

3. Building collective infrastructures and strategies of care at documenta fifteen

Hostility towards 'strangers' at documenta fifteen

'I was a stranger and you took me in'. So reads the inscription on the Nigerian American artist Olu Oguibe's 16.3-meter-high concrete obelisk *Das Flüchtlinge und Fremdlinge Monument* ('Monument for Strangers and Refugees') installed in Kassel's Königplatz square on the occasion of the mega-exhibition documenta 14, held in Kassel and Athens in 2017. This Biblical inscription (from the Book of Matthew 25:35) was written in gold on each of its four sides and in four different languages: German, English, Arabic and Turkish – the four languages most commonly spoken in Kassel. At the time, the monument was perceived by many to be both a call to action and a homage to German hospitality towards refugees. Communicating a pro-refugee message from the city's main square, the obelisk soon became controversial as it stirred up the deep divisions over the country's refugee policy. When the exhibition ended and the city of Kassel initiated a fundraising campaign to purchase the work so that it could remain in the city, politicians from the local branch of the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland ('Alternative for Germany') contested the acquisition. Oguibe's monument was vandalized in January 2018, purchased by the city in June 2018 and dismantled in October 2018 without the artist's consent. The dispute was finally resolved in 2019 when the monument was relocated and reinstalled in Treppenstraße (Petersen 2023, 154–156; Ross 2022, 280; Brown 2018, n.p.), a centrally located, pedestrian stairway leading past the building, which, in 2022, became Ruruhaus – the headquarters and social hub of documenta fifteen. From there it leads on to the Friedrichsplatz square where the main venues of Documenta are located: the Fridericianum, Documenta Halle and the square itself which Documenta uses as a key venue for art in public space as well as an open air service area with street food vendors catering for the thousands of daily visitors to this mega event. Christine Ross has drawn attention to the counter-monumentality of *Das Fremdlinge und Flüchtlinge Monument* and the way it disrupts the standard temporal codes of monuments as historical markers. Oguibe's obelisk does not so much commemorate the past as uses the past as a foil for the ongoing

urgency of the present, with thousands of refugees and migrants from Africa and central and western Asia arriving on Europe's doorstep every year. Its meaning thus fluctuates depending on changes to German and European border and migration policies (Ross 2022, 283). The obelisk's counter-monumentality is also palpable at the linguistic level, as the personal pronouns (*I, you and me*) are what linguists term 'shifters': placeholders whose referent is determined by the situational and relational context of their use, which means that the addresser and the addressee could be anyone. Intending the monument to be a homage to both refugees and the host community, Oguibe thus emphasized that welcoming strangers and refugees involves the development of a *reciprocal* relationship between guest and host, based on an interplay between hospitality towards and gratitude from strangers (Oguibe 2017, 0:40–2:00 min.).

Fig. 10: Olu Oguibe, Das Fremdlinge und Flüchtlinge Monument ('Monument for Strangers and Refugees'), 2017. Concrete, 3 × 3 × 16.3 metres. Shown here in its permanent location in Treppenstraße, Kassel. Photograph: Anne Ring Petersen.



When inaugurated in 2017, *Das Fremdlinge und Flüchtlinge Monument* was likely to be read in the context of the widespread hospitality of Germans welcoming refugees in 2015–2016. Apprehended in 2022, when documenta fifteen took place, the inscription could be read as a questioning of hosting practices in the period after the COVID-19 pandemic when the European border and migration regime had become more restrictive, and hospitality had been not exactly ‘waning’, as Ross posits (Ross 2022, 283), but was more unevenly distributed than before with the arrival of millions of forcibly displaced Ukrainians since the beginning of Russia’s military invasion in February 2022 – with some 7.9 million people finding refuge across Europe over the following ten months (UNHCR 2023, 4). As Ross perceptively observes, the gratitude expressed in the inscription ‘I was a stranger and you took me in’ twists into worry and questions such as ‘What and when is hosting? Who is hosting? Why and how to host?’ (Ross 2022, 283). The fact that Oguibe’s monumental reminder of the ethics of hospitality was originally commissioned for documenta 14 points to Documenta’s institutional role of hosting artists and artworks from near and far to stage an encounter with what is still unknown and strange, and sometimes even uncomfortable or disturbing to confront, at one of the world’s most influential contemporary art events.

While Chapter 2 examined the history and methods of Trampoline House, a welcoming community centre for asylum seekers and local citizens in Denmark with the art space CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics nested within it, Chapter 3 explores the extraordinary story of how this local Copenhagen-based community centre became a key participant in the fifteenth edition of Documenta, curated by the Indonesian collective ruangrupa. Trampoline House’s contribution to documenta fifteen in 2022 resonates with Oguibe’s obelisk, not only because of the shared commitment to an ethics of hospitality and social ‘inclusion’ of refugees but also because any analytical engagement with these thought-provoking projects must consider their institutional embedment. Like the monument, towering over the shops and restaurants lining Treppenstraße, Trampoline House engaged with refugeehood and the ambiguous relationship between guest and host – Derrida’s *hospitality* – thereby spotlighting the tensions between refugeehood and hosting. Moreover, being a community centre (albeit one that had operated in proximity to artistic and curatorial practices), Trampoline House did not fit Western definitions of art, but echoed, rather, the programmatic message on Daniella F. Praptono’s documenta fifteen poster at the entrance to the Fridericianum: ‘... this question (where is the art?) is really happening ...’. As the art historian Judith Elisabeth Weiss noted in her essay on documenta fifteen as a ‘collective artwork’, the question of where the art is, is an existential one in the socially, politically and economically deprived ‘global South’ where formal education is often lacking and the stuff of life is more important than aesthetics (J.E. Weiss 2022, 66–67). Trampoline House’s

contribution testified to the fact that this also holds true for asylum seekers and other deprived and marginalized groups in the 'global North'.

Although CAMP's founders, Kuratorisk Aktion, did not participate in the capacity of a curatorial team, both Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen were involved in curating documenta fifteen but at different levels of the organization. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Hansen became a member of ruangrupa's five-headed Artistic Team, with curatorial co-responsibility for the event and for extending invitations to individual artists, the so-called *lumbung* artists. Nielsen remained in her position as programme director for Trampoline House and co-coordinated its participation in documenta fifteen, together with an Artistic Team from the House.

The House itself had closed in 2020 due to financial difficulties but struggled on in a scaled-down version as Weekend Trampoline House (see Chapter 2). Throughout 2022, Weekend Trampoline House was given refuge on Fridays and Saturdays in the congregation rooms of the Absalon Church in the Copenhagen district of Vesterbro, which also hosted the preparatory workshops for documenta fifteen organized by Trampoline House's Artistic Team. Nielsen has explained the decision to participate in documenta fifteen despite the closure of the house thus: there might not be a house, but there was an 'ecosystem' and all the experience the community had harvested over the years, as well as methods and values that could be shared. Yet they faced an immense task. In the midst of mourning the loss of the house and seeing its supporting social structures fall apart, they 'had to start from scratch' and build a new infrastructure for Trampoline House's activities and for its Artistic Team to continue their work (Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022, 13:30–16:00 min.)

In addition to enabling them to continue their work, documenta fifteen offered Trampoline House's Artistic Team a platform for sharing their history, knowledge, methods and political critique. Chapter 3 follows up on the case study in Chapter 2 by examining how Trampoline House became part of documenta fifteen's huge transnational experiment in transversal politics and transformative collectivity and worldmaking. More specifically, the chapter analyses their contribution to the exhibition as well as Trampoline House's collaboration with one of the other participating collectives, Project Art Works from the UK, on further developing their creative strategies of care in workshops. Reviewing Trampoline House's presence at documenta fifteen also allows me to pursue, in a transnational context, the key question of how artistic and curatorial practices can make refugees and migrants come into appearance and claim 'voice', how they can contribute to an interrogation of exclusionary asylum policies and help transform understandings about who is a citizen and who belongs to the community. Chapter 3 will use an infrastructural lens to explore the question of how art institutional platforms and curating can help foster a transnationally interconnected epistemic community. To borrow two keywords from documenta fifteen's curatorial terminology, in this particular case the postmigrant epistemic community could be further characterized as *inter-lokal*

(inter-local) and based on the principle of *lumbung*, i.e. a form of worldmaking and community-building based on the collective sharing of resources and knowledge in solidarity.

Infrastructures of selection, redistribution and participation

As one of the 14 collectives invited by ruangrupa to develop the idea and practice of *lumbung* over the long haul, Trampoline House joined the circle of so-called *lumbung* members.¹ In the official documenta fifteen vocabulary, the transnational network constituted by these 14 collectively organized projects and organizations with roots in art was designated *Lumbung Inter-Lokal* ('Glossary', Asvestopoulos 2022, cover, n.p.). Both the *lumbung* members and the *lumbung* artists, i.e. the groups and individuals who were invited to share resources and make art together during documenta fifteen, were asked to extend the spirit of collectivity and institutional hospitality by inviting more guests, bringing the total number of participants close to 1500 – predominantly recruited from outside major cultural and economic centres, and mostly based in the so-called global South.

