

Riham Isaac

Riham Isaac, a performance artist, actress, and theater director, didn't know what path her career would take when she completed her BA in physiotherapy at Arab American University in 2005. As she started to get involved in her university's drama club, she realized a strong connection between her interest in kinesthetics and her lifelong affinity for classic Egyptian cinema, developing her acting talents until she was taking lead roles in theaters such as Al-Harah Theater in Beit Jala and Ashtar Theatre in Ramallah.

Following several years of participation in international productions, residencies, and festivals, Riham moved to London where she earned an MA in performance making at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2013. Here, she helped conceive *Coming Tide*, a transient performance piece that takes place in the muddy Thames riverbed at low tide to explore rituals and perceptions of ugliness and beauty.

Riham realized her own artistic ideas as both performer and creator with her directorial debut *I Am You* in 2016. The show toured throughout Palestine and in Sweden. Using the red clown nose as a symbol of the deep emotions hidden beneath the masks we project, the performance incorporated body movements, poetry, video, and mirrors in a space that allowed the audience free reign to explore their inner identities and contemplate both their isolation from and connection to humanity.



In 2017, Riham co-directed – with Academy Award-winning English director Danny Boyle – *The Alternativity*, a show commissioned by Banksy and staged at his Bethlehem-based Walled Off Hotel. Working with a variety of multi-talented youth groups, Riham and Danny updated the traditional nativity story to reflect the reality of Bethlehem today – as the birthplace of Christ *and* a city under occupation – using modern elements such as metal detectors, text messaging, and rap music. Riham's hope was to show the world a view of Palestine beyond what is conveyed in the news, a place where bright talents and strong communities are a cause for celebration.

Riham is often seen working and collaborating within the burgeoning art scene of her hometown, Beit Sahour, where she is active in the local community and has founded the Art Salon. She encourages others to utilize the space to explore and develop their artistic side. Art Salon currently hosts classes for youth to engage in multidisciplinary activities that include dance, acting, painting, photography, and circus performances. Riham has also been teaching courses at Bethlehem University and Dar Al-Kalima University since 2017.

“As an artist from Palestine, my connection to our human existence is unique as I live in one of the most controversial places in the world. Nevertheless, I am a citizen of the world and believe in making art that is influential, provocative for everyone. Flowers and mirrors are recurring objects in my work as both connect me to fragility, vulnerability, dreams, and fragmentations. Through my works, I hope to create some transformation in the world we live in now and to offer my art as an inspiration to build an ideal world.”

For more information about Riham Isaac, visit her website at <https://www.rihamisaac.com>.

