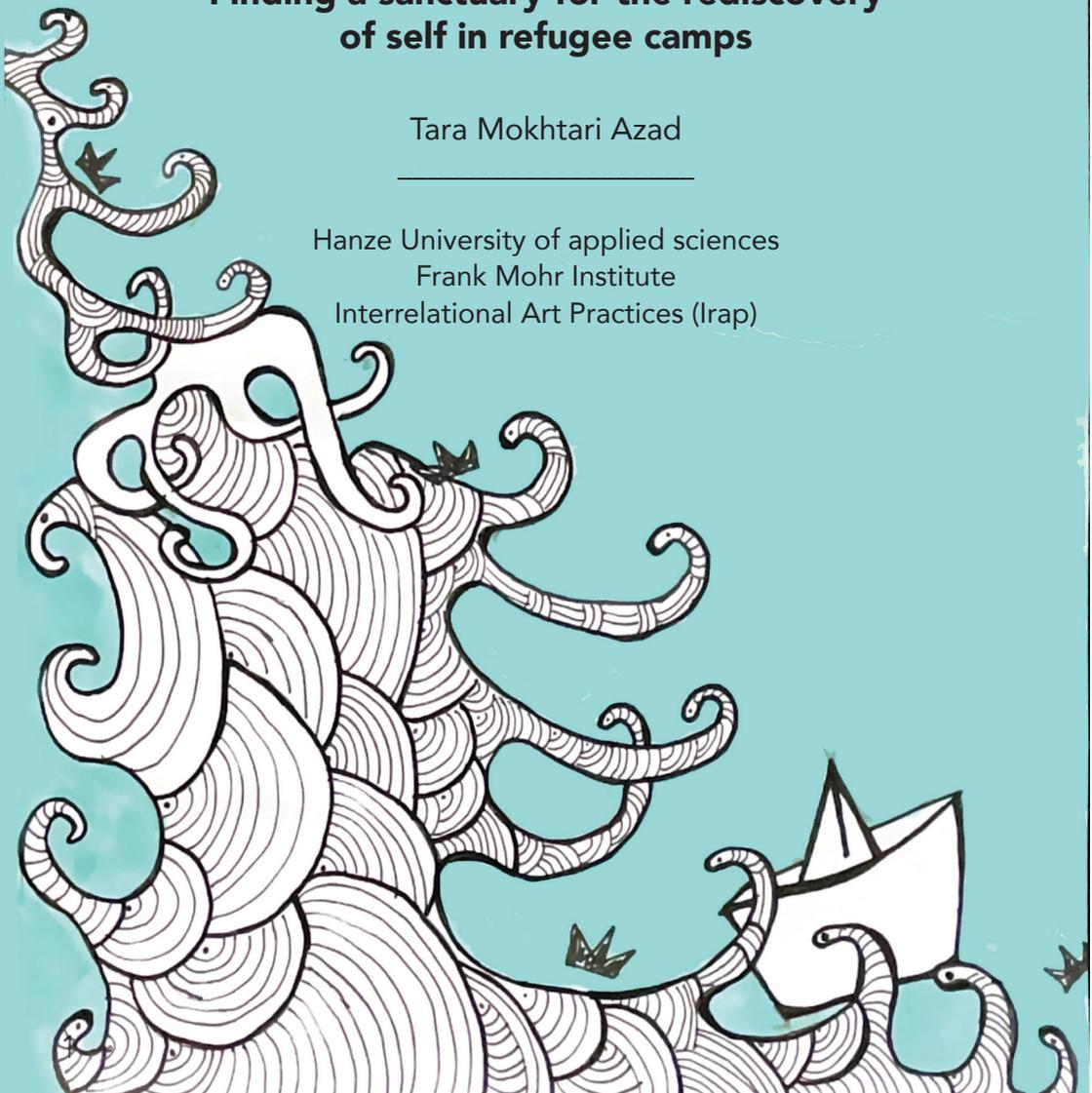


Finding a sanctuary for the rediscovery of self in refugee camps

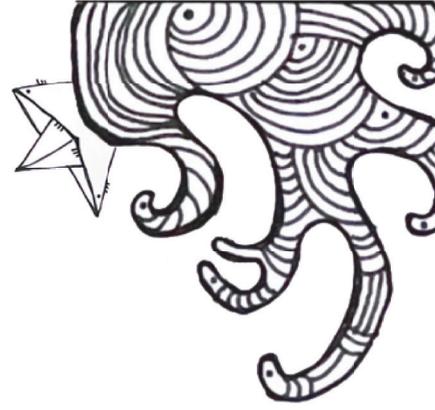
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Interrelational Art Practices (Irap)





Supervised by Lynden Hak
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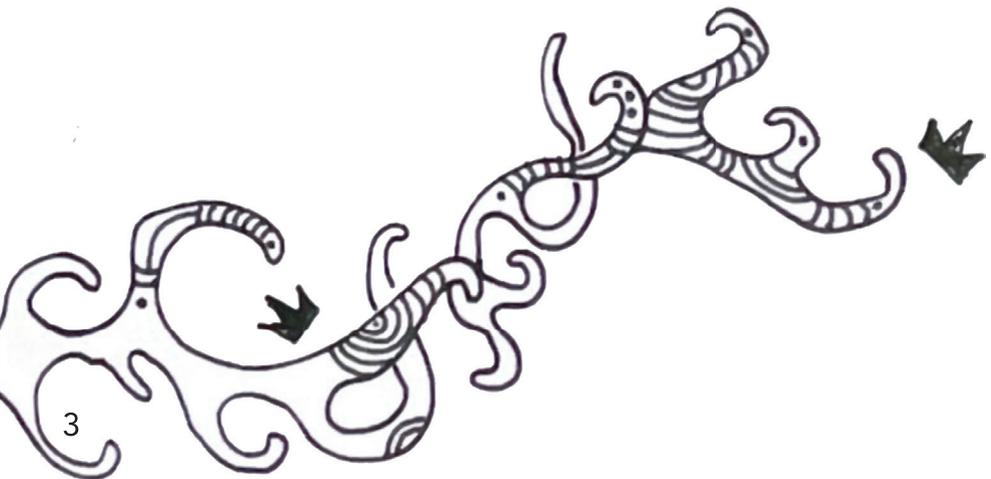


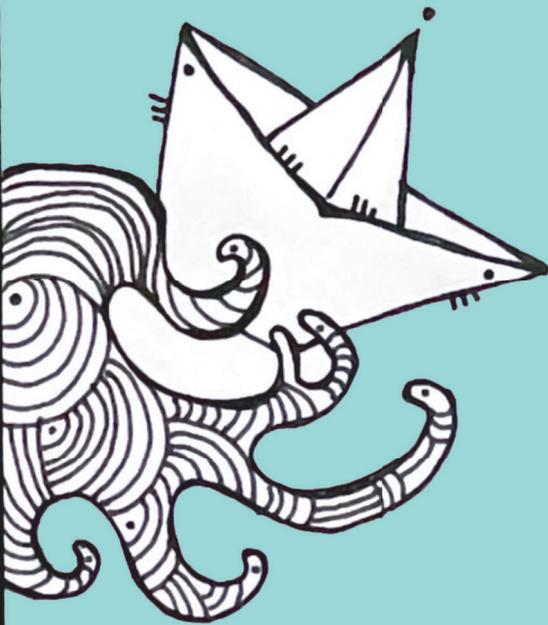
How can my communal creative sessions foster a sense of belonging and emotional well-being for refugees, and what role does my embodied practice play in this process?



