Europeana Impact case study

Taboo workshop at the Young Pople's Meeting 2018
A collaboration between ULK, SMK Open and six help organisations

Written by Merete Sanderhoff, curator and senior advisor, SMK User studies prepared and analyzed by Julie Thesander, anthropologist, and Mette Houlberg Rung, user experience researcher, SMK

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Introduction

This case study explores short term outcomes of remixing artworks to address and relate to mental and physical vulnerabilities in young people's lives.

The setting was a creative workshop called *Make the Invisible Visible* at the Young People's Meeting in Copenhagen, 6 September 2018. The workshop was co-organised by three parties:

- <u>SMK Open</u>, a four-year initiative to open up the digitised collection of SMK the national gallery of Denmark, suppoted by the Nordea Foundation and running from 2016-2020.
- <u>ULK the Young People's Art Labs</u>, SMK's creative community of young volunteers aged 15-25 who work experimentally with the museum collections and reach out to new and diverse user groups. ULK has an activist approach and a strong social agenda.
- A group of Danish help organisations working with young people with mental or physical disorders, for instance depression, suicidal tendencies, ludomania, or cancer. The youngsters face a strong sense of taboo around their disorders, and as a result share feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The help organisations: <u>Ung Kræft</u> (Young Cancer), <u>Livslinien</u> (The Life Line), <u>Headspace</u>, <u>Ventilen</u> (The Valve), <u>Center for Ludomani</u> and <u>Landsforeningen mod Spiseforstyrrelser og Selvskade</u> (National Organisation Against Eating Disorders and Self-Harm)

In a collaboration with the help organisations, and facilitated by ULK, the workshop invited young people to create visual expressions of the difficult emotions that are shared across mental and physical disorders, by discussing, clipping, and remixing digitised artworks from the SMK public domain collection. The purpose of the workshop was to use open art as a stepping stone to break taboos and open up dialogue, understanding and possible healing by means of artistic co-creation in an intimate, trusted setting.

The short version

The Taboo Workshop *Make the Invisible Visible* used freely reusable public domain artworks as a conversation-starter among young people taking part in the Young People's Meeting in Copenhagen 6-8 September 2018. The Young People's Meeting attracts more than 30,000 youngsters every year.

In a collaboration with the NGO's, and facilitated by ULK, the workshop invited participants to create visual expressions of the difficult emotions that are shared across mental and physical disorders, by discussing, clipping, and remixing artworks from the SMK collection. The workshop was co-organised between SMK Open, SMK's creative community Young People's Art Labs (ULK), and six NGO's working with young people who struggle with mental or physical disorders that are tabooed.

What is the impact assessment looking to show, to who and why?

At workshop level, we were curious to see if the creative act of clipping and remixing artworks could enable fruitful discussions and foster greater understanding of difficult topics and life situations among young people. On a more general level, we were looking to explore how it influences and possibly changes young people's relation to art, museums, and cultural heritage when they get free and open access to digitized artworks.

The impact assessment is a first attempt at collecting qualitative data about the possible impact an open and freely usable digitized cultural heritage can have in young people's everyday lives, and on their perception of art, museums, and cultural heritage in society.

What data is collected, from who and what methods are used

An independent anthropologist and expert in user studies prepared and conducted a series of interviews with workshop participants immediately after the workshop. 5 groups of high school kids (16-19 years old), 4 teachers, 3 representatives from the NGO's, and 2 representatives from ULK were interviewed (questions in Appendix).

Observations were also made of the overall quantitative reach of ULK and SMK Open being present at the Young People's Meeting. Over 100 youngsters joined the various activities offered throughout the event 6-8 September, with more than 70 taking part in the Taboo Workshop.

What are the highlights of the impact assessment

Rich information was found in the statements of young people having participated in the Taboo Workshop, and key stakeholders around them. Together, they identify ways in which open access to cultural heritage can be a catalyst for playful learning, personal development, active engagement in important issues, and development towards greater human understanding.

What is learned from this, and what's next?

We were able to increase our understanding of how playful participation and engaging creative practices can help bring art and museums at eye level with young people, making them feel empowered to explore and learn about different cultures and ways of life, and about themselves by engaging with cultural heritage as a tool box.

