YOUSOUND

Zine 3



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Illustrating Everyday Life at El Sistema Greece

YouSound is a social science research project that studies symphonic and choir music education organizations centred on the inclusion of migrant and refugee youth in Europe.
We have chosen two organizations in different countries to serve as case studies: the Dream Orchestra in Sweden, and El Sistema Greece. In 2022 and 2023, we are visiting both countries, applying ethnographic methods to better grasp the complexity of interactions between multicultural human beings in these music education contexts.
The first two YouSound Zines were a result of visits to the Dream Orchestra in Gothenburg, Sweden. The next two editions cover the El Sistema Greece program in Athens. The ethnographic illustrator, Beatriz Machado, and I spent a month and a half following the music education work that is being done with minor migrants, refugees and Greeks.
El Sistema Greece, founded in 2016, was conceived as an artistic educational tool, contributing to the education and social inclusion of migrant youth in Greece. The program has been working intensively in several of Athens' refugee camps, as well as in schools in some of its most multicultural neighbourhoods. Please visit their website, www.elsistema.gr, for more information.
Beatriz Machado applies her illustration skills to capture some of the actions, movements, pedagogical tools and emotions occurring daily in these particular music education spheres. The illustrations are accompanied by her own words, creating a graphic diary of what was lived collectively by students, teachers, parents and administrators at El Sistema Greece. We thank them for the moments we shared and hope you enjoy discovering these drawings and thoughts!

Alix Didier Sarrouy — YouSound Principal Researcher

The Art of Seeing: An Exploration of Observational Drawing

"(...) Learning to draw is more than developing the ability itself. (...) Drawing isn't hard. The problem is seeing, or (...) starting to see in a specific way."

Betty Edwards, Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain (pp.29-30, 1979)

When it comes to ethnographic drawing, it is essential to maintain a hybrid and plural approach that concentrates on the intersection between the subjects and their surroundings. Drawing is not only economical and agile but can also evoke the physicality of the artist. The focus should not be on merely capturing shapes but on attempting to convey the uniqueness of a moment, a task that only the process of drawing can achieve. As Tim Ingold asserts, "The pencil is not an image-based technology. Nor is it exactly an image. It is the record of an observational gesture that accompanies what is taking place" (Drawing Together, 2010).



During the month and a half that I spent drawing the rehearsals at El Sistema Greece, in various places in Athens, the experience of observational drawing became increasingly agile. The materials and expressions took different forms, evolving over time.

The experience in Athens was distinct from my time with the Dream Orchestra in Sweden. My colleague Alix Sarrouy and I stayed in an apartment on Averof Street, close to the National Archaeological Museum, between Viktoria Square and Omonoia in downtown Athens.

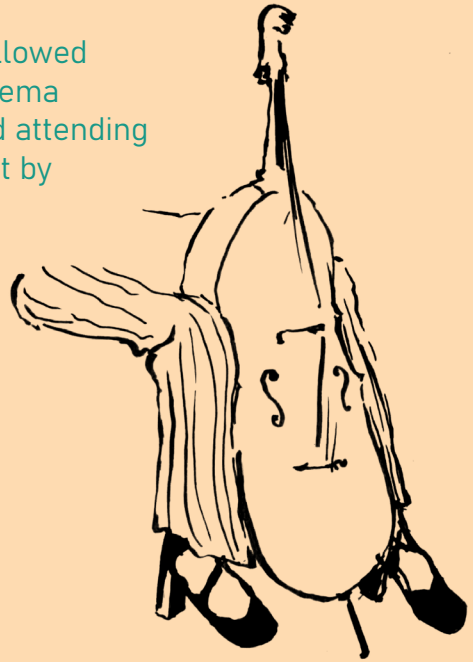
During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Greek government announced the eviction of over 11,000 refugees from the reception places where they were staying during their asylum procedures. Due to the lack of housing options, many found themselves in Viktoria Square, a small city park in central Athens, between the 3rd of September and Aristotelous streets. Homeless individuals, including mothers and fathers with young children, pregnant women, people with physical and mental health issues, and the elderly, had sought refuge but were instead exposed to very poor living conditions. Nowadays, fewer homeless people sleep in the Square, but it remains an important place for the Afghan community in Athens.

Omonoia is a neighbourhood in downtown Athens, known for its central square and served by one of the main stations of the metro. It has experienced significant urban decay in recent years, leading to drug dealing, prostitution and theft, especially in the western section. Despite this, it remains a focal point for commercial and social life in Athens, especially for the various immigrant communities.

Our location gave us a direct perception of urban poverty, including prostitution and homelessness.

On our first day in Athens, Sunday the 16th of October, we had the pleasure of attending an outdoor concert by the Kypseli Orchestra at noon in Kapaps Park. Walking from Averoff Street to the park took an hour, but it was a fantastic opportunity to explore the city and observe the different neighbourhoods. Almost every building in Athens had graffiti, ranging from curious name tags or cryptic sentences to political criticism and protest.
During the concert, we recognised some of the repertoire being played, such as 'El Merengue del Primero', which the Dream Orchestra musicians had also played in Gothenburg during our previous research trip. After the concert, we had a community lunch with the El Sistema Greece team, the students and their families, who had brought different foods from their own countries. We were treated to amazing food while music played and, after lunch, everyone gathered at the centre where the concert had taken place to dance to a world-music playlist to which everyone had contributed.

During our first week, we followed a schedule set by the El Sistema Greece team, which included attending classes: music theory, taught by Francis Gagliardi; violin, by Giannis Ismirnioglou; choir, by Konstantina Angelopoulou; flute, by Konstantina Roussou; wind and percussion, by Giannis Panagiotou; and cello, by Bessy Papadopoulou.



Dimitrion Núcleo

The first rehearsal we attended took place on October 18th at the Apostoli-Dimitrion Centre for Creative Activities for Children, a núcleo located in Moschato, a southwestern suburb of the Athens agglomeration. (A 'núcleo' is a space for learning music in which diversity is respected and the connection between music and social issues is explored.)
To get there, we took the metro, changing from line M1 at Omonia to line M2 at Monasteraki and getting out at the Ampelokipi station. After leaving the metro, we had to walk for fifteen minutes, which felt longer on our first visit because everything was new to us.
The Dimitrion Núcleo offers cello, violin, and choir lessons. The rehearsal we attended was particularly special because it was led by a quartet ensemble named Pura Corda. The ensemble comprised violinists Mayumi Sargent Harada and Panagiotis Charalampidis, violist Eura Fortuny Marques, and cellist Antigoni Seferli.