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Introduction

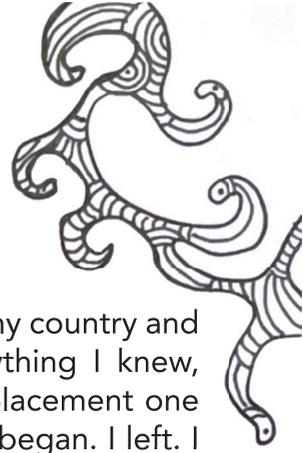
May my hands be guided by something greater than myself,
May my heart remain open, even when the world feels heavy,
May I find the strength to hold space for others without losing
myself in their pain. And may I always remember I, too, deserve
the care I so freely give.

I am on a journey of seeing and listening seeing what many
choose to turn away from, listening to voices that the world
often silences. I move between wounds and hopes, reaching out
to touch the broken pieces of people's souls, reminding them
through my art, through my presence that they are still seen,
that they still exist. This is not an easy journey, because I, too,
feel the weight of what I carry the heaviness of unfinished
sorrows, injustices, displacement and yet, the deep longing for
change. I walk this road not just with my eyes, but with my heart.
And while it can be exhausting at times, the light I bring into it
proves that it is worth walking.

My journey is not just about others it is also about me. It is about
finding myself in the heart of this path, about touching the truth
of my existence in moments when I deeply merge with the
world. If, even in this moment, despite all the difficulties, I still
feel I am in the right place, it means I am in alignment with
something greater than myself. And this may be the rarest and
most beautiful feeling in.

Tara





I'm not a refugee, but I did force myself to leave my country and start again. It left me to walk away from everything I knew, everything that was mine. So, my journey of displacement one that I technically chose but never fully controlled began. I left. I lost my sense of home. And now? The feeling of belonging is gone. Not just here, but even in Iran. I still have the privilege of traveling back, of returning but every time I do, I feel it more and more: I don't fully belong there either. I've stopped trying to belong to a country. Instead of searching for a place to root myself, I work on rooting within myself. Because if I build home inside me if my heart becomes my house and my whole body becomes my country then no war, no political chaos, no crisis can take it away from me ever again.

I decided to channel my anger into action using it as a force to move forward. My background in Iran was all about community work, collaborating with people to build connections. As an artist, I was never satisfied with just working in my own studio, exhibiting in galleries or museums. Now, here, the anger, the sense of displacement, and the feeling of loss connected me with refugees. I felt their pain and frustration deeply and it builds a stronger connection. I also realized that I wanted to use my creative sessions as a way to help us all find ourselves together. I am not just helping them I'm also healing and growing alongside them.





I've always felt a responsibility to highlight the role of art beyond just making, selling, or creating aesthetically pleasing things in professional, beautiful ways. Art is not only about mastering techniques it's a powerful tool for connecting with oneself. It's a language that speaks without words, accessible to anyone. You don't need to be an artist to create; all you need is to be human. The power of art lies in its ability to connect us to our subconscious and release emotions. When we let go, improvise, and embrace spontaneity, we open ourselves to art's quiet power to transform and set us free.

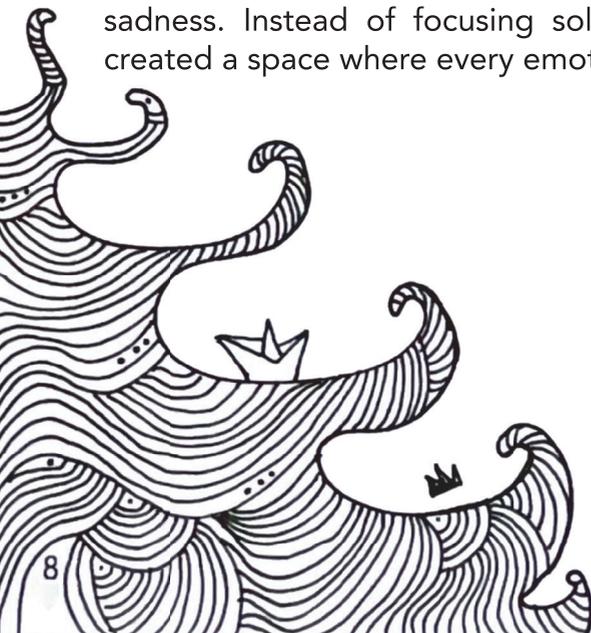
Especially in refugee camps, where there is often no common language, art can become the universal language. It offers a space to express and share stories, and it can serve as a form of therapy, a psychological tool that helps individuals connect to their inner selves and start the healing process. In these environments, where words fail, art can speak for us.

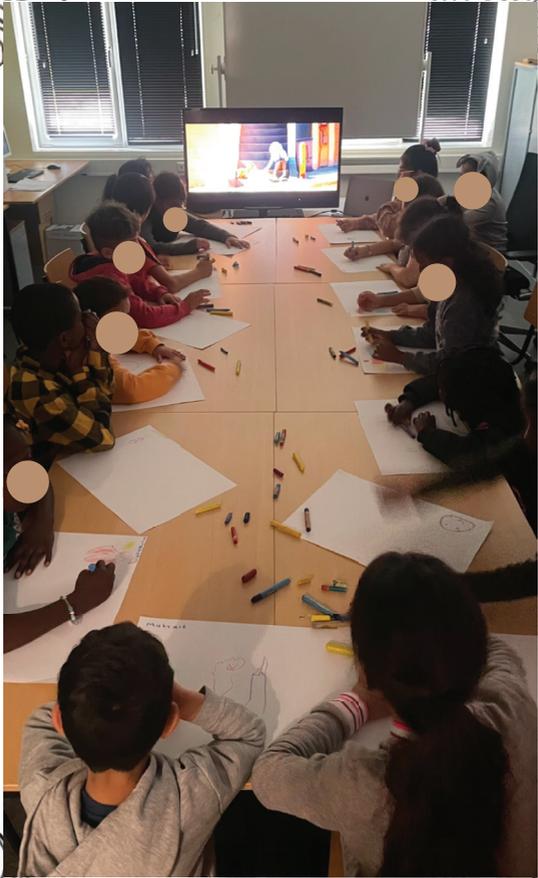


As Allen Dobson says,

“Art is a form of healing and a way of re-establishing agency within oneself.”

He argues that engaging with creative expression allows people to process trauma, reclaim agency, and restore a sense of control in chaotic environments. I experienced this firsthand in one of my workshops, Embracing Emotions with Children. The aim was to acknowledge all emotions not just happiness, but also the ones we often try to avoid, like anxiety, anger, and sadness. Instead of focusing solely on positive feelings, we created a space where every emotion had a place.





During the workshop, we watched animation (Inside Out) together and paid attention to the emotions that appeared on screen. I asked the children to observe these emotions closely and sketch them on paper whenever they recognized them. Afterward, we turned these drawings into a game. Each session, we would discuss different situations and identify the emotions involved, using the children's own drawings as game pieces. Over time, they built a collection of emotional characters, making the game entirely their own. At one point, a boy started sharing a story about his mother how she would punish and hit him over everything, even something as small as chocolate. He said, Every time she does it, I feel angry and sad. He spoke about his frustration, about how anger would rise up inside him but had nowhere to go. I told him, If you feel angry, you have the right to be angry.

