



RESEARCH PAPER



BRNO UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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FINE ART AND DESIGN

ONCE UPON A TIME

RESEARCH PAPER

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on my personal experience of a war refugee, in my research paper I aim to examine collage as a creative medium for putting fractured pieces of my life back together and creating a new story out of the traces of the past. Because of the war, my life has changed dramatically: I do not work in an architecture studio in Ukraine anymore, I cannot see my father and friends, I am scared that my home might cease to exist. I face an urgent need to adapt to a new environment and make new plans. In my research paper, I would like to bring attention to collage as a creative method, a coping mechanism, and a fitting metaphor for reassembling life shattered by the war. I plan to reflect on the process of reimagining my own story through semi-autobiographical text, collage, and illustration. Additionally, I want to examine collage as a storytelling device in collage workshops for small groups of Ukrainian children. During the workshops, I will create stories with my young participants: we will develop a character together, think of the obstacles this character needs to overcome in order to achieve its goal, and figure out a way how it could be done. My method is both personal and suprapersonal: through workshops, I aim to create broader context for my inquiry in which I want to consider collage storytelling as a way to capture my own hopes, fears, and desires as well as to document the experience of others who, like me, face the challenges of life overturned by the war.

Keywords: collage, reassembling, storytelling, collaborative storytelling, war, refugees, PTSD, workshops with children, autotheory, autofiction, documentation of the war.

ONCE UPON A TIME

INTRODUCTION

In the wide range of human experiences, certain topics resonate with us more than others, drawing us into deeper reflection. Among them – the exploration of trauma, particularly in the context of war conflict and displacement. Many children are exposed to traumatic experience that can have long-lasting effects on their psychological and emotional development.¹ Traditional therapeutic approaches often involve verbal communication, which may not be suitable for children who struggle to articulate their feelings. In this research paper, I am actively engaging in the healing process through the collage technique, drawing from my firsthand experiences as both a refugee and someone who has lived in a country affected by war. Here I want to provide a healing not only for children, but also for myself.

I have chosen collage as a creative medium for several reasons. Since 2019, I have found reassurance in this approach (Fig. 1, 2). For me it is a method to process my emotions, to create order from chaos, to transform negative memories into positive ones. Selecting and arranging pieces of material helps me become more aware about my own actions, thoughts and ideas.



Fig. 1. Anna MEDVETSKA, *What You Can Offer to This World?*, 2020, paper, magazines, acrylic markers, 21 x 30 cm.



Fig. 2. Anna MEDVETSKA, *Travel Even Within Yourself*, 2020, paper, map, magazines, tape, tickets, acrylic markers, ink, 21 x 30 cm.

¹ Jessica ELISE BEILHARZ – Marlee PATERSON – Scott FATT – Chloe WILSON – Alexander BURTON – Erin CVEJIC – Andrew LLOYD – Uté VOLLMER-CONNA, “The Impact of Childhood Trauma on Psychosocial Functioning and Physical Health in a Non-Clinical Community Sample of Young Adults,” *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 54, 2020, No. 2, pp. 185–194, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004867419881206> (accessed on 29 February 2024).

My diploma project consists of two parts – social and personal.

In the social part, I recognize and make use of the healing potential of collage not only for myself, but also for others. Art therapy can help children with emotional, developmental, and behavioral problems by facilitating positive change through engagement with therapists and art materials in a safe environment. Research suggests that art therapy, including collage-making, can reduce symptoms of PTSD. A case study on the collage art therapy for immigrant youths shows that such form of art therapy can positively change emotional components in immigrant youths' art works, indicating potential positive adaptation.² This research investigates the problem of socializing children from multicultural couples. Participants had ten sessions of collage art therapy that aimed to discover what influence they have on youths' wellbeing. The results showed that art therapy relieved emotional difficulties related to children's immigration including language limitations, unfamiliar environments, and stress experienced in different education systems with their home countries. Through collages and facial expressions children were able to express themselves non-verbally, that showed positive influence on their socialization in the future. Collaborative art projects can also bring people together and make them feel supported. To this end, I organized a series of artistic workshops for children, who have been forced to leave Ukraine due to the war. These creative sessions provided a new activity for small participants and a comfort zone to share their experiences.

In the personal part of the project, I make collages that reflect on my own experience and perception of myself, the world around me, and the intense challenges of reality that I encounter. The collages document and reflect on my experience since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Some of my thoughts might be controversial, but these expressions are rooted in sincerity and genuine beliefs, offering readers an honest insight into my inner thoughts and feelings.