What was initially celebrated by some critics as a bold curatorial approach – handing over the responsibility for one of the world's most influential art exhibitions to an Indonesian collective that voluntarily relinquished control by introducing a procedure of snowball sampling that gave the *lumbung* members and *lumbung* artists curatorial co-responsibility for recruiting more participants from their networks – became an object of critique when documenta fifteen stirred up a rampant anti-Semitism controversy. This was largely due to the fact that the radical decentralization of responsibility resulted in the curatorial collective (ruangrupa and its Artistic Team) losing the overview of the countless individual works and contributions. The downside of the curatorial snowball approach raised deeper questions of the suitability (and lack of adaptability) of the infrastructures of major Euro-American art institutions and biennials confronted with curatorial and artistic practices that deviate from the familiar forms pivoting on the individual authorship (and responsibility) of the *auteur* curator and what art historian Karen van den Berg describes as 'the author-centred Western art star machinery'. As van den Berg observes, the infrastructures of the global artworld were 'inadequately

1 These were Britto Arts Trust, FAFSWAG, Fondation Festival Sur Le Niger, Gudskul, INLAND, Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt, Jatiwangi art Factory, Más Arte Más Acción, OFF-Biennale Budapest, Project Art Works, The Question of Funding, Trampoline House, Wajukuu Art Project, ZK/U – Center for Art and Urbanistics. See <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-network/> (accessed March 27, 2025).

prepared for the consequences and contradictions' that ruangrupa's 'rhizomatic, collective mode of production and presentation' entailed (K.v.d. Berg 2023, n.p.).

What held *documenta fifteen's* heterogeneous mix of people and practices together was the overarching idea of *lumbung*. Derived from an agrarian term for a communal rice barn in Bahasa, Indonesia, where farmers share harvest surplus and everyone contributes what they can spare, *lumbung* is a word that denotes both a material architectural structure and a social infrastructure: people as infrastructure. I take the phrase 'people as infrastructure' from the article of the same name by the urbanist AbdouMaliq Simone, who writes about economic collaboration between people living in the ruined inner city of Johannesburg. Based on a detailed ethnographic study, Simone demonstrates how residents of limited means have used their ability to engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons and practices in flexible ways to develop 'a highly urbanized social infrastructure' that introduces a kind of provisional regularity and establishes a 'platform providing for and reproducing life in the city'. In Simone's understanding, the city's infrastructure of people consists of these flexible and often mobile 'conjunctions' between people, objects, spaces and practices. There is much to suggest that *documenta fifteen* was designed to work in a similar way, i.e. as an infrastructure of people (Simone 2004, 407–408).

The curatorial studies scholar Ronald Kolb has argued that ruangrupa's practices and methods are 'commons-driven', as they prefer doing to contemplating and representing. This preference shifts 'the power of representation' away from the tendency of exhibitions to establish a certain understanding of the world through an 'objective' or object-based public display, and to a more performative and participatory mode of exhibition-making that foregrounds interpersonal exchange in enclosed contact zones. More than anything, ruangrupa operated simultaneously on several levels: regionally across Indonesia, locally in Kassel, and inter-locally in the sense that the invited collectives interacted with each other in 'Lumbung Inter-Lokal' (ruangrupa 2022a, 16). Kolb concludes that ruangrupa's approach to commoning practices depended on the establishment of 'a network of networks embedded through local practices in a trans-local network' on a scale 'unparalleled in the art field' and thus capable of not only challenging but also threatening the established exhibitionary complex (Kolb 2022, 61; see also 67). However, the scaling up of a resource infrastructure, and its practices of trust-building and sharing, from the scale of a small village community to a multi-sited transnational network also presented challenges. The extent to which the *lumbung* approach could operate effectively and sustainably when expanded to a global scale was openly addressed by ruangrupa. As they note in the *documenta fifteen Handbook*, the distance between the globally distributed localities of the *lumbung* members made it difficult to maintain trust among the collectives, the individual artists, the collaborators and

the organization of Documenta (ruangrupa 2022a, 40; Phillips 2022, 14–15; Kolb 2022, 57).

Ruangrupa used the word *lumbung* to refer to collective sharing as the very core of documenta fifteen, as well as to send a strong message to the world about the regeneration and redistribution of resources needed in times of climate breakdown. They explained that *lumbung* ‘becomes something that the community can access in times of scarcity, such as a climate catastrophe or famine. [...] We see *lumbung* as a principle of cooperation, based on generosity and empathy. Sustainability is only guaranteed if resources are continuously renewed and replenished’ (ruangrupa 2022b, 60; 2021, n.p.). During the summer of 2022, when Europe was struck by unprecedented heatwaves and what the Global Drought Observatory assessed was likely the worst drought on the continent in 500 years, the concept of *lumbung* should also be read as a wakeup call to European citizens, governments and industries.² At the same time, the evocation of an agricultural community tradition can also be related to ruangrupa’s home city Jakarta – today one of the world’s largest metropolitan areas, with 35 million inhabitants (as of 2021) and faced with serious environmental problems, including rapid urban growth, traffic and population congestion, with ecological breakdown and aggravating flooding. At 17 cm annually, Jakarta is one of the world’s fastest sinking capitals. In response to these challenges, the government has decided to move the capital from Jakarta on the island of Java to the planned city of Nusantara on Borneo. The curatorial studies scholar Dorothee Richter has thus suggested that ruangrupa’s reconnection with agrarian traditions could be seen as romanticizing, or even as an act of ‘self-othering’ (Richter 2022, 34; ‘Jakarta’, in ‘Wikipedia’).

In documenta fifteen, *lumbung* became a metaphor for social, political and artistic practices that work towards a just and sustainable collective economy based on solidarity and the sharing of resources, where resources are scarce or – at documenta fifteen – where resources had to be stretched to cater for an excessive number of participants. Such practices were already being developed by the collectives ruangrupa invited to become members of *Lumbung Inter-Lokal*. When accepting the invitation, the collectives committed to *lumbung*-building processes ‘before and beyond’ documenta fifteen. They also received a production budget of 180,000 Euro and 25,000 Euro paid up front as seed money and ‘as an acknowledgement of the years of work in the artists’ localities and a seal of our agreement to find translations of that work to Kassel in 2022. This translation in its turn is made in such a way that it becomes (re)generative for the work beyond documenta fifteen’ (ruangrupa 2022a, 21). For many *lumbung* members, the budget came at a time of financial precarity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it was

2 BBC News, ‘Europe’s drought the worst in 500 years – report’, August 23, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62648912> (accessed August 25, 2022).

the documenta fifteen budget that enabled Trampoline House's Artistic Team to continue their work, although the house itself had been forced to close in 2020 when the Danish funding dried up.

Trampoline House's story exemplifies how ruangrupa extended the definition of the (mega-) exhibition to include the preparatory collective processes and the potential long-term effects as 'an important part of documenta fifteen' (ruangrupa 2022a, 9). The envisioned outcomes were, firstly, that the participants' contributions to documenta fifteen and whatever they had 'harvested' from the exchange with other collectives and individuals would 'cycle back' to each of the local contexts or ecosystems; and secondly, that the numerous local reverberations of this (re)generative circular process and redistribution of resources would transform the ecosystem of the artworld by 'sowing seeds for more changes in the future'. In doing so, documenta fifteen would ideally proliferate alternatives to the art market, and to object-based museum collections and artworks as 'mere individual expression' (ruangrupa 2022a, 16–17, 30). Weekend Trampoline House (see Chapter 2) is an important example of how documenta fifteen's cyclic and prefigurative principles governed the invited collectives' work, and how the redistribution of funds for the realization of documenta fifteen – or, *lambung one* in ruangrupa's terminology – enabled a precarious collective to evolve and persist beyond the closure of the art exhibition.

This brief description of the infrastructure of selection and financial redistribution suggests that the concept of *lambung* served not only as a generative concept but also as 'the operating system' for the 'ekosistem' (the social network of participants), as the whole organizational logic was derived from this concept. It also indicates that ruangrupa's curatorial approach scaled up the friends-cum-cultural-organizers model that they themselves represent (ruangrupa 2022a, 12). Founded in 2000 as a non-hierarchical collective, their practice encompasses many types of social and cultural activity, including self-organizing, sharing ideas and resources, as well as exchanging services and socializing activity such as eating, hanging out and singing together. In 2018, they established their present Jakarta headquarters, Gudskul, together with two other collectives, Serrum and Grafis Huru Hara. This is a multipurpose place and not-for-profit work model that serves as a platform for education, sharing, self-organization and 'collective-practice simulations', but also as an exhibition and studio space, as well as a clubhouse and informal meeting place that brings people together to talk over meals and for karaoke and 'loose assemblies' (Nguyen 2022, n.p.; ruangrupa 2021, n.p.). At documenta fifteen, ruangrupa introduced a whole terminology to support the building of new infrastructures and *lambung* practices and provide the language needed to describe them: *meydan*, for example, means 'public space' in Turkish and Arabic and designates accessible common spaces free of charge; while *nongkrong* – an Indonesian word for getting together to hang out and spend time together (with

friends) – suggests that visitors and participants should take an unconventional approach when visiting documenta. Instead of dedicating themselves to individual contemplation of objects, visitors should prioritize ‘decelerated togetherness’ and linger in the ‘hangout zones’, community gardens and waterfront spaces constructed for the event. As Karen van den Berg observes, ruangrupa’s insistence on activating a whole terminology alien to the Western artworld indicates that ruangrupa’s documenta followed ‘an episteme of its own’ (K.v.d. Berg 2023, n.p.).