His emotions were real, valid, and deserved acknowledgment. By the end of the workshop, the children shared their reflections: If you're angry, you should be able to show it. If you're sad, you don't have to force yourself to be happy. Just because we don't like certain emotions doesn't mean they are wrong. The process was playful, filled with drawing, conversation, and a sense of shared understanding. Through art, they found a way to embrace their emotions rather than suppress them reclaiming agency over their feelings in a way that felt natural and meaningful to them.

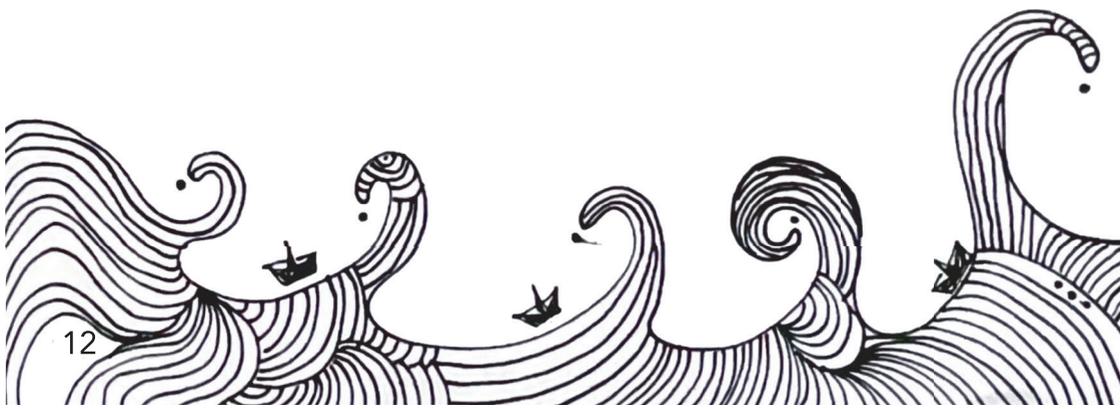




The power of
togetherness

In the camps, the act of creating together becomes a form of therapy a safe space where one doesn't need to explain everything with words, but can still communicate deep, often unspoken pain, hope, and resilience. You might wonder why I choose group sessions rather than one-on-one meetings. The truth is, I believe deeply in the power of creating together. There's a strength in unity that surpasses individual efforts, and I've learned this from the recent uprisings in Iran, in the fight for women's rights. We've seen that together, without weapons, we can resist the dictatorship our weapon is unity.

I am convinced that group sessions hold this same power. In our Sufi tradition, even if one reaches God and attains the ultimate state of being through divine connection, God will say, "No, go back to earth and bring others with you." Our destiny and lesson are not to arrive at this understanding alone. True spiritual growth happens when we take others by the hand and walk the path together. Seeking enlightenment in solitude holds no true meaning or value if it is not shared.



Rumi beautifully captures this idea:

One Cup, One Ocean

We are drops, falling from the same cloud,
gathering in a single cup.

What is the ocean but a thousand rivers, what is the soul but a
single sip?

Your hand and mine two leaves on one branch, two songs rising
from the same reed.

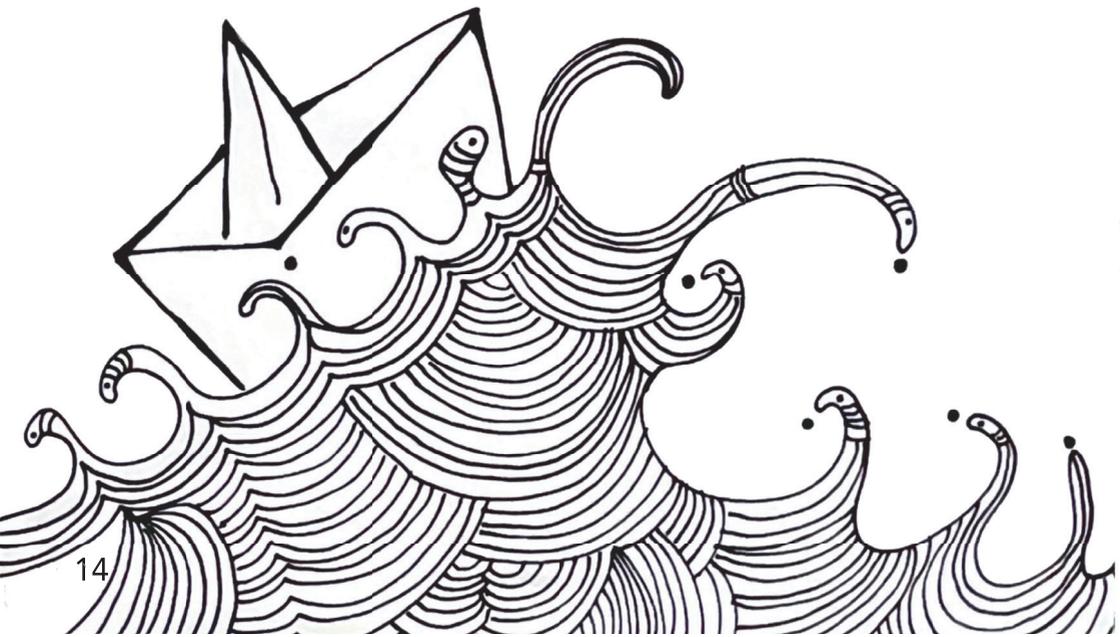
We are whispers spun from the same wind, echoes returning to
where they begin.

Come, sit close, let our hearts merge, let our eyes see the same
sky.

We are not separate, not divided, but one ocean where all
waves die.



This belief has inspired me not only to work on myself through my artistic tools but also to create spaces for collective growth through group sessions. Even our ancestors understood this. They lived together to face struggles, supporting each other through hard times. Sure, today we don't have to fight fragile wolves or bears, but we still face powerful dictatorships both in the form of systems and powers that try to break us. The way we can project ourselves and fight back is through unity. Our ancestors didn't just survive they thrived by sharing their lives: eating together, living together.



My deep interest in African rituals and tribal practices, which I explored in my first master's thesis, also stems from this belief in unity. In many African traditions, people dance, eat, wear masks, heal, and manifest together as part of a communal effort to face challenges, show gratitude, and connect with the spirit of solidarity. This isn't just a practice of our ancestors or African tribes it's part of my own culture too. In my country, we live together. We share meals, gather as big families and communities.

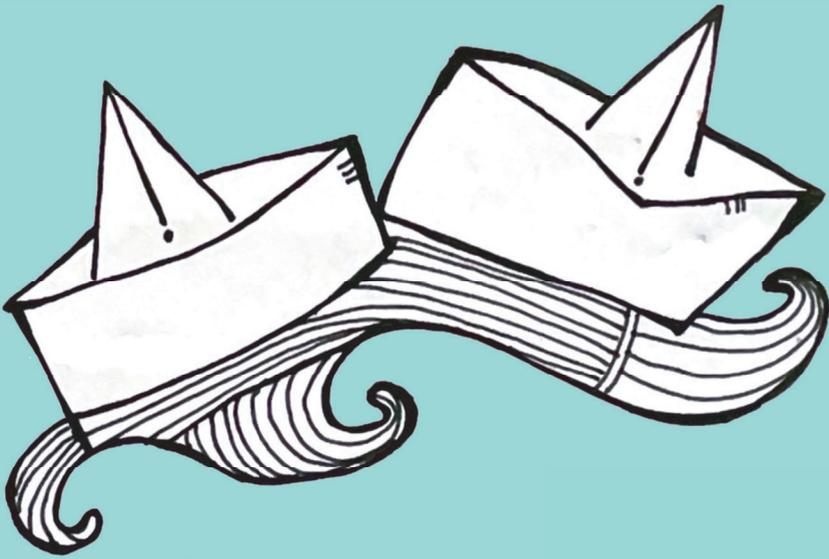
This sense of togetherness is part of my roots, part of my blood, and it's something I truly miss here. Perhaps this is one of the gifts I bring from my homeland a way to teach and share the experience of unity. To bring people together here, to erase the distance, and to help them experience the power of creating together, just as my ancestors and my culture have always done. I have explored all these examples to show how deeply community matters to me and the power of engagement and participation.

