

## **artasfoundation Circular October 2024**

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## ***Dear friends of artasfoundation***

It's October, and we have returned from three art projects in Armenia and Georgia – back to the reality of being overwhelmed by news, mounting tasks, non-stop meetings, and back to the virtual collaboration between our decentralised workspaces.

Our art projects frequently offer a different kind of summer pause, where the rest of life seems to stand still. These are moments we have been envisioning, planning and preparing for over a year. For us it is the pinnacle of our work, not a pause. We're not switching off or stepping away; instead, we're fully immersing ourselves. We use artistic expression to explore and practise a form of togetherness that transcends borders. These moments allow us to envision a future of interconnectedness, however small, that we strive to weave into reality.

Recently we have been using the terms "community" and "socially engaged art" extensively, promoting or rather offering the words to various communities, eager to see what they become; ready for their interpretations to surprise and inspire us. Therefore, with our projects we have been building frameworks for testing these terms, such as the *International Summer School for Socially Engaged Art in 2023*; *Sharing Stories* (hopefully taking place as you are reading this circular); and the *Living Room*, which is a physical art space dedicated to this topic. In August, the *Living Room* hosted the *Art and Social Transformation Lab*, where three local art initiatives found their starting point and will be realised in the coming months.

A current example where community is central is *Tbilisi Crossroads*, a 10-day residency, which marked a milestone for an ongoing project. Community is also an essential aspect of the *Teachers Training*, an advanced training programme for art teachers from the outlying regions of Armenia, who through the project become part of a wide network that connects art teachers all across the country.

We are interested in each other. We don't want to live in parallel, we want to learn from each other, artistically and beyond. We also want to get into dialogue with you. Please join us in our *Artas Community Event* on 26. November as well as our discussion series *Art in Conflict* online or offline at Theater Gessnerallee Zurich.

As a small team, we want to create a big impact and to do this, we draw our strength from the realisation of our art projects. In the process, the precious moments that arise are thanks to you, our allies who dream along with us and support us by contributing artistically, practically, organisationally or financially to make these projects a reality.

Olivia Jaques, on behalf of the entire *artasfoundation* team  
Theresa Ackermann, Shoghakat Mlke-Galstyan, Tamar Janashia, Sandra Suter,  
Rana Yazaji, Mara Züst as well as the President of the Board Dagmar Reichert

## What Connects Artists in Exile?



Photo: Dagmar Reichert

They are trying to separate us, those *Masters of War*, who Bob Dylan was already singing about all those years ago. But what is it that connects us? What connects Anna, the filmmaker from Odessa, who worked as a local guide for photo journalists during the Russian attack on Kherson, and Mayana, who studied art in Novosibirsk, works with ceramics on the topic of “memory”, and left her homeland in 2022 for political reasons? What do they both have in common with Hanna, the contemporary dancer who was arrested during demonstrations against the rigged elections in Minsk and left the country after spending time in prison, or with Danya, who organised festivals in the forest near Moscow with artist friends in opposition to the existing art system until he went into exile in 2022? And what do they all have in common with Salomeya, the visual artist who was born in Tbilisi in the difficult 1990s, grew up in Moscow, studied film there, but has now returned to Georgia and is active in organising demonstrations against the current government’s policy?

*Tbilisi Crossroads* is the name of the project, of which the first phase was organised in August. We invited 12 artists who are currently living in exile in Georgia as well as native Georgian artists to a 10-day residency and exchange in the Georgian mountains.