The study demonstrates that working creatively with art entails two primary outcomes when it comes to tackling difficult emotions:

- 1. Expression users say that the creative process is an icebreaker that enables them to put into words and/or images the difficult emotions they feel or are confronted with in others, helping them grow and show empathy
- 2. Impression users say that working creatively and intuitively with their hands provides a breathing hole, an open space, a chance forget oneself and to reflect on their own emotions on a deeper level

This is a pilot study which will be an important basis of a two-year research project by four Danish art museums, focussing on longer term outcomes of letting young, socially fragile people meet and engage with art on a regular basis.



Members of ULK at UFM'18

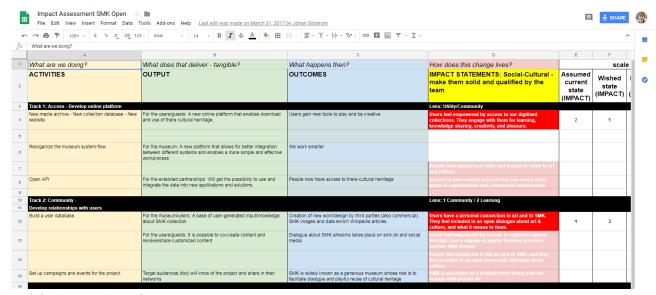
The full version

The case study is a first practical test of the tools offered in the <u>Europeana Impact Playbook</u> on SMK Open. This four-year project has been a partner in the Europeana Impact Task Force since it started in 2016. SMK Open will create a common digital infrastructure that connects all of SMK's digitised resources, making them as openly available to the world as possible. In essence it's a technical project, but the aspiration behind the infrastructure is to make SMK's collection and knowledge useful to and used by more and more diverse user groups, by bringing it online in openly licensed and ready-to-use formats, ultimately having an impact on the opportunities to learn, create and innovate with SMK's collection as raw material. Therefore, it's been of mutual interest to use SMK Open as a testbed for the development of the Europeana Impact methodologies and tools.

In order to understand how we designed the case study, here's a recap of the background and preparatory work leading up to the actual event we have used as our case.

Winter 2017: Preparation – Point Zero analysis

In the winter of 2017, we started to prepare the design of an SMK Open impact assessment. First step was to map the impact of our digitised collection before 2016 when SMK Open was instigated. We called it a Point Zero analysis. In this process, we mapped the outcomes of open access pilot projects at SMK from 2008-2016 by analysing a mixed material of user surveys, statistics, and anecdotal user statements that had been accumulated through the years. It was the first time we had given this material a synthetising treatment. Parallel to this, we made our first attempts at mapping the Impact Areas, Impact Lenses and Change Pathway for SMK Open.



Draft for change pathway for SMK Open, winter 2017

April 2017: Kick-off workshop

In the spring of 2017, we gathered the Europeana Impact Task Force, the SMK Directors and the SMK Open team for a one and a half day <u>kick-off impact workshop at SMK</u>. The purpose was to make sure that key stakeholders across SMK understood and fully supported the aspiration of SMK Open to have an impact both on the organisation (through changing the technical infrastructure of the museum) and on the museum's users.



Members of the SMK Open team in conversation with Harry Verwayen, head of the Europeana Impact Task Force, at the kick-off workshop

During the workshop, we discussed and agreed on the Impact Areas and Impact Lenses of SMK Open. We defined two primary target user groups, we would focus on in our impact work, and we worked out general impact statements for the project.

Impact Areas Social-Cultural

Impact Lenses Utility and Community

Primary target groups School teachers/students in Denmark, and Young creatives

Impact statements

Utility

Users feel empowered by access to our digitised collections
They engage with them for learning, knowledge sharing, creativity, and pleasure

Community

Users feel connected to art and to SMK

They participate in an open dialogue about art, and what it means to them

However, at the time of the kick-off workshop, SMK Open was still in a start-up phase where focus was on internal technical infrastructure development, with no concrete user-facing initiatives in the pipeline that could be assessed for their impact on target users.

Autumn 2017: A case to study

At this point in time, the coordinator of ULK – the Young People's Art Labs, invited SMK Open to join an exciting new project. ULK was planning to participate in the 2018 Young People's Meeting (UFM'18) – a three day public festival for 15-25 year olds aiming to foster democratic engagement – and they wanted to bring SMK's digitised public domain collection into play there. This offered us a great opportunity to actually test the impact of SMK Open on live users. The attendants at UFM'18 were a great match for our primary user groups, as they would be a good mix of school kids (and their teachers) and young creatives. A collaboration between ULK + SMK Open was born, and we immediately started planning the collaboration that would roll out from the spring of 2018.



