

Artist statement about the process **OUR STORIES** - Read. Listen. Walk Collectively bearing witness to stories of war, migration, persecution and exile

By Hanna Ivy Iveslätt

I am an artist living all year around on the west coast island Orust. I usually work with drawing and writing and for many years my works have dealt with the war traumas of both my grandmas .

This summer I am a student at the faculty of fine art at HDK/Valand on the international course *INDIVIDUAL PROJECT -with focus on socially engaged arts practice and questions of place and communities based on the principle of more-than-human-realms and art.*

As part of this course I am initiating the art process **OUR STORIES** for bearing witness to stories of war, persecution, migration and exile collectively in our community.

For this first part of the process we are going to work with the story of Doaa al Zamel. She left Syria because of the war and we are going to read, listen to and walk with her detrimental journey towards refuge in Sweden.

The art process is sprung out of a constant occupation of my mind with issues of war, migration, persecution and exile. I can't get the existence of the inconceivable suffering and pain caused by war, occurring at this very moment in so many spaces and repeating itself over time, out of my mind. It is always there somehow and I am constantly struggling with how to process the existence of ungraspable atrocities in relation to my daily existence. I often ask myself - Who is mutilated to uphold the peace and stability I experience?

I am no activist, no social aid worker or no politician. I am an artist. As an artist I believe that artistic processes can carry breakthrough, transformation, repairing and mending. I am also firmly convinced that artistic process must always deal with fragmented parts. That it must occupy itself with that which is impossible to explain, overview or describe. That as soon as it attempts to grasp the whole picture it will lose its vigor and clarity. That it must cherish diving into the details that one cannot bypass and dare dwelling with all that it can't make sense of. That it must go to where the questions are more than the answers and to where the emotions and the intellect are in a fistfight.

I have chosen Doaa's story because I haven't been able to stop dwelling on it. How can I try to grasp the dreadfulness she has lived? And ever more so the fact that she is just one out of millions living similar horror? I have also chosen it because I find Doaa's existence a miracle. She actually survived and I want to celebrate that she is here with us.

I wish **OUR STORIES** to be a space for being brave enough to be with the ungraspable pain lived by millions of human beings who experience war, migration, persecution and exile, and of which Doaa is one of them. I wish us to look for the connections of their experiences to our daily lives in a country in peace, that is in debate over how many of these human beings we have the capacity to give a chance of a life in peace too.

I also want it to be a space for feeling grateful to the people that made it here!

This process doesn't primarily aim for intellectual conclusions or ideological stands. It aims for embodying and embarking. It aims for making space for whatever is necessary for each and everyone that participates. It aims for resisting the repression of compassionate responses which is often required to get by in our daily existence of information flow and of which a large part is constituted of stories of incomprehensible violence. It aims for going to the roots of our perception and processing of witnesses of terrible pain and torment, pain and torment caused by war started for reasons not necessarily disconnected from the sustenance of our daily habits. To bring those stories to where we cannot habitually protect ourselves from their impact on us and categorize them as not part of our own lives. It carries the hopes that from this something truthful can take place. And that it bears meaning to do this together as a community.

About silence

In this process I draw from my experience of formal zen buddhism to practice silence together. It entails not speaking with words or with gestures. It entails keeping your gaze low and not meeting each others eyes. This does not mean that we are not attentive to each other or that we are not creating bonds and shared experiences. What it means though is that we do not allow our first reactions to get voice and that we give ourselves the opportunity to harbour our responses and cut across our habitual patterns of thinking, feeling, remembering and perceiving.

I wish the outcome of this process to be reparative and with a sharp loving spear into our shared future.

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