[www.artasfoundation.ch/en/project/tbilisi-crossroads](http://www.artasfoundation.ch/en/project/tbilisi-crossroads)



## Art in the Realm of Peace – Living Room

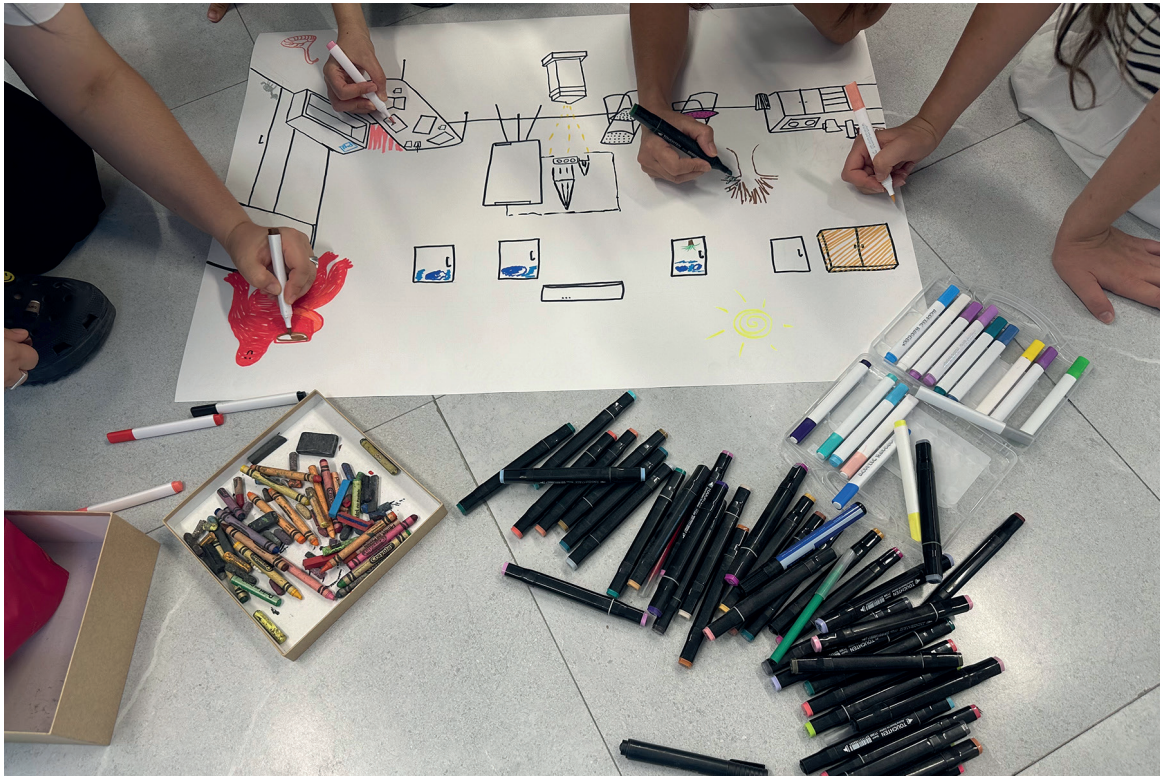


Photo: Ani Galstyan

In the growing community of the *Living Room*, art, represents an aesthetic relationship with the world. Here, we strive to apply this relationship between art and the world firsthand. It is often quite challenging, but when we reach a moment of sudden realisation that we can shift our understanding of our realities through art, it brings a sense of clarity.

The *Living Room* is now available for booking by artists and organisations who share this vision. It is already hosting Dizak Art Organisation's children's choir rehearsals and is conducting a series of screenings featuring Armenian and regional films, followed by discussions with the filmmakers. Additionally, a meeting between art-based organisations and artists to discuss responses to the needs of forcibly displaced communities from Nagorno Karabakh took place at the *Living Room*, as well as an afternoon tea with the Askeran Women's Club.

[www.artasfoundation.ch/en/project/living-room](http://www.artasfoundation.ch/en/project/living-room)

## New Projects Take Off in Yerevan



Photo: Lusine Galstyan

Collaboration among artists is not achieved simply by sharing a space; it requires much more. Real cooperation emerges from the willingness to take creative risks and to emotionally invest in the collective process. A group of ten people, including visual artists, dancers, musicians, art historians, cultural managers and researchers, came together in the *Living Room* for seven full days to collectively explore the relationship between their art practices and social transformation in Armenia.