Entrance to the Young People's Meeting

March 2018: UFM'18 Inspiration Meetup

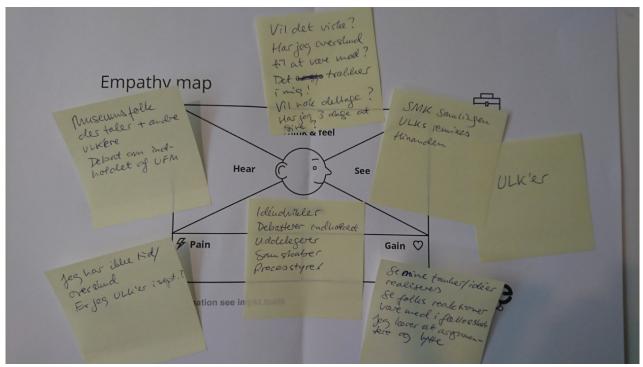
The organisers of UFM'18 offered a one day inspiration meetup where institutions and organisations that were going to be present at UFM'18 could meet, foster ideas together and collaborations with each other. At the meetup, ULK + SMK Open got in touch with a handful of help organisations that were keen on exploring new ways to break the taboos around mental and physical disorders among young people. The availablity of a digitised art collection that could be freely reused was a promising field to explore. We formed a working group across the organisations that would design a workshop for UFM'18 where users could use SMK artworks creatively as a way make these invisible taboos visible and bring them out in the open.

April 2018: Change Pathway workshop

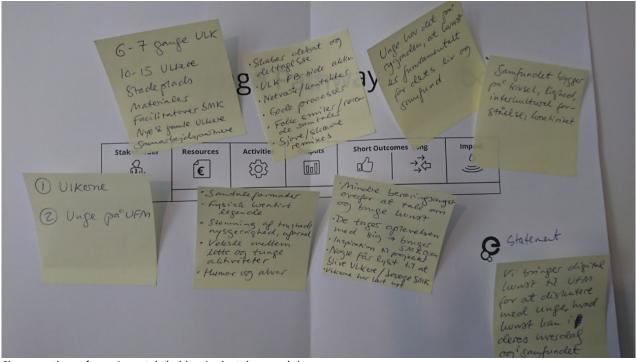
In our preparatory work so far, we had determined that the Taboo Workshop would aim at having impact in the Social-Cultural area, and look specifically at impact through the Utility and Community lenses. The crux of the workshop was to empower users to increase their understanding of other people through creative use of digitised artworks, thus building a bridge between the utility and the community strands. The workshop would invite young people to engage in a shared educational experience by way of their own creativity.

The impact we were hoping to contribute to with the workshop was a) to get participants to reflect on and empathize with other people's emotions and life situations through a co-creative process using visual language and b) to reflect on the ability to use digitised artworks as a raw material for their own creativity, play and learning.

Having established a practical framework for the workshop based on the overall goals of SMK Open, it was time to work out a Change Pathway for the specific user groups we were aiming to involve. We did this during a half day workshop with the ULK coordinator, one of the ULK volunteers, SMK's user experience researcher, and two members of the SMK Open team. At UFM'18 there would be a mix of school kids aged 15-19 who were there with their teachers, and young people attending the festival on their own initiative. Both types of users could potentially participate in the taboo workshop, so we drew separate empathy maps for each of them, mapping their pains and gains as participants. We also made empathy maps for school teachers, and for the ULK facilitators. Based on the empathy maps, we developed change pathways for the individual user groups. Understanding the impact we hoped our workshop would have and the potential barriers to overcome in order to get there helped us figure out how to design the taboo workshop.



Empathy map for participants in the taboo workshop



Change pathway for various stakeholders in the taboo workshop

May-June 2018: Developing the workshop concept

In the early summer, we held a series of work meetings with the help organisations where we turned the abstract idea of *Make the Invisible Visible* into an actionable plan for the workshop. We decided to let the

workshop revolve around testimonies from young people suffering from mental or physical disorders, recorded into a three-minute audio track that would be played at the beginning of the workshop. The testimonies would not reveal which specific disorders these young people were struggling with, but rather focus on the difficult tabooed emotions that anyone with a disorder carries around like a heavy burden.