The process of creating images from pieces allows individuals to project their inner thoughts and emotions onto the artwork, providing valuable information for therapeutic intervention and self-discovery. One of the notable properties of collage is its physicality. Children are free to choose any piece of material they see, what allows the exploration of subconscious feelings and the externalization of internal conflicts came onto the artwork. This projecting method is highly used within art therapeutic sessions.

Both parts of my research seek to consider the method collage as both a creative medium and the healing method. This paper will lead us through the process, reconsidering valuables of life. By sharing my own experiences and insights from the collage workshops, I invite others to join me in this transformative journey of healing through creative expression.

² Geummi WANG – Youngsoon KIM – Youngsub OH, "A Case Study on the Collage Art Therapy for Immigrant Youths," *Education and Information Technologies*, No. 24, 2018, pp. 1115–1129, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-018-9819-y>.

COLLAGE WORKSHOPS

According to the Czech news portal *Novinky.cz*, over 50,000 children and students have relocated to the Czech Republic since the full-scale invasion.³ Each individual, myself included, carries the weight of trauma resulting from Russian aggression. While some children may realize the current events, not all have the means to process their emotions and thoughts effectively. This is where my workshops aim to lend a helping hand. To organize the workshops, I made some preparatory steps. Firstly, I consulted with a psychologist regarding the questions, I should and should not ask children. The more we discussed, the more challenges and obstacles I identified. It is crucial not to re-traumatize them. I was advised not to inquire about the children's war experiences unless they start conversation themselves. This means our activities should avoid triggering distressing memories. However, it is impossible to predict precisely what might cause flashbacks. Triggers could be not only words but also sounds, tastes, or images.⁴ The best approach I could adopt was to exclude all words that might remind them of Ukraine, such as “home,” “family,” and “friends.”

After a valuable consultation with a psychologist, I proceeded to my next step: writing a scenario for the workshop. Initially, it comprised three parts: an introductory abstract collage, a collage titled “How do I feel today?” and a character story consisting of three pictures of the character, their goal and obstacles that needed to be overcome to achieve it. However, after the first workshop, it became apparent that such amount of work was overwhelming for the children. Therefore, in the second workshop, I decided to focus solely on the final part – the creation of a character story. In the third workshop, I further reduced the assignment and the participants only focused on crafting the appearance of an imagined character, with the backstory left for subsequent discussion. For illustrating the assignment, I prepared two collages with different characters (Fig. 3, 4). The underlying idea of the activities was for each child to convey their emotions through the picture they create. Although this might not be immediately evident, I can assure the reader that when children discussed their collages, they were very much discussing themselves. Describing their collages, they gave voice to their experience.⁵

³ Filip ŠÁRA, “V českých školách se na konci března učilo 51 281 ukrajinských uprchlíků,” *Novinky.cz*, 24 April 2023, <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/veda-skoly-v-ceskych-skolach-se-na-konci-brezna-ucilo-51-281-ukrajinskych-uprchliku-40429733> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

⁴ Bret STETKA, “How the Brain Purges Bad Memories,” *Scientific American*, 31 July 2015, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-brain-purges-bad-memories> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

⁵ Anila BABLA, “Putting the Pieces Together: Collage as a Mode in the Treatment of Trauma,” *Collage Research Network*, 29 May 2020, <https://collageresearchnetwork.wordpress.com/2020/05/29/putting-the-pieces-together-collage-as-a-mode-in-the-treatment-of-trauma> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