They were playing for the students and teaching them how to conduct an orchestra through the EEEMERGING+ project, which supports young early music ensembles in Europe. The students, from Argentina, Greece, Egypt, and Poland, were all very young and found the experience engaging. At the end of the rehearsal, they played a small concert, which was truly amazing!

We visited again on November 2nd. This time, I experimented with drawing with digital tools using Procreate, a digital illustration app for iPad. We watched the class with Giannis Ismirnioglou, a violin and choir teacher, and José Martin, the art director of El Sistema Greece, a conductor and violin teacher from Venezuela. There were snacks, including cakes and chocolates, and beverages for everyone to enjoy.

José used a fun analogy to help the students understand the importance of playing as a group: "We are all together on a bus!"



Kypseli Núcleo

On October 19th, the Pura Corda quartet also visited the Kypseli Núcleo, which is El Sistema Greece's headquarters located in the multicultural and vibrant Kypseli neighbourhood in central Athens. It took about thirty minutes to reach it on foot, passing different neighbourhoods and stores, and a lot of coffee shops. The núcleo offers classes in choir, viola, violin, cello, trumpet, French horn, flute, percussion, music theory and music initiation. The children at this núcleo come from many countries including Greece, Albania, Democratic Republic of Congo, Venezuela, Syria and Afghanistan, as well as Kurds from Iraq and Syria.
We were treated to a second rehearsal and another small concert. This time, I felt more confident in taking out my graphic diary and pens and started to draw. As the students were older, they also took part in a theory class in which Pura Corda showed them different bows and explained their evolution throughout history.

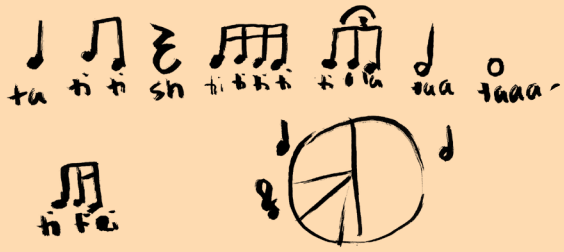
One of the students was so immersed in the music that he acted as if he was scared, hiding in his shirt almost as if he was defending himself from the intensity of the notes played by the bows.





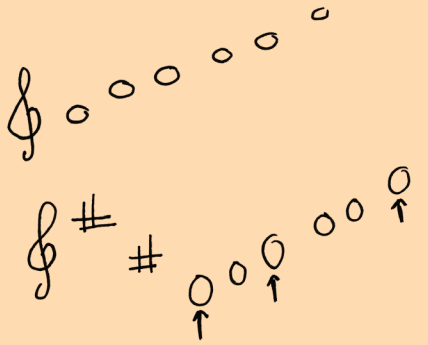
Music Theory

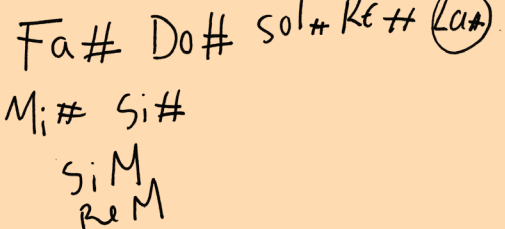
The next class was with Francis Gagliardi, a music educator, French horn player and pedagogical advisor from Venezuela. She started the class by asking each student's name and how many languages they spoke, among them Farsi, Dari, Swahili, French, English and Spanish. After some warm-up exercises, the students were asked to write the notes on the board and their sounds, such as "ta," "ti ti," "sh", "ti ti ti ti," and so on.



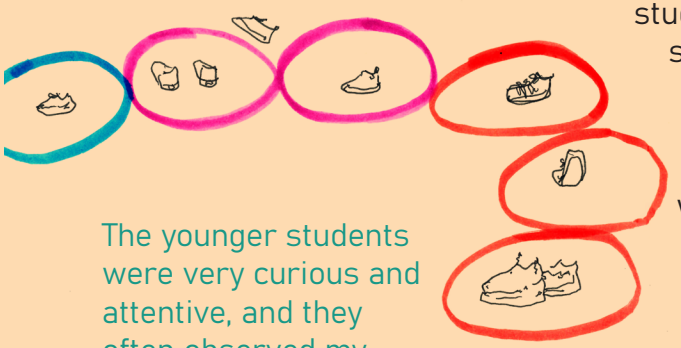








This class involved a lot of energy, with fast and varied warm-ups and a lot of movement. With the younger students, Francis used hula hoops and balls to teach notes and rhythms. It seemed like a fun way to learn. After the warm-up exercises, the older students had a more sedate class where they sat, wrote on the board, and played their instruments in unison with the teacher.



The younger students were very curious and attentive, and they often observed my drawings with interest. They were always polite and thankful and would even compliment me when leaving with their parents, on the street, or outside the building. It was an interesting experience because they would approach me regularly and say “Hi!” enthusiastically, leaving their parents confused, probably wondering who this stranger could be.

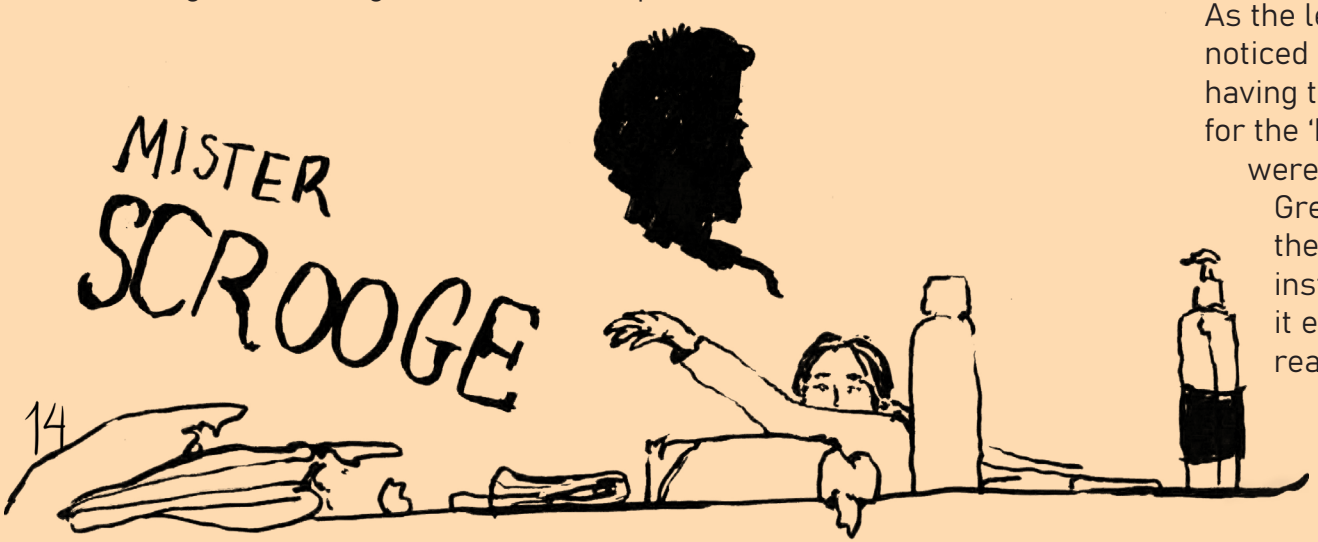


Choir Class

In the choir class, Konstantina Angelopoulou began with warm-up exercises for the face, cheeks, neck and hands.
Right after, the next class with teenagers began. One of the most popular warm-up exercises, used in both the choir lessons and the music theory classes, was 'pass the clap', in which students stood in a circle 'passing claps' to the student next to them, and changing direction when the 'Re' note is called out.

