

Island Residency Lab

25 May - 3 June 2025
Turkey

Report



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Introduction

The Island Residency Lab took place from 25 May – 3 June 2025 on a Turkish Island. It was co-produced by Re-Connect Festival & Residency, BIRCA and The Festival Academy and brought together a group of TFA Alumni, artists, and curators from Argentina, Greece, Iran, Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey, and Yemen.

The 10-day immersive experience for in-depth artistic dialogue and connection built on a pilot edition from last year and offered a framework to explore, research, and experiment with new artistic practices and forms of collaboration.

Through shared dinners, sensory walks, a joint exhibition & public presentation, and conversations that went beyond the usual “Where are you from?” or “What do you do?”, the programme created **space to reconnect with ourselves, with one another, and with our shared humanity - in dialogue and in silence, through our bodies and inspired by the landscape.**

The Lab also offered the possibility to **continue exploring the local community and heritage.** Gaining a deeper understanding of the location and its potential was important for this phase, as the partners are in an **ongoing process of reflecting on how the longer-term design of the project** could look like. This year, another **objective was to produce artworks and tangible artistic research** that the partners can use as examples when further pitching the project.



Photo: Berna Küpeli

Re-Connect's Island project

Building on the Island Lab 2024 (find more information here), The Island by Re-Connect is further developing into a project that aims to create **a meeting point, a creative playground for artists and cultural practitioners that activates through residencies, labs, and public events**. It builds on the **concept of a utopian island**, where geopolitical discrimination is overcome, no access is defined by passports or border controls, and cultures are open to exchange with one another. The chosen island is located on a very important geopolitical position, on the border of “East” and “West” (with an emphasis on questioning these terms), on the European and Asian continent, a place where many nationalities can travel without a visa or through very simple online visa processing, making it an accessible destination for artists worldwide.

The aim of the project is to **secure a meeting point for artists who face exclusion based on nationality and passport-related issues**. The Island wants to provide a place to meet other artists, programmers and peers from all continents.



Re-Connect's Island Residency meets Festival Lab

In January 2025, with the support of BIRCA (Bækkelund International Residency Center for Artists, Denmark), Re-Connect launched an **open call for artists from performance and bodily-based disciplines to apply for a fully granted residency** at The Island, Turkey.

Project proposals had to address relevant **environmental topics and engage respectfully with nature**. Proposals reflecting island ecosystems or the topic of borders were of special interest. The call was aimed **exclusively at artists from the Global South, those based in areas of conflict, and/or frequently facing travel limitations due to visa-related issues**. Artists based in the SWANA Region were given priority.



Photo: Berna Küpeli

The residency offered 3 projects a **stay at a remote location by the sea, with plenty of access to nature and with the support of an international creative community** as a framework to explore, research and try out new practices, without the aspiration to produce finished artworks. During their stay, the 4 selected (one project was produced by an artist duo) could combine alone-time, participation in practices of deep listening and observation, and critical discussions with international curators, facilitated by TFA and Re-Connect teams. The aim was to offer **an immersive experience where time and space are set by the context that residents inhabit** and not by the pressing demands of the global world.

In the context of this residency, The Festival Academy invited 2 Alumni, who are part of TFA's global community of festival makers, to join the cohort of artists to not only **immerse themselves in the environment of the residency, and furthermore support artistic processes with their expertise and through peer-to-peer exchange**, as well as to get a better understanding of the projects' concept in order to think together with the team about **further developments of The Island**, brainstorm about possible next steps, proposing artists, and exploring possibilities of bringing the format to other locations.

Team

Re-Connect



Nima Deghani
Co-Founder, Mentor
Residency Director



Naghmeh Manavi
Artistic Consultant,
Project Advisor



Berna Küpeli
Co-Founder, Local
Coordinator, Artistic
Documentarian



Giuliana Grippo
Program Lead,
Curator, Artist
Support Coordinator

Partner

The Festival Academy



Inge Ceustermans
General Director



Fabiola Eidloth
Content Development,
New Initiatives Manager

BIRCA



Susanne Daig
Director and Owner

Methodology

Selection

Both Re-Connect and TFA believe immersive experiences can bring people together in long-lasting ways. Yet, these need a guided structure, attentive mediation and care. The Island Residency Lab sought to explore new ways of togetherness and presence, bringing back the value of non-verbal exchanges, and allowing space for spending casual time with each other. Nature as an element that intertwines us all play a key role during the whole stay. Bringing together a harmonious yet effervescent constellation of people also plays a key role in the design of immersive experiences.

The Festival Labs are conceived as upskilling opportunities for Alumni of The Festival Academy's previous programs. The Labs are “next level” activities for exchange among festival leaders. Like this they do not only serve the community that TFA has built up over the last 17 years, but also ensures that participants are already familiar with TFA's methodologies and ethos, and thereby facilitating a more productive lab environment.



The challenge of the selection process was to put together a group that would allow everyone to benefit and contribute best with their unique abilities and perspectives to build a fruitful conversation and impactful collaborative experience.

TFA put an emphasis on reaching out to possible participants individually, coordinated by Inge Ceustermans and the TFA team, following an in-depth examination of certain criteria. The candidates were contacted directly, briefed about the overarching project and Lab concept. The team of The Festival Academy has an in-depth knowledge of the profiles of their Alumni community which helped identifying suitable people.