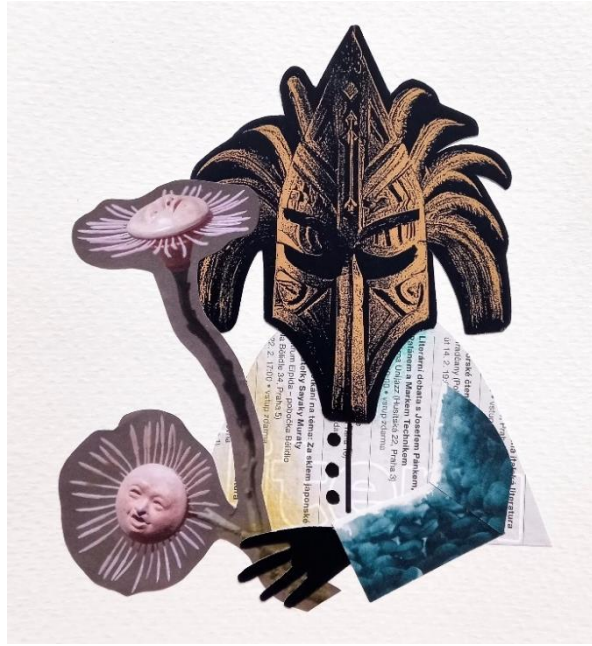


Fig. 3. Anna MEDVETSKA, *The Librarian*, 2024, paper, magazines, acrylic marker, 12 x 16 cm
 Fig. 4. Anna MEDVETSKA, *The Knight*, 2024, paper, magazines, acrylic marker, 13 x 13 cm

The final step was to find a suitable venue for hosting the workshops. My initial choice was to reach out to the Ukrainian Center in Brno. Seeing their diverse range of activities for both children and adults, I viewed this as a chance to engage potential participants. To my surprise, the center's curator informed me that they already had a full schedule of workshops and were not seeking additional ones. Additionally, the center had previously encountered issues with irresponsible students who failed to uphold their commitments to events they had agreed to host. As a result, I had to explore alternative options. Eventually, I approached The Women's Educational Institute, commonly known as "Vesna." This organization has a reputation for providing assistance to those in need, and since 2022, it has been organizing activities and educational activities for both Ukrainian women and their children. Fortunately, the coordinators at Vesna were enthusiastic about accommodating my workshops and provided a space for them.

FIRST WORKSHOP

The first workshop took place on December 20, 2023 at Vesna. For my debut, I chose children aged 5 to 8 years old. However, it quickly became evident that they were not prepared for the level of engagement I had planned. Some of them struggled to even use scissors (Fig. 5). When I suggested tearing paper instead, their attention was captivated by the act of destruction and the sound it produced. It was impossible to hold their attention for a long period of time. Another mistake I made was bringing sweets to the table – the children were more interested in eating gummy bears than participating in the activities, distracting them even further (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5. First workshop process, 2024, photo: Jonáš Svoboda.

I was nervous that we would not be able to accomplish everything I had planned and I felt disappointed in myself. It felt like a failure since the children could not complete their collages as I had envisioned. However, to my surprise, all the participants, including the mothers who were also present, expressed satisfaction with how the workshop went. The little girls were reluctant to leave and even asked for another workshop. Upon reflection, I cannot deny that there were some shortcomings and unforeseen challenges. However, if I had not encountered these issues, I would not have been aware of their potential occurrence. Overall, while there were difficulties, I consider the experience to be a valuable learning opportunity. I learnt from it and upgraded my next workshop.



Fig. 6. First workshop process, 2023, photo: Jonáš Svoboda.

SECOND WORKSHOP

The second workshop was held on January 17, 2024. Learning from my previous experience, I decided to invite children aged 10 to 12 years old. Additionally, I reduced the number of collages from five to three.

The children arrived at the workshop without their parents. There were three girls Masha, Lera, Milana and one boy Vova. Masha was particularly talkative and social, while the others were more reserved. Vova appeared self-conscious but quiet.

Before we began, an unexpected moment occurred. Masha arrived first and as we were introducing ourselves, she began sharing her story. She recounted her memories from the early days of the full-scale invasion, mentioning that she lived in Kharkiv, a city bordering Russia. She described witnessing heavy bomb shelling and realizing something was wrong when she saw her mother crying and her father preparing to go to the frontline. I was shocked and unprepared to respond adequately. Our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of other participants. What struck me most was the girl's calm tone as she shared her story, not seeking help but simply expressing herself. It reminded me of my own experiences and experiences of people I know who also left Ukraine due to the war – we have become accustomed to these memories. While we understand what happened and why, speaking about it no longer instills fear. We even discuss it with laughter and jokes, though it does not neglect the initial fear we felt. This adaptive response to stress is characteristic of trauma, which varies in its impact from person to person depending on the previous experiences, psychological state, and upbringing.⁶

After this striking moment, I redirected my focus to leading the workshop. However, capturing the children's attention with the materials I had prepared proved challenging. It seemed that most of the participants were not interested in what I had brought. Only Masha eagerly searched through the magazines, while the rest of them had to be persuaded to explore the materials on the table. Additionally, I discovered that the children did not know each other, contrary to my assumption that they would be familiar with one another from attending the center regularly.

