

**NIASD contact information**

Mail address: P.O. Box 36103  
Mezzeh, Damascus, Syria  
Visitors address: East Mezzeh,  
Al Farabi, Street no. 85, Damascus, Syria  
Tel: 00963-11- 61249790, 61249791,  
6117622, 6120515  
Fax: 00963-11-6120515

Website: [www.niasd.org](http://www.niasd.org)

Email: [director@ni-damascus.org](mailto:director@ni-damascus.org)  
[deputydirector@ni-damascus.org](mailto:deputydirector@ni-damascus.org)  
[assistant1@ni-damascus.org](mailto:assistant1@ni-damascus.org)

## NIASD NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2010

We are happy to inform you about the activities which have recently taken place at the Netherlands Institute for Academic Studies in Damascus (NIASD).

### 1. Science and Education

*Study trip group of prof. dr. Machiel Kiel (23 May - 2 June 2010)*

Upon the request of prof. dr. Machiel Kiel, formerly with Utrecht University, the institute assisted in arranging a study trip for 13 students and former students of prof. dr. Kiel. Unfortunately prof. dr. Kiel's health did not allow him to travel to Syria himself. Upon his request the group was guided by Annemeik Schlatmann. Below you will find an impression of Constantin Panchenko, one of the study trip participants.

"I was lucky to fulfill an old dream - to visit Syria, the country of my particular scholar interest. It was one of my best journeys. Every day was equally interesting. I was fascinated by the mosaics of the Omeyyad mosque, by the dome of the Ezraa church and endless ruins of Bosra. The visit to Maalula was also fantastic. I most of all liked the combination of beautiful landscapes and historical monuments which were not crowded by people. Palmyra



certainly was extremely impressive as well. The view of Qasr Ibn Maan and its desert during a rather windy sunset left an ever lasting impression on me. Rasafa was the site of my particular interest because my research is connected with the history of Christian Arabs. This city had been predominantly Christian until its abandonment in the 13th century. Taking into consideration that Rasafa is currently only partly excavated, I really hope that new archaeological discoveries will be made there in the future. Krak de Chevallier became a real climax of the journey. I especially liked the view from its towers on neighbouring mountains,

olive trees, vineyards, villages and monasteries. It is the best area in Syria from my point of view.” Constantin Panchenko, Moscow State University, Russia.

*Cooperation agreement concluded between Damascus University and the University of Groningen (May 2010)*

Over the past years the institute worked hard to assist in the realization of a cooperation agreement between Damascus University and the University of Groningen aimed at small scale student research exchanges in the fields of media and culture. As we mentioned in our spring newsletter, the agreement was signed at the end of March 2010 by Damascus University’s president, dr. Wael Mualla. In May 2010, the University of Groningen sent the agreement signed by university president prof. dr. S. Poppema back to the University of Damascus. After the summer holidays, the institute will contact Damascus University and the University of Groningen to assist with the implementation of this agreement.

*Study visit by Fontys delegation to Yarmouk Private University (8 - 10 June 2010)*

Since the end of 2009, the institute assisted Yarmouk Private University (YPU) in Syria with arranging contacts with Dutch universities with the aim of starting co-operation in the area of quality management and control. This resulted in a visit by Mr. Rob van de Gevel, Managing Director of Fontys International Projects, to Yarmouk Private University in June 2010. During his visit, Mr. van de Gevel, Astrid Rijbroek (director NIASD), the YPU president and several YPU deans exchanged ideas about their future cooperation possibilities. A follow up visit by Fontys to YPU is scheduled for the period September-October 2010.

*Summer Course Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture (20 June - 11 July 2010)*



This summer the second edition of our Summer Course Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture took place at the institute with a total of 21 students (18 Dutch, 2 American, 1 Bulgarian). A team of Dutch lecturers — dr. Lucinda Dirven (UvA), dr. Luit Mols (research consultant Islamic art), dr. Robbert Woltering (UvA) and teacher team leader dr. Mat Immerzeel (UL) — delivered the lectures and provided instruction on the spot at various sites

in Damascus and its surroundings. In the Netherlands, Dianne van de Zande of Leiden University coordinated various matters related to this course, while the institute provided all practical arrangements in Damascus, including housing of the students and transport to and from the sites.

The course provided an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to Christian and Islamic art and architecture and included monuments and works of art from Late Antiquity. During the lectures and excursions, students were exposed to fine examples of Antique, Christian and Islamic art and architecture and studied the social and cultural contexts underpinning

those architectural achievements. In the Damascus area a number of mosques, churches and — for a wider perspective — synagogues were visited, in addition to places such as the Deir Mar Musa monastery and the Monastery of Our Lady at Saydnaya.