How can independent artists in war times respond creatively to the suffering and losses of people in their communities, including the forcibly displaced communities from Nagorno Karabakh? In the *Art and Social Transformation Lab* the urge to react to the distress and feeling of disquiet was one of our starting points. We navigated our path through many concerns, among them the wish to support children in dealing with traumas and encouraging people to recreate their sense of home.

*Home is Where Your Heart Is*, *Transparent* and *Where is your Safe Space?* are the three projects that emerged from the lab shaped by the participating artists. By the end of the week they had formed three art collectives whose projects will be running from October 2024 to February 2025.

[www.artasfoundation.ch/projekt/living-room](http://www.artasfoundation.ch/projekt/living-room)



## Mastering New Art Techniques

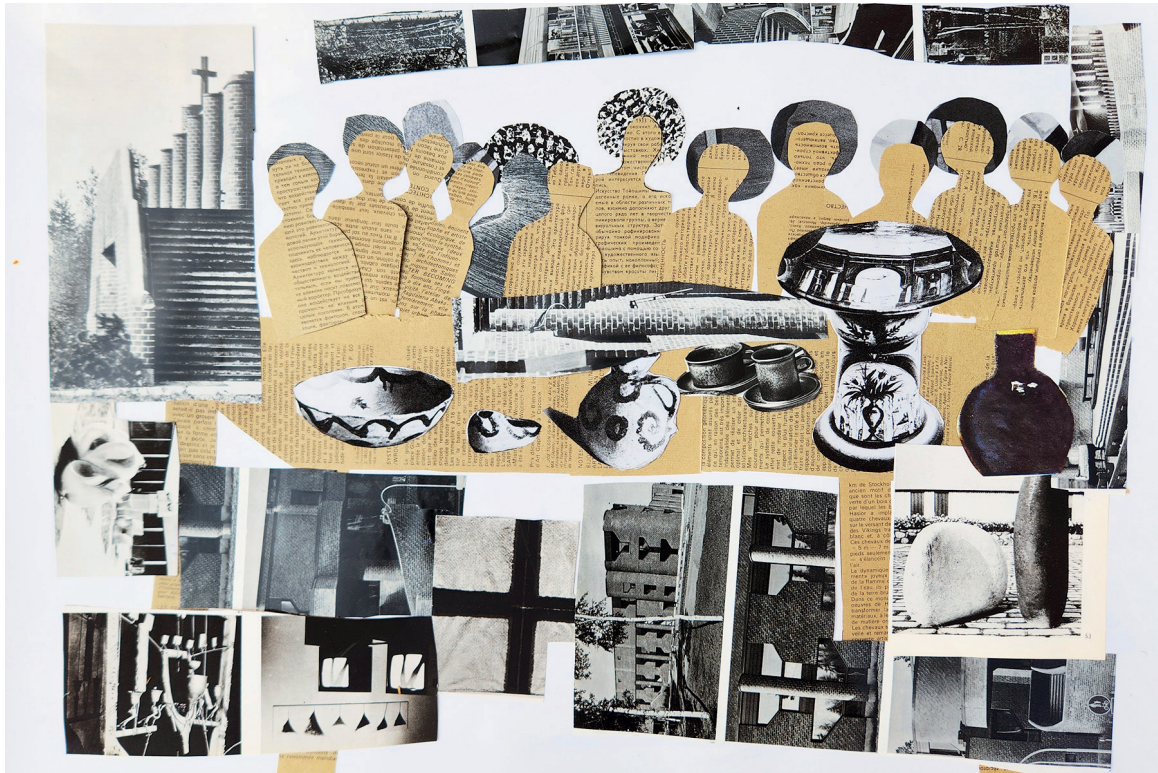


Photo: Tamara Janashia

The third round of the *Teachers' Training* that started in August 2024 in Aghavnadzor, Armenia, brought together 40 art and technology teachers from public schools of the outlying cities. The advanced in-depth training resulted from a joint effort and already well-established cooperation between *artasfoundation* and the Armenian State Pedagogical University (ASPU). In different workshops held by the five instructors (two international and three local) the participants could exchange creative methods of teaching and update their knowledge of new methodologies. The workshops allowed the participating teachers to forge new professional networks and friendships in a positive and productive environment. In a vibrant and ideal space for communication they shared insights, teaching strategies, and ways to navigate bureaucratic hurdles. We were able to witness how teachers from diverse backgrounds and age groups stepped back into the role of students. For many, it was the first opportunity to revisit and expand their knowledge since graduation.