How this episteme shaped their practice was particularly apparent at the key venue, the Fridericianum. Here, ruangrupa replicated their headquarters to give visitors a taste of how they work and as a model example of how many of the collective presentations at documenta fifteen were designed as a window onto the different local practices. Lastly, but importantly, by replicating Gudskul – and renaming the museum Fridskul (Fridericianum as school) (Asvestopoulos 2022, 12) – ruangrupa publicly marked their position and integrity. As they explained in the documenta fifteen guidebook: ‘instead of integrating ourselves into the long-established documenta system, we decided to stay on our path. We invited documenta back, asking it to be part of *our* journey.’ In doing so, the guest became the host, the master of the ‘house’ (cf. the architectural metaphor of documenta fifteen as a community rice barn) or the ‘acceptor’ who receives, makes welcome and by whose rules (of what and where art is) the institution Documenta, i.e. the guest, has to abide. A reversal thus took place: the host was invited by the other into their home (Derrida 2000, 9).

Ruangrupa’s hospitality and welcoming of participants was by no means unconditional. For documenta fifteen, the art collective laid out seven ‘rules’ or ‘lumbung values’, replicating principles central to their own practice: local anchoring, humour, generosity, independence, transparency, sufficiency and regeneration. The idea (and ideal) was that the contributors should not produce new works *for* documenta but use, rather, the long preparation phase to ask themselves how the lumbung values could be aligned with or ‘translated’ into their local practices and subsequently translated to the exhibition sites in Kassel. Here, the inter-lokal members and lumbung artists would finally become ‘neighbours for a hundred days’, approximating a globalized village community (ruangrupa 2022a, 34, 39).

Differentiated participation in documenta fifteen

In many ways, documenta fifteen epitomized the participatory turn in the arts, as all the invited groups were guaranteed some degree of interaction and collaboration with others. But what about the participation of the visitors? Much was done to engage children, especially in Fridskul/Fridericianum, where the Brazilian educationalist Graziela Kunsch had designed a nursery environment for children and parents, and where Rurukids could also be found – an open-door space where

children could play, relax, read books, watch films and participate in creativity workshops with some of the lumbung artists. Adult visitors often had to assume the rather traditional role of the perambulating viewer, an observer of (video) documentation of other people's collaborative processes and projects which had unfolded at another time and in another place. The occasional conversation with artists who were present in the exhibition mostly took place 'on the educational level', as the author and cultural journalist Max Glauner remarked in a discussion of the participatory aspect of documenta fifteen's collaborative art productions. His observation gives credence to Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson's claim that the participatory turn works in tandem with an educational turn, or a curatorialization of education that increasingly frames research, knowledge production and informal educative processes as artistic events and practices, sometimes even as the main event (O'Neill and Wilson 2010, 12–13). Although visitors were offered a range of 'interactive participation', these were often limited in scope and characterized by 'pedagogical distance', noted Glauner. Visitors were offered opportunities to, for example, drink tea in a Bedouin tent, write a comment on a Post-it or play a board game in Gudskul, and they could 'hum along' when watching one of the many video and audio works featuring songs. However, such activities did not achieve what Glauner calls 'lumbung parity' (Glauner 2022, 96–97; see also Schmidt 2024).

For the producers, participation was a quite different matter. The lumbung members were asked to engage in explorative 'inter-lokal' collaboration with other lumbung members on specific projects and to share programme, space and equipment (i.e. infrastructures), as well as encouraged to exchange knowledge and knowhow with one another to enrich their own practice, and to co-produce new knowledge. Major outcomes of this approach were lumbung.space, a digital platform and archive interconnecting the participants, and Lumbung Press, an offset printing workshop stationed in documenta Halle to realize artistic printing projects from well before the opening and throughout the exhibition period. For example, Lumbung Press printed a special issue on Trampoline House's contribution, published by the Copenhagen-based magazine *visAvis*, which seeks to improve the debate on asylum and migration, among other things, by publishing texts by people seeking asylum (Germa et al. 2022). Trampoline House's workshops with the British collective Project Art Works are among these 'inter-lokal' collaborations (of which, more below).³

As many commentators have noted, documenta fifteen was the first Documenta to be curated by artists/curators based in the so-called global South. In this edition of the mega-event, contemporary art and curating served, then, as a lens on contemporaneous shifts in the relations between hemispheric 'world cultures'. As the 100-day exhibition period of the quinquennial progressed, it became increasingly

3 <https://lumbung.space/> (accessed August 23, 2025).

evident that the cultural encounter between the South/ruangrupa and the North/the institution Documenta was tremendously generative, but it also ignited an unfortunate and explosive political and media controversy, which largely shifted the public's attention away from the prefigurative action undertaken by the participants collectively to a storm of accusations of anti-Semitism that turned documenta fifteen into 'the year's most contentious exhibition' (Greenberger 2022, n.p.).

Already before the opening, the atmosphere had become increasingly tense, but the real catalyst for the excessive outrage and increasingly politicized and toxic debate was the Indonesian collective Taring Padi's monumental painting *People's Justice* (2002), featuring two anti-Semitic caricatures of Jews among the dense mass of figures that filled the picture space. *People's Justice* was spectacularly displayed as the *point de vue* of Kassel's Friedrichsplatz, a centrally located public square and one of Documenta's most prominent venues, thus confirming the common observation that art in public space is especially prone to agitate people. As soon as the piece went up, close-ups of the two caricatures of Jews began to circulate on social media and in the German press, generating a huge outcry. Although the painting was removed after just a few days, ruangrupa was subjected to critical scrutiny after allegations that their curatorial process had opened the gates for anti-Jewish racism in the form of anti-Semitic imagery and the exclusion of Israeli Jewish artists. This fierce criticism was not only put forward in public debate but also by Jewish organizations in Germany and the US, as well as at the highest political level.⁴ Only days after the piece was dismantled, Germany's culture minister Claudia Roth proposed a five-point plan for how Documenta should change behind the scenes as a 'prerequisite for future federal funding'. Others called for more governmental control of Documenta, with Boris Rhein, the Prime Minister of the state of Hesse, where Kassel is located, demanding an investigation into the show. Predictably, the anti-Semitism allegations were also instrumentalized for right-wing politics, as the Jewish organization Casa do Povo in São Paulo, Brazil, pointed out when they denounced the rumour that they had been disinvited from documenta fifteen (Casa do Povo 2022). As the pressure grew over the following month, the director of Documenta, Sabine Schormann, mutually agreed with the board to resign, mid-way through the 100-day exhibition period.⁵ A side-effect of the disproportionately

4 Judith Elisabeth Weiss has explained, with reference to Germany's Nazi past and the genocide of the Jews, that 'the mural had to be taken down because it hurt the feelings of the Jewish victims in a country of perpetrators. The prohibition of anti-Semitic stereotypes in Germany is constitutionally regulated with the political-moral obligation of "never again" (J.E. Weiss 2022)

5 Two separate anti-Semitism controversies surrounded documenta fifteen. One centred on Taring Padi's *People's Justice* and its anti-Semitic imagery, the other centred on the inclusion of a Palestinian collective and the suspicion that Jewish and Israeli artists had been deliberately excluded from the show. Already in January 2022, i.e. prior to the opening and the controversy

one-sided focus on anti-Semitism was that other types of racist reactions, threats and hostility related to documenta fifteen (especially against ruangrupa and the Palestinian participants) were virtually sidelined, as was every other aspect of the collectivist work and spirit of sharing that characterized the event.⁶ In effect, the debate about an exhibition that featured thousands of objects and contributions by approximately 1500 participants basically revolved around only a handful of works and the anti-Israeli BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign) affiliation of a few of the participants.

The strong reactions can partly be explained by the political and historical contexts. The first Documenta was organized by Arnold Bode in 1955 in part as an attempt to move out of the shadows cast by the Nazi regime and the Holocaust and to bring Germany up to speed with the modern art that the Nazis had deemed 'degenerate'. In the years leading up to documenta fifteen, however, crimes motivated by anti-Semitism had increased significantly. Therefore, anything shown at the exhibition in Kassel would set itself in relation to the Holocaust as a crime against humanity and Germany's anti-Semitism policy (Richter 2022, 39). Although there were some grounds for criticism of the anti-Semitic elements in documenta fifteen, there is much to suggest that the event unwittingly became collateral damage in Germany's memory wars over the Holocaust and its Nazi history (ruangrupa and lumbung community 2022b). My approach is thus in line with Karen van den Berg's analysis and proposition that, in the aftermath of documenta fifteen, critical attention should not centre on any anti-Semitism, but on the contribution that this edition of Documenta made to 'the development of an alternative operating system for the arts' (K.v.d. Berg 2023, n.p.).

