

can bora

portfolio

2025
selected
works

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ARTISTIC STATEMENT

I am a queer multidisciplinary performance and visual artist from Istanbul, based in Amsterdam. With a background in Theatre Studies (Paris 3 – Sorbonne Nouvelle), Acting (Hector Berlioz), Contemporary Dance (A.R.E.A.), and Performance Practices (ArtEZ), my academic journey has deeply shaped my artistic approach.

As a creator, I combine theatre, dance, and video in my performance work while also pursuing independent projects in filmmaking and installation. In the performing arts, my goal is to foster a non-hierarchical dialogue among these disciplines, an egalitarian exchange where each form informs and supports the others.

In a world characterized by rapid social change, isolation, and the saturation of mass digital culture with its constant need to classify and separate, I focus on **connectivity: exploring how we can sense, meet, and stay connected — not only with ourselves but also with one another—beyond imposed categories.**

Grounded in posthumanist thought, I draw on somatic methods and feminist philosophies that view the body as a dynamic interface between the personal and the political. My research into migration, queerness, identity, and cultural in-betweenness fuels this broader quest for connection. Central to my practice is somatic inquiry, treating **the sensing body** not only as a means of expression but **as a site of discovery, self-emancipation, and ecological awareness.**

The use of Green Box (chroma key) is integral to my practice. It enables me to layer different realities, what is physically present and what is mediated on screen. I am drawn to the intense tension between the flesh-and-blood body and its visually imposed double. This tension exposes the politics of representation, showing that identity is shaped more by sociocultural and political projection than by simple presence.

I strive to create spaces of radical inclusion—places where the invisible connections between people, and between humans and the wider ecology, can be sensed rather than simply understood. I invite audiences to move beyond appearances and engage with one another through shared embodied presence, perceiving our interconnectedness as something experienced in the body, not just romanticised in the mind. Through these practices, I seek to open spaces where **art functions as a catalyst for collective awareness and ecological responsibility.**

Drawing on more than twenty years as a yoga and meditation teacher and somatic instructor, I lead workshops and trainings that expand perception and deepen the connection to one's own body through **HEALIVE**.—a method and platform I developed that combines somatic psychology, performance studies, and mindfulness with creative practice to foster embodied and responsible agency.



WORKS

To access the videos, please click on the titles of the works.

HENNA NIGHT REIMAGINED: UNVEILING THE SPECTRUM OF THE SELF (2024)

THEATER - PERFORMANCE ART

Henna Night Reimagined reinterprets the traditional Turkish Henna Night, an Anatolian rite of passage typically centered on the bride-to-be and shaped by societal expectations. In this work, the ritual is transformed into a poetic and defiant act that honours self-liberation through a queer lens.

Traditionally, the Henna Night is marked by a bittersweet, often sorrowful atmosphere, symbolising the bride’s departure from her family and entry into a socially prescribed role. *Henna Night Reimagined* disrupts this framework, reshaping the event into a vibrant celebration of the human experience, embracing multiplicity, fluid identities, and the freedom to define one’s own path.

Blending performance, participatory elements, and ritual, the performance creates a space where tradition is not erased but reimagined, expanded to include queer voices and to engage with our relationship to the broader ecology.

Credits

Concept & Direction: Can Bora • **Text:** Can Bora • **Co-author:** Basak Layic • **Performers:** Can Bora & Berat Bebek • **Dramaturgy & Final Direction:** Ipek Sur • **Video:** Can Bora & Batuhan Keskiner • **Light Design:** Can Bora & Elio Troullakis • **Sound Design:** Rens Blonk • **Costumes:** Thommy Kraft & Gizem Doğu • **Technical Assistance:** Elio Troullakis • **Poster:** Gizem Doğu • **Photography:** Batuhan Keskiner & Vladimir Vidanovski

Context & Presentations

Developed during residencies at CC Amstel (Amsterdam) and Rede More, Lisbon, the project premiered at the RRReuring Festival, Podium Mozaïek (Amsterdam, 2024). Supported by AFK, Amarte Fonds, Voordekunst, and Het Cultuurfonds.

Presentations: RRReuring Festival – Podium Mozaïek Amsterdam (2024) • CC Amstel Amsterdam (2025) • Storytelling Festival – Podium Mozaïek Amsterdam (2025) • Podium Noord - The Hague (2025) • Lindenberg Cultuurhuis – Meneer Otis - Nijmegen - (2025)





INFECT ME GENTLY (2025)

SHORT MOVIE

Infect Me Gently unfolds as a poetic short film where performance and cinema meet. Shot largely in a single, unbroken take, the work uses Green Box compositing to multiply the artist's own body within the frame, creating a layered presence that is at once intimate and spectral. An HIV-positive artist paints with his own blood, confronting viewers with a material that provokes both fascination and panic. During an early showing, a visitor recoiled, afraid of "catching something," and this real encounter slips into the surreal: a ghost-like figure drifts between exposure and erasure. Through this restrained visual language, long-take choreography, subtle sound design, and chroma-key doubling, the film reflects on the concept of the Other and the tension between contemporary medical knowledge and enduring social fear. It leaves a lingering question: which is more contagious—the virus, or fear itself?

Credits

- **Script, Direction, Performance, Cinematography & Editing:** Can Bora
- **Music:** Sabine Rains, 78 Pulse, Kjartan Abel – used under Creative Commons license via freesound.org

Awards

- *Emerging Artist Award & Audience Choice Award* – 10 Minute Challenge, Queer Film Festival Utrecht

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The fascists... and the truly queer.