TFA conducted furthermore in-depth conversation with each of the candidates beforehand. Participants selected had to be from countries with mobility restriction, either due to political instability, conflict or visa policies or to share the lived experience of mobility restriction as part of their past even if they are not facing these challenges currently. Furthermore, TFA selected a strategic partner, operating on a Greek island to explore possibilities of expanding the methodology to another location.



Photo: Berna Küpeli

Acknowledgment of Context

The Residency Lab was being developed in the context of an increasingly turbulent and distressing global reality. Both TFA and Re-Connect acknowledged participants limited capacities/ challenges of maintaining focus and presence while witnessing daily atrocities and systemic violence through digital devices. The emotional weight of current events, including ongoing genocide and oppression, creates a challenging environment for artistic and collaborative work.

The Residency Lab was being organized with the awareness that oppressive systems thrive on distraction and disconnection. The intention was to create a working method that remains connected to decolonial action - an approach that does not separate creative practice from political consciousness.

Guiding Questions

The Residency Lab is positioned as a space to rethink the ways in which festivals, residencies, programmers, and producers approach artists, and to examine how this institutional gaze shapes both the individual and their work. A critical view is taken of selection processes that rely on labels or categories, prompting a set of foundational questions:

- **How are identities of individuals and communities constructed and perceived?**
- **Is it possible to connect as equals on a human level without confronting the histories of oppression and colonialism?**
- **How can assumptions about identity be challenged without erasing the inequalities that continue to shape lived experience?**
- **How can mutual recognition of suffering be practiced without reducing any human life to a narrative of misery?**

The focus in relation to these questions was sharing experiences of our current world, looking for connection and trying to heal from the violence people have been exposed to. The 10-day gathering also aims to be a co-creation space and allow participants to co-design certain aspects of the programme, make proposals and engage in any way.



Challenges

One challenging aspect in this context has been bringing together people with vastly different life experiences, especially when they come from regions that are in conflict or have historically been positioned on opposite sides of global power structures. Even when everyone believes they are "on the same side," this shared commitment can uncover hidden layers of tension. This can be the case when funders are present in the room together with the people they support - despite good intentions, differences in lived experience and underlying power dynamics can create subtle barriers to genuine connection. Despite a strong ideological alignment, unspoken expectations can be present that are shaped by (sometimes unaware) positions of privilege.

This situation underscores the complexity underlying the above-mentioned question: Is it truly possible to connect as equals on a human level without directly confronting the histories of oppression and colonialism that continue to shape our perceptions and interactions?

Initiatives like the Island Lab make it clear that theoretical solidarity and shared ideals are not enough; genuine connection requires uncomfortable and active, ongoing reckoning with the (historical and current) power structures that continue to shape our interactions

Committments

Commitment 1: Connecting Without Labels

The first point of contact among participants occurs during the shared van journey from the airport to the island. Participants were asked via an info email beforehand to engage without defaulting to socially coded questions, and to avoid the following inquiries:

- Where were you born or where are you coming from?
- What is your job or professional position?
- What are your future plans?

The intention was to create aspace for connections that go beyond conventional markers of identity, and to open up conversations rooted in the immediate, shared context. Participants were also invited to reflect on and contribute other questions they prefer not to be asked.

There was also explicitly mentioned that there is no obligation to engage in conversation. This methodology recognizes the social pressure to be communicative during travel and makes space for silence, introspection, or non-verbal presence when needed.

Commitment 2: No Social Media, No Location

Via a first info email, participants were furthermore encouraged to refrain from using social media during the stay and are asked not to exchange social media accounts on the first day. These tools are intentionally set aside in favor of direct, unmediated interaction. Smartphone use is also to be minimized. If phones are needed, participants are asked to turn off location services, especially during the journey to the island. This is presented as an opportunity to experience the disorientation—and potential beauty—of not knowing the destination.

The residency Lab aims to embrace this shared journey as a step toward a collectively imagined utopia. The trust in the unknown and in one another forms a central principle of this initial phase.

Programme

Sunday 25th May Arrival, Welcome Dinner.

Monday, 26th May

Silent Walk, Shared Breakfast, Exploration, Collective Dinner.

Tuesday, 27th May

Silent Walk, Shared Breakfast, Exploration and Work-in-Progress, Collective Dinner.

Wednesday, 28th May

Individual Breakfast, Sensory Walk with Umit, Debrief and Shared Lunch with Umit, Preparation for Public Presentation, Collective Dinner.

Thursday, 29th May

Early Breakfast, Preparation of Public Presentation, Public sharing of work-in-progress, artist talks, or creative experiments, Pizza night.

Friday 30th May

Silent walk, Shared Breakfast, Hybrid session with former participants, Exploration & Work in Progress, Closing Party with Collective Dinner

Saturday 31st May

Silent walk, Shared Breakfast, Exploration and Work-in-Progress, Preparing Exhibition Space, Shared Dinner.

Sunday, 1st June

Silent walk, Shared Breakfast, Preparing Public Exhibition, Public Exhibition, Drinks in town.

Monday, 2nd June

Free day for rest and wrap-up, Optional Sunset/Evening Walk.