The omission of Jewish Israeli artists is reflective of a general problem of ruangrupa's model of membership and political alignment: despite the inter-local connectedness and trans-local alliances it engendered, it also produced exclusions

over *People's Justice*, activist groups in Germany criticized ruangrupa and their artistic team for including the Palestinian collective, The Question of Funding, who were perceived as 'anti-Israeli activists'. For a detailed English-language outline of this protracted controversy, see Greenberger 2022, dated 23 June. Claudia Roth's proposal for a five-point plan was made public at <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/bundeskanzleramt/staatsministerin-fuer-kultur-und-medien/roth-menschenwuerde-unverrueckbar--2055528> (accessed August 8, 2022, no longer online). For anti-Semitism as a form of racism, see Berenbaum 2022.

- 6 The one-sided criticism provoked ruangrupa, the artists and the artistic team of documenta fifteen to publish the letter they had sent to the members of Documenta's supervisory board in the internationally circulated newsletter *e-flux*, with an appeal to the international press and public to support them in their refusal of Documenta's alleged censorship of works. The signatories also complained that artists and members had experienced 'structural racism and neglect', e.g. in connection with obtaining visas and accommodation in Kassel. See ruangrupa and lumbung community 2022a.

of its own. Yet, it is important to observe that ruangrupa's preference for small-to-medium 'cellular organisms' – which was reflected in their introduction of Lumbung Inter-Lokal, as well as assemblies or 'mini-majelis' of four to five collectives and individual artists organized according to time zones (dictated by the need to meet online during the COVID-19 pandemic) – also served a generative purpose (ruangrupa 2022a, 32, 40). Such infrastructures evoke the curator and art historian Minh Nguyen's perceptive observation that its curatorial framework was set up to explore networks of relations as alternative paths for intimacy, support and allyship, with an emphasis on collectivity and friendship:

Friendship-as-praxis is tricky: it's subjective, exclusionary by nature, and, in some cases, a veil for nepotism. But participants in this Documenta – predominantly from outside major cultural and economic centers—are less cliques based on inter-generational wealth or MFA cohorts, and more groups that have long collaborated without funding or fanfare. They have convened to address specific local needs by creating social organizations where they were absent. (Nguyen 2022, n.p.)

Reflecting on the commonly overlooked connection between art and friendship, cultural theorist Nikos Papastergiadis has emphasized the significance of friendship in creative production and critical evaluation. His observation that some art projects, such as Thomas Hirschhorn's collaborative projects, 'can only come to be if there is friendship' hits the spot with regard to documenta fifteen's politics of lumbung (Papastergiadis 2020, 15). Friendship, explains Papastergiadis, offers an alternative way of thinking about the relations, processes and commitment that shape the field in which art and ideas are generated: 'Friendship thrives in circumstances where there is familiarity or convergences of interest, creating an opportunity to bond, and may be aligned with the experience of solidarity. However, we are also aware that friendship requires a sharpness and vitality that is not always compatible with the fuzzy feeling of union.' (Papastergiadis 2020, 21)

Trampoline House at documenta fifteen

Following the invitation to join Lumbung Inter-Lokal, Trampoline House invited 'members and friends of the house to form an Artistic Team, responsible for participating in the lumbung meetings and for developing lumbung collaborations and projects for the exhibition'.⁷ Recapitulating Oliver Marchart's distinction, it could

7 Quoted from the website of Trampoline House, 'documenta fifteen', <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/events/2022/6/10/documenta> (accessed March 28, 2025). The Trampoline House's Artistic Team were: Carlota Mir, Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali, Fedaa Sultan (from Oct. 2020–Dec. 2021), Helene Grøn, Jean Claude Mangomba, Joachim Hamou, Khalid Albaih,

be said that when Trampoline House became part of documenta fifteen, it entered a powerful established institution, thereby shifting its position from activist art to a critical form of art that operates from within the institution (Marchart 2019, 26).

Videos, writings and workshops were an important part of the infrastructure of Trampoline House's participation in documenta fifteen and their attempt to bring their community's calls for change to Kassel. Beginning in January 2022, the team members hosted different workshops in Weekend Trampoline House in Copenhagen and, later, in Trampoline House's installation at Hübner Areal in Kassel and other documenta fifteen venues. Several workshops centred on producing testimonies of refugee experience and the living conditions in the Danish asylum, deportation and integration systems. Thus, an early workshop with pupils in Copenhagen engaging with asylum laws and asylum centre regulations was documented in the thought-provoking video *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary*, subsequently shown in the installation area in Kassel alongside a video introduction to Trampoline House.

The human rights activist and poet Jean Claude Mangomba facilitated a creative writing workshop about the criminalization of asylum seekers in a discriminatory legal system, and in the spring of 2022 the artist and co-founder of Trampoline House, Joachim Hamou, initiated a string of puppet workshops in Weekend Trampoline House and in Danish deportation centres. The idea was to enable some of the Trampoline House users, who were not allowed to travel and had been stripped of their identity cards and right to mobility in the Danish asylum system, to represent themselves and have a kind of ghostly presence in Trampoline House's exhibition in Kassel. A concluding workshop was also held in Kassel itself, in which adults and children made masks of the participants.⁸

Furthermore, Trampoline House's Artistic Team made an intervention into two of Kassel's public spaces. Khalid Albaih used the pedestrian underpass under the busy traffic circle Platz der Deutschen Einheit (the Square of German Unity) for the sound installation *The Walls Have Ears*, which amplified the unheard voices and testimonies of asylum seekers in Denmark and filled the passageway with the murmur of voices, as if a multitude of people were moving through it (Kunstforum International 2022, 250). Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali gave visibility to the life and suffering of refugees in the fashion show performance *In a Closed World – Visible and Invisible Walls*, in which he used the Treppenstraße as a catwalk for models presenting 40 outfits from his political fashion show performance *If the Sea Could Talk*, a

Morten Goll, Muhannad Al Ulaby, Sara Alberani, Shakira Kasigwa Mukamusoni, Tone Olaf Nielsen, visAvis and Yong Sun Gullach (from Oct. 2020–Dec. 2021).

8 For an overview of the events and exhibits contributed by Trampoline House's Artistic Team, see <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/events/2022/6/10/documenta> (accessed March 28, 2025).

tribute to the thousands of migrants and refugees who have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, or died elsewhere, on their journey towards safety.⁹ As explained in Chapter 2, this performance had previously been staged in 2015 inside a densely packed Trampoline House to mark the opening of the art space CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics. In Kassel, the performance was re-enacted in public space, accompanied by a poet-singer and a dancer giving voice and bodily expression to the suffering of refugees. And all the while Oguibe's towering *Das Flüchtlinge und Fremdlinge Monument* was watching over the disquieting spectacle on the pedestrian street, evoking the hope of hospitality and of being embraced by a local community: 'I was a stranger and you took me in.'¹⁰

Indoors, at Hübner Areal, three of Mwicira-Mitali's outfits served as the eye catcher of Trampoline House's installation *Castle in Kassel*. Mwicira-Mitali had incorporated them into a collaborative work with Joachin Hamou, *Silenced Bodies – Loud Images*, in which the extraordinary dresses sewn out of rice bags from United Nations refugee camps, sisal, bast, and other materials, were displayed on mannequins balancing precariously on a makeshift platform evoking a raft. The dresses were crowned by masks – imprints and self-representations of asylum-seeking members of Trampoline House who could not leave Denmark. Because Danish asylum legislation prohibits asylum seekers from leaving the country while their case is pending – and only permits rejected asylum seekers to travel back to the country they fled from – many of the people who contributed to the project for documenta fifteen could not travel to Kassel with the Artistic Team for the opening.¹¹ Thus, the masks were also critical reminders of the unequal access to the privilege of transnational and cross-border mobility. In the artworld, the difficulties with obtaining visas encountered by artists with a background of forced displacement hamper the careers of many artists – and it continues after they have been granted refugee status but not (yet) citizenship. Like goods, their works usually travel easily across the national borders the artists themselves cannot cross. Thus, the reception of their work is affected by the inability of the artist to be present and speak about their work in person.¹²

9 For a video of *In a Closed World – Visible and Invisible Walls* made in collaboration with documenta archiv, see YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vD_7fqvPrRA (accessed April 1, 2025).

10 The fashion show was held on July 15, 2022. See <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/calendar/in-a-closed-world-visible-and-invisible-walls/> (accessed April 1, 2025).

11 See Trampoline House's programme for documenta fifteen at <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/events/2022/6/10/documenta> (accessed April 1, 2025).

12 For an analysis of how legal constrictions and visa costs in the UK, along with intersectional barriers in the artworld in general, affect artists with an asylum seeker or refugee background, see Chapter 2 in Carden-Coyne et al. 2026.