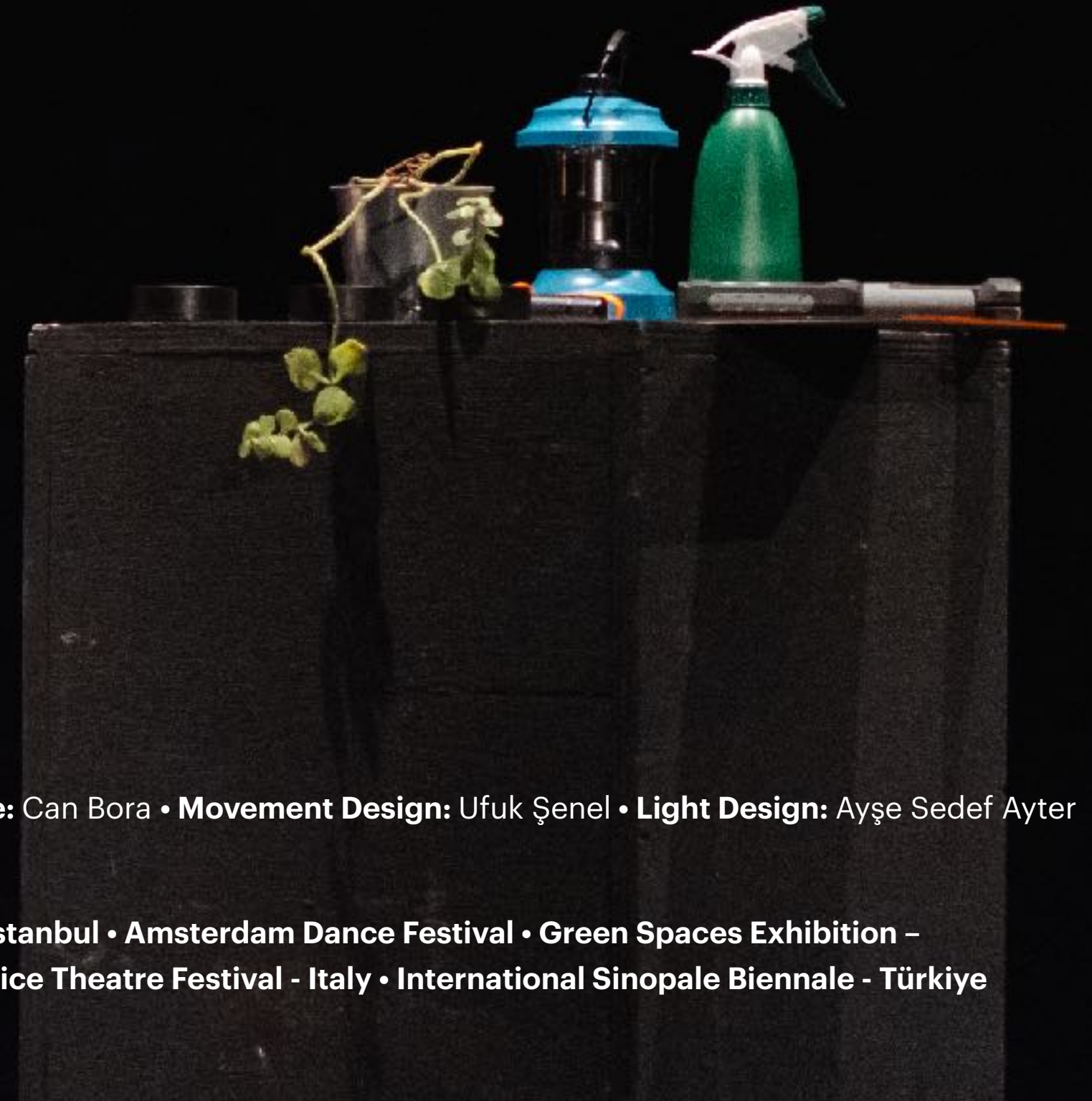


DREAMBAZAAR (2000-2025)

"Gentleness appears first as a failure." - Anne Dufourmantelle

THEATRE - DANCE

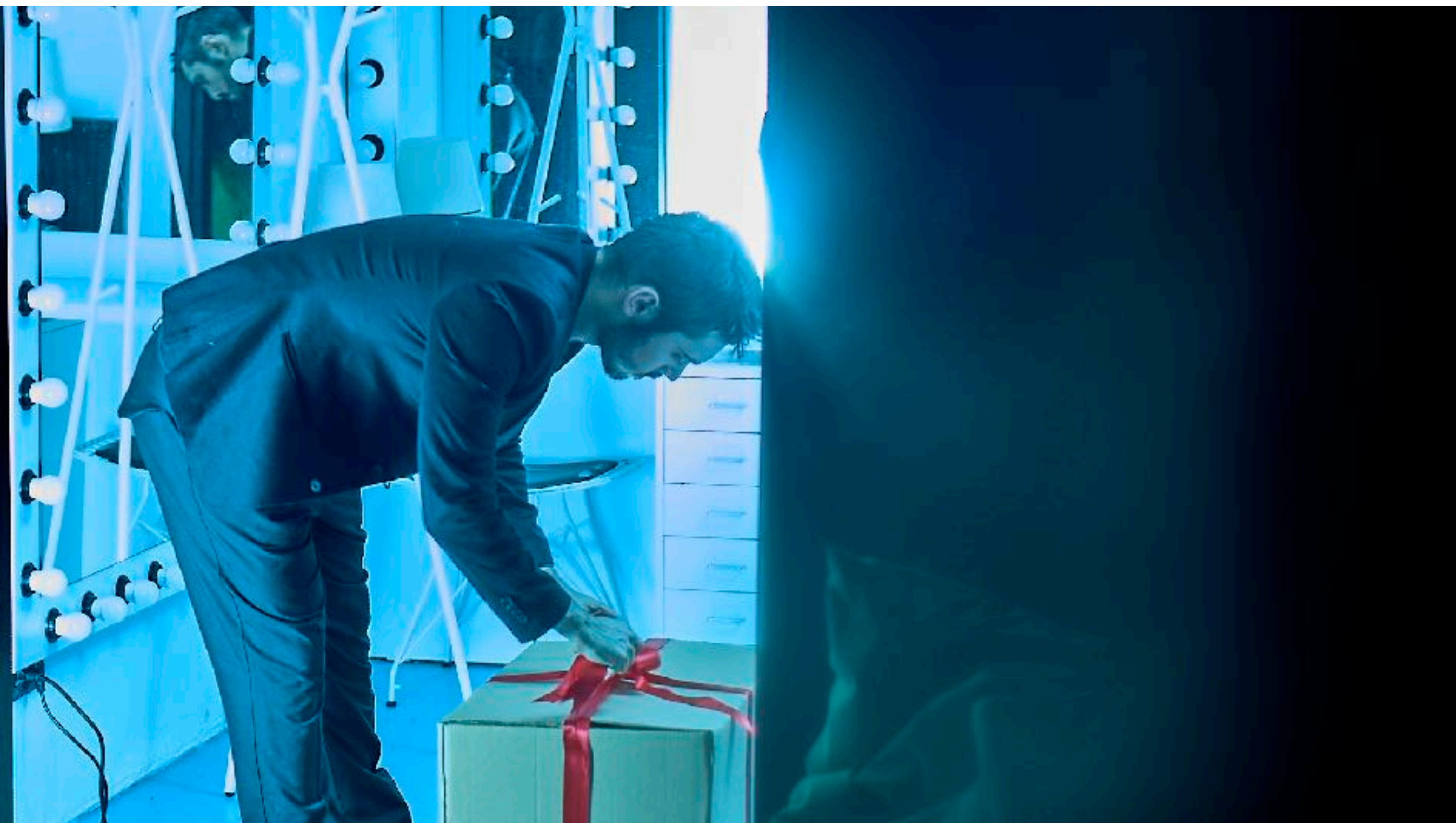
Inspired by the complete works of Samuel Beckett, including his choreographic explorations, *DreamBazaar* unfolds in a near-future dystopia where Adam, a solitary figure striving to nurture the last living plant on Earth. The work reflects on egolocial precarity, gentleness, and absurdity through poetic narrative. It channels Beckett's sense of waiting and existential absurdity to trace Adam's shifting relationship with the plant, moments of care, doubt, and quiet madness, as a mirror of the inner negotiations we make with ourselves. Originally created for the loft-like Koma Stage in Istanbul, the piece has evolved to include a participatory ritual in which audience members gently interact with the plant, extending this meditation on solitude and interdependence.