Tuesday 3rd June Departures.





Based on the methodology of the pilot lab on the Island, the organisers included the following activities into the Residency Lab 2025 programme:

Silent Walks: Every day as a first activity in the morning, the group gathered in the garden of the shared house and started the day with a silent walk to the beach. The aim was to start the day connecting through non-verbal communication and mindful awareness surrounded by nature, activating participants' sensorial perception. The group walked together, but also leaving space for individual pace and explorations along the way. One of the highlights was a daily stop at a mulberry tree where everyone would pick and enjoy the sweetness of the fruits.



Sensory Walks: Guided by an experienced local anthropologist and somatic practitioner, the group was invited to a walk around unusual parts of the Island's village. The walk took place in silence and was guided by local guide Umit who asked participants to collect sensorial impressions on the way, such as sounds, images, smells, tastes and touch. They were invited to take objects that they found meaningful, such as flowers, stones or sticks. At the end of the walk, the group gathered to draw a reflection of their imaginative sensorial map on a piece of paper and shared with the group their personal sensorial experience. The activity concluded with a shared lunch.

Collective Meals: All participants shared the task of preparing dinners for the group, signing up for kitchen shifts. Daily freshly cooked meals and recipes from the participants home countries added to the immersive practice of the Residency Lab and strengthened and deepened the knowledge and understanding of each others reality and context.



Sharing a House: The group stayed at a house, a couple of kilometers outside of the village, in the middle of fields and gardens. The bedrooms were placed around a central and spacious living room with couches and a big windowfront with view into the green surroundings. All participants helped to keep the place clean and commit to the houserules. This shared responsibility added to the immersive experience and strengthened the bond that built up amongst the participants.

Participants

Abduljabbar Alsuhibi (Alumnus Atelier Gothenburg 2018) is a young Yemeni cultural activist. He is the representative director of the art critics group “Rawbit Cultural and Media Foundation” and a ICORN artist in Helsingborg, Sweden, as well as the co-founder ECHO organization that aims to advance educational and cultural empowerment for the Yemeni youth in and outside of Yemen.

Filia Milidaki (Alumna Atelier NEXT 2019) is Filia Milidaki is a psychologist, senior market researcher, dancer, founder of Social Cooperative Enterprise “Cinesthesia”. Her curatorial experience started in 2014 with Eye’s Walk Digital Festival, at the island of Syros. Eye’s Walk Digital festival is an innovative festival that connects the unique architectural legacy of a city, the public space and the local community through Video installation, Digital technologies and Performing arts.

Leila Ahmadi Abadeh (Artist in Residency) is an interdisciplinary artist, theater maker, and writer with a BA in Puppet Theatre (2018) and Cinema diploma from the Iranian Youth Cinema Society (2016). As a playwright, their notable projects include "They Live in Us", "Anyway, I Failed", and "The Womb House". Between 2017 and 2020, they developed a trilogy of object performances—"The Neighbors Think Nobody Is Here", "Digger", and "Unofficial", focused on object theatre and storytelling, performed in informal, interactive settings. Since 2020, they have worked as a dramaturg on various projects, including "Quasi" directed by Azade Shahmiri, while exploring web-based games, graphic novels, digital painting, and knitting. Their works have been shown in cities such as Prague, Osnabrück, Basel, Vienna, and Brussels. Leila has received residencies at Watch and Talk (Belluard Bollwerk), Cima Citta, and PACT Zollverein.



Nadeem Mazen (Artist in Residency) is a visual artist and Exhibition curator From Jerusalem, graduated of contemporary visual arts, Birzeit University, Works/volunteers at Yabous cultural centre, Jerusalem since 2007. Nadeem's work explores various societal and local questions, deeply rooted in his experience as a Palestinian living in Jerusalem, surrounded by art from a young age. His conceptual practice integrates texts, artist statements, process documentation, and research as integral parts of the final artwork—or even as the artwork itself. His work spans diverse medium, including collage, video, research, drawing, digital painting, and installation, among others. As an artist, Nadeem focuses on raising questions and engaging the audience as an active part of the work itself, creating interactive pieces that establish a stronger connection with viewers.



Patricia Habchy (Artist in Residency) is a Lebanese artist. After graduating in Performing arts from the USJ university of Beirut, she travelled to Europe in order to make a master degree in contemporary playwriting. But she soon realised that she needed more than one front door in order to give shape to her thinking and reflections. Since her first inquiry: “How could words replace action in an art based on movements?” Until her training in contemporary dance she experienced clowning, storytelling, pedagogical projects, collective creations, physical theatre, writing, circus dramaturgy, outdoor and street presentation.



Tuba Emiroğlu (Artist in Residency) is a researcher working in the field of anthropology of body and movement, senses and landscape. Since 2016, she has been exploring the body with the Axis Syllabus technique and continues her creations in this field through national and international dance meetings and performances. With an academic background in sociology and political science, Tuba deepens her work on body and movement through intersections with posthuman theories and landscape anthropology.





Outcomes

Public Presentation

On 29 May, the group shared their works-in-progress, their projects, and ideas with the local public in the framework of a public presentation which was organised in partnership with the local administration. The event took place in **İtirli Bahçe**, a gallery space in the centre of the village, on two floors, with a beautiful inner courtyard.

