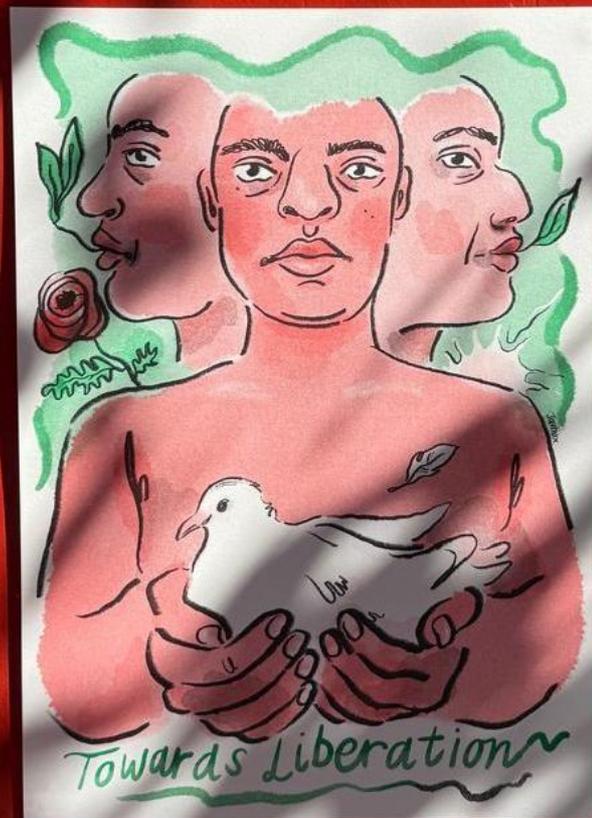


# Deep Breaths: A Reflective Creative Collaboration with Migrants in Culture





## PROJECT SUMMARY

This project was a collaborative engagement with Migrants in Culture that sought to create a reflective, restorative space for activists and community organisers working under sustained political and emotional pressure. Developed in dialogue with the organisation, the project culminated in an in-person event centred on recalibration, grounding and collective care, using creative and embodied practices to encourage pause, reflection and connection.

The final programme combined a shared meal, guided breathing, creative collaging and facilitated discussion. Together, these activities aimed to support participants in reflecting on the impact of their work, reconnecting with their communities and taking time for rest and mutual support. While the project faced significant challenges around communication, shifting expectations and organisational capacity, it provided valuable insight into the complexities of academic–community collaboration and highlighted the importance of clear governance, shared understanding and flexible but accountable partnership working.

Despite these constraints, the project offered meaningful learning for all involved and strengthened the team’s ability to navigate collaborative work with intermediary organisations, informing future approaches to community-based, care-led engagement.

## ROAD TO THE PROJECT

Following the assignment of Migrants in Culture as our partner organisation, our group undertook background research into their work using publicly available materials, including their website, social media and documentation relating to previous initiatives. This preparatory phase helped us to develop an initial sense of the organisation’s priorities and areas of interest, while allowing space for the project’s direction to emerge through dialogue. Our aim at this stage was to remain open and responsive both to the organisation’s needs and to our own interests and motivations. To support early discussion, we developed a loose set of ideas to explore together in our first meeting.

As our initial engagement with Migrants in Culture took place online, we shared short individual profiles in advance, outlining our doctoral research, professional experience, skills and interests. This was intended to provide a starting point for identifying where our involvement might be most useful. Ahead of the meeting, Migrants in Culture also shared a detailed planning document outlining a proposed activity, timeline, draft budget and anticipated time commitments. This document was intended as a working tool for joint development, though it drew on formats used in the organisation’s more formal client work, which required some clarification around specific sections and expectations.



Through subsequent meetings and correspondence, we worked together to refine elements of the proposed plan. As is often the case in community-based collaborations, this early stage involved a period of adjustment as roles, expectations and practical parameters became clearer. During this time, it also became apparent that organisational capacity and staffing structures would shape the pace and format of the collaboration. Migrants in Culture operates with a small, part-time team and a clearly defined working schedule, including a planned organisational closure in August. While this was factored into planning, it placed constraints on the timeframe available to finalise elements of the event, which ultimately took place in mid-September.

