



# **DIPLOMA PROJECT DOCUMENTATION**



BRNO UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

FACULTY OF FINE ARTS

FINE ART AND DESIGN

ONCE UPON A TIME

DIPLOMA PROJECT

AUTHOR

Bc. Anna Medvetska

SUPERVISOR

MgA. Veronika Vlková

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on my personal experience of a war refugee, in my diploma project I want to explore collage as a creative medium for putting fractured pieces of my life back together and creating a new story out of the traces of the past, new things in my life today, and emerging plans for the future. Because of the war, my life has changed dramatically: I do not work in an architecture studio in Ukraine anymore, I cannot see my father and friends, I am scared that my home might cease to exist. I face an urgent need to adapt to new environment and make new plans. My own values became simpler and more human, like they came from the pages of a children's fairytale.

For my diploma project, I facilitated collage workshops for small groups of Ukrainian children. Together, we created stories by developing characters and identifying the obstacles they face in order to achieve their goal.

In this work, I propose to use collage as a creative method, a coping mechanism, and a metaphor for reconstructing a life disrupted by war. I intend to reimagine my own narrative and create stories with others. Storytelling has proven to be an effective tool for coping with psychological issues such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety, which are prevalent among Ukrainians today. To achieve this, I plan to incorporate collaged canvases depicting characters created during workshops, video documentation of our art sessions, and a zine containing supplementary information. Through my diploma project, I aim to provide a broader context for my collages, capturing my hopes, fears, and desires, while documenting the experiences of others who, like me, face the challenges of life overturned by the war.

**KEYWORDS:** collage, reassembling, storytelling, collaborative storytelling, war, refugees, PTSD, workshops with children, autotheory, autofiction, documentation of the war.

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## TEXT PART

### INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION

Since Russia initiated a full-scale invasion in Ukraine, my life has undergone a complete transformation. All my thoughts and topics now rooted in my experiences as a refugee. I believe that as a refugee, it is crucial to seize every opportunity to speak out because if we do not advocate for ourselves, who will?

In my diploma project, I delve into the inner trauma experienced by Ukrainian children and myself and explore collage as a means of coping with it. The collage technique helps us convey our thoughts and emotions we do not have the words for. My final project serves as a visual representation of healing, not just for myself, but for others as well. Through my collages, I aim to narrate the collective story of both myself and Ukrainian children who have resettled in the Czech Republic, forging new lives here.

In conclusion, my diploma project serves as a testament to the power of art in overcoming trauma and building connections, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of refugees in the face of adversity.

Through my project, I convey a personal struggle with feeling inadequate in the face of daily challenges. Yet, it also carries a universal message: that even small efforts are significant. It serves as a reminder to myself and others that every action, no matter how minor, holds value and contributes to a greater whole.

### RESEARCH METHODS

The research paper describes in details the preparations of the scenario for the workshops and how the initial scenario has changed. Additionally, the paper incorporates personal observations and reflections, offering a firsthand perspective on the changes and developments observed throughout the workshops.

The decision to employ collage workshops as the primary research method for this paper emerges from its dual purpose: engaging participants in therapeutic activities and generating characters for my final project. A case study on the collage art therapy for immigrant youths shows that such form of art therapy can positively change emotional components in immigrant youths' art works, indicating potential positive adaptation.<sup>1</sup>

By immersing Ukrainian children, who have experienced the challenges of war and displacement, the collage workshops offer a safe space for them to explore and articulate their emotions, experiences, and aspirations. Through autobiographical elements, such as personal narratives and reflections shared during the workshops, I gained firsthand insights into the individual journeys and collective resilience of these children. The observational component of the research method allows to understand children's behavior, interactions,

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<sup>1</sup> Geummi WANG – Youngsoon KIM – Youngsub OH, "A Case Study on the Collage Art Therapy for Immigrant Youths," *Education and Information Technologies*, No. 24, 2018, pp. 1115–1129, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-018-9819-y>.

and responses within the workshop environment.

Additionally, our art sessions also aimed to introduce new activities for children in their displaced environment. For some participants, creating collages emerged as a newfound form of self-expression and an enjoyable pastime. This aspect of the project emphasized bringing joy to the children, offering them a relief from their challenges. It provided them with a source of happiness and a field for recharging, ensuring that whenever they felt the need, they could return to the collages.

In essence, the choice of collage workshops as the research method for this paper is grounded in its holistic approach to capturing the experiences of Ukrainian children affected by war and displacement. It integrates therapeutic intervention, participant observation, and artistic expression to construct a comprehensive narrative that honors the voices and resilience of these young survivors.

## **THE FINAL PROJECT**

The original concept for the final project was to compile all the stories gathered during the workshops into a book. However, as the project evolved, the collages initially intended for the book found their way onto canvases instead. Consequently, the book transformed into a zine, serving to offer a broader context for the installation.

Collage as a means of conveying emotions through art emerged in the 20th century, notably following World War I.<sup>2</sup> The Dada movement pushed artists into a new level of self-expression, characterized by its controversial yet logical nature. As Hanna M. K. noted, "They [The Dadaists] were for war when there was peace and for peace when there was war".<sup>3</sup> This sentiment resonates with our contemporary reality, where artists grapple with similar paradoxes. Themes explored by artists have shifted, with styles becoming more aggressive and techniques more diverse, reflecting on the challenging times we live in.