The event was divided into a **presentation stage** where the artists had the chance to talk about their work and artistic research process during their residency on the Island and served as a platform for the international curators to present their festivals, projects and ideas of collaboration inspired by the Lab experience. What brought all presentations together, was the **shared interest of working around topics such as the landscape and its impact on identities**. The interest of the local community was large, bringing together an audience of around 20 people who showed their **openness for international artistic exchange and and curiosity to listen to cultural workers coming from regions that face mobility restrictions** or violent conflicts.

The second part of the public event invited the audience into the inner courtyard, where Nadeem Mazar had prepared his **interactive canvas**. Building on (his)-stories of the colours of the Palestinian flag, he invited all interested to **reflect on new and playful perspectives that the concept of home can mean** and to paint and draw these imaginations on the canvas, while being seated around a big table, and accompanied by music that Nadeem shared from his region. The participation of other artists and local audiences created a **shared moment of artistic creation**. Conversations emerged on the the topic in a informal and organic way.

After a short coffee break in which the local hosts offered tea and sweets, the **partner organisations Re-Connect, The Festival Academy, and BIRCA invited for an open circle Q & A** to discuss further some of the topics that had emerged previously. Key discussion points evolved around the role of the artist to keep spaces for art accessible, to keep the arts socially engaged and artist-activist identities.



Public Exhibition

On June 1st, the artists in collaboration with the international curators, had the opportunity to **present their works collectively in a small space located at the heart of the village**. This venue, generously provided by a local project partner, is situated directly at the port. The bright, single-room space had previously functioned as a restaurant and was recently vacated, with the future vision of transforming it into an art gallery.

The group was given full freedom to **reorganize and adapt the space** according to each artist's individual needs and artistic approach. During a pre-visit the day before the exhibition, the artists and curators accessed the building to begin preparations. Chairs and tables were moved into storage, floors were swept, and surfaces cleaned. In a collective effort, the remaining furniture was thoughtfully rearranged, and the space was curated through dialogue among the artists, supported by the guidance of the curators.

A conceptual design emerged that not only **showcased each artist's work but also respected the venue's former identity**. The goal was to transform the room into a functional gallery while maintaining its character as a former restaurant - integrating existing elements and subtly referencing the location's history. The room itself proved ideal for the presentation: spacious, filled with natural light from numerous windows, and offering a beautiful view of the water.

As the second public outcome of the Lab, the exhibition was also **positively received by the local community**. Over the course of the opening afternoon, approximately 20 visitors (including a delegation from the mayor's office) attended the event. Guests engaged with the artists, their works, and the themes explored, contributing to meaningful exchanges throughout the day.

In addition to the works presented by the artists-in-residence (Leila, Nadeem, Patricia, and Tuba), the international curators Filia and Abduljabbar also contributed meaningfully to the event. Abduljabbar presented a short **performative intervention** that blended singing with spoken poetry, bringing a dynamic and emotional dimension to the exhibition. Meanwhile, Filia engaged with visitors by moving through the space with a microphone, asking each attendee, "What does the island mean to you?" This interaction formed part of her ongoing **artistic research on the psychosocial mapping of island spaces across Greece and Turkey**.

The following pages provide detailed insights into each artist's project, developed within the framework of the exhibition. Additional resources and further reading are available through the provided links.



Photos: Berna Küpeli

Artworks

Nadeem Mazen - From the collection "From and to" ON THE ISLAND

Art has always been the main character in societies and communities. It spoke about class, social issues, political struggles, and more. It existed in every aspect of life, giving people a way to express themselves, especially the oppressed. Art from and for the community is the essence of art, it is the heart of conceptual art.

By utilizing art as a tool for change, each community gets to draw its own path and shape its own way of seeing. People participate in this experimental workshop/artwork/fabric/presentation whatever one may call it. It becomes a sense of community, a sense of togetherness. It brings us back to simpler, easier times like school days or summer camps when we gathered to draw as a shared activity.

Today, we gather again to draw and paint, this time as a form of resistance, a form of presence, a way of being and existing as an open dialogue that spans widely.

This project is dear to my heart. It perfectly represents my message in the art world. I'm not seeking to be displayed in grand exhibitions or museums, I want to be in your exhibition, your space, your home, anywhere that needs art. I want to make everyone part of this journey, from our oldest to our youngest.

After completing this collective painting practice, we hang the work in a place where everyone can reach it using found objects that are familiar to the eye to create a deeper, more relatable scene, a couch, a dinner table, papers, pens, paints, scissors and more. All of it becomes the installation, the artwork we all worked on together.

Look at this fabric. Choose a part. Cut it, and take it with you. That's where its journey begins to become whatever the viewer decides it will be. For a moment, everyone becomes an artist. Everyone chooses the part that represents them, simply cuts it, and takes it to its new home maybe one day we collectively can bring these pieces back together and see how far we have come. Find more photos [here](#).



Photo: Berna Küpel



Photos: Berna Küpeli

Leila Ahmadi Abadeh - Part 1 of a poem (fragment)

How can they gather all the feathers again?
 Place them in the jar
 Hear their rattling sound.
 There are many defense mechanisms the self uses to escape the pain of feeling inadequate -
 and I have tried them all.