Alongside these practical considerations, there was a learning curve for all involved in aligning understandings of the Undisciplined Spaces programme, particularly in relation to funding conditions, scope and aims. Where questions arose, additional guidance was sought from the Undisciplined Spaces team to ensure that plans remained consistent with programme requirements. Navigating these parameters alongside the organisation's own priorities required careful negotiation and flexibility.

In the early stages, Migrants in Culture proposed an open studio-style event. Building on this idea, we developed plans for a series of interactive elements, including collaborative making and opportunities for dialogue with community partners, with the aim of celebrating the organisation's work and the wider ecosystem it supports. This was conceived as a follow-on from a smaller open studio event taking place as part of the Pelican House Materials Festival. We were invited to attend the festival, which offered valuable insight into the organisation's practice and community, and helped us develop our thinking around how the event might be structured.

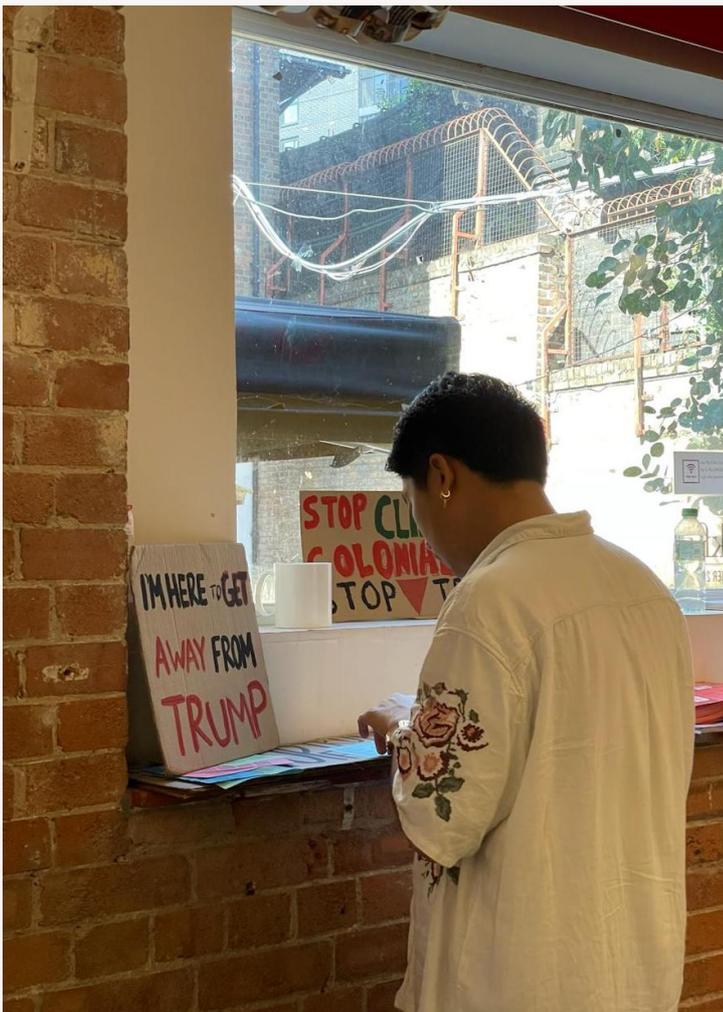
A reflection shared by Migrants in Culture during a panel discussion at the festival, centred on the idea of taking "deep breaths", became a key point of inspiration. This phrase shaped the emerging focus of the project on recalibration, self-reflection and thoughtful engagement with creative energy. As planning progressed, Migrants in Culture contributed further ideas for how the session might run, including suggestions for involving external partner organisations in delivering creative activities. In response to funding constraints, plans were adapted so that our team took on the main facilitation role, while still finding ways to connect with and acknowledge the organisation's wider network.