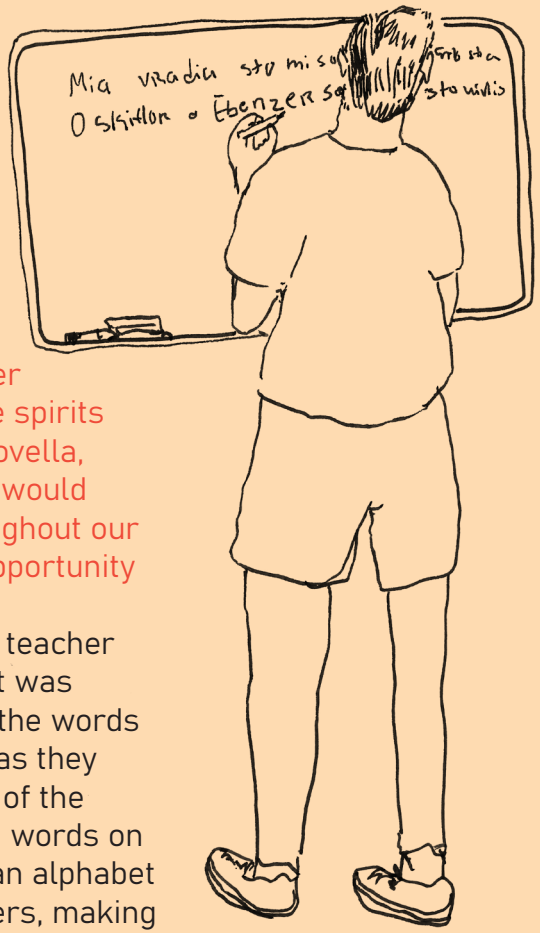


During the first choir lesson we observed, which took place on October 19th, one of the students pretended to be tired and, in a playful moment, the teacher encouraged the entire class to yawn exaggeratedly. The students joined in with plenty of laughs, creating a fun and light-hearted atmosphere.





As the ethnographer Alix Sarrouy sat in the corner, diligently taking notes, I felt compelled to include him in my drawings. At the end of class, some of the students approached me, curious to look at the illustrations.

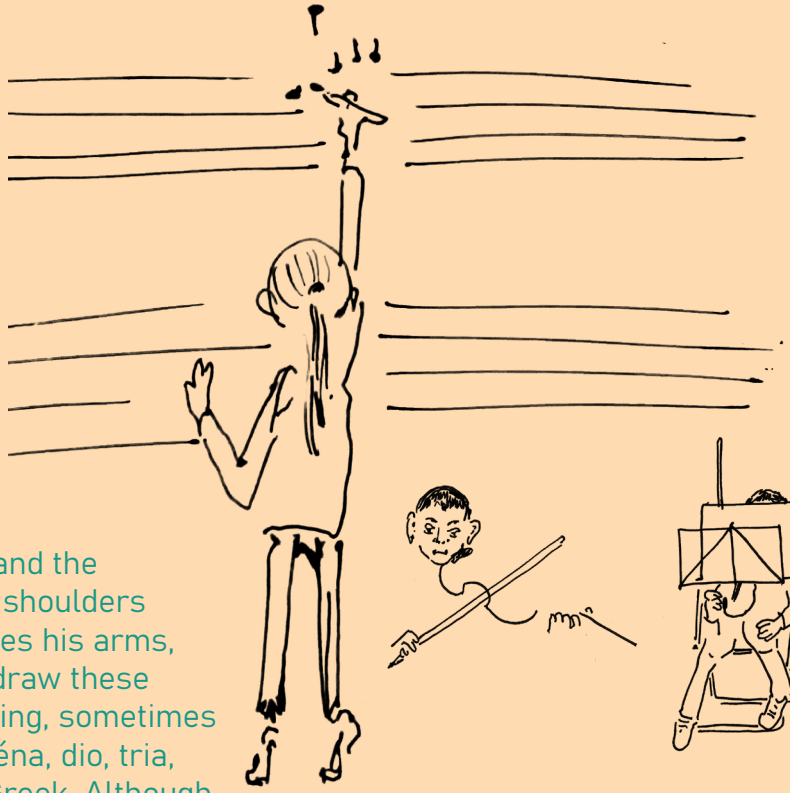


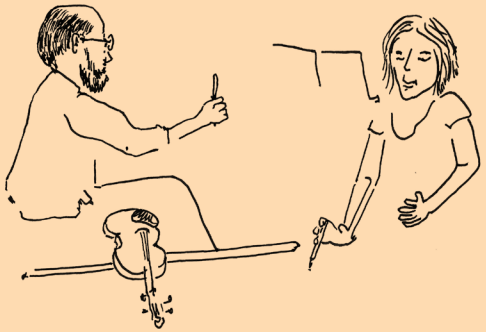
During that class, the students began to learn a new song 'Mister Scrooge', which tells the tale of Ebenezer Scrooge's redemption by three spirits in Charles Dickens's classic novella, 'A Christmas Carol'. This song would accompany the students throughout our stay, and we had the unique opportunity to watch it develop over time.
As the lesson progressed, the teacher noticed that an Afghan student was having trouble understanding the words for the 'Mister Scrooge' song, as they were written in Greek. One of the Greek students wrote the words on the board using the Roman alphabet instead of Greek characters, making it easier for the Afghan student to read and pronounce the words.

Violin and String Ensemble

Giannis Ismirnioglou always starts the class with a song played loudly over the speakers, usually something upbeat like 'Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)' by the Eurythmics, to warm up the fingers, hands and arms. Then he focuses on teaching the students how to hold the violin correctly, making sure it touches the neck, not just the shoulder. The class includes a theory component where students go to the board to write answers, some of whom have to stretch to reach it.