The workshop would start with the audio track being played in plenary. After having listened to the testimonies, participants would be invited to form groups of 3-5 and create a collage together, giving visual expression to the emotions they had encountered in the audio track. The collages would be created from prints of SMK public domain artworks and other print materials such as magazines and postcards, using simple tools: scissors, glue sticks and cardboard. Members of ULK would facilitate the process and encourage the groups to focus on open-minded dialogue and co-creation rather than making a polished end product. Workshop participants would be able to bring their collages home with them, or they could hand them over to us so we could display them in our UFM'18 stalls throughout the rest of the festival.

An important factor in designing the workshop was that we would not know the number of participants beforehand. Due to its subject, the workshop had been assigned by the UFM'18 organisers to the so-called Secret Stage, an intimate location off the beaten path where the program featured activities that participants could join in an informal and noncommittal way. Without having much to base it on, we set our expectation to max. 30 participants. We also decided to run a more informal version of the collage workshop in the ULK + SMK Open stall throughout the festival. Here, we would provide prints, magazines, utensils and ipods with the audio track so anyone could pop in, listen to the testimonies, discuss the content, and create collages.



Youngsters listening to the audio track and making collages in the ULK + SMK Open stall at UFM'18

The interaction between the help organisations and ULK proved highly rewarding for both, as they share a common ambition to foster social improvement and community-building through their activities.



The entire team behind the taboo workshop Make the Invisible Visible, including help organisations and members of ULK

June 2018: Measurements Workshop

We had designed an activity (the taboo workshop) and knew what kinds of effects we were hoping to have on what kinds of stakeholders (school kids and young participants at UFM'18). But how were we going to measure it? The SMK user experience researcher suggested that we called upon external assistance to gather user data in a scientifically adequate way. In other words, we needed an outsider to keep our user data process as unbiased as possible.

We invited an anthropologist specialising in user surveys to help us develop methodologies for data gathering. She advised us to primarily use a qualitative approach, conducting a series of short exitinterviews with workshop participants, teachers, facilitators, and help organisation representatives. She formulated an interview guide for the various target users and was the main conductor of interviews at UFM'18 (assisted by the SMK Open team in order to increase the volume of data).

The interview questions were designed to gather data, primarily from the youngsters themselves, about their experience of the workshop and its context, and about their general approach to creativity and museum images. Furthermore, we were interested in statements from the teachers to shed light on the potential learning impact of the workshop, and the general concept of using openly licensed images to spur conversation about difficult subject matter.

See appendix 1: Interview questions.

August 2018: Testing the workshop format

Before heading to UFM'18, we wanted to test how the workshop format, combining audio track with collage co-creation, would function with real users. We held a test workshop with users of the help organisations and members of ULK, and gathered their feedback. This helped us sharpen the practical details, and confirmed our notion that the format was compelling and productive for the outcomes we were hoping for – fostering dialogue about and increased understanding of tabood emotions.



Users of the help organisations and members of ULK testing the taboo workshop format

September 2018: Taboo workshop and data gathering

Finally, UFM'18 had come! The taboo workshop was scheduled on the first day of the festival, Thursday 6 September at 11-12. The festival attracts more than 30,000 youngsters aged 15-25 and right from the opening of the festival area, it was teeming with life. There were a multitude of stalls and organisations all competing for the young people's attention, and over by the Secret Stage we were getting a bit nervous whether anyone would show up for our workshop. At 10:55 there was still no one. But all of a sudden, a big crowd of youngsters, primarily school kids aged 15-19 and their teachers, turned up ready to participate in the workshop.



Arrival at the Secret Stage

There were around 100 attendants, more than triple the amount we had expected. Within a few minutes we adapted to this wonderful surprise (hoping there were enough prints and utensils for the collages!) Luckily, the Secret Stage was situated in an open field and the weather was nice, so the groups could easily spread out on the lawn.

A representative from one of the help organisations welcomed everyone and explained the concept *Make the Invisible Visible*. The audio track was played in plenary, followed by a facilitator from ULK introducing the creative exercise and asking everyone to form groups. At this point, 15-20 kids left the area, but the remaining people quickly formed groups of 3-5 and started selecting images and discussing their collage.



