



JASMINA FERČEK

RETHREAD

Self-care and community care through textiles and nature



About

The handbook *ReThread – Self-care and community care through textiles and nature* offers an insight into the programme of the same name, which forms part of the WellBIEN platform within the BIEN Textile Art Biennial. *ReThread* is intended for professionals in art therapy, educators, artists, community leaders, textile practitioners, and all those who wish to integrate textile practices and nature-based practices into their work with people and communities. The handbook combines theoretical insights, research findings, and practical workshop descriptions, making it a useful tool for designing programmes at the intersection of art, nature, and wellbeing.

In the introductory chapters, author Jasmina Ferček outlines the fundamental reasons for the programme's inception: the need for spaces where professionals from care professions and education can reconnect with themselves, their bodies, and their creativity. Textile is presented as a »soft surface of memory,« while nature serves as a co-regulator enabling calming, reflection, and renewal.

The core section of the handbook features detailed presentations of mentors from diverse fields—art therapy, forest therapy, engaged textile art, and craft practices.

One key contribution is the research section, based on qualitative analysis of sixteen online evaluations from participants. It reveals how combining textile and nature supports wellbeing, embodied presence, self-regulation, creative freedom, belonging, and identity processes. Five dynamic process factors have been identified, each involving mechanisms that shape specific outcomes:

- 1 Nature as a space of calming, presence, and self-contemplation
- 2 Nature as a relieving factor in the creative process
- 3 Textile as a carrier of memory, intimacy, and embodiment
- 4 Living dialogue between nature and textile
- 5 Community as a space of safety, mirroring support, and ecological/creative interconnectedness

Based on this analysis, the handbook offers recommendations for practitioners at the intersection of arts and health (pages 14–21). In Slovenia, this is an emerging field, with the handbook serving to facilitate knowledge dissemination for practitioners already engaged therein, as well as for those newly entering or seeking to investigate its contours.

About Creators

Jasmina Ferček, author

Jasmina Ferček is the curator of the *ReThread* programme and a professional collaborator of the BIEN Textile Art Biennial. She is the author of this handbook and research, as well as co-author of the handbook and research *Textile Communities: Social impacts and psychological benefits of creating with textiles* (2024). As a textile artist and MA in arts therapy, she explores the significance of women's creative experiences with textiles through conversations with them. In the *Oloop* collective, she has worked for 21 years in the field of participatory and psycho-socially engaged textile art. She investigated the impact of textile creation on women's wellbeing and health in her master's thesis and then wrote a book on the topic in 2022 titled *The Power of Textile*.

She is a member of the Slovenian Arts Therapists Association (SZUT), the Croatian Art Therapy Association (HART), and the European Federation of Art Therapy (EFAT).

Zala Orel, editor

Zala Orel is the founder and artistic director of the BIEN Textile Art Biennial. Educated as a communication scholar, she researches the needs of artists, the desires of audiences, and the challenges of cultural workers, addressing them through various methods that primarily involve connecting people, institutions, ideas, and resources. She has been employed at the Carnica Institute since 2013 in the fields of artistic project management and organization development. Orel is a doctoral student in Social Geography and Regional Development at Charles University in Prague.



Why do we need ReThread?

When designing the ReThread programme, I followed the intention to create a supportive space for those women who usually provide it to others – offering a space for intimate and collective moments of creative respite. In care professions, education and learning, we constantly create temporary homes, soft sanctuaries, and supportive environments for our students, users, clients, or patients. And in doing so, we forget to ask ourselves: what respectful, gentle, and loving hospitality do we live within ourselves?

Self-care is not an additional task, not indulgence, not luxury. It is a practice of respect and compassion towards oneself – towards our emotions, needs, vulnerabilities, and boundaries. When we care for ourselves, we become more present, softer, more open. Our many inner wounds – loneliness, feelings of insignificance, hunger for closeness – are in truth collective. We can heal them together. Care in community means recognising ourselves as part of a larger whole through support, solidarity, and trust.

We live in environments that often overlook the needs of our bodies, our rhythms, our emotions, our rest, and our intimate creativity. Therefore, I believe that self-care and slowing down are acts of courage. When we pause, we reconnect with ourselves. When we pause together, we restore strength to the community. In rested bodies, we hear the beating of our hearts again and remember who we are. From a nurturing stance, we gaze wider, see more – paths, steps, possibilities.