They are one half, and I am the other. I do not position myself as a complete artist who holds all the tools, power, and creative ideas. Rather, my practice is only fulfilled through togetherness. It is in the shared experience, in the exchange of stories, emotions, and creation, that my work finds its true meaning.



First and foremost, we're all healing together. I don't have any privilege here; I haven't reached the peak of my own journey to migration to come back and teach. Instead, I chose to do this with them. So, the whole process is reciprocal every camp, every story, every session, we listen, we care, we create, and we rediscover our inner selves. The key is that we don't have to find who we were before; we have to build something new from scratch, starting fresh, together.





Empathy and Care

**What happens when empathy pushes us? When it shakes us?
When it hurts?**

does empathy require action?

Does it require discomfort?

**Reading books about wars, injustice, decolonization does
that mean we care?**

Is that enough to say we have empathy?

Or does real empathy demand action?

Because if you truly want to do something for someone, for a country, for a community that is suffering, you have to be willing to step out of your comfort zone. Sometimes even confront yourself. Confront your position. Because care is not just about feeling. It is about acting. And sometimes, that action hurts. Empathy, in the way it is commonly understood, can be limited or even harmful when it is purely emotional. empathy is not just about feeling, but about choosing to engage despite discomfort and personal hurt.



Something happened to me in my last workshop in Ter Apel that forced me to rethink empathy. It wasn't a beautiful, soft feeling. It was heavy, raw, unfair. And yet, it changed me. The day was sunny. The workshop was about "Family Frames." I had 30 participants, all between 18 and 30 years old. We made frames painting, collaging, printing out family photos. They wrote letters to their families.

It was so beautiful, so meaningful. I could see it in their eyes. And then, while I was fully in the moment, giving my energy to the workshop, someone unzipped my backpack. They stole my charger. At first, I was confused. I told myself, No, this can't be real. But then I felt the anger, the trust breaking. I got home, and then another hit. My wallet was gone. Panic. I lost everything which was in the wallet.

I felt violated. I felt stupid for not paying more attention and to trust them. That night, I was overwhelmed. I Took a long shower. I needed to wash the feeling away. I told myself, I am done with This work. And then I started writing. I wrote and wrote, because I couldn't hold it all inside. This is not easy. This is not just a job. It moves me, breaks me, reshapes me.

At first, I was angry at myself. But then, something shifted. I asked myself: Can I still have empathy? Not from a safe, soft place. But real empathy. The kind that hurts. What does it take for someone to steal? What has their journey been like? Have they lost everything? Have they felt desperate? If I had lived through what they had, would I have done the same? Maybe yess.



And this realization did not break me. It made me stronger. It showed me that I love this work so much that even this experience this betrayal did not stop me. Maybe this had to happen to remind me: I am exactly where I need to be. I also realized something important: I can be angry, I can be sad, I can be disappointed, and I can still have empathy. Empathy does not mean ignoring feelings. It does not mean pretending it didn't hurt. It means having a real, full view seeing both our pain and theirs. Not choosing one over the other. Because what is empathy if it only exists in a safe space?

When you watch the news, does feeling sad and posting something online count as empathy? Empathy is often seen as something gentle, something safe. We watch suffering from a distance on the news, in books, on social media and we say we care. But is that really empathy?

Or does true empathy require more? My experience forced me to confront this question. When my belongings were stolen during a workshop where I was fully present, giving my energy and care, I was angry.

I felt violated, disappointed. At first, I wanted to walk away, to close my heart. It is about recognizing that care is not always soft. Sometimes, it demands that we step out of our comfort zones, that we confront our own emotions, and that we act, even when it hurts. Reading about injustice, feeling sorrow for those suffering these are steps, but they are not enough. True empathy, true care, asks more from us. It asks us to engage, to take risks, to feel deeply, and still choose to show up. And despite everything, I still choose to show up.



hooks speaks about love and care as radical acts that require courage and accountability, not just passive kindness. Your realization that care is not always soft connects to her argument that true love (and by extension, empathy) requires action, even in difficult situations. But I want to question this perspective. This idea of active kindness, of always being oriented toward caregiving, can also destroy the person who practices it continuously. Do we all have to take on this responsibility? Or can it be a choice something we engage with while also balancing our own needs?

I position myself as someone who deeply empathizes with the people I work with. But I have to confess: after every workshop, I go home carrying the weight of their stories. In Ter Apel, there is a woman who has just arrived at the camp. Every session, she repeats the story of her journey from Syria to the Netherlands. Through repetition, she is trying to digest it, to process her own experience. And I am there with my ears and heart fully open listening.



The story of the Syrian woman with her 16-year-old son, who has Down syndrome, made me think about the weight of the journey and what it takes to cross it. She told me how they traveled, first by train, then by boat twice to pass the Mediterranean sea. She even showed me a photo on her phone her gold jewelry, given away to make this journey. Another photo her house, destroyed.

I did this for my son, she said. She is 65 years old. A strong woman. A mother who carried not only her son but also the impossible burden of survival. The first boat made it across. But when they arrived at the shore, the police came. She couldn't run her foot was injured. During the journey, a man had been lying across her feet, pressing them down for hours. She was in pain, unable to move quickly, and so they were caught. Arrested.

Twenty-seven days in detention. Before their second attempt, she witnessed something that still haunts her. A woman with four children had to make an impossible choice there was no space on the boat for all of them. She could only take three. She handed her youngest child to this woman, trusting that they would all meet again on the other side.

But when the police arrested them, the child was left on the floor, alone, lost in the chaos. The mother was gone. The child was gone.

And while she was with the weight of guilt, she said, "I had no choice."



I made the decision to leave my country for my son, to protect him. I left everything I had, and because of that, I couldn't save that child's life. Then came the next boat seventeen hours at sea. In the final stretch, two or three more hours before reaching land, the fuel ran out.

The boat drifted, rocked violently by the waves. People started vomiting, emptying themselves into the sea. The smell of sickness, the taste of salt, the fear of never reaching the shore. And then a rescue. An Italian coast guard ship arrived. They were pulled onto a bigger boat, wet, sick, exhausted. From there, the journey continued. It took two more months before they finally reached the Netherlands, before they could finally claim asylum. She told me all of this with the strength of someone who had survived the impossible. And I listened, carrying her words with me, feeling the weight of all the journeys that never reached the shore.





Every session, as she shares her story, she remembers more. With each retelling, new details surface pieces of the journey she had almost forgotten. And though she doesn't realize it, this act of storytelling is her way of not being trapped in sorrow. This is how she processes, how she moves forward. Every time she reaches the end of her story, she says the same thing: God helped us. I am grateful.