Members of ULK introducing the taboo workshop

During the workshop, the anthropologist and a member of the SMK Open team meandered around the groups and their teachers, asking if they would be willing to participate in a short interview afterwards. This resulted in 13 interviews (a few of which were conducted later in the day in the ULK + SMK Open stall).



One of the groups working on their collage

The interviews included 27 respondents, distributed as follows:

- 16 participants in the taboo workshop from public and high schools, representing 5 groups
- 4 teachers
- 2 facilitators from ULK
- 3 representatives from help organisations
- 2 youngsters who made taboo collages at the ULK + SMK Open stall



Anthropologist Julie Thesander interviewing one of the groups after the workshop

October 2018: Analysis and narration

After UFM'18, the interviews were transcribed and analysed by the anthropologist, assisted by the SMK user experience researcher who had not taken part in the workshop and therefore could bring an outsider's view on the data. The analysis of the data made it clear that we had succeeded in reaching the main impact goals we had set for the Taboo Workshop.

According to the majority of participants in the survey, the workshop enabled them to visualize difficult thoughts and emotions, and to engage in open and meaningful conversations about them.

"We have tried to convey how your head can feel really messy sometimes, like it's about to explode, but on the outside you might look completely normal."

Girl in high school

"The exercise made me aware that there's so much you don't know about other people – what seems like the easiest thing in the world for me can cost others an incredible effort to overcome."

Girl in high school

This kind of feedback shows that the exercise of putting emotions into images enabled participants to articulate, to themselves and others, complex emotional topics that can be difficult or awkward to bring up in their normal social settings. We call this dimension *expression*. Being able to give voice to such emotions and feel that it is ok, and to become aware of their empathy for other people's life situations was an important intention with the workshop.

Responses from representatives of the NGO's who observed the workshop and reflected on the resulting collages also support the notion that remixing artworks can be a helpful approach to open up difficult subject matter.

"The problems our users deal with are extremely tabooized and they often feel they have to carry them around on their own so as not to burden others. Creative expression can be a way to let those emotions, that are so painful to share with others, out in the open."

Volunteer from NGO

However, there were also drawbacks to the impact we wanted. The workshop had many agendas, partners, and levels of information. We wanted to introduce SMK Open and the concept of open images; ULK and the concept of creative communities; the help organisations and their mission to support young people with difficult life circumstances; the reflective-empathetic experience of listening to the testimonies; and the cocreative exercise of making collages.

The responses reflect that all those levels of information created some challenges in the communication and experience of the workshop. We consciously downplayed the message about open images so as not to distract form the thematic content of the workshop.

"I'm not sure people realized, based on this workshop, that you can download all these images from the museum for free. I don't think we managed to communicate that clearly enough".

Facilitaror from ULK

However, the open artworks were a key enabler of the creative exercise. Without the open licensing, no workshop and no possibility for impact. Interestingly, when we brought up the question of setting artworks free digitally, respondents tended to feel that the original artworks hold an aura that should be somehow protected.

"When you can just look at the artworks on your computer, there's nothing special about going to the museum to see them where they're actually hanging. Maybe it takes away some of the aura that I like about art."

Teacher in 10th grade

"The digitised versions don't really do justice to the originals. The colours don't look right. It's so much more rewarding to experience the real artworks than to look at them on a screen."

Young woman at the ULK + SMK Open stall

At the same time, they recognized that the creative act of clipping and choosing details in the artworks during the workshop made them pay keen attention to the motifs, compositional elements and emotional expressivity in the artworks in a way they weren't used to.

"It made me aware there's actually a person in the picture ... why does she look like that, and what do the different things in the picture mean?"

Girl in 10th grade

Participants expressed that during the exercise they had become aware that the act of remixing influenced their perception of the old artworks, producing a sense of closeness to and ownership of the originals.

"It's like art changes character when you can touch it with your own hands. You're able to look at it up close. It means a lot to be able to hold the art between your hands and touch it."

Girl in 9th grade

"It's awesome that we can use these artworks that were once created and preserved, and make something new out of them, make them our own, so to speak. That way, you can bring something old with you into the new."