I have severed parts of myself,
 the parts that others rejected,
 and I have denied them.

A part of me - a blaming, tormenting, judgemental part -
 has used these very defenses
 against another part of myself -
 the part that has always been the target of that same humiliation.

Most of this happens unconsciously;
 we only know we're in pain,
 and we suspect that something within us is wrong-
 something fundamentally, deeply wrong.

They are afraid
 that they have no name,
 that they have thousands of names,
 that they do not know their own names.

...

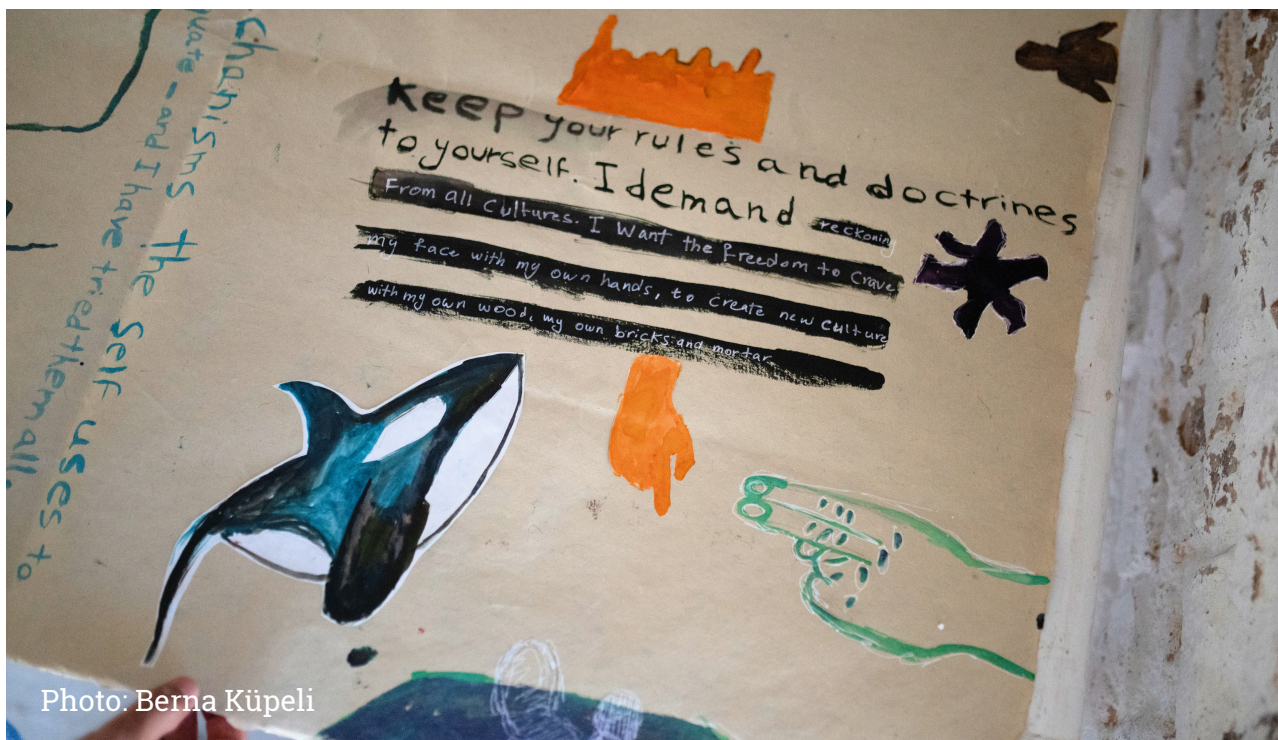


Photo: Berna Küpeli



Photos: Berna Küpeli

Patricia Habchy & Tuba Emiroğlu

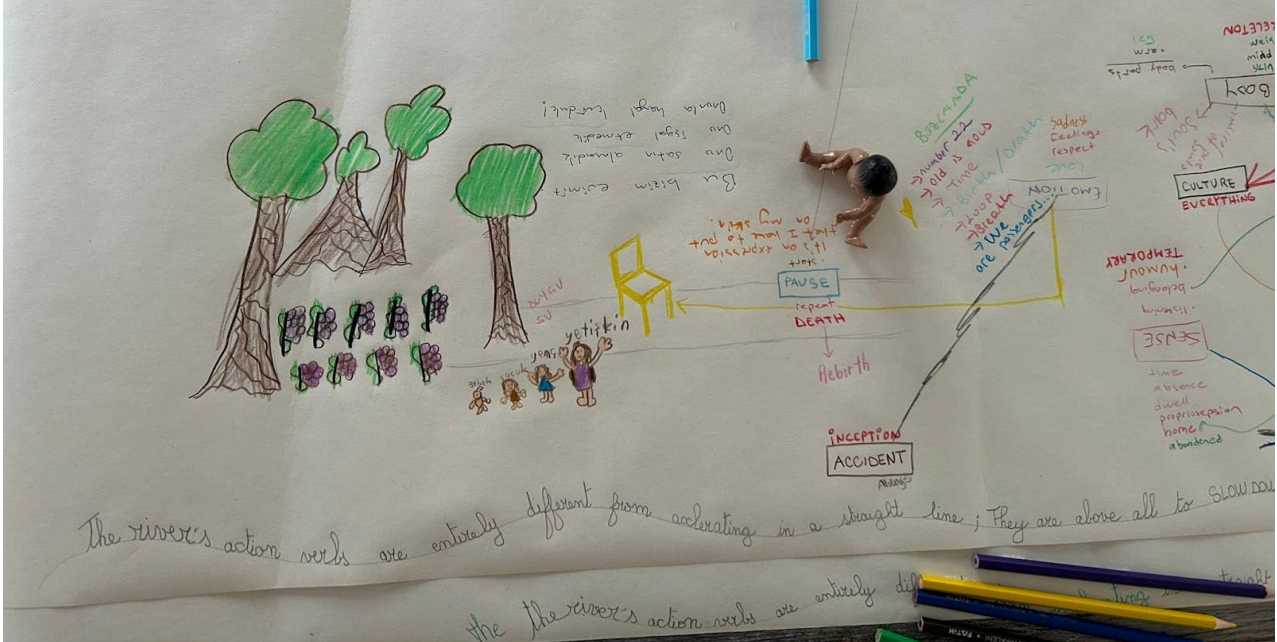
Exerpt from **A Journey on a Flotting Land** by Patricia Habchy

