gaining access to resources, and the high cost of equipment, as well as the nonexistence of a group of like-minded individuals in Gaza make such a task more difficult than in other places. Alaaraj is using time-lapse and was the first person in Gaza to explore hyper-lapse techniques.

Many of Alaaraj's early works were destroyed in the recent assaults on Gaza. In 2011, Alaaraj's first photo exhibition was sponsored by the A. M. Qattan Foundation. Since 2013, he has been involved in various responsibilities that range from cameraman to director in a number of filmmaking projects, among them *Media with Disability* (funded by Caritas and Handicap International, 2013), *Gaza Singing for Peace* (produced by Save Youth Future Society, Gaza, 2013), Education Above All's Al Fakhoora program (produced by UNDP and Qatar Fund, 2013), *100 Hamma Wa Lamma*

(produced by UNICEF and Tamer Institute, 2015), *Truce* (directed by Amer Nasser, 2015), and *Long Hot Summer* (produced by Shashat Annual Women's Film Festival, 2016). Alaaraj has offered photography workshops for children with disabilities through Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children, covered Right to Play activities in Gaza, and worked with Oxford English Center, Oxfam, and the European Union on a number of projects. He has been a member of UNESCO's Network of Mediterranean Youth (NetMed Youth) since 2014.

In 2016, his photographs were shown in exhibitions in Paris and Avignon, France, but the photographer himself did not receive permission to leave Gaza. In November 2016, when a substantial number of Gazan films were presented at the 22nd Geneva International Film Festival Tous Ecrans, their Gazan authors received permits to leave and took along a number of Alaaraj's works that sold out within the first hour of the three-day exhibit that the filmmakers had organized in a local café to honor of the Month of Solidarity with the Palestinian people.