That is why I invite you to pause, to pause together!

On Textile Art and Nature

Art invites us to pause for a moment. To sense the beauty that already exists within and among us. To draw out of the pressures of life an expression that is not perfect, yet is true. This is creation that heals, because it returns us to a sense of belonging – to ourselves, to community, and to the earth.

Art is a gift. Not only aesthetic, but also spiritual and embodied. Beauty emerges out of nothing, as we shape threads, colours and movement into something that transcends materiality.

Textile, this soft surface of memory, becomes a space where personal care and care within the community meet. When we weave, knit or embroider, we nurture our bodies, which settle into the rhythm of repetitive movements. At the same time, we tend to community – because the threads we intertwine are never only our own. In shared making, we come into contact with the stories of others. Art returns us to circulation: from touch to breath, from the inner world to the world around us. In this circle, beauty is not born of perfection, but of connection.

Nature, too, invites us to slow down. It teaches us a silence full of life. It reminds us that what we need for restoration is not beyond our reach, for nature is our first home and our first healer. Yet it does not heal merely by our being in it, but by our being with it – when we notice it, immerse ourselves in it sensorially, and cultivate a relationship with it. Every park, every garden, every path is a quiet space where shifts in body and spirit can unfold. When people gather and create in nature, it is not only individual wellbeing that is strengthened, but also the ways in which we connect, relate, and hold together as a society.

Photo: Tjaša Bavcon
Workshop: Oloop Collective / Spaces
Within Me: Exploring inner landscapes
through textile art



ReThread and WellBIEN

ReThread is a curated programme that explores the intersections of self-care, culture, nature, and care within a community. Its activities are grounded in therapeutic textile practices, mindfulness, and community arts.

ReThread forms part of the WellBIEN platform, launched in 2025 within the BIEN Textile Art Biennial, focusing on the nexus of textile creativity and health. Through these initiatives, the biennial has become a »third space« of wellbeing and health – communal, inclusive, and non-hierarchical. A space that acts as a bridge to clinical care and/or supporting reintegration into the community.

WellBIEN stems from a desire to deepen understanding and promote the significance of textile creation for wellbeing and health, offering a space for research, discourse, and experiential programmes. This year's discussion »At the Intersection of Art and Health – Ethical Questions and Dilemmas« brought together Slovenian and international practices, advocating connections between artists, specialists in arts therapy, and art psychotherapists along the »arts-and-health« continuum. Participants included Pamela Whitaker (IE), Aleksandra Schuller (SI), and Jasmina Ferček (SI), moderated by Polona Torkar.

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkjCSN-jnjE>

Within this framework, ReThread primarily offered experiential workshops. Between 2 and 4 June 2025, its creative activities took place at various locations in Kranj, both in cultural venues and in natural settings. The programme was designed for professionals in education and helping professions, offering them the opportunity, over the course of three days, to attune to themselves and to nature, slow down, settle, connect with their surroundings, express themselves creatively, and engage in self-discovery, later integrating new knowledge and experiences into their professional practice.

The mentors of the ReThread programme came from diverse fields along the "arts-and-health" continuum, including art psychotherapists, socially engaged artists and designers, practitioners of arts therapy, textile activists, forest therapists, community-based artists, and artists working with nature-based approaches.

The programme also included lectures by art psychotherapists Jasmina Pacek (HR/US), Pamela Whitaker (IE), and Savneet Talwar (US), who presented textile as a therapeutic medium for trauma healing, empowerment, social activism, and the cultivation of radical hope and care. The discussion that followed was moderated by journalist Neža Borkovič.

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-OCtkHX9gI>

Presentation of Mentors and Workshop Contents

Jasmina Pacek 1

Prof.dr.art. Jasmina Pacek, univ. spec. art. therap., is a Croatian-American artist and art therapist. She has extensive experience in art therapy, particularly working with young offenders, soldiers with PTSD, trauma survivors, children with special needs, as well as artists and art students. She employs the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC). Activating all levels of ETC – kinesthetic/sensory, perceptual/affective, cognitive/symbolic, and creative – stimulates holistic brain function and supports personal growth. This approach contributes to stable physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing and helps artists cope with the mental challenges of the contemporary art market.