“A place to meet. A house nestled in the landscape. At first, there is an idea, and then the idea transforms into a 3D model. It has depth, texture, and the strength to withstand time. There are our breaths all around. This is a conversation I am having with Tuba Emiroglu. Bodies around landscapes. Landscapes within bodies. The bodies, my body and landscapes—especially natural ones—are places/surfaces/containers/ecosystems/partners, I deeply cherish because in them I find peace and a sense of legitimacy to exist, despite society and the cultures that govern it. Suddenly, I have space to be. My place to be. My possibility/chance to be, witness, acknowledge, report. Me being a vivid tool; with all that this implies: my energy, my feelings, my intuitions, my daily rituals, the time of the day, the others around, my corporeality, my training hygiene, The external inputs that feed me, the last words I read/heard, engaged with, the kind of prayers I do, the music or the lyrics in the back of my mind, my hell of a thermometer...”

- "Moving with Landscape: The Body as a Generative Organism of Narratives with A broad range of Action Verbs"
- The island I brought back home: Politics of Attention
- 4h42: Lunch time
- This house is ours. We did not buy it, we did not occupy it. We imagined through it.
- “Mulberry tree, Mulberry tree, how old are you?”

Read the full-length article [here](#).





Filia Milidaki - excerpt from **A Psychogeographic Map of an Island**

“All participants were asked the same question: *“What does the Island do to you?”*”

My simultaneous use of the Turkish and Greek name of the island was expected to trigger participants’ memory and historical understanding of the place. The question was straightforward yet open enough, to act as a “sensory stimulation” encouraging participants to share with confidence their own feelings and personal perceptions regarding the island.

The island evokes intense and conflicting emotions to my interlocutors. I recognize these feelings as I come from a Greek island and have already lived for 20 years on another island in the Aegean. I can feel the ambivalence of the soul before the physical and social boundary that the sea may evoke and the openness and exhilaration that the natural environment provokes. [...]

To be an islander is to be a sensuous human being. I remember one afternoon in March on a Greek island, feeling the winter breeze and the heat of the summer on my skin, unexpectedly yet simultaneously. It felt like two forces struggling for dominance. For the first time in my life, I sensed the arrival of spring in such a sensory/physical way.

«The winds affect us a lot emotionally. When the wind is coming from the south you have headache and you cannot do anything. We cannot do anything. We call it “notos” (). When it comes from the north, like north-Eastish, then your hair, your body, your clothes are flying, you cannot hold things around... The North wind we call it “voreias” (*). Voreias is strong, there is no ferry and you are like stuck here, you feel helpless. Like alone. But in general I think we all like it, to be in exile here, like for three days. You cannot worry about anything because you cannot go, so you chill out»(Y).*



Photo: Berna Küpeli

Abduljabbar Alsuhili - Bozcaada and Socotra

separated by distance, united in spirit.
 Dragon blood, trees gaze at vineyards across thousands of miles.
 Both whisper to the wind tales of conquerors, merchants, and sailors.
 Here, time stands still.
 Rocks tell ancient stories.
 Blue waters surround isolated wards, preserved like secrets.
 Here, evening lights dance on glasses of wines.
 There, strange trees bend like dancers in a cosmic play.
 Two places resisting time, preserving their identities.
 Sanctuaries for souls seeking peace and beauty.
 When the sun sets, their shadows look the same.
 Two places breathing the same ancient air.

One soul.

بوزجادا وسقطري
 تفرقهما المسافات، وتجمعهما الأرواح.
 دمّ التنين، أشجارٌ تحدّق في كرومٍ على بُعد آلاف الأميال.
 كلاهما يهمس للريح بحكايا الغزاة والتجار والبحارة.
 يتوقف الزمن،
 تنطق الصخور بالأساطير القديمة.
 مياه زرقاء تطوّق حصونا معزولة، مصونة كالأسرار.
 ترقص نجوم المساء في كؤوس الخمر،
 تنحني الأشجار كراقصات الكون.
 يقاومان الزمن، يحفظان الهوية،
 ملاذان للأرواح التائقة للسكينة والجمال.
 وحين تغيب الشمس، تتشابه الظلال،
 يتنفسان الهواء ذاته منذ الأزل.
 روحٌ واحدة.