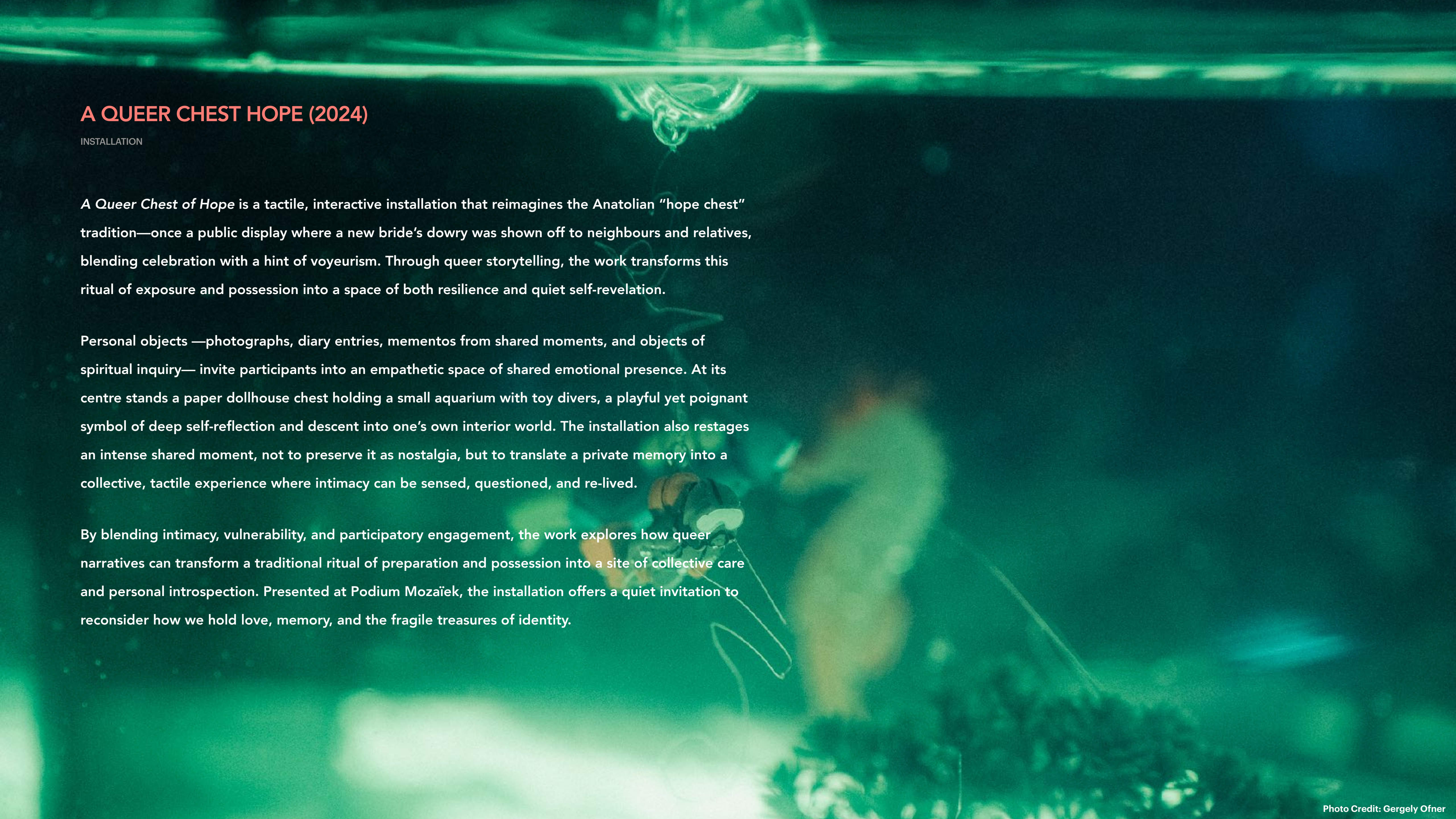


Credits

Concept & Direction & Text & Performance: Can Bora • **Movement Design:** Ufuk Şenel • **Light Design:** Ayşe Sedef Ayter
• **Set Design:** Meltem Çakmak

Presentations : **2019-2020 Koma Stage – Istanbul • Amsterdam Dance Festival • Green Spaces Exhibition – Treehouse NDSM Amsterdam (2023) • Venice Theatre Festival - Italy • International Sinopale Biennale - Türkiye (2024) • CREA Amsterdam (2025)**



A person in a blue dress stands in a shallow pool of water, looking down at a small object in the water. The water is clear, and the person's reflection is visible. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with greenery and a building.