Fig. 11: Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali and Joachim Hamou, Silenced bodies – loud images, mixed media installation at Hübner Areal, documenta fifteen, Kassel, 2022. 360 x 360 x 300 cm. Photo: Tone Olaf Nielsen. Courtesy: The Trampoline House Archive.



The three ‘Silenced Bodies’ were stranded right outside a circle of chalk drawn on the floor to mark the penetrable boundaries of *Castle in Kassel’s* territory. The installation was designed by Morten Goll and Joachim Hamou, and was equipped with sofas, carpets, lamps, potted plants, tables and chairs to conjure up the community centre’s relaxed everyday atmosphere and sociability. Except for a string of eight performances and workshops led by members of Trampoline House’s Artistic Team, the Copenhagen micro-community only had a mediated presence on three flat-panel TV screens. In other words, the transition to Documenta also transformed and translated Trampoline House into a representational mode of exhibition making. What

visitors would encounter on most days of the exhibition period was a representation of Trampoline House. Yet, it was a representation designed to convey the impression of a buzzing activist community and thus very different from the 'archival' presentations of participants such as Asia Art Archive and The Black Archives which were shown in the Fridericianum, and displays of artefacts in cultural history museums in general.

In *Castle in Kassel*, visitors could sit down to watch members of Trampoline House 'appearing' in affecting video testimonials to life in Danish camps for asylum seekers and the mitigating and life-saving work of the community centre. In *The Chain*, directed by Shakira Kasigwa Mukamasoni, a visit to Avnstrup (a centre for families who have not been granted asylum and for those who have had their residency permit revoked) gives some insight into the living conditions experienced by asylum seekers. After the opening shot from a demonstration against deportations, Mukamasoni appears and explains that 'the chain' is about the people who have been living for many years in camps, where they are not allowed to work and earn their own money and are infantilized by the camp system's control of their movements and everyday life. As one of the interviewees remarks: 'The camp is like a prison.'¹³ The video is composed of brief interviews giving 'voice' to people in Avnstrup. The most moving and thought-provoking stories are those of the young teenage interviewees who have lived in different camps for periods of between five and seven years. Their stories of how they have spent half of their childhood confirm that families spend years in camps like Avnstrup, and they are moved around between different parts of Denmark, so the children must change schools frequently and are deprived of the possibility of building lasting childhood friendships as well as losing the ability to envision a future for themselves during the debilitating long period of waiting. These conditions can be seen as a specific, inhumane variant of the 'postmigrant' condition of asylum seekers, theorized in Chapter 5 as a condition of 'waithood' and generating a peculiar form of postmigrant subjectivity.

Documenta fifteen's general thematic of translation between different places, people and spheres was interpreted in a thought-provoking way in a video directed by Morten Goll, a member of the Artistic Team and general director of Trampoline House at the time.¹⁴ *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary* cross-cuts between two

13 Trampoline House, *The Chain*, 2022; concept and direction by Shakira Kasigwa Mukamasoni. It has not been possible to obtain information on Mukamasoni's production crew.

14 Trampoline House, *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary*, 2022. Concept and direction: Morten Goll; camera: Joachim Hamou and Muhannad Al Ulaby; editing: Joachim Hamou; production assistant: Malak Saidi; cast: Hannah Doensig Bernstein, Negin Gholami, Taufiki Habyarimana, Anna Luka Østergaard-Kröll, Navid Nazaryan, Benjamin Rahmanifar and Malak Saidi.

different locations. One is a living room in which a mixed group of teenagers are gathered around a table, discussing in Danish which key words best capture their experience of the Danish asylum system. It transpires that they have all lived in, or are still living in, asylum centres in Denmark. Their discussion is cross-cut with a classroom where two German-speaking female teenagers read the translated definitions of the selected words aloud, as if they were reading from a regular school textbook on ordinary matters and not a text about the experience of children living marginalized lives under conditions radically different from those of their Danish peers. This is suggested by the words they select: phase one, two and three (of the process of seeking asylum), registration, interviews (with immigration service and the police), pocket money, curfew (home no later than 10 pm), meals at fixed times (e.g. breakfast at 7–8am, even when pupils have to leave for school earlier) – and not forgetting ‘red class’: the practice of sending child asylum seekers to classes for children with special needs, so that they develop a learning deficit that is difficult to overcome once they are sent to a public school.

Fig. 12: Trampoline House, Castle in Kassel, mixed media installation at Hübner Areal, documenta fifteen, Kassel, 2022. Dimensions variable. Photo: Morten Goll. Courtesy: The Trampoline House Archive.



Fig. 13: Trampoline House, *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary*, 2022. Still image from the video directed by Morten Goll. Shown as an integral part of the installation *Castle* in Kassel at Hübner Areal, *documenta fifteen*, Kassel, 2022. Courtesy: Morten Goll and The Trampoline House Archive.



The audience is confronted with the gap between the relative freedom of the 'ordinary' classroom, with the two German-speaking pupils, and the constrictions experienced by children in asylum centres at the moment when the camera cross-cuts from the classroom back to the group when they are deciding to define the asylum centre as a prison. The reason for this definition is given 'in translation', as the camera returns to the classroom where their explanation is read aloud in German. The children with camp experience feel that they are treated with suspicion, as if they were 'inmates', although the only 'crime' they are guilty of and the only thing that distinguishes them from their Danish peers is that they have applied for asylum in another country than where they were born. Despite the 'factual' style of the video and the staged reading of the 'dictionary', *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary* is profoundly moving because it exposes how the asylum system prevents children and youth from living a normal childhood, and that the system is designed to suppress and control.

Although the video for *documenta fifteen* focused on a local context, the translational approach indicated that the conditions described by the children were not unique to Denmark but were, rather, reflective of *campization* – a term introduced by the urban researcher René Kreichauf to describe the camplike accommodation infrastructures that have been expanded throughout the EU (see the Introduction). These accommodations operate as sites of management of people-on-the-move as they 'temporarily halt the movement of refugees and delineate a space that separates

them from the outside world' (Ross 2022, 84). According to Kreichauf's analysis, campization is achieved by measures of differentiation – including demarcation (the separation of 'migrants' from the local population); containment (as a camp encloses its residents, it also makes them visible as strangers and potential criminals in ways that amplify processes of racialization and stigmatization); legal exceptionality (the governmental and legal frameworks of the camps differ from those applied to citizens, as is evident from *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary*); and temporariness (the camp is a place of 'permanent temporariness' as the resident's length of stay is unknown and may last for years). Lastly, but importantly, campization entails problematized protection (residents generally state how these accommodations give them a sense of being protected, but this highly controlled protection also limits their autonomy) (Kreichauf 2018, 4 and 16; see also Ross 2022, 92). Here, Kreichauf builds on a 2016 study of Palestinians in Danish camps by Anja Kublitz, who concludes: '[U]nlike the spectacular catastrophe in Lebanon during the civil war of killing and being killed, life in the Danish camps is characterized by minor mundane catastrophes, infinite un-becomings that slowly erode the lives of my interlocutors.' (Kublitz 2016, 246).

The translational approach of *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary* reflected the fact that 'translation' was a key theme in Trampoline House's exhibition. Here, visitors could also flick through the visitors' book, a medium of written communication. Like the video, the book's introductory remark pointed to the significance of language and translation to Trampoline House's acts of hospitality: 'The official language of Trampoline House is English, because we want to show that inside these walls, inside this circle, the Danes are guests in the language too. We host each other by translation, by democratic process, by everyone being guests and everyone being hosts.'¹⁵

Quotes from poems and books reflecting on the experience of exclusion engendered by the Danish asylum system were inserted into the visitors' book, with an invitation to visitors to write comments on these testimonies on the blank pages. Attentive to the fact that Trampoline House's installation was created in the immediate aftermath of the influx into Europe of millions of displaced Ukrainians, following Russia's escalated military intervention on 24 February 2022, one comment in particular accentuated the continued need for Trampoline House's work with people who have fled their country: 'Prompt: Where is home? Ukraine. Being bombed every second. My heart is bleeding. For all humanity. Masha 2022. Hopeful.'¹⁶

15 The author's field notes from a visit to documenta fifteen on June 21, 2022. The visitors' book was created by Jean Claude Mangomba and Helene Grøn of Trampoline House's Artistic Team; the pair also facilitated some of the workshops.

16 The author's field notes from a visit to documenta fifteen on June 21, 2022.

Adjacent to the encircled space was a site-specific installation entitled *The Wall*: a whole wall with infographics mapping the increasingly rejective nature of Danish asylum policies under a title that evoked the many walls and fences built at borders around the world to keep unwanted refugees and migrants out of national territories. *The Wall* thus provided a critical explanatory context for the *Castle in Kassel*. Integrated into the long text painted directly on the wall of Hübner Areal were digital screens displaying Muhannad Al Ulaby's 'The Gif Collection' – a collection of animated loops conveying a narrative through a few frames and utilizing cartoons, photography and the shapes and red and white colours of the Danish flag to convey the national context.¹⁷ The use of the personal pronoun 'you' in the wall text ensured that the intention of nudging visitors to identify and empathize with asylum seekers would be difficult to miss: 'This is what you are facing when seeking asylum in Denmark... You must be accommodated in an asylum center located far from the city centers to keep you from integrating into society... If you are rejected, you lose the right to pocket money and unpaid internships, must move to a deportation center where you are not allowed to cook your own food, and must report daily to camp authorities.'