Stitching stories: Finding your safe space 2

Jasmina's three-day workshop began with an introductory lecture on using narrative textiles as a means of expression, aligned with Perry's neurological »5R« model (2006). Participants engaged in relational, repetitive, relevant, rewarding, and rhythmic textile activities, choosing

from various materials to create personal textile stories through weaving, knitting, crocheting, embroidery, or sewing. At the end of the therapeutic process, participants took their works into nature, where they found safe spaces for displaying them. The sessions took place in the Škrlovec tower and at the garden of the Kranj Horticultural society.

Savneet Talwar 3

Dr. Savneet Talwar, PhD, ATR-BC, is a textile artist, certified art therapist, somatic coach, and educator. She is a tenured professor teaching art therapy at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). She also lectures on topics related to the political dimensions of craft, textiles as a medium of resistance, and the social and material intersections of craft practices that support wellbeing. Her artistic and therapeutic work is characterized by expertise in dismantling oppression, social justice, and intersectional feminism. Talwar has designed numerous community projects, including the *Wandering Uterus Project*, *CEW (Creatively Empowered Women) Design Studio*, and her latest *Mending Lab*. She is the author of *Art Therapy for Social Justice: Radical Intersections* and numerous articles in international

journals on ethics of care, intersectional feminism, feminist pedagogy, craft politics, culture, and identity.

Mending towards radical hope 4

Participants of her workshop focused on patching, sewing, and repairing techniques. Both literally and metaphorically, these are powerful tools for storytelling, activism, grieving, remembering, and healing. During the three-day workshop, they reflected on the challenges we face as global citizens in responding to geopolitical conflicts and collective mourning. With the power of the needle, they expressed an ethics of care for the community in a world dominated by indifference. The sessions took place in the old town centre, in the quilting studio of Margareta Vovk Čalič.



Patricia Geraldés 1

Patricia Geraldés lives and works in Porto and holds a degree in Painting from FBAUP (Faculty of Fine Art Porto). The focus of her artistic research is the ancient relationship between Humanity and Nature. She uses materials and natural resources found in forests, mountains, and beaches to develop installations that evoke the meaning of sustainability and ancestors. She is the artistic director of the Portuguese residency project *Encontros da Primavera*. She collects stories and memories, studies rituals, and depicts craft practices originating from traditional ways of knowing and doing, thereby honouring their collective timeless wisdom. She strives to develop artistic practices that emerge in harmony with the living world, art that fosters ethics, connection, and co-responsibility between community and environment, between human and non-human beings.

Personal diary 2

The three-day workshop focused on the work of the ancestors, specifically the communal process of linen production—from sowing to processing the plant into fabric. This was once interwoven with ritual singing, dancing, and celeb-

ration. Participants created their own artists' books using drawing, collage-making, writing, old photographs, plants, and songs, expressing deep respect for nature and community. The sessions took place in the garden of the Kranj Horticultural Society.

Mateja Kavčič and Vita Ivičič 3

Mateja Kavčič is an academic painter (ALUO, Ljubljana). She works in painting, drawing, spatial installations, and land art. Her works feature in many gallery collections and have earned several awards. In recent years, she has primarily created ephemeral spatial installations from materials found in nature. These touch on ecological themes and stand in contrast to the present time. Having no designated use and leaving nothing behind in the end, they reject the superficiality of consumerism. They offer detachment and awaken the primal connection with nature, transporting us to a primary – human state.

Vita Ivičič completed her studies in design at Chelsea College of Art & Design in London. In 2017, she received an award for the most experimental and innovative collection at the *Mittelmöda* competition in Milan. In her work, she uses natural materials, sometimes recycles old

ones, dyes with natural dyes, or prints them using botanical printing techniques, and focuses on high-quality and sustainable textile production. Flowers and plants serve her as a source of inspiration and a medium for creation. Since 2022, she has led a project on producing handwoven white Dolenjska linen canvas – from planting flax, pulling, obtaining fibers, spinning, to weaving.