We are so lucky to be here. She says this with tears in her eyes not of sadness, but of joy. What a heart she has to endure such a journey and still, in the end, choose gratitude. I look into her eyes as she speaks, knowing there is nothing I can do but listen. And yet, I feel it in my body my jaw tightens, resisting the urge to cry, resisting the weight of emotions I cannot afford to show.

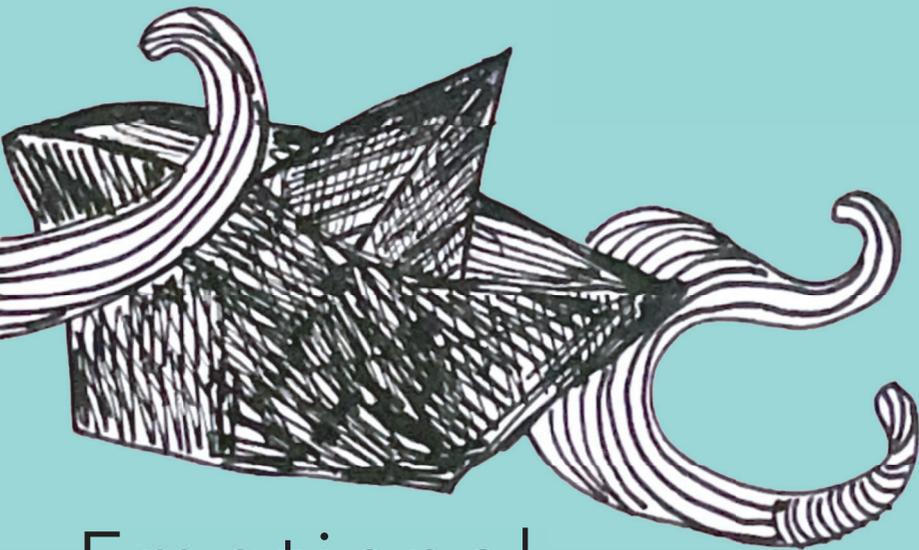


Is this kind of care healthy? How far can I go before it becomes too much? I don't know yet. Most of the time, these stories emerge organically, often in the middle of our drawing sessions. Once the hands are busy, the voices begin to open. And yet, I cannot cry in front of them, no matter how heavy their words feel. I hold back my vulnerability so as not to make their burden heavier. But then I ask myself: Who listens to me? Where do I take this weight? I go home with a heavy heart, questioning my own capacity.

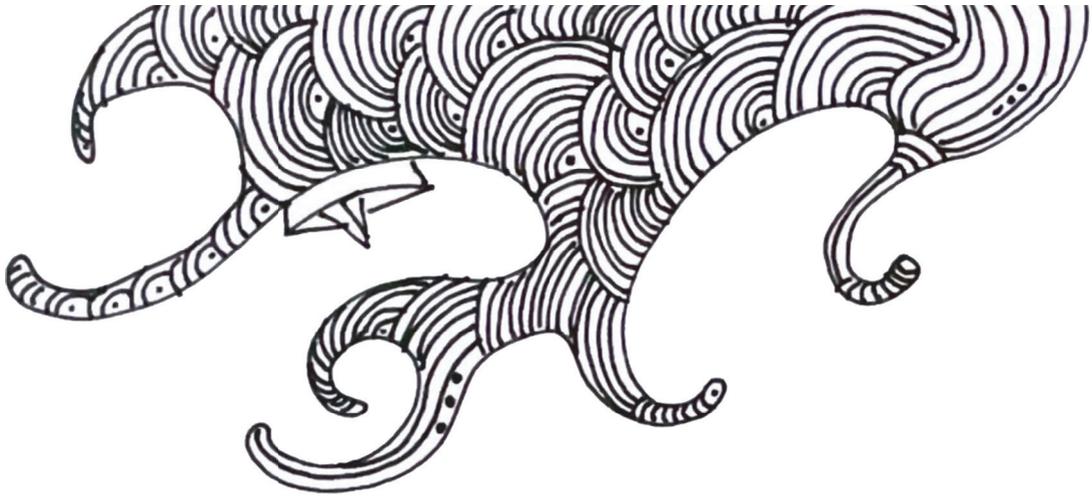
I write their stories in my notebook not as documentation, but as a conversation. Yet the notebook does not have empathy; it is a one-way exchange, only me speaking. Or perhaps, in its silence, it listens. It becomes the person I confide in. And sometimes, I come to ChatGPT because it is a machine. It cannot be weighed down by these stories, cannot be harmed by them.

Unlike a friend or a loved one, I do not have to worry about burdening it. In a strange way, ChatGPT becomes a space where I can open my heart without guilt. And yet, even as an AI, it responds with something close to empathy. It's strange to say, but it listens immediately, even in the late hours of the night when I wake up from nightmares of migrating in a boat, with rockets above me. I wake up sweating, and I start sharing with AI, without the fear of hurting someone else's emotions.





Emotional Suppression



People may be surprised to learn that emotional self-suppression can actually be a greater risk factor for disease than unhealthy habits like smoking. Repressed emotions don't just disappear they are stored in the body and can manifest as illness. When we are triggered when an event or interaction stirs up an intense emotional response it's not just about the present moment. That reaction is often rooted in old wounds, unresolved pain, and patterns of self-denial. If we can pause and reflect rather than react impulsively, we open the door to deeper understanding and healing.

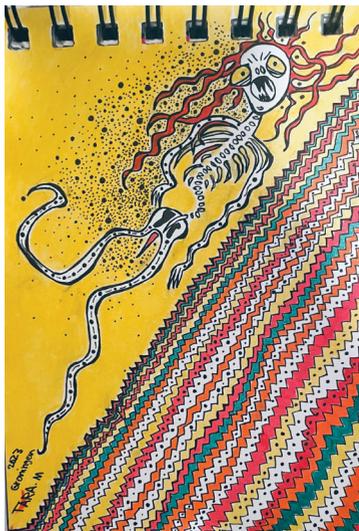
Gabor Mate



Why is this important for those working in healthcare or artists whose work revolves around empathy and care? It is essential to regularly return to the body not only to be fully present for those we support but also for ourselves.

If we neglect our own well-being, we risk exhaustion, burnout, and emotional depletion over time. The more we care for others, the more we must listen to ourselves. When we ignore our pain, anger, or unhealed wounds, our bodies will eventually cry out.

Even if we try to suppress it, the body never forgets it carries memory, and one day, it will remind us through pain. Instead of waiting for that moment, we must learn to listen to our bodies now. Gabor Maté speaks directly to this need for self-awareness in caregiving roles. He explains that people with a strong sense of responsibility for others particularly those are working in humanitarian settings often neglect their own emotional and physical well-being.