At other times, Giannis might play some Mozart, and the students warm up their fingers, arms, necks and shoulders more calmly. When teaching a piece, Giannis moves his arms, conducting the students. I found it fascinating to draw these gestures because it was almost like he was dancing, sometimes complementing his movements with the words, "éna, dio, tria, tecera!", which means "one, two, three, four!" in Greek. Although I didn't understand the language, it was melodic.





Later on, during our final weeks in Athens, I was still drawing Giannis class, but, when he was listing the people present in the room, he didn't mention me to the students. He found it amusing because he had completely forgotten that I was there, and he even apologised. I was delighted to blend in because it meant I was doing my job, interfering as little as possible.

In this class, the hand position is essential, so Giannis ensures that all students master it before holding the bow, which allowed me to study and draw their hands.







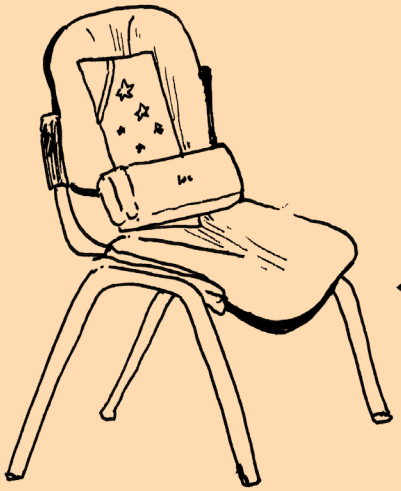


Flute Class

In the first flute class we observed, on October 22nd, Konstantina Roussou, the teacher, gave out small stickers of musical instruments to the students as well as to us. I picked a violin and stuck it to the cover of my graphic diary.

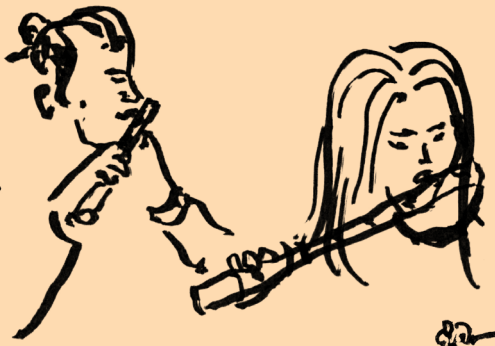
The students played standing up, leaving their belongings on the chairs. As it was a small room, with more proximity to the students, I was able to draw details better, such as their positions, hands, mouths, clothes and instruments.







to train the position



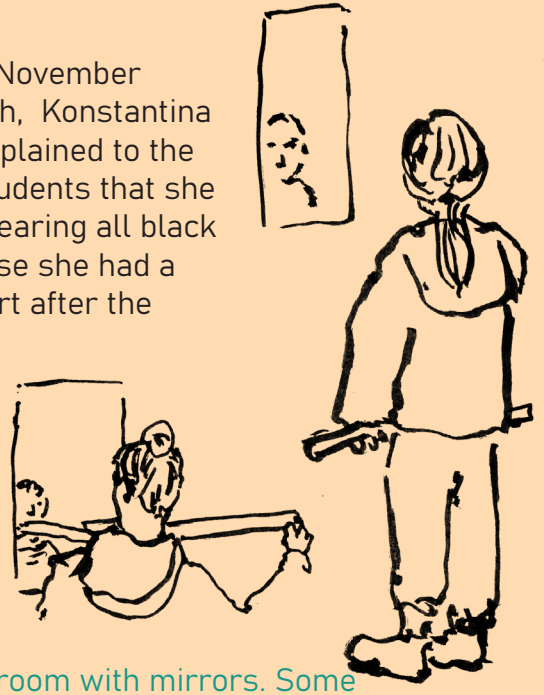
Different levels of learning were observed, with some students practicing first on the head of the flute, in order to focus on embouchure and breathing. They played individually, took turns and helped each other, and then played together.







On November 11th, Konstantina explained to the students that she was wearing all black because she had a concert after the class.



This class was held in a bigger room with mirrors. Some students stood in front of the mirrors and looked at themselves while playing to practice the exact positions of their mouths. This was a bit awkward for them, and they easily became distracted and watched me drawing them in the reflection.

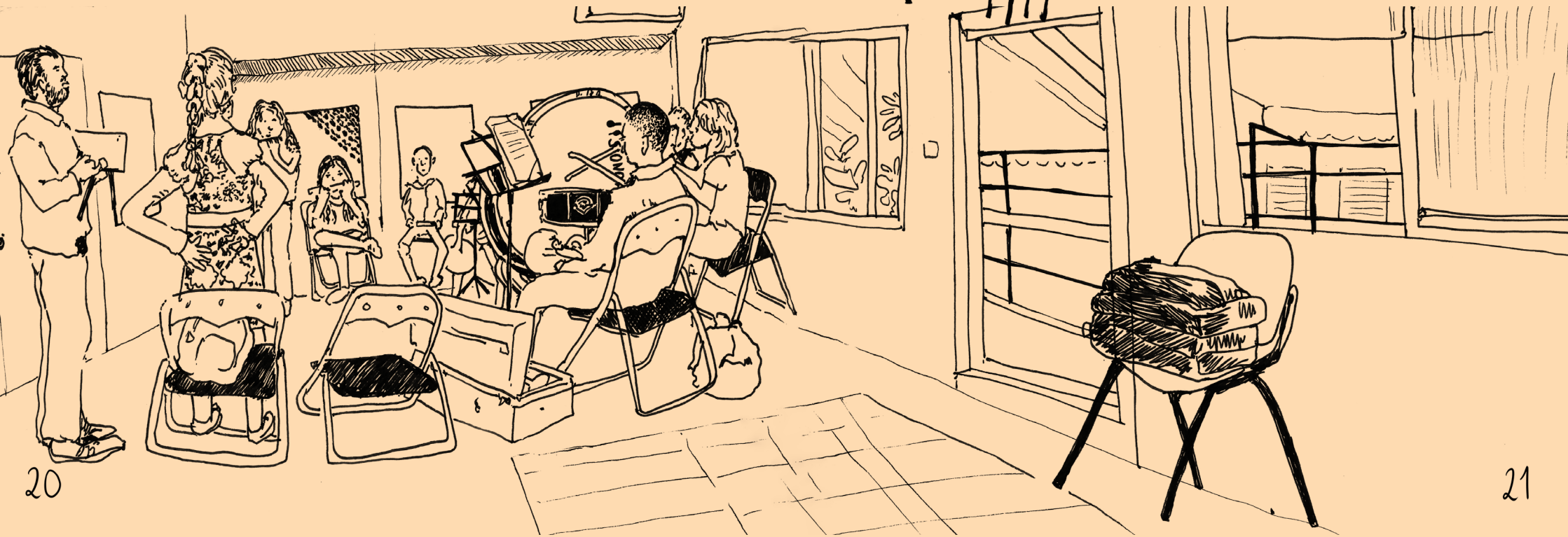
Finally, at the end of the class, a girl student distributed chocolates on sticks wrapped in plastic with decorative bows.