Over the three years the project has been running we found that by enhancing their own skills the teachers often experience a shift in their perspectives. They are rediscovering their motivation to teach and to give back to their communities.

<https://www.artasfoundation.ch/en/project/teachers-training>

## Connecting with Global Peace Initiatives



Photo: Maja Leo

*artasfoundation*, in collaboration with the Berghof Foundation and the Centre For Social Change Nepal, participated in the Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development 2024. Together, the three foundations organised a workshop on 6. May entitled *Embodying Transformation Through The Arts*. This workshop aimed to explore a holistic understanding of social change by fostering imagination and agency towards alternative pathways, with a particular focus on how the arts can enhance trust, social cohesion, and cooperation.

Connecting with the international peacebuilding sector beyond artistic practices offered a valuable opportunity to rethink the role of art in peace mediation processes. It allowed for the exploration of cross-sectoral and holistic perceptions to both bottom-up as well as top-down peacebuilding efforts.



## Rethink Art in Conflict With Us!



Photo: Theresa Ackermann

Since September 2024, we have expanded the discussion series *Art in Conflict* (previously *Jour Fixe*) through a collaboration with Theater Gessnerallee. The event with artist Diala Brisly and researcher Cindy Horst on 18. September was the first in the new cycle.

Meeting Cindy and Diala online for a preparation talk, Diala shared experiences that showed how powerful artistic work can be – for example, when a silent child started to speak again after a workshop in a refugee camp. However, Cindy remarked that despite these stories, the building of community and trust is currently being increasingly neglected by state institutions in favour of continued militarisation.

In an effort to counter this development we bring these topics to discussion in the series *Art in Conflict*. Diala and Cindy shared with the audience that their collaboration had nurtured a continuous and in-depth process of learning – as a researcher in exchange with an artist, as an artist in exchange with a community, as people in dialogue with other people, as in *Art in Conflict*.

The discussion series is organised by the Center for Art and Peacebuilding, a joint initiative of *artasfoundation* and the ZHdK, and is supported by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia. To receive the monthly invitations, please write to [info@artasfoundation.ch](mailto:info@artasfoundation.ch).



## Join the *artasfoundation* Community!



Photo: Olivia Jaques

Another opportunity to engage with us is our annual Artas Community Event. On the evening of November 26, 2024, we invite you to join us in visiting two institutions from our network. We will begin at the office of Surprise Magazine in Zurich, where we will meet journalist Diana Frei and her colleagues and discuss how socially engaged work can be approached creatively. Afterwards, we will head to the nearby Kulturbüro for an aperitif. This event offers you the chance to meet supporters, interested parties, and members of the *artasfoundation* community in person. The event will not be streamed online.

Meeting point: 26. November, 2024, at 18.00 h, Kanzleistrasse 107, Surprise street magazine office.

For those who wish to engage with us earlier than this and more regularly, we warmly invite you to join our monthly discussion series *Art in Conflict*. These sessions take place in person at Theater Gessnerallee or Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), and are also accessible online from anywhere in the world. We are looking forward to seeing familiar and new faces! Bring along interested friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, and let them know about the opportunity to participate and become actively involved.

Sign up here for the Artas Community Event: [info@artasfoundation.ch](mailto:info@artasfoundation.ch)

## Support artasfoundation

*The work of artasfoundation is only possible thanks to the generous support of donors and friends. We ask for your help and would like to thank you very much for your ongoing support.*

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