Despite the initial reluctance, all the children eventually began working on their collages. Once they started, the creative process went swiftly (Fig. 7). Each child completed at least one collage, although it became apparent that three collages were still too many for them to complete within the workshop's timeframe. Realizing this, I encouraged them to work at their own pace without rushing.

Two of the participants managed to complete the story, with three collages each. Masha's story, which she shared with me earlier, seemed to be reflected in her artwork. It depicted an elf stranded in the human world, willing to return home and facing obstacles along the way (Fig. 8). Here is the story that Masha shared with us:

⁶ Nicholas KUIPER, "Humor and Resiliency: Towards a Process Model of Coping and Growth," *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, No. 8, 2012, pp. 475–491, <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v8i3.464> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

[takes the first collage depicting character] Hello, I am Elfina. I want to come back home. I am in the human world now. I want to see my friends, Diana and Lyutik.
[takes the second collage depicting obstacle] Who is this? I am the Dancing Queen! Dance and I will let you go. Okay!
[takes the third collage depicting goal] Hurrah, Elfina has come back!

There is a clear connection between her collage story and our earlier conversation, though it was unclear whether this was a result of our discussion or a reflection of her ongoing thoughts. After workshop children were asked to describe their collages.



Fig. 7. Second workshop process, 2024, photo: Danylo Domashev.

Another story from Vova featured Santa Claus, searching for his lost reindeer, Rudolf, using a sled (Fig. 9). Here is what he said:

Once upon a time there was a Santa Claus. He lost his reindeer Rudolph. He looked for him everywhere, but could not find him. He found him at the bottom of the mountain, took his sled and went down to him. He was going too fast, so he tried to stop and he almost hit a rock.

The third story, portrayed in a single collage, featured spider Gosha and cockroach Valera (Fig. 10). Gosha was building a house with a help of his newly found companion, perhaps symbolizing the adaptation to a new country as a refugee. This is how Lera described her work characters:

This is Gosha, a spider who somehow got into an apartment. He made friends and he settled under the couch. There he built a house, a web, and he lived happily until he was kicked out of the apartment.

The final collage from Milana depicted a pink cat attempting to learn to read, but struggling to do so (Fig. 11). This story was short:

Once upon a time there was a cat and she wanted to learn to read. She stole a newspaper from the owners on the table and tore off a piece of it and started to learn, but she failed.

I cannot be entirely certain of the meaning behind it. In the past, the girl might have attempted to learn something but failed, similar to what happened with this cat. Alternatively, she could have been projecting another experience through this scene. At this point, I am only speculating about what it could signify, as unfortunately, we did not have a deeper conversation.



Fig. 8, 9, 10, 11. Children's collages of Elfina, Santa Claus' Sled, Spider Gosha and Cockroach Valera and Pink Cat, 2024, photo: Danylo Domashev.

Since children create their artwork from their subconscious, they may not be aware that their collages reflect their traumatic experiences. However, it's possible that the imagery and themes within their artwork suggest underlying emotional or psychological aspects of their trauma, even if they do not consciously acknowledge it.⁷

This time, everything felt less chaotic. I was more prepared for what was about to come and managed to organize everything efficiently (Fig. 12). Despite initial hesitance, children thoroughly enjoyed their collage-making experience and, once again, eagerly requested another workshop.

⁷ Huseyin UZUNBOYLU – Gozde EVRAM, "Understanding *Children's* Paintings in Psychological Counselling with Children," *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, 2017, No. 3, 449–463, <https://doi.org/10.18844/prosoc.v3i3.1621> (accessed on 29 February 2024).



Fig. 12. Second workshop results, 2024, photo: Danylo Domashev.

THIRD WORKSHOP

For the third workshop on February 21, 2024, I had three girls aged 10 to 12 years old, Lera and Nastya who are sisters, and Olya. These participants were engaged from the outset, and I decided to introduce myself and share a bit of my own story to encourage them to do the same. Sharing our names, places of origin, and interests helped to foster a friendly atmosphere, especially for the Olya who was not acquainted with the others (Fig. 13).

To streamline the activities, I further reduced the number of collages to only one depicting the character. This adjustment proved helpful. The children were less distracted and fully engaged in crafting their designs and stories. Unlike the previous group, they seemed more at ease, perhaps because I did not feel pressured to rush them, allowing the workshop to flow naturally.