Picnic with Nature 4

Participants in the three-day workshop explored two traditional craft processes – weaving seat mats from marsh grasses and botanical printing, where they created unique patterns and imprints of nature by direct pressing of plants onto fabric using the Japanese *hapa zome* technique. The sessions took place outdoors in the canyon of the Kokra River and at the Cherry Garden of Layer House.



Tjaša Bavcon and Katja Burger Kovič – Oloop Collective 1

The Oloop Collective has operated for two decades at the intersection of art, design, and social and participatory practices. Their artistic vision transcends textile materiality, treating it as a space for inner processes that open dimensions of the sensory, emotional richness, and symbolic. Oloop textile artists continually explore creativity as a universal human experience—not just as a medium of expression, but as a path to self-exploration, contemplation, and regeneration. The rhythm of breath aligns with hand movements, material touch awakens bodily memory, repetitive motions calm and return to the present moment. This process extends beyond the visual, awakening holistic perception, recognition of inner emotional landscapes, and deeper relationships to self and world. In their practice, textile creation is a field of possibilities—a space to open, connect, express, and co-create. Textile becomes not just substance, but a carrier of stories, emotions, and healing processes that transcend the individual and extend into communal experience.

Spaces within me – Exploring inner landscapes through textile art 2

Participants explored their inner experiences through textile-artistic practice. Using simple techniques of folding and wrapping textiles, they spontaneously connected with inner spaces. The session was designed as a safe, supportive space that, through artistic expression, encourages mindful exploration, self-understanding, and integration of personal experience into broader community and creative contexts. The meeting took place in the canyon of the Kokra River and at the Crobath House.

Oljana Karpus 3

Oljana Karpus is a Ukrainian creator who connects ethnographic practices with therapeutic art. Her work is based on researching deeply rooted cultural symbols and rituals that have served for centuries as tools for inner stability and personal transformation. After years of leading therapeutic groups in Kyiv, since moving to Slovenia she has focused on supporting women in crisis situations. Oljana's work involves creating with the intention of processing emotions, empowerment, and recognizing one's own value. She connects therapeutic

art with traditional rituals, such as making motankas (Ukrainian dolls) or pysanky (decorated eggs), which represent archetypal symbols of protection and growth.

Little duchess – Precious for who you are 4

Participants explored their inner patterns and developed a sense of self-worth by creating the traditional Slavic doll. The workshop offered more than just handicraft—it was a process of inner transformation and a shift from a life conditioned by external expectations to a more authentic existence.



Breja preja 1

Nina Arnuš, as a cultural studies scholar and arts therapy student, and Anka Pintar, as a cultural sociologist and philosophy professor, focus on how creativity drives positive change. For a decade, they have led Breja Preja, a textile community under Zavod Tri, connecting creativity with the inclusion of immigrants, intergenerational, and intercultural collaboration. Notable projects include *Krpanka*, *Izvezene zgodbe*, and *Zgodboprejke*. Every March 8, they highlight women's equality with public textile installations and run charitable craft initiatives. Anka and Nina believe art is accessible to all—everyone can create, express creativity, and enjoy handmade products. Their philosophy emphasizes process over appearance, observing what unfolds during creation. Their workshops intertwine various textile techniques, movement, and creative practices—storytelling through embroidery, crocheting with activism, and knitting with mindfulness. They encourage beginners and explore techniques suitable for all skill levels.

Embroidery and yoga 2

Participants decorated their t-shirts with embroidery, making them unique and extending their lifespan. Mentors ensured spinal well-being with yoga exercises during creation. The session took place at the Cherry Garden of Layer House.

No-Border Craft 3

No-Border Craft is a self-organised group of activists, asylum seekers, and refugee women who »crochet together and socialise without borders«. Their crochet gatherings take place in collaboration with the informal craft group KvaKvačkaš. The group's goal is to build a social network between local and migrant women, and to strengthen the power, knowledge, experiences, and courage of migrant women. As they actively seek opportunities offered by the alternative economy, they offer their products in exchange for voluntary contributions at various occasions. In the No-Border Craft craft group, handmade work connects with social engagement. By exchanging craft knowledge, they weave a social network within which women from different countries connect in a solidary community. Sharing knowledge and skills in knitting and crocheting is also providing assistance in finding a place in society.