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In the lead-up to the event, communication took place primarily via email, particularly as Migrants in Culture approached its August closure period. During this phase, the project went through several iterations as priorities and ideas evolved, including changes to format and a refinement of the intended audience. These shifts required responsive planning within a compressed timeframe and shaped the final structure of the event.

Despite these evolving circumstances, the project culminated in an event centred on grounding, reflection and collective care. Designed around the theme of "deep breaths", the programme brought together a shared meal, a guided breathing exercise, a creative collaging activity and space for reflective discussion. The event aimed to offer participants time to pause, reflect on the impact of their work, and connect with one another in a supportive environment.

While some practical challenges emerged in the final stages of planning, the project provided valuable learning for all involved and contributed to a deeper understanding of the complexities and possibilities of collaborative, cared engagement.





## WHAT HAPPENED?

We arrived early on the day to prepare the space for the breathing and creative activities, as well as the shared meal. A member of the Migrants in Culture team was also present to set up and contributed artworks to help shape the atmosphere of the space. Posters designed by Migrants in Culture were displayed for dissemination during the event. We used this time to revisit the outline for the day together and were made aware that attendance might vary, as invitations had been managed by the organisation and flexibility was built into the schedule. As a result, we remained responsive to fluctuations in numbers throughout the day, particularly for the facilitated session later in the programme.

On the day itself, a late adjustment to the running order was required due to unforeseen circumstances. Although the programme had been discussed in advance, changes to staff availability meant that the schedule needed to be adapted at short notice. While this adjustment was necessary, it did compress the timing of some elements and required us to move carefully between activities, particularly to accommodate the availability of the breathing session facilitator.

Following a brief introduction, the event began with a shared lunch prepared by Hannah Yu-Pearson. The meal reflected the reflective ethos of the day, drawing on seasonal ingredients and principles informed by Eastern medicine. The food was warmly received, and the lunch created an informal space for conversation. As anticipated, some attendees chose to depart after this part of the event, as the creative workshops had been positioned as optional extensions to the shared meal.

The lunchtime conversation between Migrants in Culture and attendees was engaged and meaningful, and appeared to be an important focus of the gathering. Due to the layout of the space and the flow of discussion, it was challenging for our team to intervene or transition the group smoothly into the next activity while keeping to the revised timetable. To ensure the breathing session could take place within the available window, the conversation was brought to a close. During the breathing exercise itself, flexibility was prioritised, with participants supported to step away or access quieter spaces if needed.

By the time the collaging activity began, some attendees had left or were taking time away from the group, which resulted in a smaller and more fluid workshop setting. While participants did engage with the activity, the informal tone of the afternoon and limited prior framing of the session made it more difficult to facilitate the deeper reflective discussion we had initially envisaged. We worked to maintain a connection between the creative process and the broader aims of the project, though varying levels of engagement suggested that clearer communication in advance may have helped participants better understand the intention of the reflective elements.



## LESSONS LEARNED

Our experience working with Migrants in Culture highlighted several important considerations for future academic and community-based collaborations. In particular, it offered valuable learning around communication, roles and responsibilities, and project governance.

First, the project underlined the importance of clearly communicating funding parameters at an early stage. Greater shared clarity around what activities were in scope would have supported more confident planning across all partners. Earlier alignment on what had been communicated to all parties would have helped streamline decision-making as the project developed.

Second, the project demonstrated the value of building in moments for shared reflection when working with community organisations operating under limited capacity and time constraints. As priorities and ideas evolved over the course of the project, it would have been beneficial to pause and formally revisit aims, roles and delivery plans.

Third, the project highlighted the complexities of managing participant and attendee communications through partner organisations. While this approach respected existing relationships between Migrants in Culture and their networks, it also shaped participant expectations in ways that affected engagement with the facilitated activities. In future projects, this risk could be mitigated through shared visibility over communications, while still preserving partner autonomy and trust.

Overall, the project provided a valuable learning experience. It reinforced the importance of clearly defined roles, robust communication practices and early attention to organisational capacity and working structures. These insights will inform future collaborations, supporting greater clarity, mutual understanding and effectiveness in academic–community partnerships.

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