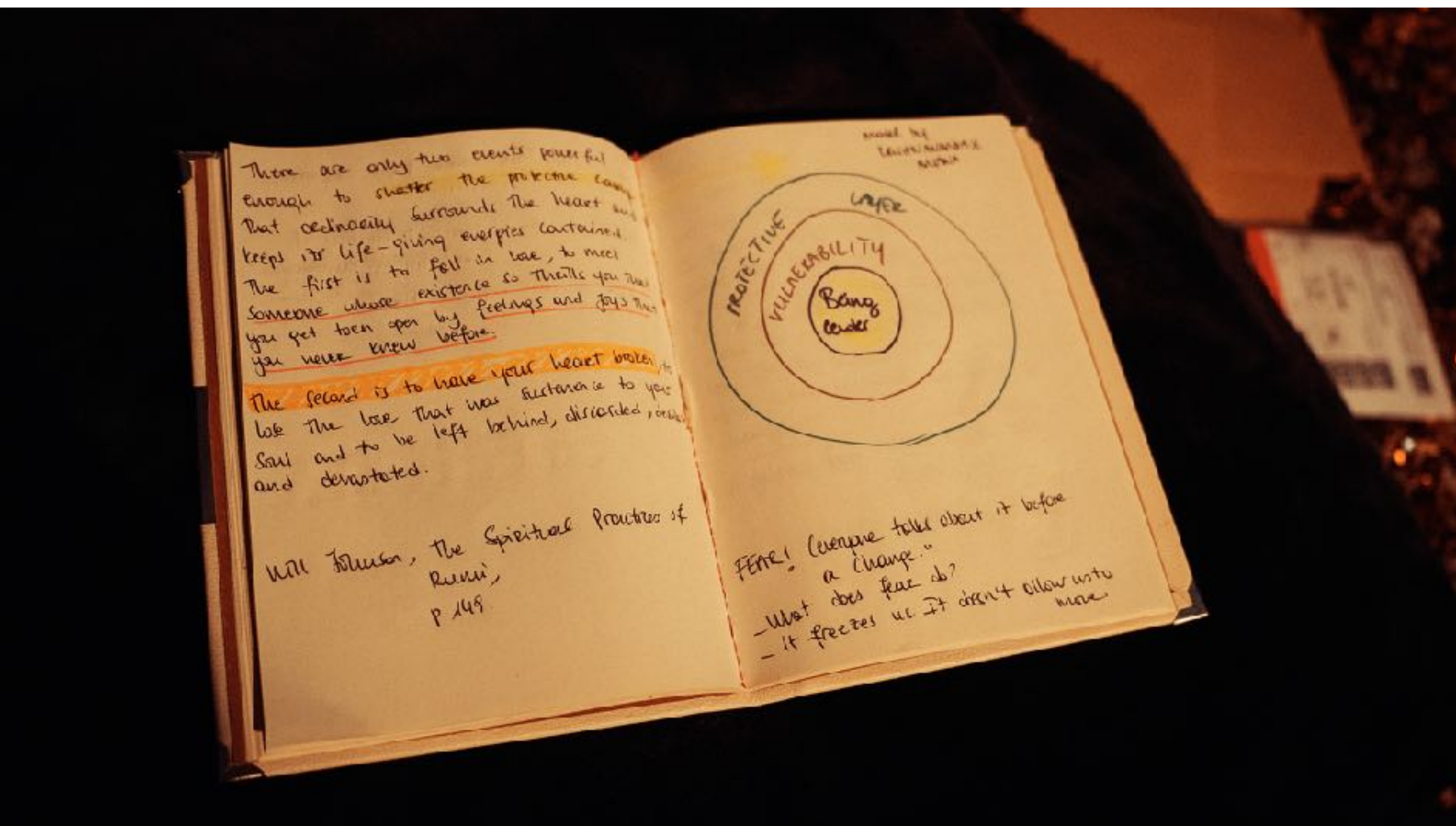
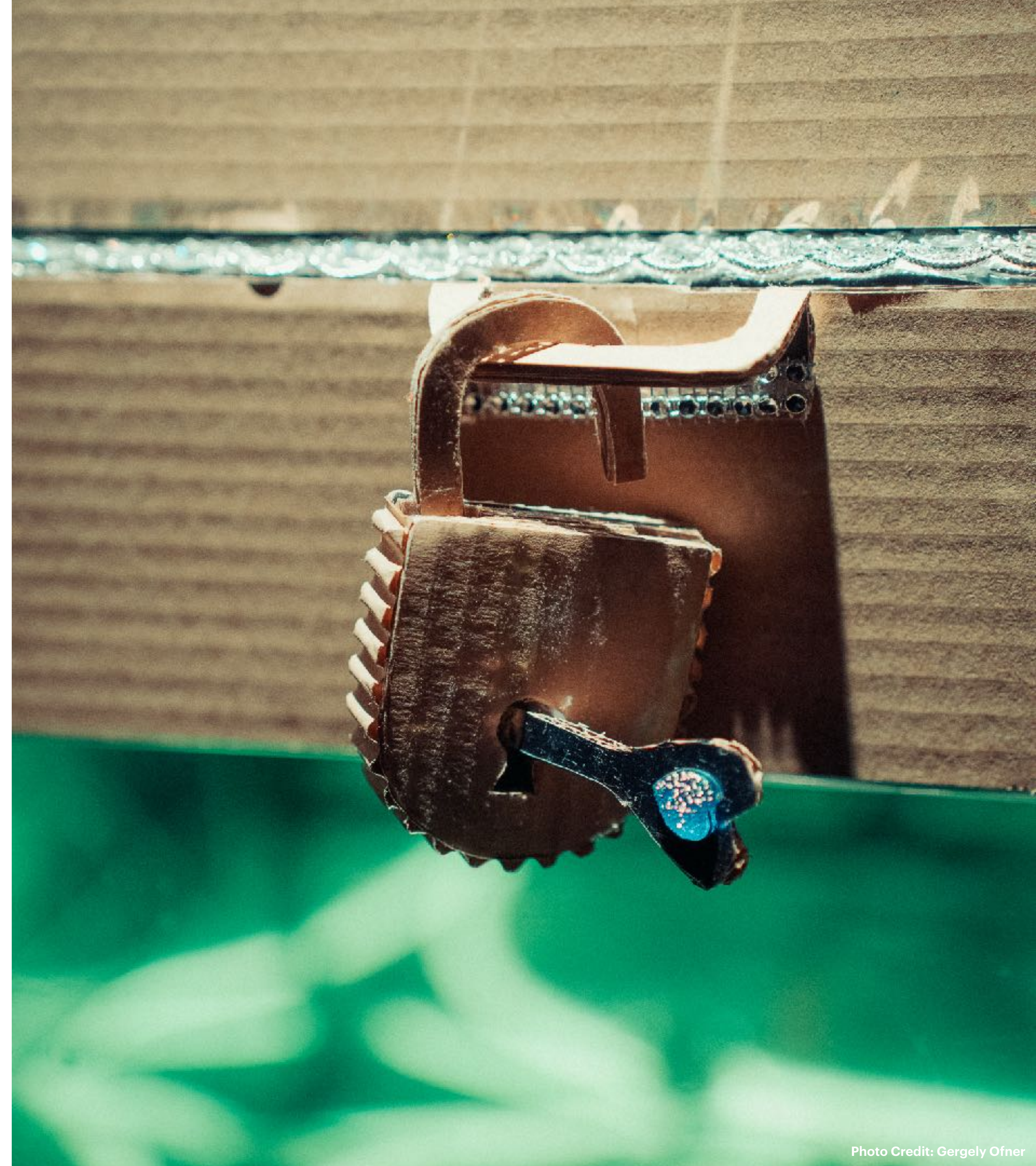
A QUEER CHEST HOPE (2024)

