

# Around Town

## Trading places

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*Boys from the hood* a performance by the Forsythe Company

A unique event brings Swiss performers to Israel and vice versa.

**Elianna Bar-El** speaks with Culturescapes creator and director **Jurriaan Cooman**

Based in Basel, Switzerland, Culturescapes hosts a different country each year, bringing the top literary minds, dance ensembles, art and film gurus and musicians of said country to Switzerland for a series of performances, discussions and exhibits over the course of two months. This year, Israel is the guest country, and for the first time ever, Culturescapes will also be hosting a parallel festival, called Swiss Season, which will see artists from Switzerland hosted in Israel, taking part in such important events as the Herzliya

Biennial, the Abu Gosh Festival of vocal music, and the Haifa Film Festival. From October 1 until December 6, Swiss artists from various genres will engage in artistic panels across Israel.

**What is Culturescapes?**

The short answer is that it is an invitation to artists of all disciplines from one designated country to showcase their art in Switzerland. The longer answer is that I understood that art is based on three universal truths: a common language; something that is related to history and/or conflict, based on things that have been written, rewritten and then rewritten again; and that which is based on trauma (for example, Chernobyl in the Ukraine, hunger and minority issues in China, the Holocaust for Israel). I decided I wanted to better understand countries through their cultural identities and bring that understanding to Switzerland. Once we choose a country, as with Israel, I visit on several research

trips, identifying the who, what and where of the festival.

**Why did you choose Israel?**

Israel is most always defined by a critical and political situation. But after my visits and my research, I saw firsthand how complicated the situation is and that there is no easy solution. For those in Switzerland who don't have the ability to travel to Israel for themselves, we are bringing Israel here – and vice versa. Swiss artists will be able to engage Israelis in their realities and talents through art and performance. Despite Israel's turbulence, its people and its artists make up one of the most culturally rich countries you can imagine.

**What do you hope Swiss people will gain from Israeli culture?**

As a whole, we almost never have the possibility to offer a "reality check" of a certain place – this is that opportunity. To correct perceptions through art is authentic and it is in a real context. Instead

of one-sided media coverage, Culturescapes enables people to no longer be dependent solely on what they are subjected to via the news. I know the Swiss will be surprised by the quality of Israel's artistic talents [Ohad Naharin and the Batsheva Dance Company, author Etgar Keret and singer Yasmin Levy are just the start]... and from this, my hope is that they will get their own impressions of Israel – and adjust the pictures in their mind.

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**And what about your own impressions of Israel?**

Having visited Israel 13 times in the past two years, I feel a very strong connection. Maybe it's an idealistic impression, but Culturescapes is a means for taking steps in how we want and need to live together in the world. We need a free space for culture. And we can only do this when we get to know each other better. Our intensive partnerships in Israel were so positive, it gave way to this dual festival. The relationship is twofold, offering independent Swiss theater and dance a platform in Israel and in music, offering well-known artist Christoph Büchel and budding star Matthias Mooij a stage. I highly recommend the two Swiss dance groups performing at the Suzanne Dellal Center: Forsythe and Alias/ Guilherme Botelho. Creating a return platform in Israel is a way of getting to know one another and harboring more understanding and interest in another country. How we can live together is the root of this festival. If the Swiss people get this too, I am happy.  
*See [culturescapes.ch](http://culturescapes.ch) for full schedules in both countries.*