Girl in 9th grade

What we can learn from these testimonies is that the concept of remixing public domain art enables people to investigate works of art more closely and to mirror themselves in motifs they might have quickly passed by under normal circumstances. There is evidence that it increases people's sense of agency and creative empowerment when they are invited to use reproductions of artworks as tools to express themselves. However, we seem to be still up against an enduring public conviction that digital copies take away from the auratic experience of the original.



A group of school kids in the process of making a collage

A factor which confused the participants as well as the teachers was that, apparently, the program had an inaccurate text which said that the workshop would feature live testimonies, while mentioning nothing about the co-creative collage element. Not surprisingly, this resulted in misguided expectations. Especially the teachers expressed frustration and disappointment with this, leading to a lack of confidence that their students would get much out of the workshop. However, the kids were quick to adapt and appreciated that they were invited to be creative themselves rather than just sit back passively to listen and learn.

"The fact that we were asked to put something down on paper really spurred on our thinking – as opposed to just sitting and listening to someone talking."

Girl in high school

Thus, the study shows an interesting gap between students' and teachers' responses. Teachers were mostly focussed on the educational potential of the workshop. They remained disappointed that it turned out different than what they were promised. Students, on the other hand, were confused at first, but appreciated the opportunity to make something with their own hands instead of just receiving information. They expressed a lack of creativity in classrooms and curricula, and they evidently have a need for being more creative in learning processes.

"It's an entirely different way to work with a topic if you compare it to what we do in class. In school you learn a lot, but you express yourself a lot less when you're working on a project."

Girl in 10th grade

"We don't really have creative classes at school anymore. That was more of a thing when we were in primary and middle school. Now it's all about books and computers."

Boy in 10th grade

Workshop participants also noted how rewarding it is to become immersed in a creative process. They expressed how they often feel they are under time pressure in their everyday lives, and that being creative can stop time for a moment and allow them to just exist. They experience a sense of calm by sitting together with friends or family and making something. The creative process of carefully studying, clipping, and reassembling images entails a sense of *impression* – of taking a time-out to reflect on their own emotional state of mind. The rewards of taking part in creative processes with others is amplified in the responses from the ULK representatives, who invest a significant part of their free time in the volunteer community. This has offered them valuable new perspectives on life, strong personal relations and a sense of belonging.

"Art makes me curious about life."

Facilitator from ULK

"I have so many friends in ULK, I've found a real community here. And also a sense of freedom."

Facilitator from ULK



One of the groups showing the collage they created

Conclusions

The short term outcomes, or direct impact, of participating in the workshop were very promising. Through their feedback, participants confirmed that remixing and discussing artworks had worked as an icebreaker for difficult conversations and new emotional insights. Furthermore, they responded positively to the chance offered by digitisation and open licensing to express themselves and become immersed in creative processes of remixing old artworks.

Our study demonstrates that working creatively with art entails two primary outcomes when it comes to tackling difficult emotions:

- 3. Expression users say that the creative process is an icebreaker that enables them to put into words and/or images the difficult emotions they feel or are confronted with in others, helping them grow and show empathy
- 4. Impression users say that working creatively and intuitively with their hands provides a breathing hole, an open space, a chance to forget oneself and to reflect on their own emotions on a deeper level

Creative work supported by open art enables young people who are struggling in life or who are trying to understand how others feel to express their feelings in different ways, and to find ways to cope with and digest their impressions.

There were also indications of possible longer term outcomes, or indirect impact, in the interviews. To

properly map these would require follow up-interviews with participants' family, teachers, friends etc. which was out of scope for this pilot, but will be pursued in future impact assessments.

In summary, free access to digital cultural heritage seems to

- evoke confidence to express oneself and empathy towards others
- increase understanding of the nuances and possibilities of visual language
- make cultural heritage feel more accessible
- create a sense of ownership to cultural heritage

Some of the key challenges we need to tackle include

- communicate how art and creativity can play a role in (young) people's lives
- reach out and engage young people and their families in artistic, creative experiences and activities
- influence schools and politicians to prioritise creative subjects in the education system

December 2018: Next steps

The short term outcomes of this study forms the basis for a longer term research project in a collaboration between four Danish art museums across the country: 'Art meetings with young people on the verge' (Kunstmøder med unge på kanten). This will focus on longer term outcomes of letting young, socially fragile people engage on a regular basis with art in weekly workshops over the course of two years.

Thanks and credits

Thanks for a most rewarding collaboration:

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Julie Thesander

Nordeafonden

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