When creating a large collaged piece, gathering papers becomes a crucial part of the process. During workshops, I allowed both myself and the children to use any type of magazines. However, when assembling the final canvases, I carefully search for the perfect piece before gluing it down. Each canvas was prepared as if for oil painting – made a frame, stretched the canvases and glued them up. To make it more collage-friendly, I added a layer of monochrome newspapers for additional texture and background. I begin working on the canvases from the center of the composition, allowing me to adjust other parts to the main elements. The canvases will be installed with space between them, symbolizing the void that refugees seek to fill with new experiences. A red thread will link all the pieces together, serving as a symbolic representation of our shared story. The artwork also illustrates that our memories persist despite our efforts to move forward.

Many Ukrainians experienced a period of uncertainty after Russia's full-scale invasion. Artists, in particular, took a pause from their creative endeavors to regroup and reorganize.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Keith HANNA, *Dadaism: Its history and its influence*, Wyoming: University of Wyoming 1964.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2

Among them, Olga Lisowska stands out as a significant source of inspiration.<sup>4</sup> Like many others, she needed time to find calm amidst the chaos. Olga sharing her concerns about the war through her graphic works and actively participates in exhibitions to share her experiences on a global scale. Although her creations are primarily in the medium of graphics, they exude a collage-like atmosphere, which serves as a profound inspiration for my own canvases.

As mentioned in previous paragraphs, the canvases depict characters created by children during collage workshops. Among them are Elfina the Elf, longing to return home; Santa Claus, searching for his lost reindeer Rudolf; Pink Cat, eager to learn to read; Gosha the Spider, cast out from his home; Teddy Bear, a gift for a mother without a story; and The Grape Leaf, representing a child's choice against creating a living character.

There is one more character, distinct from those created by the children in the workshop: a small dinosaur named Isaak, created by me back in 2020. I even made a few comics about his life. Despite being considered an adult by societal standards in 2020, I still felt a strong connection to my childhood. Isaak symbolizes my memories of childhood – a time when life felt simpler and more carefree, even if I did not fully appreciate it at the time. This detail adds a touch of nostalgia to my work. Since my life became divided into "before" and "after" 24 February 2022, everything before that date is associated with the sweetness of cherished memories.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, the journey depicted through the collage workshops and subsequent artistic installations encapsulates the multifaceted experiences of refugees and the resilience of the human spirit. From the initial workshops where children found peace and self-expression amidst displacement to the final installation featuring a diverse array of characters, each canvas serves as a reflection of individual stories woven into a collective narrative of hope, loss, and resilience. The evolution of the project – from the initial concept of a book to the transformation into a zine and the inclusion of personal elements such as dinosaur Isaak – underscores the deeply personal nature of the artistic process. Through collages, workshops, and installation, this project not only provides a platform for expression but also serves as a testament to the enduring power of art to heal, connect, and transcend the boundaries of language and experience. As refugees navigate the complexities of their new lives, these artworks stand as a reminder that amidst endless challenges and uncertainty, there is beauty, strength, and resilience to be found.

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<sup>4</sup> Olga LISOWSKA, <https://www.instagram.com/olilisowska>

## IMAGE PART

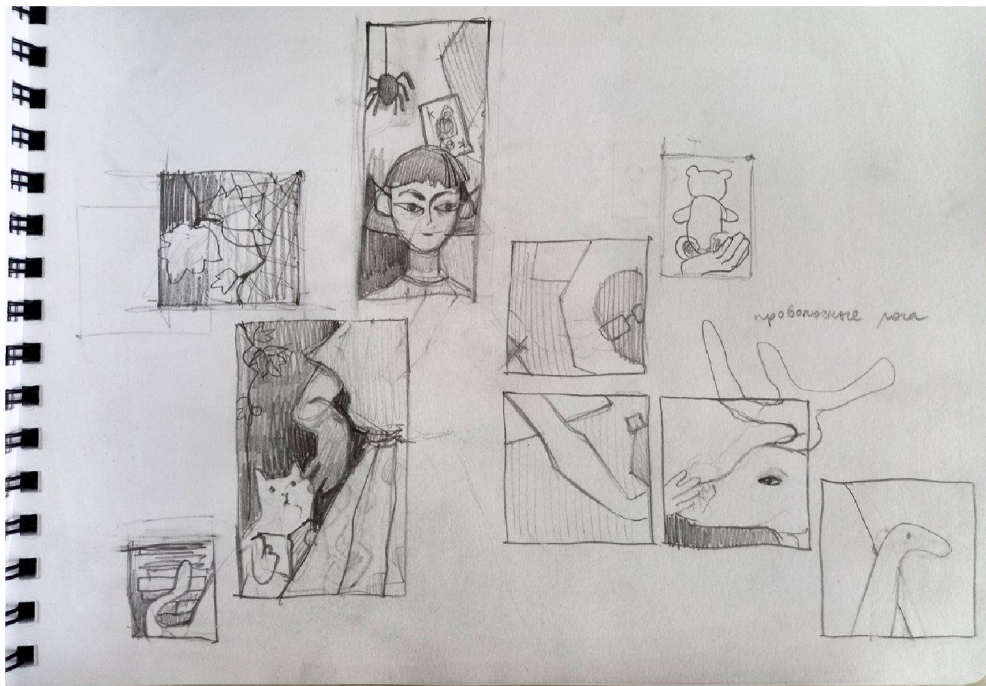


Fig. 1. Sketch of the composition for the installation



Fig. 2,3. Process of the central collaged canvases





Fig. 4. Process of the collaged canvas