The 'aggressive humanism' of the mural's description of the asylum system formed a stark contrast to and gloomy backdrop for the 'caring humanism' pervading Trampoline House's installation *Castle in Kassel* and their workshops. It also indicated that, for Trampoline House's Artistic Team, participation in documenta fifteen was not about the prestige associated with the art event but more about its communicative power as a showcase that could potentially attract worldwide attention to the suffering of asylum seekers in the Danish system. As noted by Morten Goll, 'It is the biggest megaphone we can get' (Morten Goll, quoted in Kryger 2022).

Creative collaborative strategies of care

Also included in Trampoline House's exhibition was the iconic name sign that used to decorate its central room, as well as children's drawings, protest signs from pro-asylum demonstrations and, importantly, a group of photographic portraits of people from the house. These eerie monochrome portraits were either based on the negatives or covered by a semi-transparent veil of blue tint, evoking a ghostly sense of presence that underscored the absence of the community body on site. The portraits were grouped on the wall so that they encircled and symbolically embraced a drawing depicting a circular diagram onto which institutions and

17 As indicated by the exhibition wall texts by Trampoline House's Artistic Team, *The Wall* was a collaborative work comprising contributions by Muhannad Al Ulaby, Morten Goll, Joachim Hamou, Claude Mangomba, Khaled Albaih and Olga Alexandrovna Thieme.

actors vital to the presumably asylum-seeking creator's life in Denmark had been mapped. The creator's home marked the centre of the diagram. In the circles around it were a hospital, a job contact, a park, cars, and most conspicuously, Trampoline House, adorned with a smiley and the attribute 'help'. In the exhibition, this visualization of a lifeworld or individual cosmos attested to art's capacity for facilitating worldmaking as well as an analytical understanding of how anyone who is situated in society is simultaneously situated within a web of relations.

This small drawing was intricately linked to two large-scale collaborative drawings based on similar circle diagrams. All the drawings or 'cosmologies of care' had resulted from Trampoline House's collaboration with one of the other lumbung members, Project Art Works, on a series of joint workshops entitled 'Massaging the Asylum System and Creative Strategies of Care'. It was co-curated by Sara Alberani, Carlota Mir and Tone Olaf Nielsen, in collaboration with Kate Adams of Project Art Works, and comprised workshops in different localities. The three drawings on display had resulted from the first workshop for people in the Danish asylum system with a connection to Trampoline House. It was held in Weekend Trampoline House in Copenhagen on May 20–22, 2022, prior to the opening of documenta fifteen and was based on 'cosmologies of care' – a method of activism, discourse and facilitation developed by Kate Adams when Project Art Works was one of five artist collectives nominated for the 2021 Turner Prize, and part of Project Art Work's contribution to documenta fifteen.¹⁸ The knowledge on which the drawings were based came from the people of the House, while Kate Adams used her experience with the cosmology method and her knowledge of health systems of care and control to facilitate the development of the drawings, as well as initiating a conversation on what the participants understood 'freedom' to be.¹⁹ The workshop series as a

18 This paragraph draws on the text in the exhibition space describing the aim and process of the workshop to visitors, as well as the workshop description in documenta fifteen's calendar of events, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/calendar/massaging-the-asylum-system-and-creative-strategies-of-care-a-workshop-by-project-art-works-and-trampoline-house/> (accessed March 28, 2025). The first workshop in Weekend Trampoline House was curated by Carlota Mir and Sara Alberani, both members of Trampoline House's Artistic Team, with Tone Olaf Nielsen and Kate Adams also involved (Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022). The collaboration was supported by the Italian Council (2022), Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity, Italian Ministry of Culture. See the announcement of the concluding workshop: <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/calendar/massaging-the-asylum-system-and-creative-strategies-of-care-a-workshop-by-project-art-works-and-trampoline-house/> (accessed March 28, 2025).

19 In a short video from the workshop by Muhannad Al Ulaby entitled *Massaging the Asylum System – A Collective Exploration*, Kani, the woman who made the small drawing mentioned above, is seen presenting her drawing. There are also clips showing Kate Adams facilitating the process of drawing and the dialogue on freedom. Apparently, the video is no longer online.

whole aimed to experiment with practices of care and develop critical perspectives on (social) care, as well as producing testimonies of refugee experience with the Danish asylum, deportation and integration systems.

Project Art Works is a collective of about a hundred neurodiverse artists, activists, caregivers (including family members), facilitators and staff, founded in Hastings, UK, in 1997 by the artist and activist Kate Adams and the painter Jonathan Cole. Like Trampoline House, they fight for the rights of severely marginalized people and seek to support and empower them, among other things by raising awareness to change the social care system in the UK, much like Trampoline House has sought to raise critical awareness of the asylum system in Denmark by sharing the stories of refugees and asylum seekers in the country. Project Art Works uses a broad set of artistic and holistic methods to foster understanding and representation of people with complex needs for care and support. Like *ruangrupa's Gudskul*, their installation at the Fridericianum replicated their studio environment in Hastings, with rubber flooring and cardboard sheeting on the walls and a large structure for archiving artworks and film. Among the works displayed was the evolving series of large-scale drawings *Cosmologies of Care*, to which the Trampoline House drawings belong.

As part of the preparation for their collaboration, the members of Trampoline House and Project Art Works discussed each other's practice in documenta fifteen's conversation series 'lambung konteks'. Under the headline 'Navigating Systems of Care and Control', the members of the two collectives discussed the similarities and differences between their methods and their communities.²⁰ Although they work in different European countries, both collectives had experienced how societal and institutional infrastructures affect the people they work with, and support, in ambiguous ways. As Alberani noted, the institutional systems that 'care for' refugees and asylum seekers, and for people who are neurodivergent, often operate as oppressive systems of control that hamper their access to a public sphere – and thus to participation, visibility and 'voice' (Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022, 19:00–22:00 min.). While Project Art Works primarily focuses on creative collaboration and artmaking – thus using artmaking to help build the structures of representation and solidarity that health and welfare systems seldom provide – the systems of care and control central to Trampoline House were the legal systems of immigration and asylum, the asylum centres, and humanitarian organizations such as the Red

20 For this online conversation about the collaboration between Trampoline House and Project Art Works, moderated by the social scientist Yasmin Gunaratnam, see 'lambung konteks: Navigating Systems of Care and Control'. It took place prior to the opening of documenta fifteen on May 5, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sHlvXgKASg> (accessed April 1, 2025).

Cross (Trampoline House and Project Art Works 2022, 21:45–24:00, 42:00–45:30, 48:30–58:00 min.).

In the collaborative workshops, the participants explored, through facilitated conversations, the relations between the Trampoline House community, the needs of people as they seek asylum and try to rebuild their lives in Denmark, and the ways in which different institutions and civil society initiatives support or work against their dreams and needs. The conversations also considered how Trampoline House sought to empower displaced people and to fight for a more humane asylum system. The participants drew ‘cosmologies of care’ to examine the interrelationships between people, systems and the state. Drawing thus became an investigative instrument to map and analyse the forces and factors determining the lives of asylum seekers and their process of resettlement in the country where they hope to build a new home. Kate Adams’s methodology of care worked well for the participants because it was a gentle process unfolding in a relaxed atmosphere. It enabled the participants to work together to visualize the relationship between individuals and systems of care and control, especially the different institutions and bodies asylum seekers must interact with, as well as representing their struggles and desires. Each of the collaboratively fabricated large-scale drawings depicted a cosmology of concentric circles which placed refugees within the structures of the Danish asylum system and society, i.e. the infrastructure of care and control that can both enable and hamper their worldmaking (Alberani et al., 2022, 22:00–30:00 min.). In my interview with the three curators, Carlota Mir explained that it was the collaboration on a drawing representing the Danish asylum system in the first workshop in Copenhagen that made them realize the impossibility of having a system that would care for the needs and wishes of asylum seekers which the present system was created to suppress (Mir in Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022, 25:00–28:00 min.).

One of the two large drawings from this workshop made visually comprehensible the complex (invisible) network of relations which make up the Danish asylum system. Resembling a complex Venn diagram, it visualized the interlocking institutional, legal and financial infrastructures that determine the lives of ‘people with temporary residence permit’ – and how supportive civil society organizations, documenta fifteen, and activist groups and movements such as Black Lives Matter were positioned in relation to the asylum system. This drawing could thus be read as the ‘cosmos’ of asylum seekers in Denmark, and it invited a dual reading. It could be read as a mapping of the activist initiatives supporting their worldmaking and attempts to reposition themselves within a system designed to relegate them to the margins (Black Lives Matter, ‘the church industry’, and local initiatives in Copenhagen such as the Bridge Radio and the magazine *VisAvis*). It could also be read as an infrastructural analysis of the interlocked systems of care and control that both fuel and inhibit their agency. The other drawing focused more on humans as relational beings and collectives. It depicted a cosmology of concentric circles in which ‘people’

constituted the centre, mapping several types and degrees of freedom, and how they can be reached. The centre was encircled by layers of determining factors: barriers, obstacles and facilitators, ranging from the legal asylum system itself to housing and work, to money and justice, health and disability, community and citizenship, and territorial borders. Radial lines labelled ‘resilience’, ‘anger’, ‘hope’ and ‘Trampoline House’ named the human resources and agency that the ‘people’ at the centre of the circle diagram needed to overcome the concentric layers of ‘circumstances’ and reach the area beyond the circle, where the key words suggested that desired freedoms such as unrestricted movement, relationships, and deciding what happens to one’s body and future would flourish.