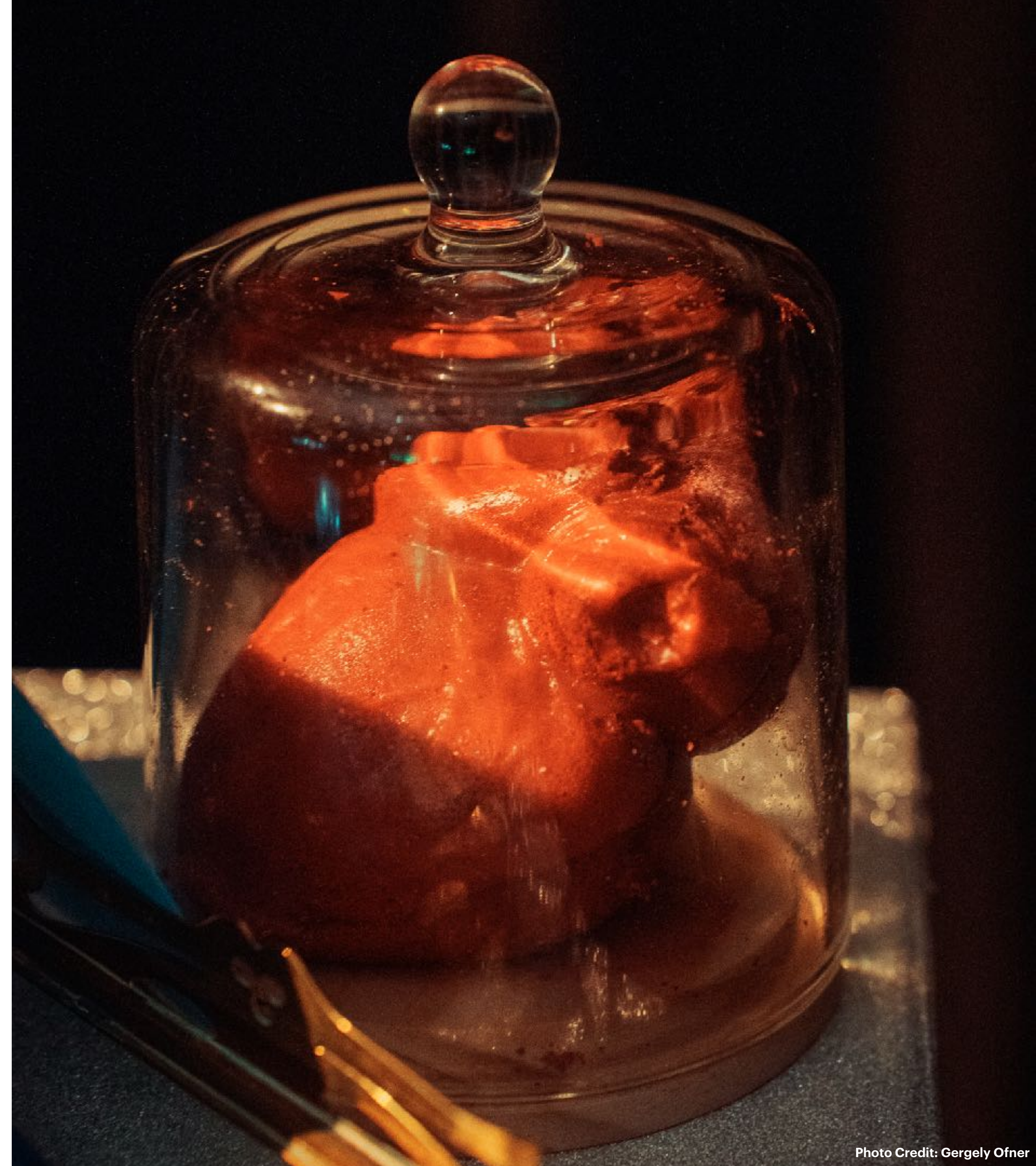
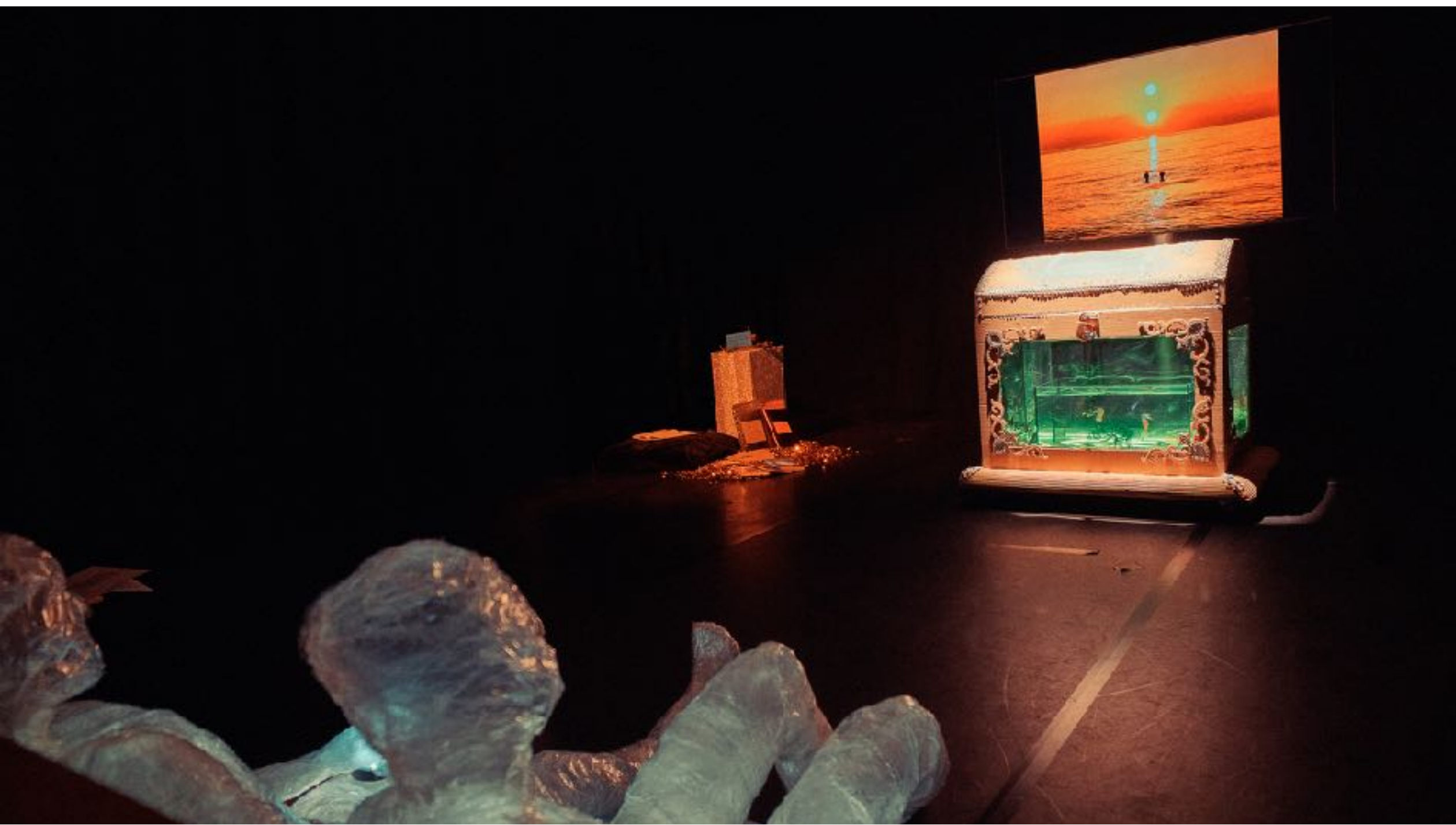
INSTALLATION

A Queer Chest of Hope is a tactile, interactive installation that reimagines the Anatolian “hope chest” tradition—once a public display where a new bride’s dowry was shown off to neighbours and relatives, blending celebration with a hint of voyeurism. Through queer storytelling, the work transforms this ritual of exposure and possession into a space of both resilience and quiet self-revelation.

Personal objects —photographs, diary entries, mementos from shared moments, and objects of spiritual inquiry— invite participants into an empathetic space of shared emotional presence. At its centre stands a paper dollhouse chest holding a small aquarium with toy divers, a playful yet poignant symbol of deep self-reflection and descent into one’s own interior world. The installation also restages an intense shared moment, not to preserve it as nostalgia, but to translate a private memory into a collective, tactile experience where intimacy can be sensed, questioned, and re-lived.

By blending intimacy, vulnerability, and participatory engagement, the work explores how queer narratives can transform a traditional ritual of preparation and possession into a site of collective care and personal introspection. Presented at Podium Mozaïek, the installation offers a quiet invitation to reconsider how we hold love, memory, and the fragile treasures of identity.