Photo: Berna Küpeli



Other Outcomes

- **Strengthened the community among Alumni of The Festival Academy** through in-depth exchanges, building connections, and a deeper understanding of each other's backgrounds, personal stories, projects, and festivals.
- **In-depth connections and exchange with artists from regions that face mobility restrictions or visa limitations** from within the Re-Connect Residency programme.
- **Built meaningful relationships with the local community**, including artists and staff of Re-Connect and BIRCA.
- **Gained a deeper understanding of the region and the local culture**, as well as the challenges, connecting, learning about the unique cultural, social, economic and geopolitical context.
- **Practical and discursive exchange on the impact of art and festivals on local communities, the landscape and environment.**
- **Exchange about the role of arts in contexts of conflict/war** and deeper understanding how creativity can support solidarity and care.
- **Experienced and explored strategies for working and producing in challenging contexts**, learning how to navigate logistical, social, and political obstacles.
- **Firsthand experience of local approaches to revitalizing socially and economically challenged regions**, understanding how art and festivals can play a role in community transformation.
- **Built bridges between participating regions with a focus on Mediterranean and SWANA, and peripheries (such as islands)**



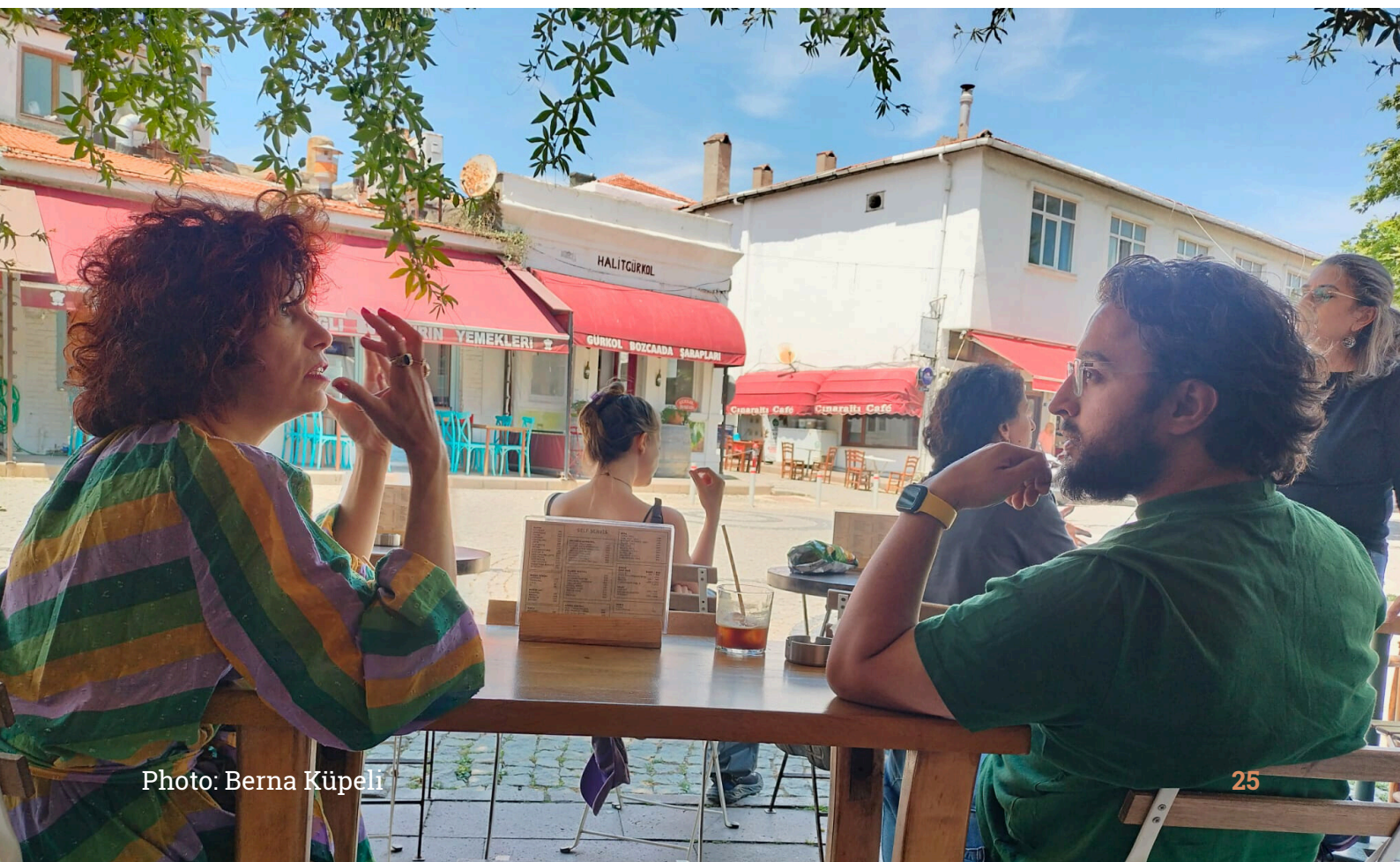
New ideas

Island Lab in Greece

As a direct follow-up to the Island Lab, The Festival Academy has initiated in-depth discussions with curator and artist Filia Milidaki to further explore and develop the concept of "the Island" within a new context. Building on the insights and connections formed during the Lab, the collaboration envisions integrating this conceptual framework into the EyesWalk Festival, which takes place on a Greek island. Filia has proposed to deepen her artistic research on the psychosocial and cultural dimensions of island life, with a particular focus on how insular environments shape collective memory, identity, and interpersonal dynamics. This potential collaboration marks a promising continuation of the Lab's impact, extending its themes into new artistic and geographic territories.