Fig. 14: Collaborative drawings by Kate Adams, Project Art Works and Trampoline House in Hübner Areal, documenta fifteen, Kassel, 2022. Front: Cosmologies of Care: Freedom, 2022, posca pens on paper, 180 x 150 cm. Back: Cosmologies of Care: The Asylum System in Denmark, 2022, posca pens on paper, 290 x 290 cm. The drawings were made during Project Art Works’ workshop ‘Massaging the Asylum System’ in Trampoline House, May 20–22, 2022. Workshop curation: Carlota Mir and Sara Alberani. Guest facilitators: Kate Adams and Tim Corrigan (Project Art Works). Trampoline House consultancy: Nabila Saidi and Tone Olaf Nielsen. Photo: Tone Olaf Nielsen. Courtesy: The Trampoline House Archive.



The collaborative interlinkage of the two lumbung members was also manifested in Project Art Work's exhibition space, where a German-language version of the last-mentioned drawing was on display. For Trampoline House and Project Art Works, this local-to-local, or 'inter-lokal', collaboration on creative strategies of care enabled the collectives to share knowledge and experience of how the holistic, artistic and investigative method of 'cosmologies of care' could be adapted to other groups than the neurodivergent people for whose needs it was initially tailored. The two large-scale drawings suggested the method's usefulness as a collective instrument, while the small cosmological drawing that formed the centre of the cluster of community portraits pointed to the method's potential as a tool for displaced individuals to comprehend and express how forced displacement had relocated them geographically and repositioned them socially.

As Carlota Mir has explained, the method and the collaboration also enabled the participants to realize that, despite the considerable differences between the needs of refugees/asylum seekers and those of neurominorities, there were many similarities with regard to the systemic suppression and obstacles they each had to tackle – and this insight made possible *a coalitional moment*. By sharing their knowledge and methods while working together, i.e. by 'living out a politics of lumbung', and by acknowledging the similarities as well as the uniqueness of their members' needs and aspirations, Trampoline House and Project Art Works were able to forge 'a temporary coalition of people who have been othered' while also recognizing that such a coalition is not devoid of inner conflicts and tensions (Alberani et al., 2022, 46:00–50:00 min.).

Shortly before documenta fifteen closed, the two collectives co-hosted a concluding workshop in Kassel titled 'Massaging the Asylum System and Creative Strategies of Care'. This workshop took a more visionary approach to refugeedom. The aim was to let participants explore how to rethink the European asylum system together by using Project Art Works' visual method of cosmologies of care. The workshop took inspiration from the ways in which European leaders and peoples had welcomed the millions of Ukrainians who had been forcibly displaced by Russia's military invasion. The extraordinary political and popular goodwill demonstrated that the EU is capable of improving its dysfunctional asylum system and establishing infrastructures that enable displaced people to access housing, healthcare, education and work. Accordingly, the reception of the Ukrainians was dubbed *Den store modtagelse* ('The Great Reception') in a research-based podcast series in four parts, exploring how the reception of the Ukrainian refugees in 2022 was experienced by Syrian refugees living in Denmark, and by the municipal caseworkers and volunteers who receive refugees. Unlike the Syrian refugees who arrived in 2015–2016, the Ukrainians were granted residence on the basis of a special law that allowed them to obtain a residence permit without prior asylum processing. They also experienced a greater freedom of mobility (and freedom from

visa requirements) because they had had access to the EU prior to the war as sought-after labour migrants. Briefly explained, the change of the legal framework gave them much quicker access to housing, work and becoming part of society, although they shared with the Syrian refugees the condition of only being granted temporary residence and the prospect of having to live in uncertainty about their future for years (Bayraktar, Kohl, and Sandberg 2023, part 1, 2:30–10:00, 14:50–18:30 min.).

As Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen suggests in the podcast, the handling of the Ukrainian refugees can be seen as ‘a natural experiment that can help point some ways forward from the paradigm we have been locked into for the last 20, some would say 30, years – the control and deterrence paradigm’ (Gammeltoft-Hansen, in: Bayraktar, Kohl, and Sandberg 2023, part 1, 30:45–31:45 min.). Gammeltoft-Hansen suggests that, with time, it will be possible to see what concrete effects the procedural and legal changes have had in terms of faster residence permits, faster access to the labour market and greater freedom for displaced people to choose where they want to settle, both locally and across the EU – all issues that the prevailing paradigm has made it difficult to open a political discussion about in Denmark and at a European level.

The last workshop in Kassel used this historical and political opening to pose the question as to whether the future reception of refugees in Europe could be different, be more humane. The workshop brought together a more casual and mixed group of people of different nationalities, including from German, Middle Eastern and Ukrainian backgrounds. Some people had flight or migration experience, others were visitors to documenta fifteen who happened to be passing by and engaged spontaneously for a couple of hours. While the first day of the workshop took place in Trampoline House’s exhibition in Hübner Areal, the second day was held in Project Art Works’s space in the Fridericianum (Alberani, in Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022, 30:00–36:00). In the workshop, the participants first collaborated in pairs on drawing cosmologies of a future asylum system. The second day, which was facilitated by Tone Olaf Nielsen, ended with all the participants collaborating on a large cosmological drawing of a future asylum system. Inspired by the European willingness to change the system temporarily to accommodate displaced Ukrainians, they envisioned an asylum system that would welcome people from war zones without any questions being asked regarding their reasons to be here; a system that offered people the possibility of living in a place of their own choice, of receiving assistance from the beginning, also for family reunification, and where other barriers to people’s need to rebuild their lives would also be lifted (Nielsen, in Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022, 32:00–34:00 min.). The last workshop of ‘Massaging the Asylum System and Creative Strategies of Care’ thus used the cracks and openings in the European refugee regime produced by the reception of displaced Ukrainians as leverage for claiming a more humane asylum system for all displaced people.

Transversal politics as prefigurative politics: Concluding remarks

Based on this account of the ‘Massaging the Asylum System’ workshops in Copenhagen and Kassel, I contend that these workshops succeeded in engendering a transnational epistemic community – that is, a knowledge-sharing community which pursues the common goals of developing a transversal politics of care for asylum seekers and of reimagining the asylum system of Europe’s postmigrant societies. The collaborative cosmological drawings remain as visual testimonies of the coming into being of this fleeting and malleable epistemic community. In Marsha Meskimmon’s understanding of transversal politics, affect, imagination and aesthetics are posited as central to creative and transformative political projects. Building on the sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis, Meskimmon contends that transversal politics are more focused on advocacy than ‘representation’ – that is, speaking *with* rather than *for* (Meskimmon 2020, 7). This is exactly the approach of the workshop series. However, as political struggles are always about ‘representation’, the questions of the *who*, *what* and *how* of representation, along with the questions of the *effects* and *affects* produced by representation, cannot be ignored.

As affect, imagination and aesthetics are at the core of artistic practices of representation, they can assume a central role when they are deployed as critical or activist tools to reimagine society, or an aspect of it. By acting materially and creating representation(s) – understood *both* as the production of objects/images/texts which can transmit a message and be ‘read’ and call forth affective and reflective responses, *and* as a speaking *with* and also (through the images) *for* – Trampoline House and Project Art Works mobilized art’s potential to reshape the social imaginaries of flight and change the perception of asylum seekers and the asylum system.

Trampoline House’s commitment to envisioning a more humane asylum system, and the commitment of all lumbung members and artists to turning this art event into a powerful collective experiment in practising lumbung values, suggest that the kind of transversal politics at work in documenta fifteen amounted to a visionary collective experiment in creating the future in the present social relationships – an experiment in transformative worldmaking, as it were. It could be described, then, as a *prefigurative politics*.²¹ I borrow the concept of prefigurative politics from social movement studies, where it concerns the ways in which social movements and their participants seek to embody or represent the future they desire in their contemporary practice. As political theorist Dan Swain notes, it refers to the idea of ‘building the new world in the shell of the old’, and it is often associated with the idea of building an intentional community within social movements (Swain

21 I have developed these thoughts on the relation between documenta fifteen’s lumbung practices, prefigurative politics and post-multiculturalism further in a subsequent study. See Petersen 2025.

2019, 47–48). In this case, the old shell is Documenta, an institutional infrastructure of the Western art world.