The combination of in-depth academic lectures and articles, the integrated approach to Christian and Islamic art and architecture and the direct exposure to architectural and art-historical artifacts in Syria proved effective and was well received by the students. We intend to run this course again in 2011.

#### *Summer Course Intercultural Communication (27 June – 8 July 2010)*

A week after the Summer Course Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture had started, the institute also welcomed 14 students (10 Dutch, 1 Chinese, 2 Syrian, 1 Iraqi) for the first edition of its Summer Course Intercultural Communication.

The focus of this course was on intercultural communication between persons with a Western and a Middle Eastern / Arab cultural background: 1) in informal contacts, 2) between professionals and clients, and 3) in organizations. The course is unique in the sense that, as far as



we know, it is the only Dutch course on intercultural communication which is provided in the Middle East, in a very different cultural setting compared to that of the Netherlands.



In the first week students were instructed by Anke van Haastrecht, MA (RUG), and dr. Ben Boog (formerly RUG, now Boog Research), while Youssef Azghari, MA (Avans), and Jelle Alkema, MA (Avans) took care of the second course week. During the course also three guest lectures were delivered: by IT consultant Mr Nabil Nassar, scholar and publicist dr. Iman Al-Ghafari, and by Ms. Angelina Eichhorst of the Delegation of the

European Union to Syria. We intend to run this course again in 2011.

### *Summer Course Arabic 2010 (15 July - 10 August 2010)*

The institute's Summer Course Arabic took place from 15 July until 10 August. Our experienced team of six Syrian teachers delivered this course to a total of 46 students from the Netherlands (36) and Belgium (10). The course covered listening, reading, writing, conversation skills and grammar. Conversation skills received special attention, and what better location could there be for students to work on their spoken Arabic than Damascus?

Prior to the course the students were required to do an email placement test and upon arrival in Damascus a written test and interview with the teachers. After these tests, the students were divided into six different levels: absolute beginners, beginners I, beginners II, intermediate I, intermediate II and advanced. Classes were given both in the morning (09h00-13h00) and in the afternoon (13h30-17h30). Twice a week the students had to do assignments in the city of Damascus to practice and improve their conversation skills. The institute arranged housing for all course students, either in rooms in the Old City of Damascus, or in rooms in apartments with air-conditioning elsewhere in Damascus.



*Assistance to prof. dr. Peter Akkermans' Tell Sabi Abyad team (April - June 2010)*

As in previous years, the institute provided assistance to the Tell Sabi Abyad excavation team of prof. dr. Peter Akkermans of Leiden University. This assistance included things such as making photocopies, buying necessary excavation materials, checking and fixing the old Nissan Patrol car also known as “The Red Elephant”. Upon the return of prof. dr. Akkermans to Damascus, members of the Tell Sabi Abyad team were invited for a dinner at the residence of the Dutch Ambassador. The institute helped the embassy with inviting teachers of the Department of Archaeology of Damascus University and students of our “Archaeological Pottery Research” course (April 2010) as well. Before all guests could enjoy their dinner, prof. dr. Akkermans informed them about the findings of the 2010 excavation season which he illustrated with a great number of beautiful pictures.



*Arabic translation of English texts for the museum in Raqqa (May-June 2010)*

In the framework of the preparations for a Dutch archaeological exhibition in Raqqa, the institute produced the Arabic translations of texts explaining the findings of the Tell Sabi Abyad team. The texts were written by Ms. Hannah Plug. The exhibition starts in August 2010 and continues for about two months.



*Approval obtained for a Environmental Media Training course (27 June 2010)*

During the last couple of months, Dutch water specialists Joshka Wessels and Francesca de Châtel developed a course on Environmental Media Training, which is scheduled to take place at the institute 22-26 September 2010, with 10-15 participants. This training course is targeted at Syrian print journalists, photographers and film makers and aims to share insights on the various ways in which environmental issues can be covered in news media. This project is funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Damascus, while the institute arranged for the approval from the Syrian Ministry of Culture to run this course.

*Project proposal “Training Course in Project Development and Management for Women 2010-2011” finalized and submitted (June 2010)*

During the month of June, the institute, together with the Danish Institute in Damascus (DID), finalized a project proposal for the “Training Course in Project Development and Management for Women 2010-2011” and subsequently submitted this project proposal to several potential donors. This course is a follow up of the earlier successful training course “Project Development and Management” (PDM) which was delivered in 2008-2009 at both institutes by trainers from Maastricht School of Management (MSM). At the time of writing this newsletter, we have received positive initial reactions from several potential

donors, and we are awaiting their official decisions. If we manage to attract full funding for this course, the Maastricht School of Management will be contracted to deliver it.