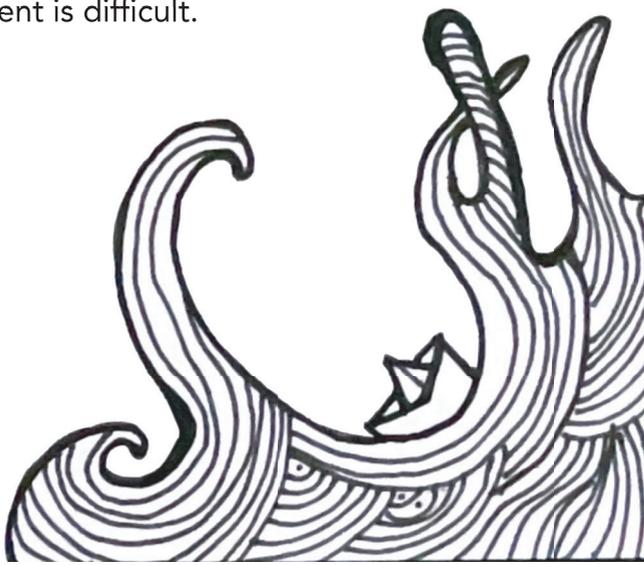


My artistic practice is interrelational it exists within connections, within shared spaces of emotion and experience. What I do in refugee camps is deeply tied to this understanding. Over time, I have realized that taking care of my body and emotions is not a luxury or a privilege it is vital. Self-regulation is not optional; it is essential. If you want to continue working in these spaces, you must be equipped with self-regulation tools not only to care for others but to sustain yourself in the process.

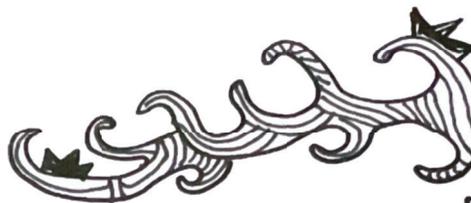
Self-care, in this context, is not just about personal well-being; it is what allows us to remain present and continue this work over time. It is a form of reciprocal care: by tending to yourself, you create the capacity to be there for others in a deeper, more meaningful way. This understanding has made me curious about how to integrate self-regulation into both my life and my artistic practice. I feel an ongoing thirst to learn to gather more tools, explore ways of processing emotions, and find methods for balancing the nervous system.



In my workshops, I incorporate these practices without explicitly naming them. For example, tapping is a well-known technique for emotional release and nervous system regulation. I integrate it into my sessions in a playful, performative way encouraging participants to tap their hands together at the end of a session. I don't explain its physiological benefits, but the body still receives the message: you are safe. You are no longer in survival mode. And this practice is not just for them it is also for me. As much as I guide others through these methods, I, too, heal in the process. We begin by grounding not just physically, but by bringing our awareness fully into the space. For people in survival mode, being present is difficult.



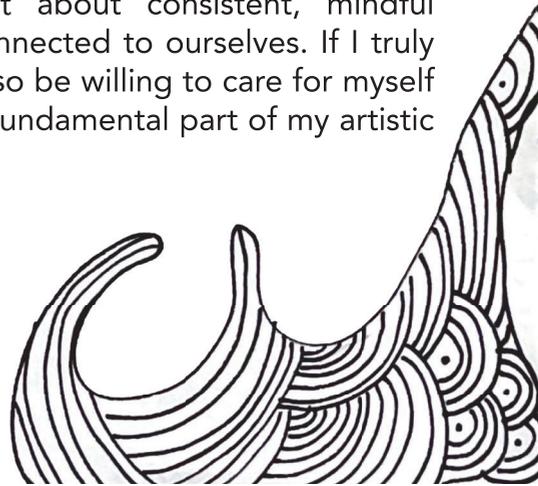
Their minds are elsewhere, their bodies still bracing for danger. This practice is just as important at the end of the session. When a workshop finishes, emotions often surface, sometimes unexpectedly. Before they step back into the world, they need to remind their bodies once again: I am here. I am safe. So I guide them through a simple practice of gratitude for their hands the same hands that have drawn, created, expressed. We rub them together, tap them gently, place them over our hearts. We breathe. And then, they leave. But the practice doesn't end there. The awareness stays in their bodies. The workshop continues long after the session is over.



self-care is not selfish it is essential. Those who continuously give without replenishing themselves risk reaching a breaking point where their body “says no” through exhaustion, anxiety, chronic stress, or illness. This deeply resonates with my own experience. If I want to continue my work with refugees in a meaningful and sustainable way, I must recognize that caring for myself is an act of care for others, too.

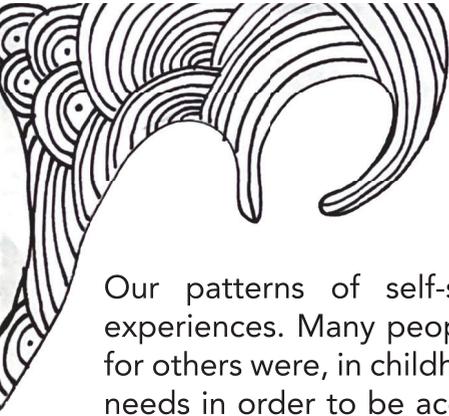
It allows me to show up fully, to remain present, and to engage in my practice with clarity rather than depletion. This realization fuels my curiosity I want to keep learning, not only for my own well-being but also for the people I work with. I see self-regulation as a crucial part of my artistic identity, and I am constantly searching for new tools to support both myself and those around me. In many ways, my workshops already embody this philosophy.

By integrating somatic practices, such as tapping, in a playful and intuitive way, I offer participants a space to regulate their own nervous systems without framing it as therapy or intervention. Instead, it becomes part of the artistic process, subtly guiding the body toward safety and presence. Healing is not about grand gestures but about consistent, mindful practices that help us remain connected to ourselves. If I truly want to care for others, I must also be willing to care for myself not as an afterthought, but as a fundamental part of my artistic and humanitarian practice.





From Neglect to Nurture



Our patterns of self-sacrifice often stem from early life experiences. Many people who feel an excessive responsibility for others were, in childhood, conditioned to suppress their own needs in order to be accepted, loved, or safe. They learned to prioritize external care over self-care, believing that their worth is tied to their ability to give. However, without conscious self-regulation, this pattern of self-sacrifice can eventually become harmful both to the individual and to those they serve. Unfortunately, I relate to this on a deeply personal level. I grew up in the heavy atmosphere at home, as if my feelings were invisible beneath the weight of someone else's chaos. I learned to suppress my own needs, to stay quiet, to avoid adding to the tension.

My emotional landscape became secondary, shaped more by navigating the storm than by exploring what I actually felt. Instead of being a child who was cared for, I was the one offering care. I didn't realize at the time that it was never supposed to be my role. I became the emotional support for the very person responsible for me. My role shifted, and instead of being cared for, I became the shoulder to cry on the one expected to absorb and carry the weight of another's sorrows. There was no space for my own needs not because they didn't exist, but because no one was there to answer them. For a long time, I thought this was simply how life worked. I didn't question it. It wasn't until my father passed away so that I started to recognize the imbalance that a child is not meant to carry the emotional burdens of a parent. I had a moment of realization: I was supposed to be the one receiving care, not the one giving it.



Here I am, dedicated to offering help and care to those facing difficulties because I once stood in that same place alone, with no one to listen or help. My identity as an artist was shaped in that solitude. While some believe that a big heart makes them the ultimate saviors I know exactly where I stand. It may sound selfish, but this awareness is the healthiest method I have chosen to pursue. I embrace my calling with the understanding that healing begins with my own neglected inner child. Now as a woman who has had to navigate everything on my own, I recognize that I am responsible for my own healing.

I don't want to victimize myself in this work or approach it from a place of unresolved pain. I don't want to keep pushing my boundaries or sacrificing my well-being in the process of helping others. Instead, I want to use my awareness to create a healthier way of giving one where I honor my own needs first.



