Ahyay-e-Hunar or Rejuvenation of Art is the University of Oklahoma's selection for Summer 2022's Davis Project for Peace. We executed this project with the goal of restoring the Sketch Club in Quetta, Pakistan and making them a self-reliant organization. Some undertakings include: renovating the Sketch Club facility, introducing printmaking as a new artform, non-profit development, training sessions in outreach, and fundraising. We also organized an exhibition of different artforms.

Artist lineup for the exhibition:
- Sketch Club, Asef

Project Description

● How did you decide what issue(s) you wanted to address and what approaches or strategies you chose to implement? Why did you choose your host site? In what ways did local relationships support you or contribute to the project?

The lack of exposure from the outside world is an ordeal for the Hazara community in Quetta, Pakistan. Being surrounded by military check posts and the major educational institutes being on the other side of these check posts hinder their intellectual and artistic awareness. Even then the art institutes that are available to them excel at producing students who are less exposed, yet they still get aware of something beyond the realm of what they were being taught. We decided to exhibit the works of these students along with the works of some established artists. These artists inspire them on a more personal level because they had been students once too, if not of the same institution, then in the same societal context. The struggles of these artists are not far from what these students can imagine their own struggles to be.

Other than the exhibition, we also introduced printmaking to the students. As an art form that is not very accessible, even to students in the US either, printmaking is a beautiful medium of art that has a strong tradition worldwide. Even in the markets of Quetta, which were really scarce in art materials, we found linosheets and carving tools to make prints. Exposing a group of people unknown to this art form, encouraged them to think about other media that were not aware of or potentially experiment with a medium that they would want to invent themselves.

Being a local of the area, my friends helped me a lot with the planning and organization of the events during this project. I would like to thank my friends, our mentors from Mehr Koh studio, Quetta Chakhana, and Asef Ali Mohammad for making this project a success and worthwhile.

● What changes or adjustments did you make to your original plans, and why?

Summary

Ahyay-e-Hunar or Rejuvenation of Art is the University of Oklahoma's selection for Summer 2022's Davis Project for Peace. We executed this project with the goal of restoring the Sketch Club in Quetta, Pakistan and making them a self-reliant organization. Some undertakings include: renovating the Sketch Club facility, introducing printmaking as a new artform, non-profit development, training sessions in outreach, and fundraising. We also organized an exhibition of different artforms.

The changes or adjustments and their rationale could be found below:
The wooden roof did not have the desired insulation, so we renewed the corrugated sheet along with the installed gypsum sheets. This ended up costing more, however, the founder of Sketch Club insisted on this and we deemed it more appropriate for their cause. This ended up removing the installation of a space heater and fan from our project.
The 12 x 12 ft room expansion changed to a 30 x 14 ft room expansion. Again, this is what the founder of Sketch Club insisted upon and used his social reputation to achieve.
In the absence of a photographer or a photography-savvy individual, we decided to opt for a printer, scanner, and projector to help the instructor as teaching aids and the students with their projects.
Most of the adjustments we made were due to the problems the founder and instructor of Sketch Club, Fazil Musavi was causing us. We knew his motives for expanding his studio, however, we could not do a lot to contest his decision since he has a respectable reputation in the community. He even demanded an expense report from us, deeming himself as the head of the project and the one responsible for the funds.

● Are there opportunities for continuing your work on this issue? If so, please describe.
Yes! The photographer whom we worked with on the project for the exhibition plans to publish his photo book which he has been working on for 15 years. His exhibition titled “The Plight of the Hazara people” was a massive success in our exhibition. The work included 20 photographs which were a collection of the bombed sites, portraits of the survivors and the families of the ones killed, life in Mariabad (the site of the project), institutional oppression, and much more. His photo book combines the same themes with that of peace nowadays in which there is still fear and a lack of awareness of the outside world. It would be great to work on the publication of his photo book and spread awareness about the highly institutionalized oppression of the Hazara people in Quetta, Pakistan, and all around the world.