Observing their creative process was fascinating. Lera, in particular, demonstrated a wealth of ideas. She enthusiastically created four collages, each with distinct themes and varying levels of complexity. It seemed that she simply enjoyed working with paper and images. Her first collage depicted a castle for a king and a queen, which she sourced from a picture with playing cards. It was akin to witnessing my own experimental and chaotic process, where the end result remained uncertain until the very end. Assisting her in improving composition was a pleasure. In contrast, Nastya, focused on a single collage featuring a teddy bear. She worked with a particular color palette and was delighted to find pink self-adhesive paper for a bow tie for her character. Despite my encouragement to use various materials, she preferred a single-colored paper without text or images. Meanwhile, Olya chose to create a plate of grapes. When I suggested adding anthropomorphic features to transform it into a character, she insisted to leave it as it was but added a hand reaching for the fruits, remarking: "Now there is something alive here." (Fig. 14). I respected her decision. It is

important to not say strictly what children should do, but guide them and listen to what they are saying while collaging.⁸



Fig. 13. Third workshop process, 2024, photo: Anna Medvetska.



Fig. 14. Third workshop results, 2024, photo: Anna Medvetska.

During the workshop, we also delved into discussions about our families. I shared that when I was their age, my parents would not allow me to go anywhere alone, yet the sisters arrived independently. They said that their parents felt they were safe and let them go to Vesna on their own because transport in Brno is reliable and it is close to their current place of living. Olya was accompanied by her mother, who appeared visibly exhausted, likely due to her numerous responsibilities. During the workshop, Olya mentioned, that sometimes she had

⁸ Joseph DI LEO, *Interpreting Children's Drawings*, New York: Routledge 1983.

fights about cleanliness with her grandmother, who lived together with them. I recommended to be patient with her parents as everyone in her family did their best to make a good life for the whole community. Reflecting on family matters, I could not help but contemplate my own challenges with my father, which seemed more tangible with distance. When I am thinking about our issues, I feel bad, that we are arguing because of unimportant things in global scale. Yet, they still have their place to be, because it is still lowering my quality of life and our relationship. I can feel these problems mostly while I and father are having conversations and I find it to be a reason why I avoid him.

The girls, like the previous group, eagerly requested another workshop. I was pleased to hear that. Following our activities, Lera and Nastya asked if they could take some of my materials home, selecting the some of their favorite magazines. I was delighted that they wished to continue creating beyond the workshop. In the final moments of the workshop, Olya started another collage, but her mother arrived and politely explained that they had other commitments. Disappointed, the girl understood and left.

WORKSHOP REFLECTION

While I began each workshop with a set scenario in mind, I found myself adapting and refining my strategy as the workshop unfolded. It became evident that each child had unique needs and preferences, making it impractical to impose rigid instruction. Instead, I organized the workshops to foster joy and a sense of freedom for the children – creating an environment where creativity could truly flourish.

The workshops also served as a means of navigating and processing my own emotions. Responding to the workshop process, I found myself reflecting on personal challenges throughout the sessions. These reflections came about naturally in the community setting and atmosphere I cultivated. Thus, the workshops not only provided a space for healing and self-expression for children but also for myself.

COLLAGE BOOK

The artistic component of my project underwent through numerous revisions from its inception. Initially, I envisioned intertwining my own collages with those created during the workshops, inspired by Jen Jolliff's approach of using children's artworks to craft collective mosaics for schools (Fig. 15, 16). The artist was curating art classes where each child was painting their own tile 10 x 10 cm. Prior to the classes Jolliff created a "big picture" concept for each mural she curated, so children artworks completed each other and created the full picture in the end. This project allows young students to express their creativity but also participate in collaborative activity. This concept aimed to symbolize our shared narrative of trauma and offer a therapeutic outcome for all participants, offering a fresh perspective on children's art – encompassing not only their own creations but also mine. However, as I started to think about details, technical and ethical concerns emerged.

Firstly, I found it difficult to collect the collages. Many children understandably wished to share their creations with their parents, making it difficult for me to gather every piece. While some generously left their works with me as gifts, others I captured through photography with the intention of compiling them into a digital picture book. However, I soon realized that photographs alone were insufficient for producing a high-quality art book, presenting a significant complication to my plan. This is why I changed my focus from digital idea to hand-made.

Furthermore, ethical considerations weighed heavily on my mind. Thinking about the process of cutting and rearranging the works of children gave me pause. Ultimately, I concluded that I could not bring myself to change or manipulate their collages of others, recognizing the importance of respecting their artistic integrity. While it might have been possible to compile all the works without alterations, it would not have constituted an artistic endeavor but merely served as a photo-documentation of the workshops.