Winds and Percussion Ensemble

Some students who had been at the flute class were in this class, so we were already familiar faces to some.
There was a large drum and an assembly of smaller drums in this classroom, and everyone had to be assigned a different instrument to play harmoniously together, so there was less agility at the start of the class.
Some students stood up, while others sat down. Some were still practicing with half a flute, while others were waiting for their turn. This class was held in the largest room at the Kypseli Núcleo, allowing me to draw a wider view of the class and space.

At the end of the class, I showed my graphic diary to the teacher, Giannis Panagiotou, and the students. I received feedback that I had forgotten to draw the hair of one of the students, which allowed some to tease him by calling him bald. It was a funny moment, but it also made me more cautious.



Trumpet Class

Giannis Panagiotou, the teacher, explained that pushing the air through the trumpet is like the moment when you steady yourself and gain balance, before kicking a football.
He made the students stand up and trained them to coordinate stepping forward with pushing the air. Then he brought me into the class, pointing at me and saying, "To Beatriz!", so the students could push the air in my direction.

At the end of the class, I showed my drawings to Giannis, and he gave me his email so that I could send them to him once they were digitised and edited.



Cello Class

This lesson was taught in the smallest room at Kypseli, despite the cello being the biggest instrument. Everyone fit, and the teacher could move around the students with ease, but it was also the class where I felt the closest proximity to the students. They would look at me a lot and, when I smiled, they would smile back.

In the first class that we attended, on the 25th of October, the students prepared their cellos and bows while training their positions. Bessy Papadopoulou, the teacher, helped them, sometimes speaking in Greek and other times in English, saying, "You have to practice, and then your ear will know what's right!"





During my digital experimentation phase, I attended a class on November 2nd, where I drew digitally. It was good to work on a surface that allowed me to change the background colour and tools quickly and easily, but the number of options made me more indecisive. Nonetheless, Bessy saw my drawings and was very excited to print some of them out and display them in her house.

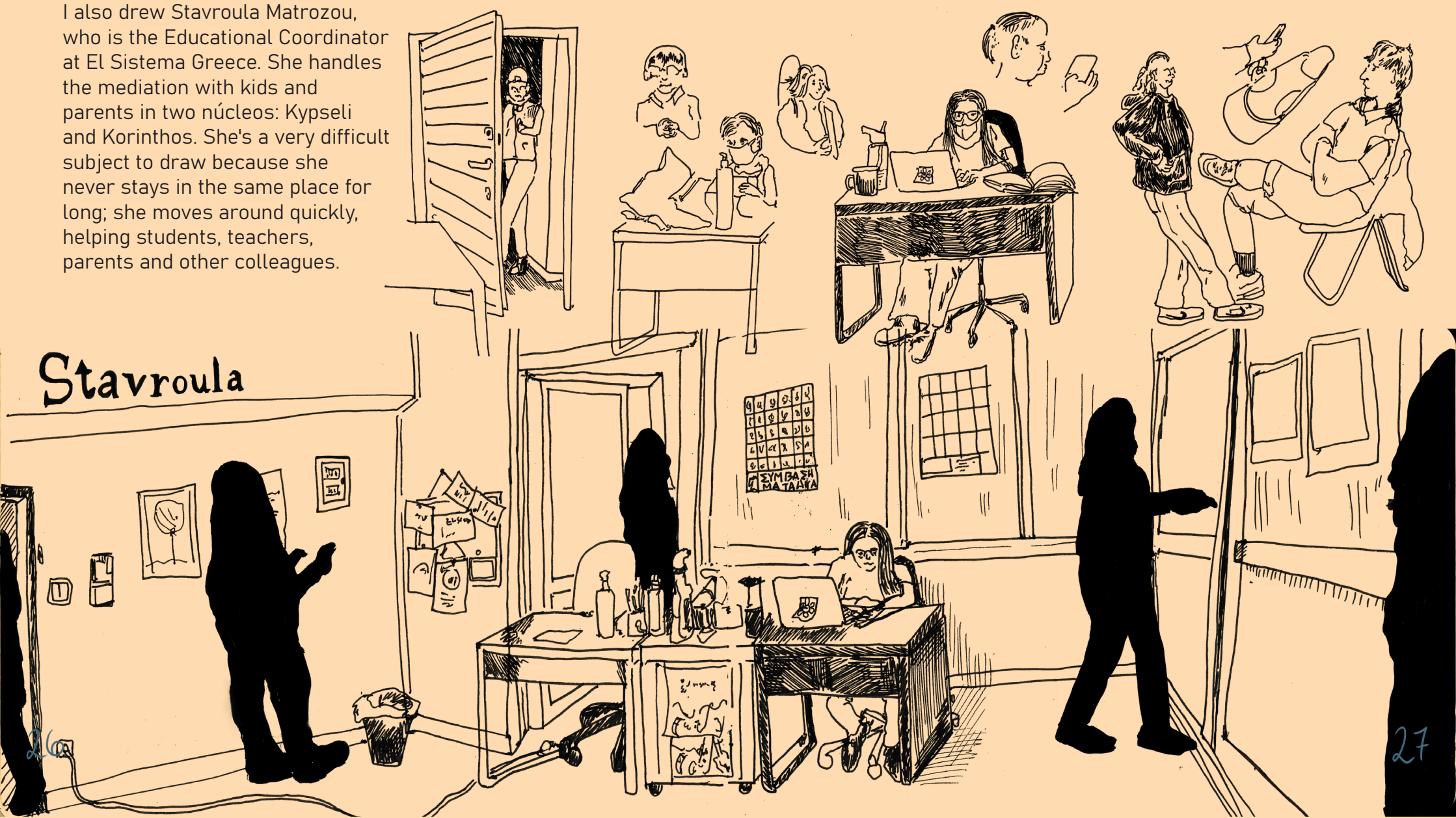


The Waiting Room

In the final few weeks, after drawing many classes and rehearsals daily, I decided to spend some time drawing in the waiting room to capture some of the social dynamics of the space and the people.

I also drew Stavroula Matrozou, who is the Educational Coordinator at El Sistema Greece. She handles the mediation with kids and parents in two núcleos: Kypseli and Korinthos. She's a very difficult subject to draw because she never stays in the same place for long; she moves around quickly, helping students, teachers, parents and other colleagues.