But there is more. As the sociologist Marianne Maeckelbergh has explained, prefigurative politics is a method, an ‘action form’ concerned with creating appropriate organizational infrastructures and processes:

In my experience as an activist, practising prefiguration has meant always trying to make the processes we use to achieve our immediate goals an embodiment of our ultimate goals, so that there is no distinction between how we fight and what we fight for, at least not where the ultimate goal of a radically different society is concerned. [...] Prefiguration is a practice through which movement actors create a conflation of their ends with their means. It is an enactment of the ultimate values of an ideal society within the very means of struggle for that society. (Maeckelbergh 2009, 66–67)

To draw the strands together, I would like to propose that the artistic and collaborative practices which thrived within the lumbung framework of documenta fifteen could be described as an *art of prefiguration*. My use of this term is in conversation with the concept of prefigurative politics developed in social movement studies, and I use it to describe the work of artists who have ‘walked the talk’ and experimented with practising the change they want to see as a way of ‘building the future now’ (Rob Sparrow, quoted in Graeber 2009, 202).

Art resembles protest movements in the sense that, across history, artists have been pioneers in contesting and reimagining the values and practices of society. At the core of the art of prefiguration is the enactment in the present of a desired world or society of the future. Like transversal politics, prefiguration involves advocacy. It is also inextricably linked to communication and representation and is carried out through the infrastructures, platforms and technologies of representation and appearance available in a given historical period. It is a deep understanding of prefiguration’s dependency on representation and the potential in working within the infrastructures of an art institution attracting global media attention that prompted Morten Goll to state on behalf of Trampoline House’s Artistic Team that Documenta ‘is the biggest megaphone we can get’ (Goll, in Kryger 2022, n.p.).

Looking at documenta fifteen more broadly, the artworks and installations on display at the exhibition venues were, arguably, crucial instruments of communicating the projects and objectives of the invited collectives and individuals to the visitors. However, the primary channel of communicating a prefigurative politics was more likely to have been the democratic deliberative processes through which the invited participants became engaged in organizing and collaborating on a Documenta founded on lumbung values. These processes could be perceived as generating a micro-utopia in which ‘many forms of grounded utopianism’ could

coexist (Sears 2014, 19), an exemplary community dedicated to lumbung values and serving as an alternative model of how to live, think and talk together on a crisis-ridden earth in the age of the capitalocene (Demos 2017, 85–87). They can also be seen as an alternative, which demonstrated to the broader public that ‘other ways are possible’, as ruangrupa put it (ruangrupa 2022a, 17; cf. Swain 2019, 50); and that a worldwide network of artists and cultural producers had for some time already been exploring such forms of worldmaking and of generating other ways of organizing their activity and alternative social and economic infrastructures – as blueprints of the change they wanted to bring about.

If many visitors and critics failed to grasp the prefigurative dimension of documenta fifteen, it was probably because the generative processes played out primarily among the in-group of participants and was rarely accessible to the out-group of visitors. This critique is in line with that of Karen van den Berg, who argues that, as this mega-event attracted thousands of visitors every day, the informal ‘nonkrong’ gatherings were unable to compensate for the absence of public discussion events with adequate publicity: ‘Participation in the workshops was, to an extent, reserved for insiders and persistent visitors who clicked their way through the depths of the website, registered well in advance, and were prepared to wait longer.’ (K.v.d. Berg 2023, n.p.) What visitors saw throughout the exhibition venues and experienced in the workshops was mostly the material and immaterial traces resulting from the organizational processes that were collected and communicated through the medium ruangrupa termed *harvest* (Blagoev and Ortlieb, 2023, 3): the artistically recorded takeaway from an event (e.g. a meeting or discussion) that is made in order to ‘share what is being discussed’ and enable ‘collective learning’, and which can take any form, including ‘a sticky note, a story, drawing, film, sound piece, or meme’ (ruangrupa, 2022a, 42).

Prior to the opening of documenta fifteen, in an interview with Nikos Pastergiadis, ruangrupa had explained the core ideas of their practice and how this informed the lumbung values of their documenta. They stressed the importance of co-operation among active participants to carry out a task considered ‘useful for the common good’ and emphasized the role of gathering, listening, non-domination and collective imagination: ‘In sum, we are drawing on ideas that bring people together in conversation rather than force them into authoritative processes. Conversations meander, and decisions spring forth [...] It is a collage: thousands of pieces of ideas come together. Bad ideas are polished up with a little collective imagination.’ (ruangrupa, 2021, n.p.)

Crucially, ruangrupa also suggested that documenta fifteen was only the first phase in an evolving system of change. This idea was emphasized in the concluding conference *Let there be lumbung*. Here, the significance of the journey *after* documenta fifteen – repeatedly designated ‘lumbung one’ – was stressed in ways which confirmed that a non-prescriptive prefigurative politics, with an openness towards a

variety of possible priorities and goals, underpinned the making of documenta fifteen.²² Furthermore, ruangrupa's curatorial strategy of inviting 'friends' resonated with Papastergiadis's proposition that friendship is essential to the experience and meaning of art:

The new arts economy that we are aiming to build brings art back to its more useful function: the imagination and realization of new (and remembered) ways of living and organizing that are more just, humane, and holistic. We are therefore looking for friends that focus their artistic experimentation, activism, and/or imagination on the fields of (urban, rural, public) space, economics, education, and ecology. We're interested in organizations that cherish relations, generosity, and the search for the rebalancing of individual and collective needs. In the first phase of crafting this new art economy, collectives and organizations that already have this at the core of their mission are invited to enrich the lumbung economy with their own experiences, activities, and resources.²³

The avenue explored by Trampoline House and Project Art Works in their joint workshops was one that took art's visual and political agency seriously, casting imagination and its visual materializations as what Meskimmon has called 'a potential "strong card" in transformative politics' (Meskimmon, 2020, 138). Moreover, as suggested by the title of Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali and Joachim Hamou's work *Silenced Bodies – Loud Images*, they demonstrated that images can speak volumes about silenced bodies: migrant, neurodivergent, disabled – and other *othered* bodies. In collectively produced videos and workshops, Trampoline House's Artistic Team explored the power artistic and curatorial practices have to affectively include marginalized bodies in the community of the national Home, despite the nationalist 'post-multicultural' attempts to affectively, and in some cases also physically, evict unwanted migrants and asylum seekers.²⁴

Although it was Trampoline House and not its embedded art space CAMP that was presented at documenta fifteen, CAMP's mission of using art to work towards more humane migration and asylum policies obviously informed the way artistic practices and visual media were harnessed in Trampoline House's exhibition and the workshops with Project Art Works. In taking a final summary look at Trampoline House and CAMP, what seems to have been the common thread in their activist social work and curatorial programmes – from the first local workshop

22 The term has also seeped into the debate on documenta fifteen; see Kolb 2022, 76; Phillips 2022.

23 ruangrupa 2021. See also *Let there be lumbung* (day 1), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goueiZ8Kh4g>, and *Let there be lumbung* (day 2), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjGxqUwOkou> (2:45:00–2:47:00 min) (both accessed March 28, 2025).

24 A concept of 'affective eviction' is elaborated in Gaonkar 2022.

at a local Danish art academy to the concluding workshop at one of the global artworld's agenda-setting mega-exhibitions – is a transversal politics that is also prefigurative. It is prefigurative in the sense that the Trampoline House community and CAMP sought the change they wanted to see by enacting practices appropriate to the future in the present. They sought to 'reach ahead' while also acknowledging that the future (of a more humane asylum system) had not yet been achieved. This spirit of hope, tempered by criticism and realism, is captured eminently well by Dan Swain's definition of the core issue of prefigurative politics: 'how to represent action in the present as both intimately connected to future alternative practices, while nonetheless distinct from them, to see the present as not not, but not yet, the future' (Swain 2019, 60).

Bringing Swain's understanding of prefigurative politics into the present study of contemporary artistic and curatorial practices inevitably raises the question of what roles artists, activists and cultural professionals can play in generating new models of coexistence that grapple with the inequalities and conflicts involved in cohabitation, at the same time as they cultivate more reciprocal modes of coexistence which acknowledge our interdependency as human beings (Ross 2022, xi-xii).

In the field of art, creative collaborative attempts are being made to reinvent multicultural coexistence from below as a kind of transnational and cosmopolitan 'post-multiculturalism' based on principles of planetary coexistence, sustainability and regeneration.²⁵ ruangrupa's documenta fifteen stands out as the most thought-provoking, radical and encompassing endeavour to date. Based on the principles of 'lumbung' and committed to collaborative practices of commoning and an ethics of sharing and sustainability, the contributors to documenta fifteen experimented with developing variegated ways of sharing resources, knowledge and friendship as a way of 'building the future now' as a radical form of worldmaking. Thus, documenta fifteen can be seen as a fertile breeding ground for an art of prefiguration, proffering 'lumbung' as a metaphor for sustainable ways of living together as a global community of transculturally interconnected and mutually responsible and responsive collectives.

25 For the resonance between documenta fifteen and ruangrupa's lumbung methodology and recent 'post-multicultural' attempts to rethink multiculturalism beyond the political backlash against it in the 2010s, see Petersen 2025.