Re-Connect Island Festival

As a continuation of the Island Lab, The Festival Academy is actively engaged in ongoing conversations with the Re-Connect and Island project teams to further develop and expand the residency format. One of the key ideas emerging from these discussions is the creation of a festival that would serve as a culminating platform to showcase the artistic productions of both former and current Lab participants. This envisioned festival would not only present a diverse range of works developed during the residencies, but also foster collaborative curatorial processes - co-led by past and present participants in partnership with local cultural actors. The initiative aims to strengthen long-term connections between artists, curators, and communities, while enhancing the visibility and impact of the Lab's outcomes across a broader public context.



Feedback

“The experience had a deep and lasting impact on me. It reminded me of the importance of slowing down, listening, and allowing things to unfold naturally. It also gave me a renewed sense of purpose in my work both as a journalist and as an artist. The connections, the reflections, the silence, and the shared meals will stay with me for a long time.”

The written feedback received from the Island Residency Lab offered thoughtful and detailed insights into the overall experience. Several key themes emerged that speak to the impact of the program and opportunities for its further development.

Positive Highlights

A Grounded and Reflective Atmosphere

Participants found great value in simple, grounded activities such as silent walks and communal cooking. These experiences fostered moments of deep reflection and created a strong sense of community, often without the need for words.

A Well-Balanced Agenda

The overall structure of the program was seen as well-designed, offering a thoughtful balance between individual time and group activities. Physical practices like the morning walks helped to slow down the rhythm, encouraging presence and introspection.

Openness and Participation

There was a strong sense of being encouraged to contribute — whether through proposing activities, engaging in open conversations, or taking part in shared tasks such as meal preparation. This participatory spirit allowed for meaningful exchange and the emergence of new ideas.

Meaningful Connections

Personal and professional bonds formed during the Lab were described as deeply enriching. Over the course of the week, shared space, meals, and dialogue led to the formation of strong, supportive relationships grounded in mutual curiosity and care.

Engagement with Place and Community

The landscape of the island was not just a backdrop but an integral part of the experience. The facilitated walks and time outdoors contributed to a deeper connection with the territory. The public presentation and final exhibition offered valuable opportunities to connect with local residents and share the group’s process in a more outward-facing way.

Lasting Impact

The residency was described as having a lasting effect on participants' sense of purpose, professionally and personally. It offered space for slowing down, listening, and re-engaging with creative practice in a meaningful way.

Suggestions for Improvement

Pre-Arrival Communication

There was a desire for clearer communication before the start of the Lab. More detailed information on the program structure, expectations, and logistical aspects would have helped participants feel more prepared and confident upon arrival.

Orientation and Early Coordination

While the openness of the format was appreciated, a more structured orientation at the beginning could help participants settle in more smoothly. Greater clarity during the first few days would likely reduce confusion and enhance early engagement.

Opportunities for Deeper Exchange

Participants expressed interest in having additional structured sessions for more in-depth discussion and collaboration. While the informal conversations were valued, there was a sense that the group held rich potential for shared learning that could be more intentionally activated.

Creative Continuity

One suggestion involved creating opportunities for ongoing engagement - such as dedicated creative spaces or studio time connected to the island. These could support the development of projects initiated during the Lab and offer a reason for participants to return and deepen their work.

Residency Duration

A shorter format - possibly a full week instead of ten days - was proposed as a way to maintain focus and reduce fatigue while preserving the immersive nature of the experience.

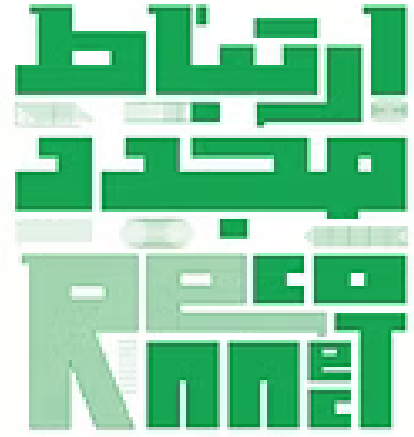
Balancing Freedom with Structure

The flexibility of the team was seen as a key strength, allowing participants to shape their own experience. However, some aspects of the week were experienced as slightly unorganized. A bit more coordination — especially early on — could enhance the overall coherence of the residency without compromising its organic character.

Looking Ahead

There was strong interest expressed in staying connected with the Lab community, including through future gatherings or online check-ins. Participants also saw potential for future collaborations — whether through residencies, artistic exchanges, or co-developing cultural programs across different locations. Several informal conversations around these ideas have already begun.

"Time slowed down, and I found space to listen to myself, others, and the island."



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