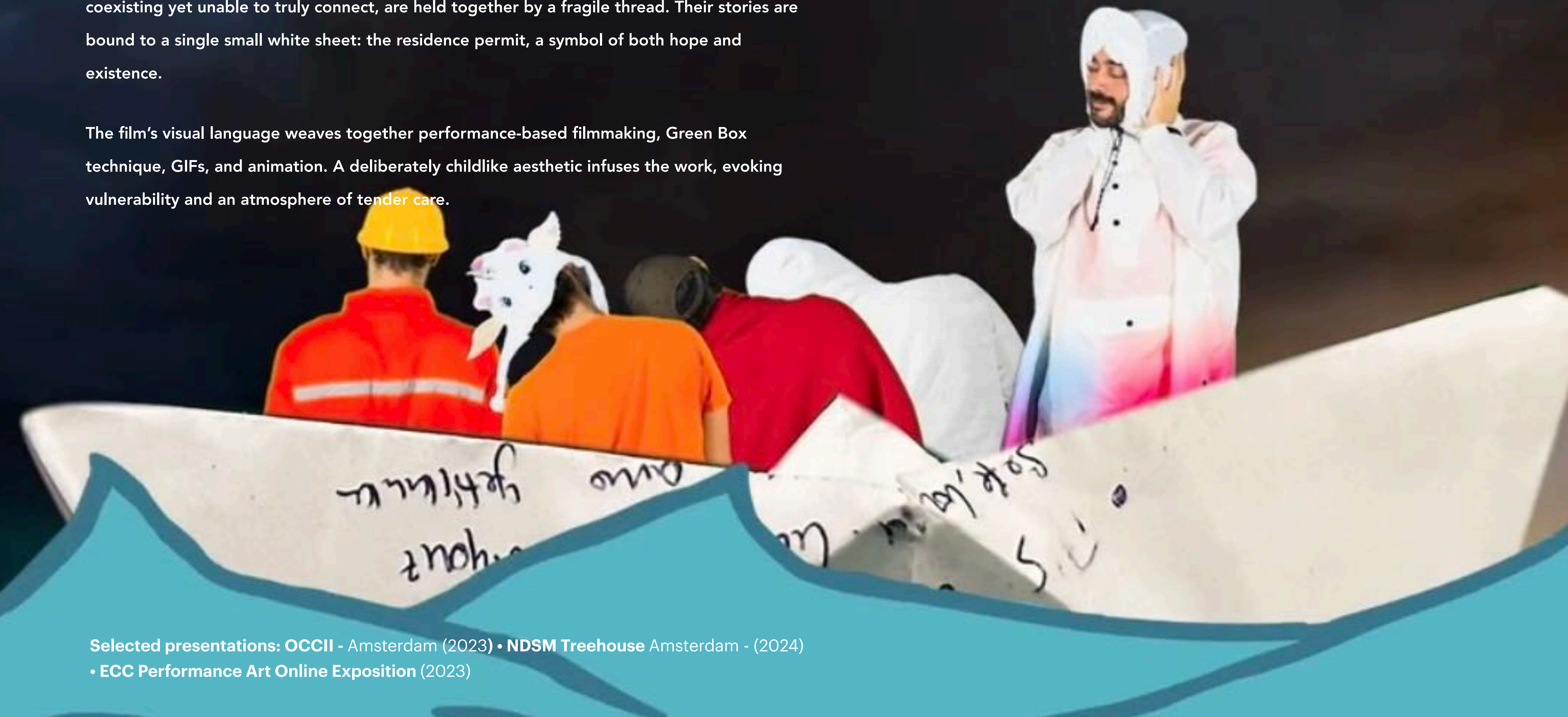


PAPER TRAILS OF BELONGING (2023)

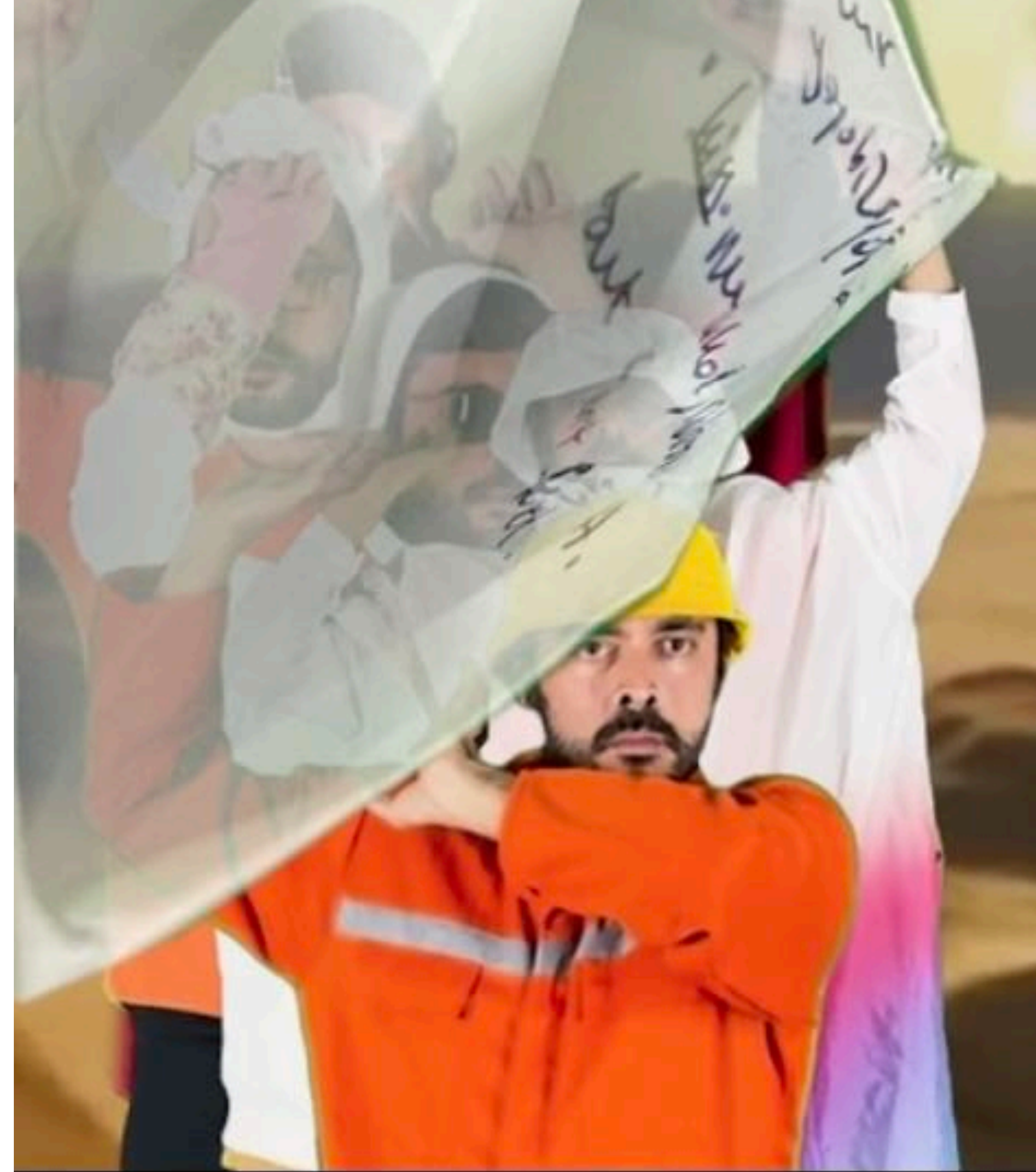
PERFORMANCE-BASED FILM

Paper Trails of Belonging is a collage film that reflects on migration as a continual transition—from someone, somewhere, or something to another state of being. Inner characters, usually coexisting yet unable to truly connect, are held together by a fragile thread. Their stories are bound to a single small white sheet: the residence permit, a symbol of both hope and existence.

The film's visual language weaves together performance-based filmmaking, Green Box technique, GIFs, and animation. A deliberately childlike aesthetic infuses the work, evoking vulnerability and an atmosphere of tender care.



Selected presentations: OCCII - Amsterdam (2023) • NDSM Treehouse Amsterdam - (2024)
• ECC Performance Art Online Exposition (2023)



I'VE RIGHT TO BE! (2023)

DIGITAL COLLAGE

I'VE RIGHT TO BE! imagines the speculative presence of a non-binary Turkish political leader. Confronting exclusion and the many forms of physical, social, and emotional violence directed at LGBTQIA+ communities—particularly in Turkey under powerful politicians and the president—, the work questions the very notion of leadership: *is a true leader one who compels the masses to follow and imitate, or one who inspires others to claim their own voice?*

Photographs of the performer in full makeup are styled as hyper-realistic campaign visuals, echoing the aesthetics of Turkish political billboards and election posters. These images are later reworked in other pieces with a playful pop-art palette, offering a colourful, ironic twist on traditional political propaganda and amplifying the project's critique of power and representation.