Power of the red-green fruit 4

The workshop offered participants the opportunity to get to know the spirit of this culturally mixed activist crochet community while crocheting watermelons – a symbol of community and vital force. Through mastering simple watermelon crochet techniques, they explored the meaning of handmade work as a way of belonging, empowerment, and visibility in public space.



Romana Brina Gobec 1

Romana is a creator and founder of Brinas Studio, a natural dye workshop. After years in the corporate world, she followed a deeper calling and became self-taught in natural dyeing. Her work explores new applications of natural dyes, textures, and pigments, revealing the unpredictability and beauty of natural materials. She blends traditional approaches with modern experimentation, creating fluid, organic patterns—entirely unrepeatable, as they result from a dialogue between material, moment, and natural forces. Creation is a ritual where mental control yields to curiosity and openness. Brinas Studio is not just a creation space, but a living story of how colors can bridge the external and internal worlds, the visible and invisible. She exhibited at the BIEN Textile Art Biennial 2023, Vienna Design Week (2021), and designed her sensory exhibition *Floral pleasures* (2022).

Rainbow soul 2

Rainbow soul was a sensory, experiential, and meditative workshop. Participants prepared natural dyes from natural raw materials under the mentor's guidance. They intuitively applied the colors of natural pigments to paper, modified them

with natural agents, and surrendered to the process of magic. Beyond the visible, they explored how flows reflect the rainbow of experiences within themselves—how to experience self and world in fullness, in all colors of the rainbow. The workshop took place in a hidden corner of the Layer House courtyard.

Matija Samec 3

Matija is a certified forest therapist and forest bathing guide from Gorenjska region. His academic journey began in marketing communications and public relations, but seeking deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships led him to psychotherapy studies. During specialisation in integrative therapy through the EAG-FPI programme, he discovered forest therapy—a method blending nature, health, and wellbeing. In the international Forest Therapy Hub environment, he trained further for work with people in the wild and began leading unique sensory experiences in nature's embrace. He guides people from the greyness of loneliness to the vibrancy of the green thread connecting us to all living things. Aware that true connection requires clear boundaries, he creates safe spaces where participants

explore sensations and test limits at their own pace. He interweaves sensory, creative, and physical work, empathetic communication, neuro-linguistic programming, and other approaches to craft unique experiences where inner and outer worlds intertwine through expression, beauty, and nature's joy.

Tuning with Nature 4

The tuning with nature workshops took place every morning in the garden of Kranj Horticultural society. Participants started the day with gentle, intuitive practices to connect with themselves and the natural world. Through sensory exercises, movement, and sensory exploration, they gradually released inner tensions, opened space for introspection, and learned how nature can become their therapeutic companion.



Photo: Vita Ivičič
Workshop: Vita Ivičič and Mateja Kavčič:
Picnic with Nature

Research, Analysis, Recommendations

This research builds on existing knowledge of the effects of textile crafting in communities by adding new insights into how incorporating nature into the textile crafting process further strengthens well-being and health, self-awareness, self-care, and mutual care within the community.

The qualitative research involved sixteen (16) participants from the ReThread programme. Data was collected via an anonymous online questionnaire completed by participants after the programme ended. The questionnaire was designed by Zala Orel and Jasmina Ferček. Questions were open-ended, exploring experiences, perceptions, meanings, relevance, and personal/professional contributions from the programme. Information was analysed using interpretative analysis.

Participants in the ReThread programme (henceforth »participants«) were mostly from Slovenia, with others from Italy, Austria, Croatia, and Germany. They had diverse professional backgrounds—from art, design, and architecture; cultural education; and psychology, social pedagogy, and art therapy. Analysis of participants' subjective experiences shows that textile craf-

ting—incorporating natural materials, conducting activities in natural settings, practising mindfulness in nature, and fostering relationships with Nature—operates within two central experiential domains:

- 1 Earthly, bodily, felt (nature, animal sounds, fibre touch, water, plants).
- 2 Relational, intimate, communal (group, sharing, co-creation, support).

Responses sketch an ecological-textile world where nature and textiles are not merely material environments, but relational interlocutors enabling return to self, community, and unburdened creative essence.

Most common shared insights:

- 1 Nature enables connection with self.
- 2 Textiles facilitate safe articulation of this connection.
- 3 Community offers space for support and co-creation.