*Marketing the MENA Scholarship Programme (July 2010)*

Upon the request of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Damascus, the institute assisted with the promotion and application processing for the MENA Scholarship Programme 2010 with the 1 July deadline. This programme is an initiative of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is administrated by the Dutch organization NUFFIC. It provides scholarships for short courses in the Netherlands for Syrian mid-career professionals employed by organizations in the fields of Water Management, Environmental Sciences, Business Administration and Management, Agriculture and Geology and Earth Sciences. For 1 July deadline there were 37 applicants. Most of these applicants applied for courses at the Maastricht School of Management.

*Intern Rianne de Vries at the institute (end of June until the end of July 2010)*



Rianne: “Right after I finished my BA in International Relations at the University of Groningen in May 2010, I flew to Damascus to do an internship at the institute for a short period. In the previous months I had been looking for a short internship to gain some experience in working in a well-established international organization. The institute offered me this possibility. For one month I have worked on setting up the 2011 Film Program. In this period I have been selecting films, documentaries and short films. In addition, the first steps were taken to contact the film owners and to finalize a project proposal for the film programme. I have enjoyed my time at the institute very much and hope its 2011 Film Program will be a great success.”

*Free lancer Fernande van Tets at the Syrian English language daily “Baladna” (10 July – 1 September)*

Fernande: “My name is Fernande van Tets, I studied Arabic & Culture (BA) and Political Science (BA) at the University of Amsterdam. I contacted the Netherlands Institute in Damascus a few months ago, stating that I wanted to do an internship in Syria. An internship as such was eventually not possible with Baladna English, but I was offered a position as free lancer at this local English daily newspaper. I write features about Syrian events, such as the opera concert at Crac des Chevaliers last week, but also about international news events such as the WikiLeaks files. The office has a great mix of international and Syrian people, and it is very interesting to see how a Syrian daily newspaper functions and what its news priorities are. I am enjoying Syria enormously. Last weekend I took a road trip up the coast to Aleppo and was amazed by how the scenary changes within 24 hours! The Syrian people are incredibly friendly and hospitable, and I definitely intend to return in the future.”



## 2. Culture

*Film Program 2010 (29 June – 1 July 2010)*



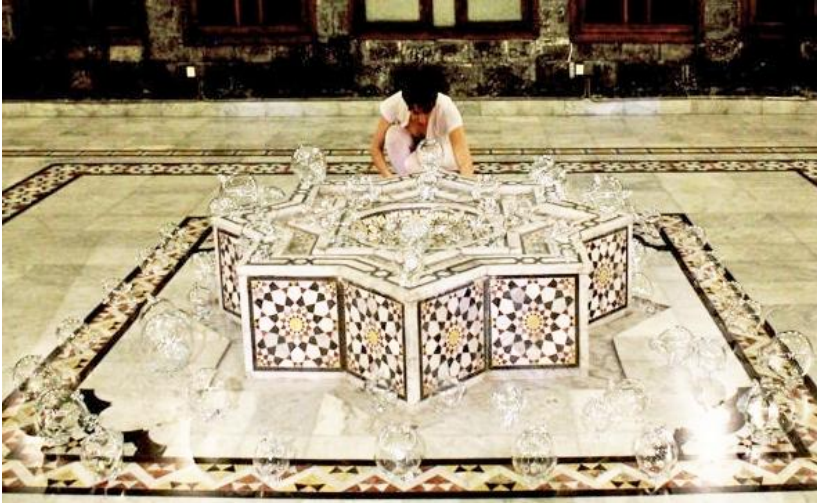
At the end of June and the beginning of July, the second block of its 2010 Film Program took place at the institute. All the films were screened with Arabic subtitles made by the institute. The second block featured: *Impasse* (Bram Schouw, 2008), *Bloody Mondays and Strawberry Pies* (Coco Schrijber, 2008), *About Fish and Revolution* (Margriet Rogaar, 2008), *Carmen meets Borat* (Mercedes Stalenhoef, 2008) and *Bridging the Gap* (Corinne van Egeraat, 2008). The Film Program 2010, which will bring Dutch films, documentaries and short films in October and December 2010 as well, is sponsored by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Damascus and by Holland Film in Amsterdam.