But I managed to draw her sitting at her desk where she welcomes everyone.
The students in the waiting room are on their phones, holding their instruments, greeting each other, but mostly choosing a place to sit and wait for the class to start.
They are great subjects to draw!

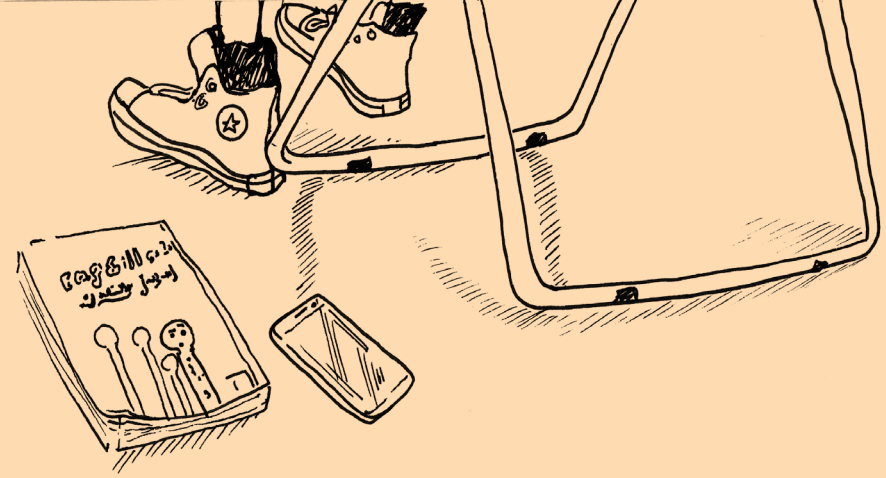


Saturday Classes

In the morning, rehearsals for the Kypseli Núcleo Orchestra were conducted by the young Venezuelan maestro, José Martin. Each student set up, warmed up, and tried out their instrument. José called for their attention by clapping "Ta ta ta ta ta – ta ta," and the students responded by imitating the rhythmic form.
Once they started playing together, they seemed out of harmony and not paying attention, frustrating the teacher who vented, "I'm worried, I told you 'From the beginning,' and you are still asking me 'where from?'!"

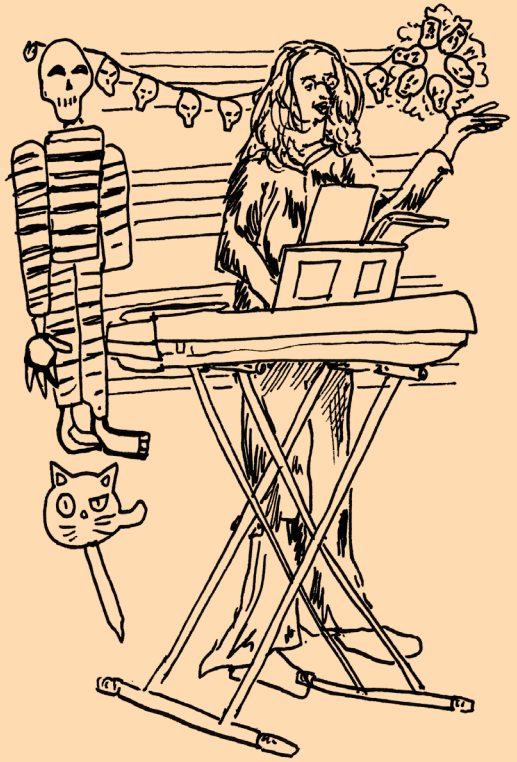






After the orchestra rehearsal, the El Sistema Greece Choir began, conducted by Vaia Papagiannopoulou, a singer, choir teacher and master. The class began with vocal exercises and body warm-ups, in which they associated gestures with the sound coming out of their heads: "zi, u, i, u, i, u, i,...", "le, le, le, le, le,...", "bruhhhhh", "ya, ya, ya, ya, ya,...", "ih, ih, ih, oh, oh, oh, oh, ohhhhhhhh". Vaia says, "You feel your whole spine vibrating!"

As we were there on October 29th, close to Halloween, there were many decorations, including skeletons, skulls, and black cats which provided a humorous background for Vaia's body and facial expressions.