From these insights, five dynamic process factors were developed, each involving mechanisms shaping specific effects. They are detailed further in the handbook with recommendations for projects at the art-health intersection.

Process Factor	Mechanisms	Experience Effect
Nature as space for calming, presence, and self-contemplation	Slowing down, sensory presence, inner insight	Connection with self, regulation, sense of inner peace
Nature as relieving factor in creative process	Releasing pressure, playful and imperfect creation	Sense of freedom, less perfectionism, more spontaneity
Textile as carrier of memory, intimacy, and embodiment	Touch, layering, arranging and transferring stories onto material	Safe articulation of experiences, integration of memories and emotions
Living dialogue between nature and textile	Collaboration with natural elements, symbolic interpretation	Sense of co-creation, meaningfulness of coincidences, symbolic resonance
Community as space for safety, reflection of support, and ecological/creative interconnectedness	Sharing, mirroring, mutual learning and regulation	Sense of belonging, support, expanded creative and ecological awareness

Table 1: Dynamic process factors developed from ReThread programme participants' insights

In the previous research *Textile communities: Social impacts and psychological benefits of creating with textiles* (Ferček and Orel, 2024), we explored the effects of textile crafting on the quality of life for participants involved in textile communities. These effects were divided into six domains—spaces: *spaces of wellbeing and health* (1), *spaces of meditation, exploration, and reflection* (2), *spaces of personal and collective identity* (3), *spaces of personal life transitions and socio-cultural transition* (4), *spaces of equality, power, independence, and emancipation* (5), and *spaces of activism and social change* (6).

The Manual: https://layer.si/bien/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Tekstilne_skupnosti_BIEN_prirocnik_design-Ur-ska-Alic.pdf



Photo: Jasmina Ferček / Workshop: Romana Brina Gobec: Rainbow soul

1. Nature as space for calming, presence, and self-contemplation

Participants describe activities in gardens and by the river as exceptionally nurturing, nourishing, and restorative. Recurring expressions include: unplugging, listening to nature, connection with self, peace, slowness, and sounds of water and animals. Nature acts as a co-regulator, slowing down, regulating rhythm, and enabling »breathing through« the experience. As an »invisible mentor,« it offers insights—when gazing at the river, stones, or movement of light. For many, it also serves as a reminder of the need for a different way of being—less goal-oriented, more bodily present, and sensorily sensitive. Participants describe experiencing nature as a regulatory space with words like: »it filled me up for the whole day,« »I disconnected from everything,« »peace, contact with greenery, different levels of feeling.«

These descriptions align with findings from ecopsychology and nature-based therapy, which confirm that nature regulates the nervous system, reduces stress, and improves emotional stability.¹ Nature restores authenticity, the sense of being part of a larger ecosystem, and serves as a space of contemplation where inner

shifts occur more easily. Yet it is not merely a physical space but a relational phenomenon—something establishing dialogue with participants' inner worlds. It enables transition from a mentally-active to a sensory-present mode of being. This aligns with Berger and Lahad (2013)², who emphasize that natural environments support physiological and emotional stabilization, allowing therapeutic or creative processes to unfold more deeply and holistically.

Recommendations:

- Place creative activities in natural environments, as this reduces tension and stress, enables connection with self, and fosters calmness, slowness, and sensory presence.
- Use nature as a co-regulator by introducing slow, ritualized introductory activities (silent observation of water, trees, or light) or exercises promoting sensory attunement (sound, touch, smell) before creative activities.
- Support embodied grounding with practices returning attention to the body (breath awareness, material touch, earth contact). This is particularly important for participants experiencing mental overload in their work.
- Treat nature as a living being rather than scenery, encouraging reflection on what nature »communicates«, symbolic connections with nature (water as flow, stone as stability), and experiencing nature as a creative partner.

¹ Jordan, M. (2015). *Nature and Therapy: Understanding Counselling and Psychotherapy in Outdoor Spaces*. Routledge. and Jordan, M., & Hinds, J. (2016). *Ecotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*. Palgrave.

² Berger, R., & Lahad, M. (2013). *The Healing Forest in Post-Crisis Work with Children: A Nature Therapy and Expressive Arts Program for Groups*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

2. Nature as relieving factor in creative process

Multiple participants speak of inner insights: »I miss my boundless creativity« or »finally I can create without conditions.« The following terms stand out: timelessness, playfulness, no expectations, inner creativity, allowing mistakes, imperfection, disconnecting from rules.