In the accompanying campaign-style posters, key slogans appear as part of the work's visual language: *"I have the right to be here, just like everyone else,"* and *"Tirelessly and unapologetically, an equal future for all of us."*

These statements, presented under the fictional banner GEP: Future and Equality Party, extend the performance into the public realm, echoing the project's call for visibility, inclusion, and collective empowerment.

Credits

Performance & Photography & Collage: Can Bora • **Makeup Artist:** Elifsu Şahiner

Presentations & Awards

Exhibited at The Grey Space (The Hague), and 4bid Gallery (Amsterdam, 2023). **Winner of the Open Call First Prize** at FEVR Festival, The Hague.





THE HELIX (2022)

THEATER - DANCE

The HELIX traces the inward ripples of a queer Twin Flame love story, exploring intimacy with oneself through multidisciplinary storytelling. Interweaving the legendary bond of Sufi poet Rumi and his companion Shams, the performance invites audiences into a layered journey of connection and inner discovery.

Using spontaneous chroma-key compositing on stage, the work reveals multiple archetypes that live within each of us, merging and colliding to reflect the complex nature of human identity shaped by a profound, soul-shaking love story. These shifting figures link our hidden impulses, quiet affections, and the exuberant “party in the heart” that makes us human.

The evening culminates in a collective celebration: audiences are invited onto the stage to dance together, briefly transforming the theater into a shared festivity that honors the quest for love, wholeness, and communal joy.



Credits

Concept & Text & Direction & Video & Movement Design: Can Bora • Technical Support: Antti Uimonen

Presentation • Performed at the **Amsterdam Fringe Festival (2022)** at **de Brakke Grond**, Amsterdam.





THE CROSSING (2021-2023)

PERFORMATIVE INSTALLATION & CONTEMPORARY DANCE

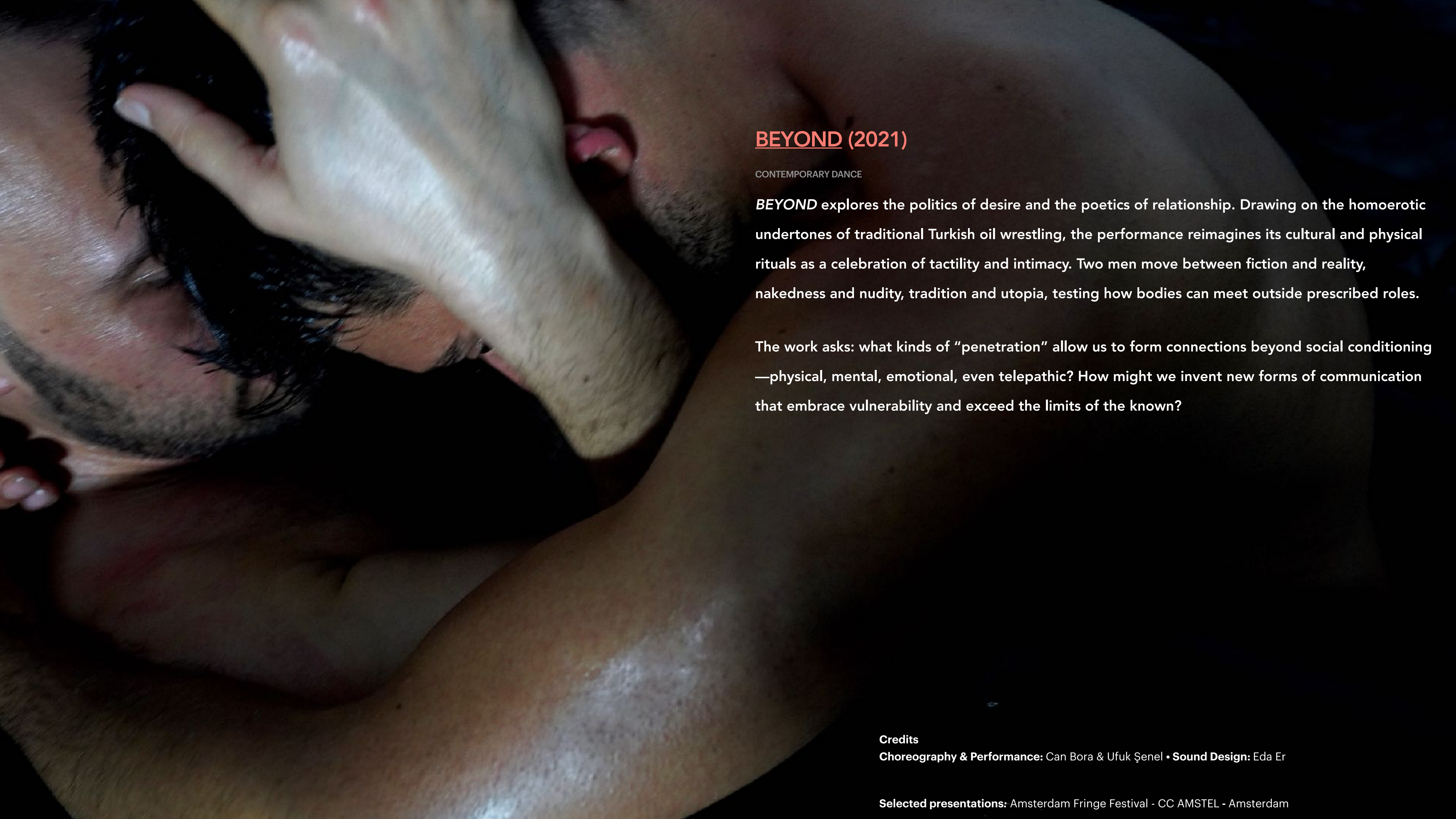
An immersive performative installation and solo dance work exploring touch as a pathway to self-connection and collective awareness. Ten interactive stations guide visitors through somatic exercises, bone-conducted sound, short journaling, and moving digital collages and video projections that expand the sensory field. An accompanying website invited people worldwide to share the touch they most longed for, revealing a striking commonality of desire across cultures. The journey culminates in a collective meditation led by the artist, fostering embodied presence and shared energy.

Developed alongside practice-based research on the speculation of touch and gaze, the solo dance version centres on the ecstatic body. Repetitive patterns blend ritualistic movement from Sufism and Shamanic traditions with the minimalist structures of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's *Piano Phase*, investigating the meaning of touch and its subtle, sensorial qualities that open the way to the subtle body and deeper layers of awareness.

Rooted in two years of research on touch and the gaze, the project reframes looking as a tactile act, revealing how perception itself can be felt. *The Crossing* creates a space where human and more-than-human bodies meet, inviting participants to experience intimacy, interconnection, and the shared ecology of all living beings.

Originally created as the **Performance Practices MA Year-1 graduation project** at ArtEZ (Arnhem), *The Crossing* was later presented at **OT301 – 4bid Gallery** (Amsterdam) and **Pure.Space** (Istanbul).