Reflection

● How do you define peace?
We find peace to be a circumstance where one can pursue life without disturbances or instability. On a broader level, it is a situation without conflict, internal or external. It is the ability to treat every moment as new without having to attach a past trauma to it. It is a state of enjoying the moments for what they are and not what one fears they could be.

● In what ways might your project contribute to peace? What changes occurred? Short-term? Long-term?
We believe that the project promotes peace by enabling a discourse through the medium of art. We hope that our investment in the community will encourage artistic expression among its members and shine a light on the issues faced by the community. The Sketch Club has seen success with art galleries in the past and we hope our project will help them continue their artistic tradition and become relevant nationally.
During our project, we could see the art facility improve significantly. We were able to include modern amenities such as new doors, windows, insulation and more. We were also able to expand the sq. footage of the building to enable more students and art forms. More importantly, with the goal of self-reliability, we helped them with fundraising and outreach skills.
On a longer timeline, these new art forms should produce more versatile and talented artists. Which in turn, would encourage more people to take up art. However, we also expect them to continue growing
and improving without the need for help from outside. The outreach and fundraising should make them capable of implementing their own strategies and vision for the future.

- What did you learn about the dilemmas, challenges, or conflicts that underlie the targeted issues or utilized approaches/strategies?

Dilemmas have been the running theme of our project. Due to cultural differences and budget constraints, questions tended to arise. It was tricky deciding how to maximize the time and money to make the most impact in the community. However, it was during this process that we realized the importance of collaboration and trust. It becomes a lot easier to execute a vision if the team has trust and a shared vision for making an impact.

Challenges can always be handled and our passion for the project helped us push through even when things got difficult. One notable example was a delay in receiving our funding, which threw off our timeline. Despite this, we made the necessary adjustments and completed the project in line with most of our vision. Our hardest lesson was the derailing effect of conflict. The founder of the Sketch Club, Fazil Mousavi, became extremely problematic towards the end of the project, which affected our ability to complete the project efficiently. We realized that we should have defined responsibilities and asserted the goals of the project. This could have helped us stay on track throughout the project without distractions.

As a leader of the Sketch Club, it is a shame that Mr. Musavi puts his self-interests ahead of his students.

- Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you?

The project is definitely the most important social work of our life. It truly convinced us that difference can be made if you are passionate about something and take initiative. This applies to almost anything in the world. If you asked us pre-UWC about executing a project at this scale, we probably would not have any belief in ourselves. However, through this project, we are confident in our ability to make a positive impact in the world. This formula is fairly simple, finding an issue we are passionate about and taking action (which is often the hardest step). The project has convinced us to volunteer our time to initiatives whenever possible. It has also challenged us to solve problems, make adjustments, and maximize our potential to make a difference on limited resources. We are inspired by the immense collaboration that had to take place to execute a project of this scale. It is exciting to see the entire chain of people involved in making our project a reality and the selfless work that goes into making a difference in communities that need it the most. We would like to thank the Davis Foundation, The UWC Committee at OU, Mohammad Javed, Karar Hussain, Shaukat Ali, Asef Ali Mohammad, Habib Qasemi, Murad Ali, Sadat Ali, Ali Zaidi, Melia Alderman, Veronica Collazo, and every volunteer that took part. We look forward to working with more artists in Quetta who for the most part, are very professional and welcoming.

Personal Statement:
Ahyay e Hunar taught us that art anywhere in the world is a universal language for artists to escape from reality and portray it. The execution of this project connected us to the best local Hazara artists in Quetta, Pakistan. It acquainted us with people from a variety of fields due to its multifaceted nature. Other than the artists, we met bureaucrats, contractors, students, teachers, plumbers and renovators etc. The types of people we met and brought opportunities to is a big success of Ahyay e Hunar. We hope to continue bringing these opportunities through the Davis Foundation to the community of people well worthy of them.