This reflects an existential sense of freedom. Participants experience creativity not as a skill, but as a way of being—a state of attention, openness, and playfulness. Nature enables them to set aside professional identities (artist, designer, craftswoman) and enter a freer, more playful, embodied experience. Nature reduces the drive for creative perfection, acting as a counterpoint to productivity and high expectations often marking textile crafts and other creative practices. In nature, one can admire the beauty of organic imperfection. The meaning of releasing control appears most clearly in processes where nature co-creates the artwork, strengthening trust in the process and reducing perfectionism. This aligns with Hinz (2009)³ and Malchiodi (2020)⁴, who note that imperfect, organic materials relax perfectionist tendencies and encourage more authentic creation.

Recommendations:

- Foster spontaneous, playful, and relaxed creative experiences—especially for those with high self-expectations, professional pressures, and pursuit of elevated standards—through creating in nature, using natural materials, and involving nature itself in the process.
- Shift focus from results to process orientation, helping participants release control and surrender to creative flow.
- Encourage interaction with natural elements, developing a sense of collaboration with materials rather than control over them.
- Emphasize embodiment, slowness, and playfulness as core process elements. Include exercises activating body connection, promoting spontaneity and play, allowing intuitive creation; offer rule-free tasks permitting personal material interpretation.

- Invite participants to temporarily suspend professional identities, as many come from high-standard professions (artists, designers, craftswomen). Nature enables entry into creativity beyond professional norms, with greater freedom, vulnerability, and inner connection.

³ Hinz, L. (2009). *Expressive Therapies Continuum: A Framework for Using Art in Therapy*. Routledge.

⁴ Malchiodi, C. A. (2020). *Trauma and Expressive Arts Therapy: Brain, Body, and Imagination in the Healing Process*. Guilford Press.



Photo: Maša Pirc / Workshop: No-Border Craft: Power of the red-green fruit

3. Textile as Carrier of Memory, Intimacy, and Embodiment

Participants frequently mention the comforting, soothing, therapeutic nature of textile material, describing it as a connection to memories, tradition, and the female lineage. Textile serves as a surface where difficult-to-verbalize themes emerge. One participant highlighted: »Therapeutic work with textiles goes deeper and captures more layers of experience, just like other forms of psychotherapy. When I fold and store my story on the textile, I can distance myself from the theme; when I unfold it again, everything is immediately there, and I can re-enter the ongoing process.«

Textile acts as a »soft carrier of experiences,« creating symbolic connections to emotional content. It enables gradual processes: sewing, cutting, embroidering, layering—mirroring inner organization and integration. As culturally and bodily »familiar,« it provides safety and bridges external and internal worlds, physical touch and psychological meaning. Being a material the body wears (literally), it offers soft, organic transitions between inner and outer. Parker (2010)⁵ discusses textile as carrier of memory, emotions, bodily experiences, and identities—culturally and emotionally saturated, historically tied to women's tradition, care, family, and intimacy.

Recommendations:

- Include textile as a tool for safe entry into personal content, enabling slow, soft, gradual approach to sensitive themes at participants' own pace.
- Use textile for self-regulation: offer inviting-to-touch materials (cotton, wool, textures), introduce rhythmic, repetitive hand processes (knitting, weaving, embroidery), emphasize physical material contact regulating the nervous system and reducing tension.
- Support narration and memory in creative processes; let textile serve as »memory space« and material holding personal stories (textile diaries, collages, story cloths).
- Highlight textile's cultural history and emotional heritage tied to care, female lineage, intimacy, family rituals; incorporate intergenerational dialogue for family or identity themes.
- Employ textile techniques for organizing inner worlds—textile enables spatial arrangement of psychological content: sewing as integration, cutting as separation, layering as multilayered experience.

⁵ Parker, R. (2010). *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*. I.B. Tauris.