*2nd AllArtNOW festival - Living Spaces (25-30 May)*

With a small financial contribution from the institute, Maria Lalou participated in the “2<sup>nd</sup> AllArtNow festival – Living spaces” and exhibited the works: *Drop`s* and *Economic Express or Mobility Express – Piggtherapy*. Her works were shown at *Maktab Anbar* and at the *Alkishla Gallery* in Damascus.

Maria Lalou is a new media/conceptual artist. She was born in Athens, Greece, and has studied Fine Art in Amsterdam. At the moment she is working and living in Amsterdam. Below you will find a small description of the *Economic Express or Mobility Express – Piggtherapy*.





Economic Express or Mobility Express – Piggtherapy is a travel with 100 glass pigs to 5 different locations chosen for their historic and economic virtues. ‘Pigs’ are representing the consumerism of the 21th century, as well as the humanistic behavior towards animal breeding. The expedition took its

name from the ‘Economic Mobility’ plan, questioning the phenomenon of testing on animals. The carriage of the glass pigs is a metaphor for Economy Values, Animal Threat and Consumption. For more information about Maria Lalou and her works, please see [www.piggtherapy.com](http://www.piggtherapy.com).

*Activities in the context of the EU funded project "Cultural Participation for Heritage Regeneration" (13 June 2010, and 1-2 July 2010)*

Under the Local and Regional Cultural Activities scheme of the Delegation of the European Union to Syria, the project "Cultural Participation for Heritage Regeneration" is jointly funded by the Delegation and by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Syria. The project is implemented and coordinated by the Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO), in partnership with the Syrian NGO Art Renaissance Association, Netherlands Institute of Academic Studies in Damascus (NIASD) and Danish Institute in Damascus (DID). In the context of this project several activities are scheduled to take place in the course of 2010.

On the 13th of June 2010, the award ceremony for the two competitions “Art in the city: competition for the design of art works in open public spaces” and “Bridging the gap: Cultural Heritage and Educational Resources: competition for the design of educational activities” took place in the Damascus Historical Museum. In addition to this award ceremony, the exhibition “Uqayba: Colours of a forgotten neighbourhood” was opened; this exhibition will run until 27 June 2010. Also in the framework of this project, an open traditional house day was organized on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2010 in Al-Narinj alley in Uqayba, a city quarter outside the walls of the Old City of Damascus. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 2010, a guided tour took place in that same Uqayba quarter.

### **3. Institutional**

*Netherlands Institute in Damascus: Salima Bouchtaoui*

As of 19 May 2010, Ruben Elsinga is no longer working at the institute. The appointment of a new deputy director is expected to take place in the fall of this year. In the mean time Salima Bouchtaoui (23) has been working with us.



Salima: “Between March and August 2010, I worked for the institute on a freelance basis, assisting the Dutch staff with various activities, most notably with the organization of the three summer courses. I will graduate from the school of Journalism in Tilburg (the Netherlands) at the end of 2010. During my stay in Syria I improved my Arabic language skills and hopefully I will be working as a correspondent in the Middle East soon.”

#### *To-be-established Netherlands institutes in Beirut and Amman*

All documents for the to-be-established Netherlands Institute in Beirut have by now been legalized in the Netherlands and have arrived in Lebanon. The registration procedure will probably be started in August 2010. In Jordan the registration procedure for the to-be-established Netherlands Institute in Amman is expected to start shortly afterwards. These registration procedures may take quite some time, during which not much news from the two to-be-established institutes should be expected.



In the previous newsletter we noted that Taco van der Zwaag (picture on the left) has been appointed as the director of the to-be-established Netherlands Institute in Beirut. In addition we can now reveal that Erik Marinus (picture below) has been appointed as the director of the to-be-established Netherlands Institute in Amman, as of the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2010. On 22 and 25 July 2010, Astrid Rijbroek, Taco van der Zwaag and Erik Marinus held their first joint coordination meeting in Damascus.

#### *Erik Marinus, director of the to-be-established Netherlands Institute in Amman*



Erik: “as of the 1st of July 2010, I have started as the director of the (to-be-established) Netherlands Institute in Amman (NI-Amman). The last few years I have worked as a project manager in Holland. This new position provides me with the opportunity to work in a challenging environment. I am looking forward to starting up the Netherlands Institute in Amman. In the upcoming period I will work on realizing the year plan NI-Amman 2010 and will work closely with my colleagues at the institute in Damascus and at the-to-be-established institute in Beirut. Many things have to be done, but let me first buy a desk and chair to work at! Please feel free to contact me through [director@ni-amman.org](mailto:director@ni-amman.org).”