

Its hard to know where to start with this year and crucially how to tie it all together into a cohesive document as each experience has been so varied and intense. After musing for a while on this very question however, I concluded that although slightly reductive, two lines can be drawn which thread most of my experience together and those are; community and creativity.

From a Kibbutz in the north of Israel, to a small craft town, Mashiko, in Tochiji Prefecture Japan, through a flat share in the banlieue of Paris, I've been lucky enough to have been well and truly welcomed into communities outside of my own and through this I've learnt and been reassured of many positive human characteristics, namely trust. Starting in Kibbutz Geva in January of this year I became part of the socialist way of life that is a kibbutz. Although slightly modified from the original 1922 version, as a result of modernisation plaguing almost all Kibbutzim, the main basis for equality continues and it was a pleasure to witness. Removing the individual incentive for success with the equality of pay and living meant that community here was far more evident than my London experiences. Although it was by no means perfect, especially with the dubious foundations that allow for such place to exist it was fascinating to be a part of it and, through that and later travels around Palestine gain a hopefully more in-depth and less bias view of the situation that has sat on the periphery of my education up until this year. Despite loving my time on the Kibbutz and my adventures in and around the more liberal, less Netanyahu supporting, progressive areas of Israel that I saw, through couch-surfing, hitchhiking and the likes, it was hard to deny the toxic religious and political undercurrents that blight that place which became even more evident after staying in places like Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. A problem which sadly is not isolated to the state of Israel.

Which moves me on to the next community; 20 Avenue du President Wilson in Aubervilliers, Paris. Ironically after leaving Kibbutz Geva, I concluded that living in community like on the kibbutz was something I wanted to prioritise in my life however, ideally not in the middle of nowhere but rather on a smaller scale in a city. So, to land where I did, living in the attic of a flat share of 7 others was quite extraordinary. The wonderful French attitude towards eating and drinking resulted in lengthy dinner times over delicious meals after long and emotionally challenging days for us all. My primary reason for being in Paris, however, was not for this community but rather for the refugee community in Porte de la Chapelle and a project that the Good Chance Theatre were running in those parts. I was the only English and long term volunteer on this project which aimed to provide a creative space for an ever growing population of people on the move, with shared lunches, work shops and ultimately human to human relationships in an attempt to counteract the reductive impact of the label 'refugee' limiting an extremely varied and interesting group of people to products of circumstances outside of their control. Anyway to try to condense this time into a paragraph is extremely difficult and also risks falling into the same trap which I have just mentioned. So I will finish on one story which to me outlines the power of the

'theatre' we created. Despite violence not being a serious problem during the time we were there, there was one day which reflected disturbances at the refugee centre down the road and resulted in a fight which became a nationalistic affair between the Sudanese and the Afghans. It was really sad to witness an outburst of emotions which ultimately had been lurking and which ended in two men with slashes from broken pieces of wood all over their faces. But the reason I'm telling this story is because of a man named Karim and his speech the next day. Karim had been coming along almost every day and was full energy and relentless joy and on the day after the fight he stood in the middle of the dome with about 45 people gathered in a circle around him to give a speech in broken English about the importance of community and solidarity. How, despite being from all over the world with different stories, at the moment 'we' are under the label of refugee and how we have to stay together in that and respect our commonalities not the things that divide us. There are many obvious reasons why this was quite such a powerful moment for me but to know that the dome had become a space where that was possible and unprompted was testament to what Good Chance was doing and how the ideology wasn't forced but shared and wasn't imposed but inherited through creativity, commonality and self expression.

Finally I'm going to briefly touch upon my time in Mashiko-Machi, Tochigi, Japan. Probably the strongest example of community and creativity, where the threads were very much woven together. Mashiko is a town of 2,400 people and everyone within that town is either involved in craft or art and if they're not they are most likely related to someone who is. This was the case with Konomi Kenmoku who, through one of the finest examples of trust, invited me into her home and her life for two and a half months without expecting much in return. Konomi is a ceramic artist and potter who migrated to Mashiko, after studying ceramics in Kyoto and built a life there. She not only inspired me but also supported and encouraged me in putting on an exhibition of the things I had been working on. It was one of the most wonderful ways to spend my time there and also incredibly rewarding to sell pottery to Japanese potters. Having read and been told countless times about the Japanese tendencies to keep foreigners at an arms length and refer to them as 'gaijin' and not much more, to be given the nickname Gabrin and encouraged to call Konomi's mother, who I lived with, Mamma-san was indicative of the way in which I was welcomed into this community and family with astounding warmth. Needless to say, my time in Mashiko was remarkable, culturally, relationally and creatively and I feel blessed to have bypassed the paradox and confusion of where modernisation has met traditionalism which is particularly evident in the places such as Tokyo and instead to have experienced the kindness of another liberal utopia living and breathing in community and creativity.

I hope that with this writing you can gain an insight into this year and what it has meant for me and also what your money will, and has gone towards. There is something extraordinary about getting out from under the rock of educational institutions and going to see the world, or at least a part of it, and having the various and mostly simple realisations that come with that. On a personal

level, understanding of my own freedom, and coming to see in practice the effects of the idea 'as you shout into the woods, so it echoes back', preparing me well for what's next and beyond. And more broadly the realisation of the binary and unrepresentative nature of the media and so many governments and how human kindness and trust extends a lot further than its' opposites.



A view of Mount Gilboa from Kibbutz Geva.



Panoramic during the construction of the geodesic dome which became the Good Chance theatre.



Amy, a friend through Good Chance, who came to visit, with Konomi over a wonderful and characteristic array of food cooked by Mama-San.



An overview of my exhibition in Kenmoku Cafe. More of my work can be seen on www.gabriellagormley.wixsite.com



*Night Rain by Me reflected in a mirror placed on the floor.
Made with 125 individual miniatures suspended on nylon and toothpicks from
the ceiling.*