4. Living Dialogue Between Nature and Textile

Participants report key moments during plant printing on textile, painting with natural dyes, creating by the river, and gathering natural elements. One describes an awareness moment: »How beautiful to be part of nature when even simple green leaves on the tablecloth create wonderful art.« Textile in nature becomes part of a living process—plants leave imprints, sun affects pigments, wind dries surfaces. Participants feel they collaborate with nature, not merely shape textile patterns. Textile intimately »pins« the experience onto itself, making it tangible—what is fluid in nature anchors in textile.

Another participant recounts a striking event: »Magical experience with a tit bird, the favorite bird of my late nephew. It flew onto my textile collage just as I wanted to present it to the group.« Textile provides space for memories, connections, emotions—nature offers symbolic meaning and support. This exemplifies symbolic resonance between environment and inner content, as confirmed by Berger and Lahad (2013)⁶.

Recommendations:

- Position creation in natural settings where nature actively participates—let natural phenomena (rain, sun, wind) become part of the artistic process.
 - Introduce techniques enabling dialogue between textile and nature: use natural pigments, plants, earth, water; incorporate methods where the final result is not fully controlled.
 - Encourage symbolic and emotional interpretation of natural events: invite observation of nature during creation, provide space for sharing observations; emphasize symbolic power of spontaneous events.
 - Create space for wonder, coincidence, and spontaneity, as nature often triggers unexpected, touching moments—embrace unpredictability as practice, allow surprises, integrate into group reflection. Such moments hold strong potential for transformation, connection, and emotional integration.
- Ensure space safety (physical and emotional): require well-developed competencies in holding space, regulating group dynamics, clear boundaries for safe movement in nature.
 - Allow individuality of experiences: forgo uniform goals, recognize response diversity, enable each to find their way of collaborating with nature and material.

⁶ Berger, R., & Lahad, M. (2013). *The Healing Forest in Post-Trauma Work with Children*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

5. Community as Space for Safety, Support Reflection, and Ecological/Creative Interconnectedness

Participants frequently mention new friendships, feelings of acceptance, vulnerability, safety, belonging, mutual respect, space for withdrawal and closeness, and learning from each other. Recurring themes include: »I could be vulnerable,« »I felt part of the community,« »I was accepted as I am.«

The group enables experience exchange that deepens understanding of nature and materials, supports expressing personal themes and transformation, and provides an environment where individual creativity gains added value through reflection, meaning interweaving, and emotional/intellectual resonance. In historically collective textile creation, community proves a key resonant space. Community appears as humanity's equivalent to natural ecosystems—diverse, connected, alive, self-regulating. This corresponds with Yalom's »universality,« »group cohesiveness,« »mutual support« (Yalom, 1995)⁷ and McNiff (2004)⁸, who describes creative community as a field of transformation.

Recommendations:

- Build safe, accepting community environments by intentionally creating conditions enabling: safe sharing of personal themes, clear agreements on respect, compassionate, non-judgmental space for expression.
 - Consider withdrawal/closeness dynamics: provide corners for solitary work or retreat while gently encouraging connection and dialogue.
 - Foster mutual learning and mirroring: incorporate circle sharing and paired collaboration during activities.
 - Treat community as an ecosystem—view it as a space of mutual regulation, relationship network where diverse experiences, stories, and identities interweave, promoting organic growth and group self-regulation.
 - Use collective textile practices for mutual connection: include group textile installations, knitting circles, shared dyeing processes in projects.
- Strengthen group cohesion: regularly incorporate connective practices, opening/closing circles, collective reflection, time/space for emotional resonance.

⁷ Yalom, I. D. (1995). *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*. Basic Books.

⁸ McNiff, S. (2004). *Art Heals: How Creativity Cures the Soul*. Shambhala.



1 Savneet Talwar setting up the exhibition in Layer Café



2 No Border Craft workshop, photo: Maša Pirc



3 Oljana Karpus workshop



4 Closing creative reflection with Jasmina Ferčec

ReThread: Self-Care and Community Care Through Textiles and Nature

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From left to right: Lovro Ivančić, Biennial Curator; Zala Orel, Director; Jasmina Ferčec, ReThread Curator. Photo: Maša Pirc

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We sat by the river, on mats we wove ourselves from marsh grasses, arranging plants into desired compositions amid flowing water and greenery. The simplicity of the technique enthralled me, but hammering with real force was truly therapeutic. Each hammered as strongly as she wished, together creating a unique sonic backdrop.

- *participant*

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