Fig. 15. Jen JOLIFF, *Sharing*, wooden tiles, around 2011, 260 x 400 cm.

Fig. 16. Jen JOLIFF, *Story*, wooden tiles, around 2011, 130 x 350 cm.

After careful reflection, I decided to compile a collage book solely featuring my own creations. This anthology will not only encapsulate my personal journey as a refugee from Ukraine but also integrate motifs and narratives that came from the children's collages. In this way, I will still share a common story albeit from my perspective. This choice not only grants me greater creative freedom but also allows me to convey my own narrative. My initial inspiration came from a silent book titled *Вовча Туча* (Wolf Swarm) by Ukrainian artist Olha Lisowska (Fig. 17). It tells a story of depression and the protagonist's battle against it. Without the use of words, narrating the story through imagery. I was drawn to the atmosphere and style of the pages and I am eager to create something as powerful as Lisowska's book. An important detail for me is that this book was created after the full-scale war started. For me, seeing that artists continued to create is already a sign of resilience.



Fig. 17. Olga LISOWSKA, *Вовча Туча* (Wolf Swarm), 2023. Book cover and page spreads.

Another inspiration is an artbook called *Not Little Things*, created by the Ukrainian initiative Kyiv Creative Community in collaboration with British poet Harry Baker after one year of full-scale war (Fig. 18, 19). It is a poem that captures the symbols and stories evoked during that hard year, such as a jar of tomatoes smashing enemy's drone, the now non-existent plane "Mriya" or the period of blackouts. Its central theme is very important for Ukrainians – even little acts towards our freedom are invaluable.



Fig. 18, 19. Harry BAKER, *Not Little Things*, 2023. Book cover and page spread.

Additional inspiration is a project curated by Joanna Lewandowska and Karolina Jeske titled *Puste Miejsce Przy Stole* (Empty Space at the Table) (Fig. 20, 21). This illustrated book delves into the experiences of refugees and their sense of displacement, contextualizing their stories within the backdrop of war. Artists Małgorzata Korczak, Marta Tomiak, Dasha Voronina and Ada Augustyniak were interviewing refugees and organizing painting workshops for children, similar to my own approach. Each artist shared their personal narrative of leaving their homeland and adapting to a new culture. I was fascinated by the illustrative style of the book, which creates an atmosphere of both loss and discovery.

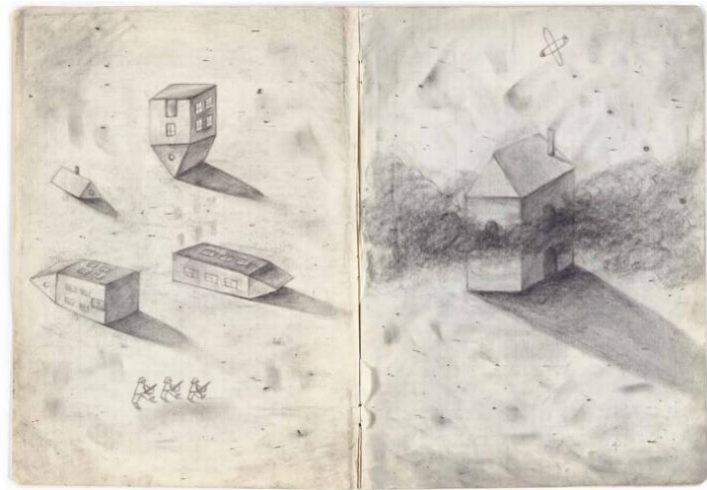


Fig. 20, 21. Joanna LEWANDOWSKA – Karolina JESKE – Małgorzata KORCZAK – Marta TOMIAK – Dasha VORONINA – Ada AUGUSTYNIAK, *Puste Miejsce Przy Stole* (Empty Space at the Table), 2016.

ONCE UPON A TIME

The title of my book will be *Once Upon a Time*, chosen to evoke the sense of bedtime stories (Fig. 14). Through this title, I aim to offer a unique perspective on war, viewing it through the eyes of a child. By interpreting my own experiences, both from the workshops and throughout my life, I position myself as a child describing their impressions of current events. In essence, I will create a personal diary through the medium of collage. With this approach I hope to not only add depth to the narrative but also foster empathy and understanding for the realities faced by young individuals affected by conflict. War crimes carry a particularly heavy weight when they involve children, both in terms of perception and emotional impact. This means evokes stronger empathy and underscores the devastating effects of violence on innocent lives.