BEYOND (2021)

CONTEMPORARY DANCE

BEYOND explores the politics of desire and the poetics of relationship. Drawing on the homoerotic undertones of traditional Turkish oil wrestling, the performance reimagines its cultural and physical rituals as a celebration of tactility and intimacy. Two men move between fiction and reality, nakedness and nudity, tradition and utopia, testing how bodies can meet outside prescribed roles.

The work asks: what kinds of “penetration” allow us to form connections beyond social conditioning—physical, mental, emotional, even telepathic? How might we invent new forms of communication that embrace vulnerability and exceed the limits of the known?

Credits

Choreography & Performance: Can Bora & Ufuk Şenel • **Sound Design:** Eda Er

Selected presentations: Amsterdam Fringe Festival - CC AMSTEL - Amsterdam

THE TURKISH COFFEE (2021)

PERFORMANCE ART

Inspired by Derrida and Levinas's ideas of unconditional hospitality, and Avery F. Gordon's book "Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination", *The Turkish Coffee* examines the tension between host and guest and the invisible hierarchies that accompany these roles. Around a single elongated table, one performer becomes the Host and a single audience member the Guest. Speaking only Turkish, the Host offers cups of Turkish coffee in a gesture of warmth while a nearby computer triggers unpredictable cues such as Islamic prayers, heteronormative folk dances, the national anthem, even a sudden belly dance with a Turkish-flag tattoo.

These disruptions fracture the exchange, shifting power to the Guest, who may deepen the encounter or quietly leave. Through this intimate one-on-one format, *Long Table* reveals how a self shaped by national codes struggles to make genuine contact with the other, exposing the cultural ghosts embedded in identity and questioning what true, unconditional hospitality might require.



HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES

ALTAR (2018-2020)

THEATER - DANCE

ALTAR portrays the subconscious journey of an HIV-positive queer protagonist who, confined to a hospital room, confronts self-hatred and the weight of social rejection. Drawing on Joseph Campbell’s *Hero’s Journey*, the performance moves between reality and fantasy, past and present, as the character descends into a personal labyrinth where shame, fragility, and resilience intertwine.

Conceived through an eight-month intensive collaborative process, the piece emerged from the simultaneous development of text, movement, light, and set design, each discipline shaping and reshaping the others rather than following a linear order. Choreography, lighting, and scenography fuse into a performative stage architecture that becomes an extension of the character’s psyche, guiding both performer and audience through a shifting terrain of inner darkness and eventual integration.

Recognized by LGBTQIA+ associations and Turkish theatre juries in Istanbul, *ALTAR* has been commended for its sensitive portrayal of HIV and exclusion, avoiding caricature while confronting deep-rooted social taboos with nuance and emotional depth.

Credits

Concept & Text: Can Bora • **Direction:** Can Bora & Ufuk Şenel • **Performance:** Can Bora • **Movement Design:** Ufuk Şenel • **Set & Costume Design:** Meltem Çakmak • **Light Design:** Ayşe Sedef Ayter

Context & Presentations

Presented across numerous venues in Istanbul, *ALTAR* has given over forty performances in two years.

Awards & Nominations

Best Innovative Theatre Award – *Yeni Tiyatro Dergisi Awards* • **Best Lighting Design Nomination** – *Yeni Tiyatro Dergisi Awards* • **Best Movement Design Nomination** – *Afife Jale Theatre Awards*









THE LACEWORK (2012-2020)

THEATER - DANCE

The LACEWORK is a multidisciplinary performance exploring “forms of storytelling” through text, dance, video, and live on-stage editing with Green Box/Chroma-key techniques. At its core is the story of a young, queer, passive-aggressive character raised in a women-dominated Turkish household, seeking to break free from the triangle of society, family, and the past.

Created as my first professional production after graduating from university, the piece merges script, movement design, and simultaneous video editing into a single performative language. Over nine years of performances across Istanbul, Ankara, Eskişehir, and many other cities in Turkey, *The LACEWORK* has become a reference point in contemporary Turkish theatre.

The work has been supported by the French Institute of Istanbul, BILSAR Art, A Corner in the World Festival, BomontiAda, and Istanbul Akbank Cultural Center, and has been the subject of two Master’s theses in Theatrical Studies in Istanbul.

Credits

Concept & Text & Direction & Movement Design: Can Bora • **Video:** Alper Akçay • **Chroma Key Module Design & Sound Design:** Utku Öğüt



SOCIAL PRACTICES: LECTURES & WORKSHOPS

PERFORMATIVE LECTURE: THE POWER OF RITUALS, PARTICIPATION & THE SOMATIC BODY

Drawing from *Henna Night Reimagined*, I presented a lecture on the enduring significance of rituals: their contemporary relevance, their forgotten spaces, and their potential to create new forms of connection. I focused on the sensing body and the concept of connectivity, discussing why embodied presence and somatic awareness play a crucial role in today’s fragmented world. Following the talk, participants were invited to collectively embody a scene from *Henna Night Reimagined*, experiencing first-hand how ritual can foster shared presence and mutual connection.

PHYSICAL WORKSHOP: EMBODIED RITUALS

“Rituals are to time what a home is to space: they render time habitable.” — Byung-Chul Han

In this workshop, participants begin by identifying a personal need drawn from lived experience and exploring it through movement practices of liminality, repetition, and ecstatic states. The process gradually expands into a shared investigation of interconnectedness. What does it mean to move, sense, and imagine the future together as a community? Through carefully guided somatic and perception-shifting exercises, the workshop frames the body as a site of both personal and collective transformation, revealing how individual desires and needs meet broader social realities and how embodied ritual can foster clarity, care, and resistance.



HEALIVE. WORKSHOP: EMBODIED PRESENCE & PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

HEALIVE. is a social-practice platform I founded to explore somatic embodiment and responsible agency in collaboration with diverse institutions and communities. The method adapts to various contexts, including movement- and authentic–dance–based sessions, workshops that address stress and burnout, explorations of personal boundaries, and yoga-infused practices. Each format invites participants to reconnect with the sensing body and to cultivate presence, resilience, and self-awareness.



Selected presentations: NIKE - Hope Alkazar (2023-2024), Hapaka (2022-2025), Istanbul • SkyStudio, Sportcity, Amsterdam (2023-2025)



A person's back is shown, covered in a large, translucent collage. The collage features nature photographs, including green foliage and a body of water, along with physical elements like crystals and balloons. The person's hands are visible, holding the edges of the collage. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green grass and a body of water.

EYES OF THE SKIN (2022-2023)

PERFORMATIVE EXHIBITION & LECTURE

Eyes of the Skin —titled in reference to Juhani Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin*—is a visual project that emerged from solitary walks in the forests of Arnhem, where I explored Shannon Cooney's *felt-sense-in-the-visual-field*, a somatic method linking internal awareness with visual space. It is also part of my ongoing research on **touch and gaze**, investigating how seeing and tactile perception inform one another. I translated this principle into a visual language through digital collages made with nature photography and physical elements such as crystals, balloons, and pop-up forms.

As a live performance at OT301, participants engaged in a somatic meditation, experiencing the collages as a dialogue between their bodies and the body of nature. The project also includes a dance video created with **Green Box**compositing.

It culminated in a commissioned online performance and seminar for Hapaka.com that addressed the importance of looking, somatic awareness, and felt-sense for mental health, while offering the work as a meditative, performative exhibition.

Selected presentations: 4bid Gallery, Amsterdam (2023) - Hapaka, Türkiye (2023)