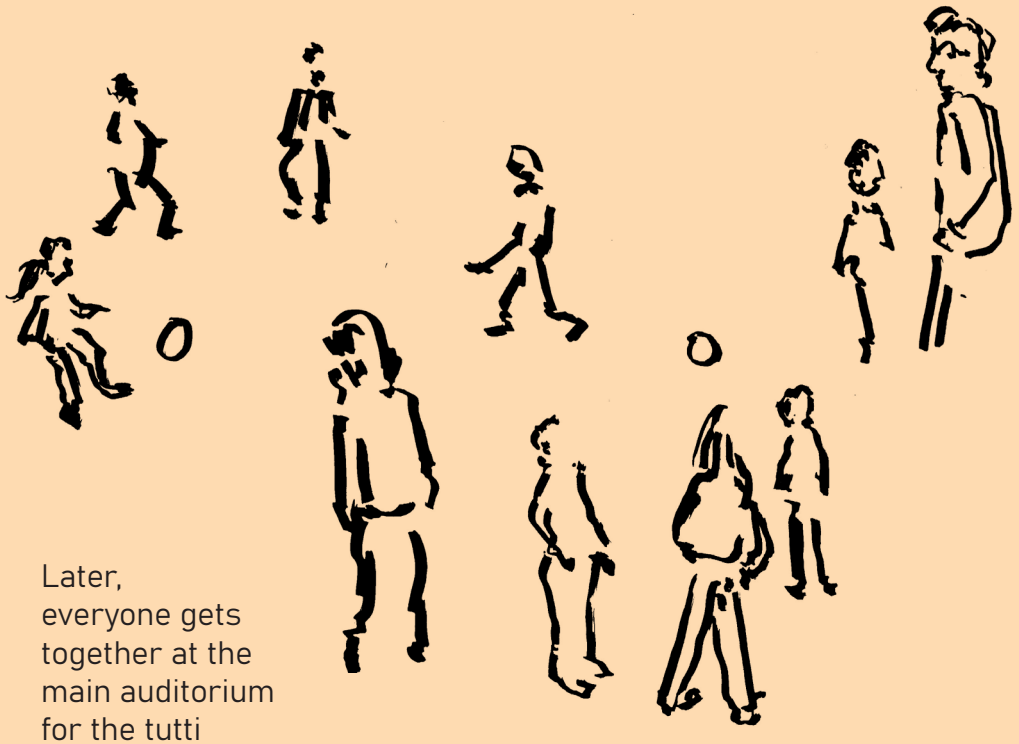


El Sistema Greece Youth Orchestra

The El Sistema Greece Youth Orchestra (ESGYO) was founded in 2017 and follows the teaching principles and practices of El Sistema Venezuela. It's open to children and young people between the ages of 8 and 26, with or without prior orchestra experience. The objective is to develop young musicians' skills through rehearsals with experienced teachers, and concerts at professional venues such as the Herodion, the Athens Concert Hall and the Thessaloniki Concert Hall. The orchestra typically performs two or three large concerts per year, including a Christmas concert at the SNFCC, a summer concert at the Herodion, and a spring concert with a large professional orchestra like ERT Greek Radio National Symphony Orchestra.
Rehearsals take place in Alimos, a town on the Saronic Gulf coast, a suburb of the Athens agglomeration, and a municipality in the South Athens regional unit. Students and some teachers take the El Sistema Greece shuttle bus from Kypseli Núcleo, which also stops at Syntagma Square. Alix and I took the bus with them. On one of the trips, a girl insisted that I try her crêpes, which she had made herself, and they were very good.
Upon arrival, students and teachers gather in the school's playground and wait for everyone. Then they go to their respective rooms for sectional rehearsals.



During the recess between the first sectional rehearsals and the tutti rehearsal, teachers and students get together in the playground to eat, drink, play football or volleyball, and chat with each other.



Later, everyone gets together at the main auditorium for the tutti rehearsal, where maestro José conducts the orchestra.
When we were leaving, I showed the drawings to Tzempen Klapakis, the violin teacher and teaching manager at ESG, and to other members of the team too. We discussed about it for awhile.



Korinthos Núcleo

On Mondays, Giannis Ismirnioglou teaches classes at the Korinthos Núcleo, which is approximately an hour and a half by car from Athens, heading north along the coast. This núcleo is based at the Kaloy-Kalogeropouleio Arts and Culture Foundation, which was created by a Greek diplomat and philanthropist who loved the arts. In his will, he left his house for teaching the arts.

When we arrived, we were offered tea and coffee. The paintings on the wall were by the founder and were all in the Fauvist style, some imitating well-known pieces like Henri Matisse's 'Dance'. The classes take place in a room with large windows overlooking the garden, which has classical sculptures.



Giannis starts the class the same way as those in Kypseli, by playing an upbeat pop song during the warm-ups. Once, he suggested I choose the song, so the students warmed up to the sound of 'Borboleta' by Ornatos Violeta, a Portuguese alternative rock band with a fusion of other musical styles, including ska and jazz.



There are two groups: one for young students under 10, and another group for teenagers. The first group has violin and choir lessons, while the second has only violin lessons.



In the second group, there was a 14-year-old girl with incredible drawing abilities. We met, talked for a bit, and I showed her my drawings. She promised to bring her drawings to the next class, and I would bring other illustration works to share. When we met again, she stayed a little later after her class, and showed me her beautiful drawings of Greek statues, which were so detailed, drawn using graphite and sometimes black pen. She told me she liked to draw during her classes and that she used to have drawing classes when she was younger. She dreamed of being an archaeologist.

In the final week in Athens, during my last trip to Korinthos, the two of us had a drawing session where we made portraits of each other. She also made observational drawings of the class. They were amazing!
She is talented!

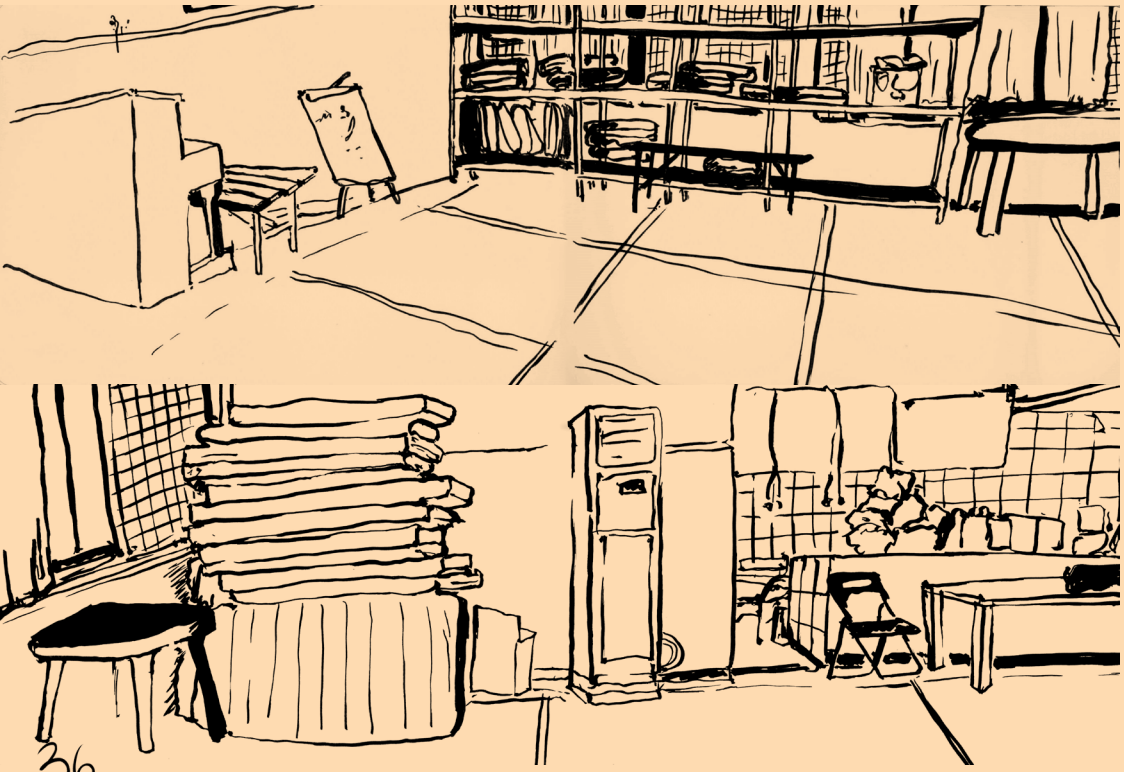


Schisto Refugee Camp

The camp is located in Schisto, in the mountains above Piraeus, a rather remote area on the western outskirts of Athens, facing the Aegean Sea. Around 200 minors live there with their families in multi-story containers. The majority are Kurds, Afghans and Syrians, while some come from Sub-Saharan Africa.