The book will feature short texts to narrate the story of the main character – myself. Each collage will serve as a descriptive image of my experiences and emotions, arranged to form a cohesive narrative. The incorporation of motifs and narratives from the children's collages adds depth and richness to the storytelling. These elements offer glimpses into the shared experiences and perspectives of the children affected by war, providing a broader context for my own story. By weaving together my personal narrative with children's, the collage book becomes a testament to resilience, empathy, and the human experience amidst conflict and displacement.

It is not socially accepted to share ideas that oppose others, yet without such discourse, society remains incomplete in its understanding of various situations. While the common belief is that refugees initially struggle upon relocating to a new country, over time, many find their place in new communities. Relocated persons experience controversial thoughts about their emotions – as some leave behind loved ones, others escape oppressive environments. Despite the challenges, migration can offer a chance for personal growth and a sense of belonging. Everyone has their own experience and all voices need to be heard.

Speaking for myself, I have mixed feelings – my initial plan back in January 2022 was to study abroad for a Master’s degree. I also considered changing my field of studies from architecture to art, but war was not part of the equation. In fact, now I have what I initially wanted, but I also have political conflict in my country, which weighs heavily on my conscience. Many of my friends have found their place in other countries, while in Ukraine, they feel like they do not belong. However, this does not mean that refugee life is easy. Each day we are challenged by internal and external problems. Through my collage book, I aim to give voice to these diverse experiences, showcasing the spectrum of emotions refugees face daily. My hope is that readers will resonate with these narratives, fostering empathy and understanding for the refugee experience.

Through organizing workshops, I reflected on my own problems and trauma. Some of these issues I was already aware of, while others only resurfaced during the workshop discussions. In the current situation of war, I cannot make any long-term plans, which increases my anxiety. Certainly, relocating to another country reduces my fear of sudden death, but my friends, father, and cat, who remain in the midst of conflict, still face this risk. There are fears that I cannot describe verbally. Some of them are covered deep inside of my subconscious. Creating collages helps me confront the grim realities of a refugee life as well as to grasp good moments that are also part of it. Although the process may appear chaotic, the collages provide me with a safe environment in which I can explore and organize thoughts and emotions.

In crafting my collages, I will use not only magazines and papers, but also items such as candy wrappers or tickets. My aim is to select materials that evoke associations with Ukraine and effectively convey my emotions and feelings. As for the binding style, I am considering Japanese book binding (Fig. 23). This technique will allow me to assemble all the components of the book, while also tie memories metaphorically. Binding the pages physically is important for deeper connection with the stories and my new experience. I imagine that as I gather and bind these pieces together, I will undergo a process of personal healing, bringing closure to emotions I have never shared before.



Fig. 22, 21. Sketches of the book cover and variants of Japanese binding, 2024.

For the presentation of my book, I envision creating a special cozy atmosphere that invites readers to go through the pages. I plan to set up a corner with a comfortable armchair where visitors can relax as they read the book. Additionally, I intend to incorporate documentation of the workshops, either through projected images or printed photographs, to provide context. The idea is to juxtapose the devastating reality confronted in the book with the warmth and comfort of the surrounding environment.

In the future, I aim to digitize this project or certain components of it to reach a broader audience within the community. It's crucial to raise awareness of refugee issues, not only externally but also within the refugee community itself. While seeking information in Ukrainian groups as a refugee, one often encounters hostility for the simplest inquiries. This is particularly evident when seeking recommendations for beauty services. Individuals may face criticism for paying attention to their appearance during difficult times. The problem is people might criticize others for what they look like, even knowing nothing more about the person. I hope to foster a more supportive and compassionate community through my project, prompting individuals to reflect on their actions and words towards fellow refugees and recognize the impact they can have.

CONCLUSIONS

In both parts of my project, I immerse myself in an ongoing healing process that I share with others, which can help refugee community become more supportive and open-minded. The journey of creating my collage book will serve as a deeply personal exploration of my own experiences as a refugee from Ukraine. By incorporating motifs and narratives from the children's collages, I aim to weave together a narrative that not only reflects my individual healing process but also resonates with the collective experiences of the refugee community. Through this artistic approach, I seek to offer a nuanced portrayal of refugee life, inviting readers to empathize with the complexities of displacement and resilience.

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