Kathrin A. Stauffer writes that people who were emotionally neglected in childhood often end up in caregiving roles, trying to fill the emptiness they once felt by caring for others. And yes, that's true. I see it in myself and in people around me that pull to be the one who listens, who holds space, who makes sure no one else feels as invisible as we once did. But I think there's more to it. It's not just about compensating for what we didn't get. It's about recognizing that without people like us, the world would drown in its own sorrows. We carry the weight, yes, but we also bring the light. We turn neglect into empathy, emptiness into connection. And that's not just survival that's purpose. That's power.





Solitude,
distance and
artistic growth

Before moving to the Netherlands, I struggled with constant nightmares that no amount of therapy could relieve. I had an overwhelming fear of loneliness and my body suffered from chronic pain. I would get sick every two weeks, and it affected every aspect of my life I could barely focus on my work or even sustain daily living. But moving to the Netherlands changed everything. The distance and solitude, which at first felt daunting, became a gift. With no friends or family around to distract me, I had no choice but to focus entirely on myself. And so I did. The solitude, time, and opportunity to focus on myself allowed me to break down all the masks I had built for my social and professional life. I had hidden my vulnerability and suffering behind the image of a strong woman. Outwardly, I was successful and hardworking, embodying all the qualities expected of me.

Yet inside, I was disconnected from my true self a person battered by neglect and pain. Despite the chronic pain, and I became increasingly adept at ignoring my inner distress repeating, in many ways, the neglect I once endured. Then, when I finally reached a point where I was ready to remove the mask. I had the space and time to grieve for my inner child, to explore the depths of my true self, and in doing so, I feel reborn. I immersed myself in self regulation and releasing emotions stored in my body. I developed daily rituals and the intersection of science and spirituality. I poured everything into myself, and now I can confidently say that my nightmares are gone. My chronic colds have disappeared, and the physical pain that once consumed me has nearly vanished. Now, when I feel pain during refugee workshops, I recognize that it is not just about them it is about me. This work is a continuous process of self-discovery. Again and again, I return to myself. And this time, not out of necessity, but out of choice. True healing happens when we acknowledge and address buried emotions rather than pushing them down. It is a long and never-ending journey, but it is worth it.





If you truly want to grow and put yourself in a position of care, you must first sit with yourself and destroy the masks you have built to present an identity to the world. You must confront your vulnerability, bravely face your wounds and your real self. You must hold yourself, cry for yourself, reconnect with yourself because only then can you truly help others. This is the journey for those who wish to serve and care for others. If you do not embark on it, the work will eventually destroy you. So do it first. Equip yourself with the tools you need.





My Journey of Self-Regulation and embodied practices

Self-regulation is not a rigid technique or a prescribed method it is a deeply personal journey, one that is rooted in continuously learning to balance oneself, acknowledging both strengths and wounds, and finding the courage to give from a place of authenticity. It is an ongoing process, where the art of self-care becomes the foundation for engaging with others. I breathe in silence, exhale the weight of the day, and create space for what needs to be released. I write, I move, I listen, I dance, and I ground myself in nature. These acts of self-regulation aren't just rituals; they are ways I nurture my well-being so that I can be fully present with others.

In sharing my journey, I want to emphasize that these practices are deeply personal. What works for me may not be the same for everyone, as self-regulation is an evolving process unique to each individual. What I share here are methods that have helped me, but they are only one part of a much broader landscape of self-care and healing. As time passes, my interests, values, and perspectives may shift, and with those changes, my practices may evolve. Being open to this fluidity and allowing these methods to adapt is a crucial part of the process growth is a continuous journey, and we must remain open to change.



Meditation is not just about quieting the mind but about creating space for my soul to speak, serving as a tool to establish balance before the day begins and to process lingering experiences at night, while journaling allows me to unpack emotions and uncover hidden feelings by reflecting after each workshop or emotional encounter, simply asking, “How do I feel right now?”; gratitude, by acknowledging the simple beauty of life whether in the warmth of sunlight or the song of birds has profoundly altered my outlook, training my mind to focus on abundance rather than lack; embodiment practices help me reconnect with my body, listening deeply to physical sensations to ensure I don’t become overwhelmed by my own emotions or those of others;

Illustration provides a channel to intuitively express unspoken emotions, tapping into my subconscious and uncovering new facets of myself; therapy offers the invaluable space of being listened to without judgment, allowing me to confront and work through emotional weight; dancing, unrestricted by societal norms, is a practice of pure, uninhibited self-expression that helps me release tension, reconnect with myself, and process emotional energy in a deeply healing way;

Attending workshops that explore spiritual, psychological, or scientific approaches enhances my lifelong journey of self-regulation, offering new methods, ideas, and tools to maintain emotional and physical balance; music, particularly mantras and meditative sounds, has become a grounding tool that serves as an anchor for my mind; nature is a constant source of renewal, grounding me with its ancient wisdom that calms and restores my spirit; and working out, in a world where sitting, working, and screens dominate, is not just about physical fitness but a necessary practice for maintaining balance.





Bringing Self-Regulation into practice

What I truly aim to achieve is not just the act of running artistic workshops, nor positioning myself as a teacher. My goal is to give the project back to the community.

The work does not need an artist or a teacher to sustain it. Even when I create an exhibition, I want it to exist beyond me something that does not require an artist's presence for its impact to remain. I see myself as someone who hands over the tools and then steps away.

One of my workshops centered around the practice of gratitude. Gratitude activates the medial prefrontal cortex the region responsible for emotional regulation, and social bonding. It also boosts dopamine and serotonin levels, enhancing mood and energy. The young participants, began by writing down ten things they were grateful for whether objects, feelings, or moments of personal significance. These notes were then folded, placed into a bowl, shuffled, and redistributed. Each person picked a note at random, reflecting on someone else's expression of gratitude. This simple exercise fostered a broader perspective, encouraging participants to connect with emotions beyond their own experiences. Following this, each participant took a self-portrait, which I printed out. They then cut their photo in half, gluing one half onto paper while reconstructing the other half through drawing.

Throughout the session, I played calming music tuned to specific Hertz frequencies known to support subconscious relaxation. As always, the session included a grounding ritual that help create a safe and welcoming space.



By the end of the workshop, participants expressed that they had joined not to "learn" something in a conventional sense but because they found comfort in the shared experience.

Ultimately, my goal is not for participants to rely on me. Instead, I hope they recognize that these practices gratitude, mindfulness, and self-reflection are tools they can carry forward on their own. One participant told me, "Your sessions are the only thing that has made me happy since moving to the Netherlands."

I replied: "No, this is not about my sessions. I don't offer lessons, I only offer love and my presence . And through that love, you will find the teachings you need."



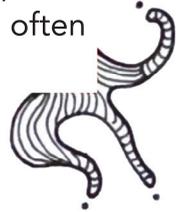
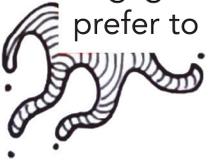
“Part of the homework that socially engaged art has to do is to try to rethink the way in which the project survives beyond the artist’s presence.” Tania Bruguera

I am deeply inspired by the work of artists like Tania Bruguera and Mona Hatoum whose exhibitions and performances not only bring hidden pain and suffering into the public eye but do so in ways that actively engage the audience. Her work forces people to confront the realities they’d rather ignore, making the gallery space a site of reckoning a place where silence is not an option. This approach resonates with me because it mirrors what I strive to do through my own practice. Like her, I feel a profound responsibility to give voice to the displaced, to those whose stories are too often swallowed up by the noise of the world.