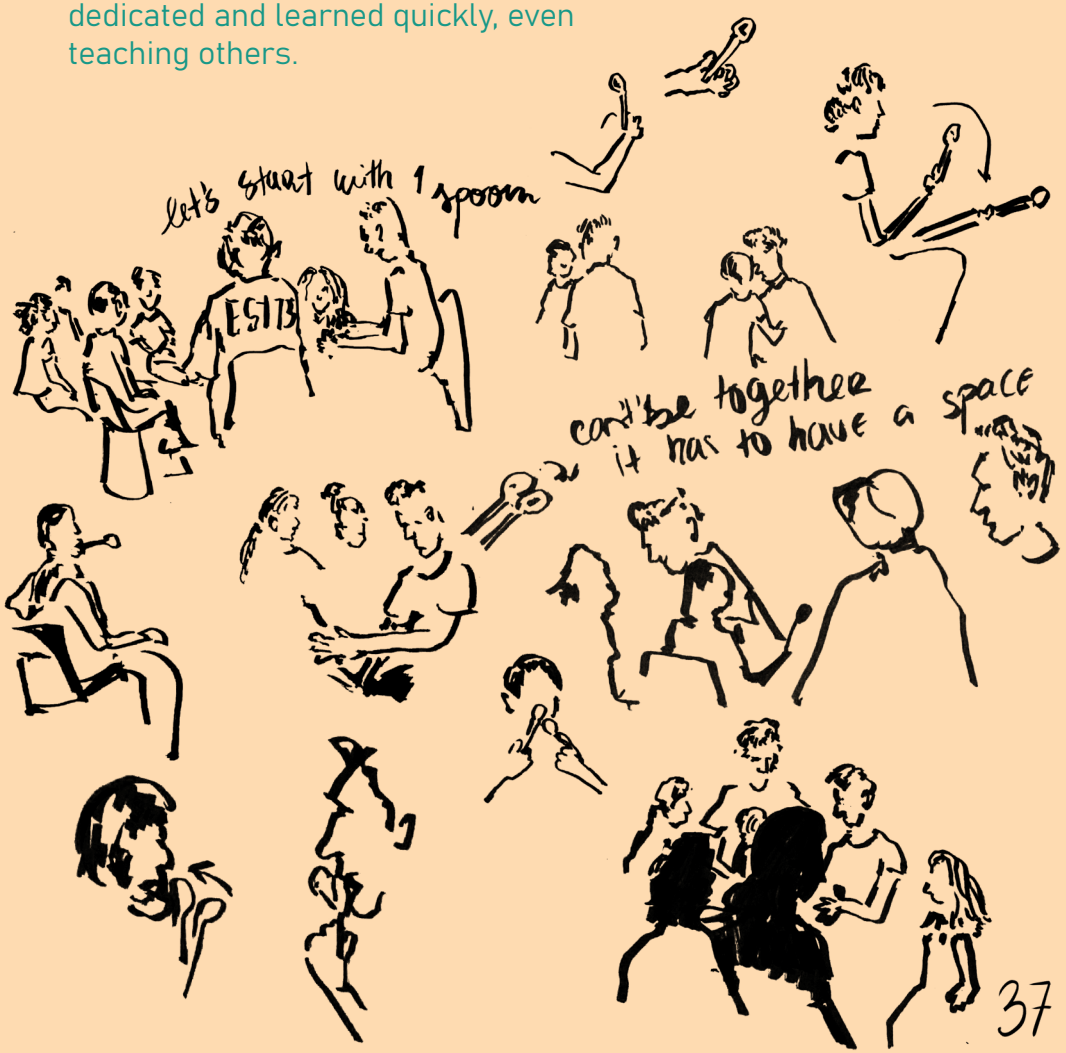
Sevi Matsakidou, the Education Manager of El Sistema Greece, drove us there on the 10th of November. At the entrance, we were asked to show our identification. Alix was going to give the kids a percussion workshop using spoons.

We were taken to the music room, which was a big space with a piano and a few violins. It also served as a storage room for clothes and baby formula.



As another activity was already taking place at the same time, it took a while to convince the kids to come and try the workshop. With the help of a local facilitator, we managed to gather around six kids, and more joined after the workshop started.

Alix began by demonstrating how to play the spoons and then taught the kids how to do it. The students were very attentive, with some being more playful and others more focused. The facilitator was translating Alix's instructions. They seemed to get the hang of it, and some were very dedicated and learned quickly, even teaching others.





At the end of the workshop, the little girls from the group came to see the drawings I had made. I invited them to experiment with my materials, giving them sheets of paper and coloured pencils. One of the girls was very young and seemed to be non-verbal, not understanding English, so we had to communicate with gestures and expressions. She was very enthusiastic, pulling on our arms and holding our hands, trying to leave the camp with us.

I returned to this refugee camp on November 15th to draw Giannis Ismirnioglou's violin and choir class, but there were only a few students, and some were behaving erratically, making it difficult for Giannis to teach as he had to keep asking for calmness and attention.

The music classes had only recently been introduced, and time, flexibility, and resilience is required from everyone involved for their successful implementation.



A Visual Journey: From Three Dimensions to Two

This is the third instalment in our four-part YouSound Zine series. The first two issues explored the Dream Orchestra experience in Gothenburg, Sweden. For this issue, we took a unique approach and delved into themes that emerged during our month-and-a-half stay at El Sistema Greece in Athens, without following a strict timeline.

As Alix Sarrouy and I participated in the program's daily classes and gradually became more immersed in the community, I used drawing to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of our surroundings. Ethnographic drawing allowed me to capture the intersection between the subject and environment, conveying the physicality of the artist. Our experience in Greece provided a unique perspective on the realities of Athens, including visible poverty and homelessness.

Using an ethnographic approach, I captured my experience through observational drawing. As I mentioned above, citing Betty Edwards, the author of Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, the challenge of drawing is not the act itself, but the way we see things. Through the act of drawing, I wanted to convey the distinctiveness of each moment and achieve a deeper understanding of the world around me.







These fanzines are not exclusively ethnographic; they also explore an authorial approach, as the drawings are made by an artist rather than a social scientist. This autoethnographic approach combines elements of autobiography and ethnography, providing a reflection on my personal experiences and culture, and how they shaped my understanding of the phenomenon of migration and forced displacement, despite the focus mostly being on depicting the diverse yet unified community in the classrooms of El Sistema Greece.

Ultimately, this issue of the fanzine highlights the power of drawing to convey the unique experiences and perspectives of the communities we interact with. The drawings evolved, allowing me to develop different expressions, gain experience and agility, and explore new ways of analytically representing three-dimensional movement in two dimensions.

The fourth and final YouSound Zine will take a different approach from previous issues. It will focus more on the graphic work and research, as well as the exploration of a style of black-and-white illustration made on craft paper.

See you for the next issue!





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