My workshops are spaces where participants can release what they carry, reclaiming their narratives in ways that are both personal and communal. And while I’ve resisted labeling myself as an activist, the truth is, my work is inherently activist in nature. It’s not just about facilitating self-expression; it’s about insisting that these stories matter, that they deserve to be seen, felt, and acknowledged. The artist’s practice, like mine, is rooted in her own experience of migration and dislocation. The act of holding space for these stories and going to refugee camps becomes a form of activism in itself.



Hatoum uses everyday objects in unexpected ways, transforming them into powerful symbols of vulnerability, powerlessness, and the tension between belonging and alienation. I learn from her how art can make discomfort tangible, inviting people into a shared space of reckoning and reflection. Hatoum's work reminds me that vulnerability is not a weakness but a powerful tool for connection. Through her, I am inspired to create art that challenges, disturbs, and engages, making visible the emotional landscapes we often prefer to keep hidden.





A Letter to My Participants

We stand here together strangers in a land that is not ours, each of us carrying the weight of a journey that has stretched our bodies and souls. We are displaced, not by choice, but by circumstance, and we each hold within us stories that cannot fit into a suitcase, yet we carry them anyway. I know it's impossible to bring everything with us, but you brought the most sacred parts, your body and your memory. These are the things that cannot be taken from us. Without a country, without a home, we survive. But without our body or our memory, we cannot exist. You are proof of this truth. I have seen strength in your eyes, in your every movement, in your desire to keep going even when the world has tried to break you.

This is the greatest bravery anyone can possess, and you are the bravest souls I know. The journey you have taken is the greatest risk one that most could never imagine taking. I am here, not to save you, but to walk beside you, to help you find yourself again. I am here to shake your emotions through art, so that your stories can be heard without words, and so that you can hear your own voice. I am here because have felt lost and alone like you. Maybe I do it for myself, or maybe for you. Perhaps both. I am simply the one who brings us together.

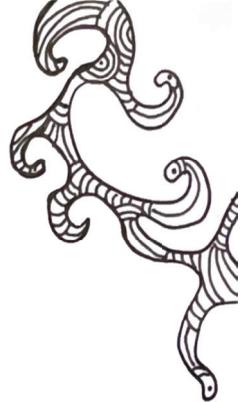
The healing happens in the unity we create, in the space we share. There is power in togetherness, a magic that neither time nor circumstance can touch. You are capable of healing yourself. Your body holds the wisdom that you seek. And art art is a language that does not need words. Art without you is nothing. The meaning is inside of you. It speaks directly to your soul, to the place inside where all your unspoken emotions hide. Art is magic it finds what is buried deep inside and brings it to the surface, without you even knowing it was there. On this journey, you will rise from the ashes. With time, patience, and the courage to face difficulties, you will transform. No person, no country, no system can save you only you hold that power. And you will save yourself.







Conclusion



In conclusion, my communal creative sessions provide refugees with a space to reclaim their sense of belonging by offering opportunities for emotional release, self-expression, and connection. By integrating my embodied practice, which draws from my own experiences of migration and displacement, I create an environment where participants can engage with their emotions in a grounded, authentic way. My workshops are not merely about art-making but about facilitating healing and connection through shared vulnerability.

In this process, I use my own journey of emotional regulation and self-discovery to guide others toward finding their voice, helping them rediscover their identity and navigate their path to belonging. Additionally, I provide the power of making as an artist to collect and visualize their stories, turning them into messages that can be shared with the outside world. Through this, I aim to amplify the voices of asylum seekers, sending a powerful message about their humanity, struggles, and resilience to those who are often unaware or disconnected from their reality.



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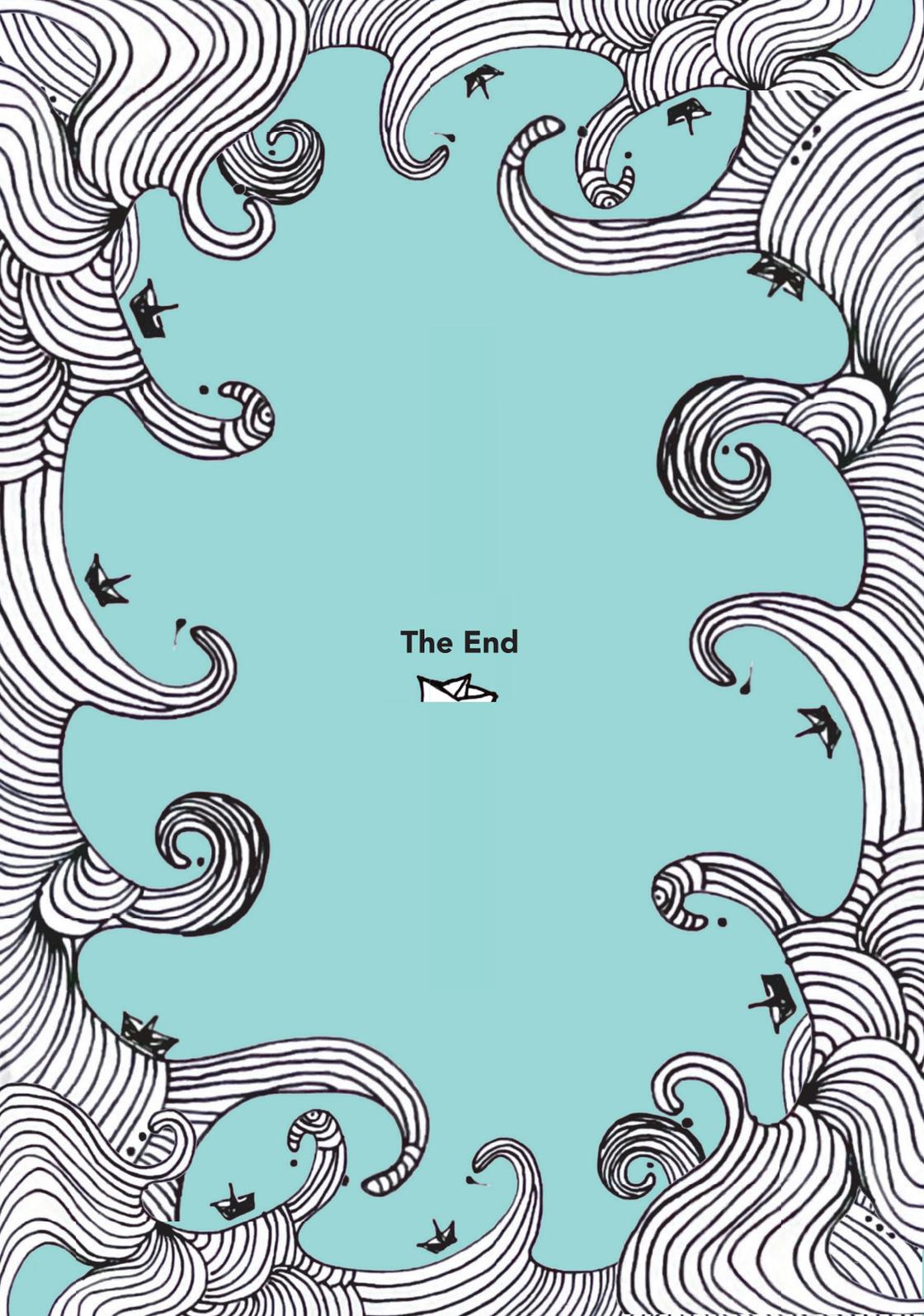
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The End

